



This report is a short summary of the activities of Rainbows4Children in the year 2023. More details on any specific issue are available by contacting Max & Kathryn Robinson at info@rainbows4children.org

Project Progress - Nicolas Robinson School

I. The current situation and the Nicolas Robinson School

On 4th November 2020, war broke out in the region between the Ethiopian National Government with Amhara region and Eritrea, against the Tigray Defence Forces of the Tigray region. At the end of 2020, The City of Mekele was occupied by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops and movement through the city was very dangerous for its citizens. Rainbows4children and the Nicolas Robinson School are non-political organisations, and so no comment will be made on the situation. The Ethiopian and Eritrean troops remained in the city until the end of June 2021. Then the Tigray Defence Force and the Regional government leaders re-entered the city. The regional government resumed control of Mekele and much of the Tigray regional state, but then the Ethiopian Government imposed a blockade on the Tigray state. No food, fuel, cash was allowed to enter the region. Phone, internet services and all external electricity supply was cut off. All banking services were blocked.

Many Internally Displaced Persons were living in government school compounds (not at the Nicolas Robinson School). For this reason, the regional bureau of education had to find a solution for accommodating these persons before schools could reopen. All schools whether private or government are administered on such decisions by the regional bureau of education. School resumed from February 2022- September 2022. As bombing of the city resumed, no school was possible in September, October and November. Following the Pretoria Agreement for the cessation of hostilities, signed in early November 2022, plans were again made to resume education. Education eventually was able to re-start at the end of February 2023. In agreement and arrangement with the Tigray Bureau of Education, an accelerated learning programme was initiated, with a 3 years of schooling compressed into 2 years. The target was that by July 2025, students should be in the correct class for their age group. Regional (grade 8 exams) and national (grade 12 exams) were also arranged to facilitate this.



Green compound, primary school



Food production at school

2. Building and equipment installed during 2023

During 2023, due to the ongoing war in the region, no capital investment was made at the school. Necessary maintenance was undertaken to enable the children to return to school.



3. Students and educational performance

In the school year 2021-22 education was disrupted by the war. Some students who lived near the school would visit and use the facilities, but in the main, there was no education possible. While the city was occupied by Ethiopian government forces the administration tried to re-start schooling, but there was a lot of fear from parents to have many children in one place. The Tigray regional government took over again at the beginning of July 2021 and announced a plan to start education in early February 2022 for students from kindergarten to grade 6. From February to September 2022 about 1,000 students from kindergarten to grade 6, attended school. School stopped again when drone and bomb attacks were resumed on the city. These attacks stopped in November 2022 with a plan to resume school in February 2023. School resumed in March 2023 and by April 2023 students from kindergarten to grade 8 resumed school. In May 2023, the students from grades 9 to 12 resumed school. The first batch of grade 8 students took their regional exams in August 2023, the pass rate (to grade 9) was 100%. In October 2023, the grade 12 students took their national exams. The pass rate was 97% (the national average was 3%). At the end of December 2023, the second batch of grade 8 students took their regional exams. The pass rate (promotion to grade 9) was 100%.

Older students, both at the school and recent graduates, were assisted in applying to universities and scholarships overseas.

4. Nicolas College

The College has been closed since Covid and then the war. The director resigned in 2021 and went to pursue further education overseas. A replacement has now been appointed from within the management team. They are looking at a collaboration with the Don Bosco technical college. They are also looking at reopening as a testing centre for certain skills.

The facilities, especially the food preparation areas, have been used to feed the children at the school. The ICT facility has continued to be used for the training of our teachers and some of the older students, whenever there is electricity. As peace returns, the chance to train young people to start their own businesses will be extremely important.

5. Sponsorship programme

Background: Previously about 250-300 students were sponsored by the EFFORT group of companies. This group uses its profits for the benefit of the people of Tigray, especially those from families who have disabilities. Most of their businesses were destroyed during the fighting and there is no chance for them to re-open. A lot of damage and looting occurred, and it will be many years before profitability will be restored. Rainbows4children has found sponsors to help these children finish their education.

