

KESHO and KEMRI-CGMR-Coast staff advise school pupils on careers



During March 2009, the Schools Engagement Programme (SEP) team at KEMRI were approached by KESHO and asked whether we would be willing to participate in a careers fair to advise KESHO's sponsored secondary students on future career options.

KESHO is a community-based organization that sponsors education for talented but underprivileged children from Kilifi District. Currently the organization sponsors around 90 students at different levels of education from nursery to university.

On Saturday morning 18th April 2009, 20 staff from KEMRI responded to a request from the SEP team and availed themselves to talk to 66 KESHO students. Staff from many cadres at KEMRI attended in order to cater to the needs of students with a range of academic abilities. Careers activities included talks from the "University desk", "The colleges and Polytechnics desk", the "CV writing desk" and group discussions with social scientists, lab scientists, medics, field-workers, community facilitators, IT technicians, training and education specialists.

The morning's activities were completed with inspirational talks from Sam Kinyanjui, Mary Mwangome, John Abwao (representing both KEMRI and the Rotary club) and finally, Kai Johnson, a former student sponsored by KESHO, who achieved an impressive mean grade of A plain. During Kai's moving and motivational speech, he gave an account of how he managed to



achieve a good enough grade to study electrical engineering at university despite many challenges. These challenges included his mud-walled thatched-roofed primary school classroom being swept away by the el-nino storm.

Day evaluation

Of the 66 attending students, 62 participants completed a self-administered evaluation form comprising of eight structured questions at the end of the KESHO careers day. 14 students were from national schools, 45 from provincial schools and 3 from district schools. The mean age of the form 1 to form 4 students was 16.6 (range - 14-21 years) with boys out-numbering the girls by 39 to 23.

When students were asked to retrospectively state their career choice before the careers fair, the majority of students had preferences for medicine (35%), law and engineering (both 20% each). Career preference for boys were evenly spread between law, engineering and medicine, however 13 (57%) of girls stated that they wanted to be a doctor. Other career choices included teaching, nursing, pilot and accounting/business management. Following the careers day activities and discussions, 20 students (32%) reported that they'd changed their first choice career option.

When students were asked "have you learnt anything new today? What was it?" 23 (37%) spontaneously reported learning that determination is a requirement of success, and 33 (53%) reported that they'd learnt what qualifications are required to pursue specific courses at university and colleges. Other reported lessons learnt included: CV writing skills, interview techniques, the need to have multiple career options and the costs/fees of certain courses.

The majority of students reported enjoying the day, meeting new people and fellow students and some suggested that more professions should be represented in future career days e.g. engineering and law. They also suggested more time should be allocated to give allowance for students to visit all desks.

Staff from KEMRI thoroughly enjoyed the morning and were able to share, not only excellent careers advice, but also first hand experience in the pursuit of their career goals. We look forward to further participation in similar events in the future.