

The Story of Silanga School

Exploring sustainability online and on site

As our project *VeSeL: Village e-Science for Life* comes to an end and we look to ensure sustainability, one visible success has been the enthusiastic adoption by one school in Kambu, an arid part Kenya, of a solar-powered, internet-connected laptop. Having learned to post text and images to a blog, use email, and most importantly charge and maintain the laptop themselves, teachers and students have been posting stories and accounts of their activities on a regular basis.

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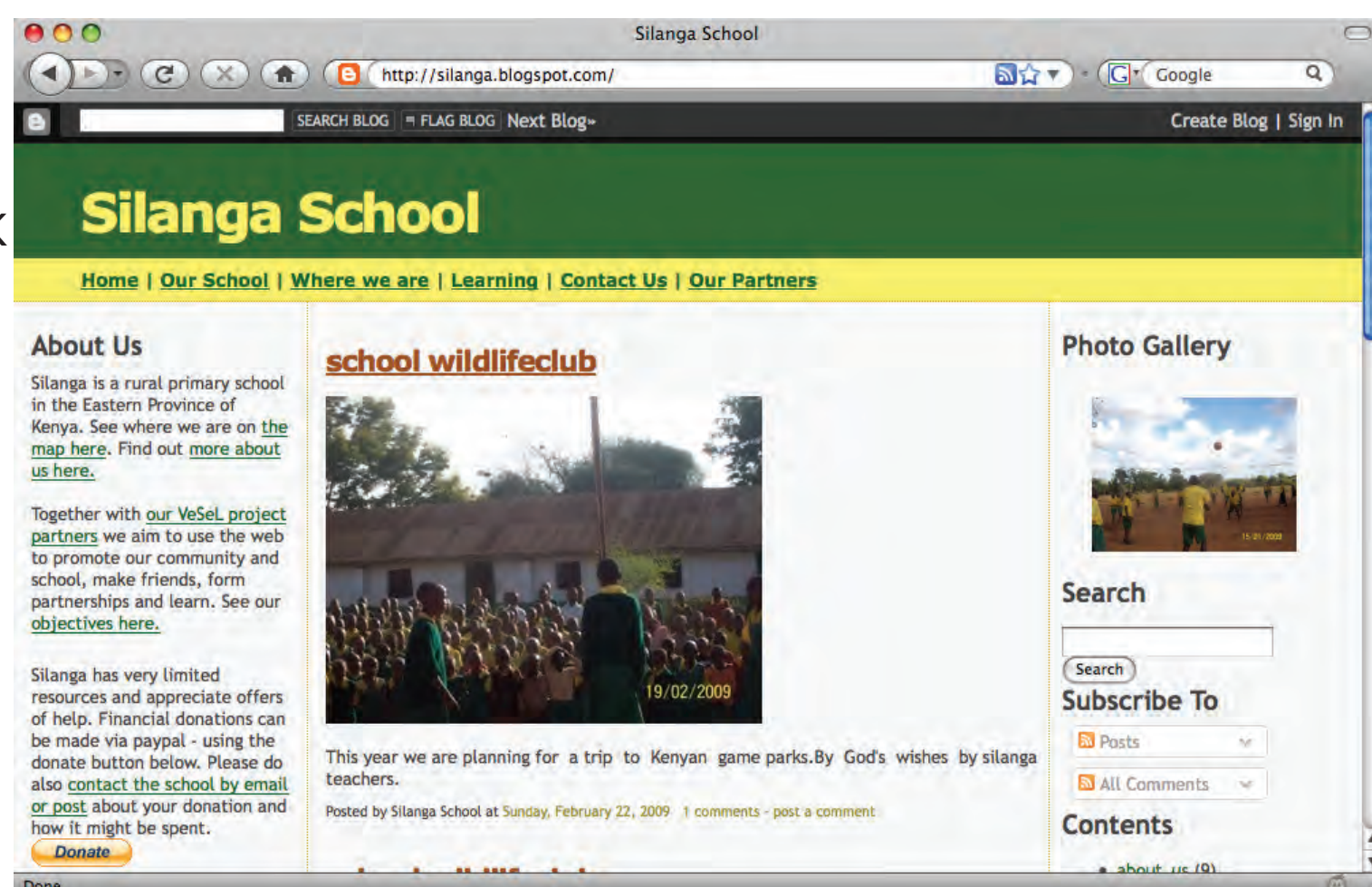
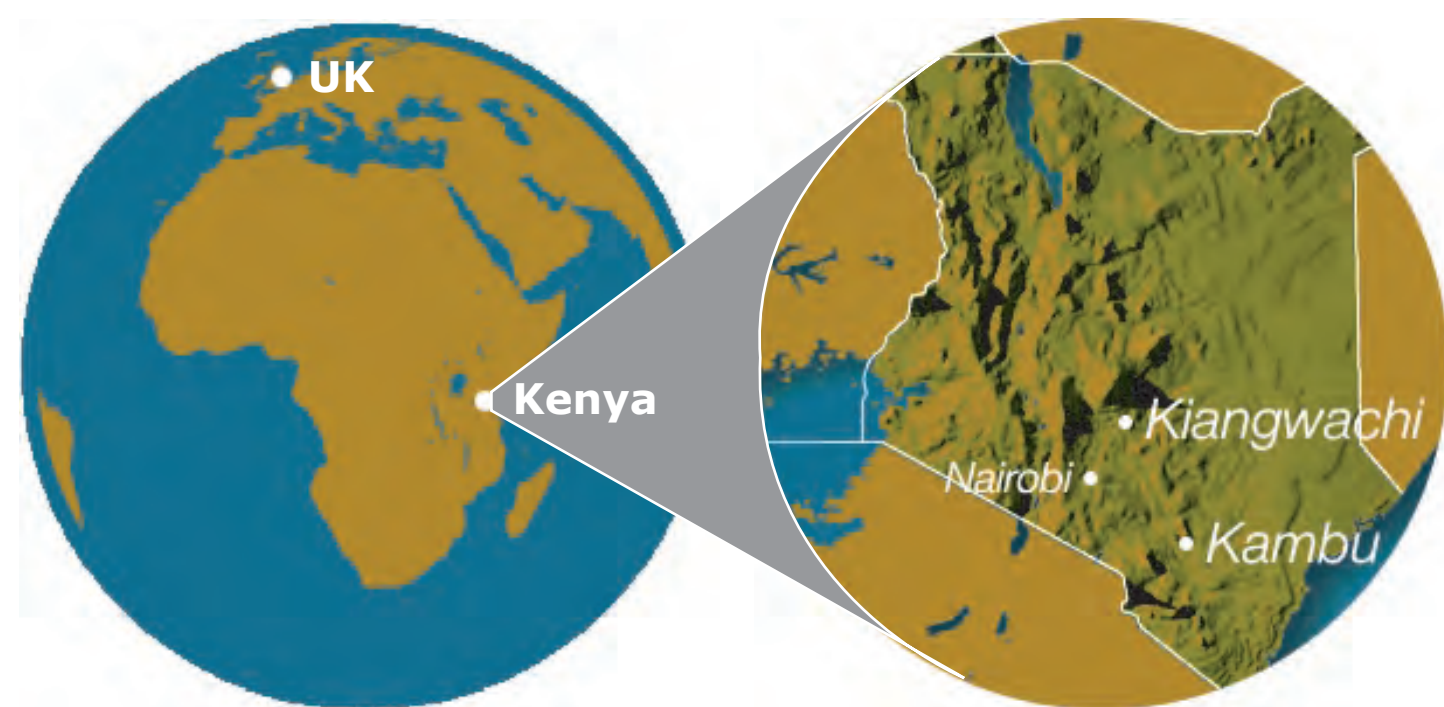
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Blogging for life

