

Ajiri Tea ~ Employing Women and Educating Orphans in Western Kenya



stopped. Sara began to question the role of “aid” in Kenyan communities. It became obvious that the aid had fostered dependency and that people needed sustainable economic opportunities to empower themselves.

Working together with her mom, Ann, who studied in Kenya through St. Lawrence University in 1978, her sister, Kate (Palisades High School '08, St. Lawrence '12) who came to visit, and her Kenyan co-worker Nick Miyogo, the Holby family launched Ajiri Tea.

Mission- “Ajiri” means “to employ” in Swahili, the national language of Kenya. Through the sale of Ajiri Tea we hope to create a sustainable cycle of community employment and education in western Kenya. 100% of profits are donated to the Ajiri Foundation, a non-profit 501(c)3, to pay school fees for orphans in western Kenya.

Handmade Labels and Ties- At least 50% of the Kenyan population lives below the poverty line. The goal of Ajiri Tea is to employ, and therefore empower, women. Each label is handmade by women in western Kenya using dried banana leaves. Inside every box, the cellophane bag is tied with twine made of banana leaves, and decorated with brightly colored beads made of recycled magazine paper. Today, Ajiri Tea employs about 50 women, many

of whom are caring for orphaned children and grandchildren.

The Tea- Ajiri black tea is grown on small-scale farms in the Kisii Highlands, an area of Kenya known for its fertile soil and abundance of rainfall and sunlight. Some farms look like a sea of bright green tea bushes grown tightly together, with small footpaths running through the field. On other farms the tea is tucked beneath maize stalks and beside the farmer’s personal garden.

Ajiri Foundation- The Ajiri Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)3 that supports education of orphans in western Kenya. There are over 1 million children orphaned by AIDS in Kenya. The Ajiri Foundation purchases school books and uniforms for primary school students, and pays for school fees, books, uniforms, and exam fees for secondary school students. The cost of sponsoring one primary school student is about \$25/year, and the cost for a secondary school student is about \$300/year.

The vision and mission of the Ajiri Tea Company and the Ajiri Foundation are rooted in the opinions, passions, and skills of people living in the Kisii, Kenya community. Through creating employment and supporting the education of orphans in western Kenya, we aim to create a positive cycle of community empowerment.



Tea basket with freshly picked tea leaves



Sara Holby with Diana, a 10 year old HIV+ orphan. Diana is cared for by her grandparents, and her school fees are paid for by the Ajiri Foundation.

By: Sara Holby
 Founder,
 Ajiri Tea Company

Ajiri Tea—Employing Women and Educating Orphans in Western Kenya

In September of 2008, Sara Holby (Palisades High School '04, Bowdoin College '08) set off to volunteer in western Kenya for a year. She planned to volunteer for a health care organization distributing food and drugs to HIV/AIDS patients. She knew she would learn a great deal and meet wonderful people but she didn't realize that her year in Kenya would quickly turn into the creation of a new business—Ajiri Tea. In January 2009 the healthcare organization lost its funding and support to the patients abruptly



Tabaka Women's Group, based in Tabaka, Kenya, make many of the labels, twine, and beads

For more Information
 about the
Ajiri Tea Company
 and the
Ajiri Foundation
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Ajiri Tea Company Products