By the end of 2023, 750 students were sponsored to go to school through the Rainbows4Children sponsorship programme thus giving them a chance that their families could not otherwise afford. In addition, 80 sponsored school students are also now sponsored in their university studies, after they left the school. We still need ~200 more sponsors, as many families have been impoverished by the war.

6. Leadership of the Nicolas Robinson School in the Community.

The Nicolas Robinson School is rated the top-quality School in the Tigray region. This is based on the quality of teaching, its services and facilities and its operations and interaction with the community.

In the report of 2020, the leadership of the School during Covid and the locust invasion was reported.

During 2021, the city of Mekele experienced 6 months occupation of soldiers from the Federal Government of Ethiopia, and 6 months of blockade when no food, fuel, phone services (neither landline nor mobile) and no internet connection was allowed. Furthermore, the only electricity in the region was that powered by generators (requiring fuel) and that generated from the Tekeze dam in Tigray. Finally, no banking services were possible from outside of the region, however after a few months, local banks set up paper transactions for transfers between local bank accounts.

The school led in the community in several ways:

They organised feeding programmes for the children to ensure they all got one meal per day.

They organised health checks for the children and sought advice from the local paediatric doctors.

They installed solar panels on the roof of a building in the school to power computers, a printer etc.

They started growing vegetables and started a cooperation with the local Bureau of Agriculture to look at training in the community. This project was started at the end of 2021 and was continued in 2022 and 2023. In 2023 the Nicolas Robinson School was a leader in the accelerated learning programme and recognised as a centre of excellence.

7. Supplementary food programme

Started in 2011, the supplementary food programme continued for all students at the school. Every day the students are given extra food to provide better nutrition (protein, vitamins) in the form of eggs, banana, milk, orange or other seasonal fruit. This program continues to pay dividends in the form of better health - especially elimination of anaemia, skin ailments and better levels of concentration and learning in class. During Covid-19 and the war, food was provided to families and children in need, associated with the school. Since school resumed, the regular feeding programme also resumed and 150 children who could not afford food were also provided with lunch.



School children enjoying a meal in the Nicolas College



mother and daughter collecting flour



8. Volunteers

During 2023 no volunteers could visit the school, due to the on-going war and then blockade on the region. However Kathryn and Max Robinson returned to visit the school on 2 occasions.

9. Care for the Whole Child

The school's student welfare director ensures the welfare of all the students in the school and she also provides home counselling when needed. Our school nurse assists us in many of these and related issues. We operate a "special fund" to cope with emergency care for critical cases and also to support families and our students who are experiencing difficulties in their lives at home. Haqi foundation, a local charity working in mental health for health and education professionals, provided training for our teachers, other staff and students

10. Fund raising activities in 2023

Our annual Swiss fundraiser raised about CHF 56,000. This is the primary single fund-raising event of Rainbows4children. This is much-reduced from previous years following two years as an online event. The charity shop in Stade, Germany (sales of second-hand clothes and household items) closed, but they have kept their German registered foundation active to enable German taxpayers to make donations through them and benefit from tax deductions.

During 2022 Rainbows4children established a cooperation with a US registered 501c3 organisation, Friends For African Education. They pass through donations to us, to enable US donors to claim tax benefits and has been a great success.

Dutch taxpayers can also now benefit as we are now registered with the ABNI.

11. Legal and accounting

The statements of the 2023 accounts for the UK Foundation and Swiss registered foundations will be submitted to the appropriate governing authorities after being audited.

The trustees of both foundations during 2023 were:-

Switzerland: Richard Max Robinson, Kathryn Robinson, Jean-Paul Rigau, Anja Stobbe.

UK: Philip Stockbridge, George Potts, Alison Burgh, Kathryn Robinson, Richard Max Robinson.

Reported by:

Kathryn Robinson

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