Specifically we trained them in basic use of the laptop and digital camera, and introduced Web 2.0 tools including Blogger, Flickr and Shozu. This was intended to facilitate a 2-way information flow to support not only their school activities but also agricultural activities.

School linking

We have put Silanga School in touch with a primary school not far from here, in East Sussex. This school has been given an identical solar-powered Macbook laptop, cameras and other kit.

We set up a nearly identical blog to the one for Silanga, and the two schools will be communicating initially through the blogs. In the first instance, they will post 'photo stories' about daily life in their respective schools, then do science-related activities.

DIY Energy

Concurrently, we have been running an activity in schools and the public involving automated and manual posting of data, photos and text to a blog. You can find out more about it in our other poster in this session, called Designing p-Science.

Sensor network

Our next step with both schools is to test a simple wireless sensor network which monitors the growth of food plants and posts data automatically to the Internet or nearby devices. This can link to a blog in the manner described above, and we will test appropriate ways of visualising the data for school children in the UK and Kenya. The sensor network has been tested at Kew Gardens in the UK, as seen below.



The *VeSeL* project

VeSeL (Village e-Science for Life) is a research project, part of the Bridging the Global Digital Divide network sponsored by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) in the UK. It was funded for three years from September 2006. The aim of the project has been to enable rural communities in Sub-Saharan Africa to use advanced digital technology to improve their agricultural practices and literacy levels, with particular emphasis upon educational barriers.