

# Kenya: Shoe4Africa Race Continues to Grow

*By Stanley Magut*

AS the year ends, Shoe4Africa race has continued to groom African girl children into the athletic arena blended with education to make them succeed in life.

What was a near fatal attack meted on the American Writer and race founder Toby Tanser later become a blessing to the African Child especially in the North Rift region where young girls flock Iten for the annual 5km women race.

Yesterday (Monday) was exactly ten years since Toby who is also a former athlete was attacked by two robbers while running in Zanzibar on the shores of the Indian Ocean.

"They came towards me armed with a machete and they hit me on my head and it cracked leaving me bleeding profusely. They ran away with my one shoe," Toby said.

A few years later after recovering, Toby who used to be trained by Irishman Bro. Colm O'Connell in Iten in the 1990's then made a life changing decision. He decided to aid an Africa child lead a better life through athletics and education.

"After losing one shoe in Africa, I started a course of giving out shoes in Africa and that is how the race was founded," Toby added.

He also incorporated the building of schools named after top cream athletes and hospitals for children.

Apart from the cash awards for various categories in the race organised on the eve of Christmas, all the participants receive training shoes with a view to encouraging them to keep running.

According to him, he decided to concentrate on the girl child because they had no opportunity to better their lives despite having amazing athletic talent.

"I chose Iten since I was training here a few years back and I realised there was no opportunity for girls to make it in life despite having the talent which could propel them to stardom," Toby said.

He said education and athletics goes together hence his decision to start building primary schools to enable the children learn while running.

"Schools are a challenge in these remote areas hence I began building them so we could bring up brilliant athletes in terms of competition and education," he said.

"Mixing education and athletics is a recipe for success and it will help them understand many things and be able to be their own managers in life," he added.

Already the foundation has built two schools in Nandi named after former world 800m champion Janeth Jepkosgei and marathoner Martin Lel and another at Kamoi in Marakwet named after three-time world 3000m Steeplechaser Moses Kiptanui.

In January another school at Kibuswa in Cherang'any will be opened.

Toby has encouraged athletes to take education seriously alongside their career as it will be useful even after their running careers.

The race has proved a stepping stone to prosperity for former world half marathon record holder Mary Keitany who ran the Shoe4Africa race in 2006 before later becoming an established athlete.

World marathon champion Edna Kiplagat and former world 5000m silver medallist Silvia Kibet launched their careers in the competition.

"We have groomed many young girls who are now top athletes and we will continue encouraging them to run. Already hundreds of thousands of shoes have been given out since the first edition until the ninth edition ran recently in Iten," he said.

"When a lady or a girl earns a pair of shoes by running the race it is something they will not forget, they feel proud as they have earned those shoes," said Toby.