

LECHE

Longido Early Childhood Education Program

Raising Academic Success for Maasai Children through the Montessori Approach



*“One becomes a well balanced adult only if one has fully been a child”
Dr. Maria Montessori*



The LECHE Program's founder and coordinator is Sarah Ilmollelian--shown above with some of the young students and two teaching assistants. Sarah was brought up in Longido, and was one of very few local young women who had the opportunity to obtain an education in the 1950s. After 41 years of teaching primary students in Tanzania, Sarah returned to school herself at age 58, to obtain a Montessori Teaching Certificate. Now retired, Sarah has come home to Longido with a passionate commitment to improving the educational prospects of Maasai children through the application of the Montessori methodology.

Sarah's dream is to establish a network of rural Montessori pre-schools throughout the communities which comprise the Longido District, within the next 5 years.

What is LECHE?

The Longido Early Childhood Education (LECHE) program aims to provide early education to young disadvantaged Maasai girls and boys residing in the rural villages which comprise the Longido District of Northern Tanzania. Using the tried and tested Maria Montessori philosophy, LECHE will prepare young children for primary education and general integration into society—easing what currently is a very difficult transition from the rural home environment to often distant boarding schools.

The Montessori method encourages independence and freedom with limits and responsibility. Through gently guided manipulation of everyday objects and specific activities – chosen by the children themselves, youngsters develop increased attention spans, hand-eye coordination, and tenacity. The Montessori Method states that satisfaction, contentment and joy result from the child feeling like a full participant in daily activities

The project seeks to create a community-owned early childhood education program through which Longido area pastoralists and other disadvantaged community members will be able to provide a good quality pre-school education opportunity to their children.

The LECHE program is administered by LOCIP (Longido Community Integrated Program), a community-based organization headquartered in the village of Longido.

How will LECHE benefit the Maasai community?

The objective of the program is to respond to the overwhelming need for good quality early childhood education in Longido District that is affordable and accessible to rural pastoral families; and:

- To inspire the children's ongoing interest in continuing their education.
- To raise the level of academic success among Maasai children, relative to the status quo.
- To gather young children in a facility located close to their homes, providing them with a sense of community through their shared education, games, and social experiences.
- To provide childcare assistance to parents and guardians to enable them to undertake the other obligations which comprise their livelihoods.
- To raise and socialize children in accordance with local customs and traditions, thereby providing cultural affirmation.
- To promote the children's health through applied education, provision of at least one full meal daily and visits from a healthcare worker at least once every three months.
- To provide on-the-job training in the Montessori methodology to educated local youth who will in turn teach the children, thereby utilizing their education and acquired skills within their communities.
- To introduce the children to Kiswahili as a second language (after Kimaasai) thus enhancing their ability to cope with the transition to the primary school environment.



One study indicated that on several dimensions, children at a Montessori school had superior outcomes relative to others. By the end of kindergarten, the Montessori children performed better on standardized tests of reading and math, engaged in positive interaction on the playground more, and showed more advanced social cognition and executive control. They also showed more concern for fairness and justice.

Lillard A, Else-Quest N. "The early years. Evaluating Montessori education." Science. 2006 Sep 29; 313 (5795): 1893-4

Pilot Schools



The Longido Village LECHE school



Children gathered at the Oltepesi school site

LECHE is currently operating two Montessori pre-schools, each of which has approximately 60 registered students between the ages of 2 and 6. The first is located in the village of Longido, the second approximately 6 kms away in the small sub-village of Oltepesi. While the two pilot schools have begun to offer classes, they are proceeding without any substantial resources, with the exception of the meagre funds the community has been able to mobilize.

The Longido class has fortunately been provided with suitable space to host a modest classroom. In contrast, the Oltepesi 'classroom' is simply the area shaded by a large tree. Children attend eagerly, despite the lack of any shelter, school supplies, food, latrines or water supply. Without a secure structure, it is difficult to make the specialized Montessori activity equipment available to the children, and a rainy day closes the school. In addition, because of the lack of a teacher's house and the lack of public transport in the area, it has proven difficult to have a qualified Montessori instructor at the school on a daily basis.



Sarah & teaching assistant, Sararwa, showing Oltepesi children how to draw their numbers.

How Can You Help?

The establishment of the classes in Longido and Oltepesi has thus far been achieved in the absence of any substantial resources. Without financial assistance however, the project will not be able to continue. Your financial support will ensure that both of the pilot schools will survive, and that planning for additional schools throughout the 32 villages comprising Longido District can begin.

Immediate Needs:

For \$7,000 a permanent school building can be constructed at the Oltepesi site. This will include a classroom, teacher's living space, simple kitchen area and a latrine.

\$1,000 is required to provide storage, shelving and a few child-sized chairs and tables for the two schools.

For \$500 a modest kitchen structure can be added to the existing Longido school building.

\$5,000 will meet the costs of staffing both the Longido and Oltepesi schools for a full year. This includes a qualified Montessori instructor as well as two teaching assistants for each location.

Ongoing supply requirements for the two schools (including everything from exercise books and pencils to toilet paper and cleaning supplies) can be met at a cost of approximately \$1,000 per year.

For additional information, or to make a donation, please contact:

joallgo@gmail.com

Joanne Allgoewer

Arrangements are in progress for processing donations through a registered Canadian charity involved in this project, so tax receipts will be available to Canadian donors.

Ashe Naleng'
(thank you very much, in Kimaasai)

