

# Never dream too big: From Inspiring Kenyan Runners to Building Hospitals



by [Toby Tanser](#)

*“What does a hospital have to do with old running shoes?”*

That’s the question I’ve been getting ever since [Shoe4Africa](#), an organization which I founded in the nineties to collect running shoes for the people of Africa, announced its latest, boldest goal: to build the largest public teaching children’s hospital in East Africa, to be located in Eldoret Kenya.

It was back in 1995 that I was taken by the true charity and kindness of the people of Kenya, and my desire to help their people has never waned. It started off with the simple idea to give shoes and solve a conspicuous need. It turns out, foreigners sending a pair of running shoes overseas did much more than prevent the disease hookworm. It gave hope to another generation of Kenyan runners, many who see the sport as an avenue to pursue their biggest dreams.

One of those runners was a young boy named Fabiano Joseph. In January 2001, Shoe4Africa gave him a donated pair of running shoes. Imagine that four years later, he won the World Half Marathon Championships. This is not the only success story. Kenya has raised many of the sport’s elite long-distance runners and continues to be a training ground.

It wasn’t until 2006, with guidance from Kenyan-born long-distance runner Lornah Kiplagat, that the “mission statement” of Shoe4Africa was challenged. It was she who led me to host Shoe4Africa’s first signature race in Kenya – an all women field – and give out shoes to the entrants. From there, we started holding bigger events, rallying thousands and thousands of women and children to race and experience empowerment through sports. And so the questions began, *“Is this more than just about shoes?”*



PepsiCo booth at ING NYC Marathon Health and Fitness Expo, Nov. 1-3, 2012, featuring a partnership with Shoe4Africa

As a grassroots non-profit made up entirely of volunteers, Shoe4Africa had the freedom to evolve. It had the freedom to dream big. It wasn't tied to the mission in its name alone. Yes, we still give out running shoes, but we have been able to adapt to also serve other critical public needs like education and health. I knew what was truly possible when, in 2010, we built a primary school in the Nandi district of Kenya.

Hearing the need for basic public health access for children, who are often overlooked or receive second-rate treatment in a general hospital, the Shoe4Africa hospital project was born. Eight percent of kids in Sub-Saharan Africa die from treatable or preventable diseases, so we expect the hospital, a 60-bed three story building, to immediately begin saving lives.

We are very close to breaking ground on this landmark hospital, which is what brings Shoe4Africa to the ING New York City Marathon this year. As we edge toward our fundraising goals, I'm proud to have our very first corporate sponsor in [PepsiCo](#). The company will be featuring our organization at its booth at the ING NYC Marathon Health and Fitness Expo and supporting the PepsiCo/Shoe4Africa Marathon Team running on Nov. 4, whose charity donations all go toward the hospital.

Please stop by the booth or visit [Shoe4Africa.org](#) to learn how to donate and get involved. No amount of help is too small, and 100% of what you donate will directly impact this hospital project.