



Change our world, educate a girl: Catch the wave in Tanzania

Clarke Blynn '74 and The Sega Girls' School in Tanzania

HST magazine recently caught up with alumnus Clarke Blynn '74, who is making an extraordinarily positive impact on the lives of young students in Africa. For the past 6 years, Clarke has been working on an important development project halfway around the world: the creation of a business-oriented, secondary boarding school in Tanzania for vulnerable girls.

Founded in 2008, The Sega Girls' School (SGS) is situated at the foot of the Uluguru mountains in a rural area of Tanzania near the town of Morogoro, 118 miles west of Dar es Salaam. Morogoro is one of Tanzania's growing mid-sized towns with a population of 200,000. The mission of The Sega Girls' School is to provide a high school education in accordance with the Tanzania government curriculum, while also giving girls solid business skills so that they can be employable when they graduate. SGS is riding a tidal wave of international interest in the empowerment of women. Largely seen as the most effective way of lifting communities out of poverty, organizations such as the Clinton Global Initiative, Nike/Novo Foundation, CARE, and UNICEF are focusing on educating and empowering women around the world.

The ultimate goal is for the school to become

financially self-sustaining. Blynn and his team are aiming to achieve this by growing the presence of businesses on campus that the girls help manage and run, with the profits from these businesses used to support the ongoing operations of the school. The Tanzania project is based on a similar boarding school in Paraguay as its model. The School provides opportunity and develop a framework that fosters business acumen, skills, and creative thinking that will help girls lead the development of their native Tanzania in the long term.

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Blynn got involved in the project through two sisters that he grew up with in the Philadelphia area, Polly and Tracey Dolan. Polly has been living in Tanzania for 14 years,



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L to r: Clarke with Josephine and the Segs Girls' School graduates, December 2013; traditional dancing at graduation; a view of the School campus from the water tower; Clarke with Felisters and her siblings on her graduation day, December 2013. Previous page: Water tower mural painted by SGS students and Philadelphia muralist Meg Saligman.

and is leading the operation in the field. Spending her first eight years in Tanzania working for CARE, Polly managed projects on the ground for them, experience that has taught her how to get things done.

Currently, the School enrolls 148 girls in grades 7-10, with plans to grow to 210 girls by 2015. Many of these girls had dropped out of elementary school; Segs brings them into the 7th grade, which is used as a remedial education year prior to starting high school. "So far, the school has been very successful. The girls' results for the national 11th grade exam were impressive; 93% of the girls passed the exam compared to 58% nationwide," Blynn reports.

The School's first buildings were constructed in 2009 and 2010. Currently, there are 18 buildings, including 6 dormitories, 3 classroom buildings, 3 staff houses, a volunteer house, an infirmary, a multi-purpose building with labs and a meeting hall, a dining hall, and two chicken pens. With the help from a USAID grant, the schools is embarking on a second phase of construction that will enable completion of the campus. Another grant has come from the MasterCard Foundation through Fundacion Paraguaya, to help the School get its businesses off the ground – seed funding that is a significant help allowing the developments to continue for the next several years.

In April 2013, Segs began a poultry operation with 1,000 egg-laying chickens. As of October, the School has been producing 700 eggs per day – a milestone and success, equal to the number that the girls must reach to become profitable. In 2015, plans for growth include starting the building phase of a 15- to 20-room hotel or lodge.

SGS is also proud to be environmentally sound. The campus uses solar power for everything including the well pump, UV lights, lighting, computers, fans, copy machines and campus-wide Wifi. SGS also captures a great deal of its rainwater during the rainy season, which is held in a 75,000-gallon cistern. This provides fresh water to the campus for half the year.



Blynn is quick to point out that the school project is fortunate to have strong regional fundraising committees in the U.S., run by Board members in Boston, Boulder, Washington, and Philadelphia. "We have a working Board that is very effective, while having a lot of fun." 🍷

Graduating from The Haverford School in 1974, Clarke earned a B.S. from Cornell University in the School of Hotel Administration. For 27 years, he has built and managed hotels in and around Philadelphia. He now devotes much of his free time to volunteering in local organizations. After visiting Tanzania in 2001, he was able to draw on past experiences and fully understand that the key to positive future global development is education. As Chair of the Business Committee of Nurturing Minds, Inc., Clarke offers his leadership, development, construction, and financial expertise to the ongoing project of The Segs Girls' School.

For more information about The Segs Girls' School and its efforts, please visit www.nurturingmindsinafrica.org.



Sega exchange student Nusura Gundi, Cindy Pierce, and Clarke Blynn '74 at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church in March 2014.