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Subject: Uji Day!

Hello dear family and friends,

This morning we arrived at the new unfinished Igoda kitchen situated beside the new unfinished community hall. Early morning images of steaming "surfurias" (saucepans), mounds of plastic mugs in primary colours, enormous tubs, large water filled drum barrels, thinly chopped wet "kuni" (firewood) slowly burning in two new "jikos" (stoves) and a quiet busy hum of activity. Mama Ivan and Mama Farida are preparing the morning "uji" or porridge (Kiswahili dictionary defines it as gruel) for 545 Igoda schoolchildren. This is the first day of "meal in a mug"! The plan is to serve it four days a week as Wed. is a half day.

Mama Ivan and Mama Farida, these two stalwart village woman have been involved with preparations since dawn - collecting and chopping firewood and hauling water. Mama Ivan peels the bark off thick eucalyptus branches and then begins heaving an axe. It isn't easy! Fetching water requires a long hike to the valley below. Soon a water catchment system will be built. On their heels are the diligent and super organizers Geoff and Jenny Knight. Rice, maize, and peanuts have been ground the night before. It takes 1 1/2 hrs. for the water to boil. Finally the ground ingredients are added and then a steady stream of sugar flows into the thickened mixture. The two watchful women stand over the gently boiling porridge constantly stirring with large wooden spoons. The ujii is ready and delicious! On the wet cement floor an assembly line is created - uji is poured into large plastic garbage cans and scooped into platters containing mugs.

Excited hungry children arrive and long lines materialize. Ruth and I hand out steaming mugs of ujii with a gentle warning - "joto sana" (very hot). We're met with quiet "asante sanas" (thank yous) as they join their friends to enjoy their first school snack. In the crowd of children intently bent over steaming cups we see many smiles, smacking of lips and dipping of fingers into the ujii to make it last longer. It's obvious they don't consider it gruel! They actually skip and run back to class. For most this will be their first "meal" of the day. The teachers are eager to have a mug of ujii too. Not surprising especially when they return to classes of 70 or more children.

Family, friends and school children at home (Frank Hobbs school) have pulled together with concerned volunteers and willing Tanzanians to make our "meal in a mug" program possible. Many thanks!! Instead of Igoda's children having to wait until the end of their day for their one meal, they can begin their school day with a hot nutritious mini meal.

Wow, what a day it's been!

Love ya,

Anne