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DISPATCHES FROM AFRICA

Thomas Crubaugh writes from Dzendereni, a small village in southeastern Kenya, where CrossFit HQ is working to improve the quality of life.



February 2012 // In the village of Dzendereni, the village council met to decide the highest priorities for developing the village. The council is comprised of 12 men and women elected annually by the villagers.

The final four projects (in order of priority) turned out to be water, classrooms, solar lighting, and a hospital.

At present, the village barely has enough water for washing and drinking throughout the year. With water retained by a dam, the village would have enough to increase their agricultural production to include more diverse crops than just seasonal corn. Also, more water would support higher-yielding livestock than the native species that survive with little water but also provide little protein.



Classrooms are being built and the new classrooms are a vast improvement over the dirt-floored, mud-walled rooms.

Solar lighting of classrooms for study at night will allow students to get their homework done without relying on family resources to provide candles or kerosene for lamps that smoke up their houses and provide less illumination than solar can provide. A simple 27 watt solar panel can charge a 120 watt battery in 5 hours. A 120 watt battery can in turn run three LED lamps. With that much light, a classroom full of kids can study any time of night.

Building a hospital is a big and complex issue that involves government agencies and regulations, a steady stream of expensive supplies, and a great deal of support from the local community. The need for such a facility is obvious, particularly when the closest dispensary to Dzendereni is currently 10 kilometers away (a two-hour walk from the village). Planning for such a development needs to start in order for it to begin when the dam and the classrooms are complete.



The council surprised us toward the end of the meeting, after we informed them that the estimated cost of the dam project would be 1,500,000 Kenyan shillings (about \$18,000). They gathered and presented us with 50,000 shillings right on the spot: the first third of their contribution toward 10% of the total cost.

The meeting closed with the announcement of a race to be held on the day of the classroom dedication. The 15 mile (25 kilometer) race is open to all the residents of this area. With cash prizes for the men and women's first, second and third place finishers, we are anticipating 300 participants.

