

# Letter from Africa

by Riley & Duncan Murdock - Winter 2007

Well, Christmas has come and gone, and if you're like most American kids you got some toys for presents, like we did. Think about your room or play room – what toys do you have? Maybe you smile thinking of your favorite ones, or when you remember the good times you've had playing with them with your family and friends. Toys are so much fun! Do you think you'd be sad without toys? If I told you that most kids here have hardly any, if any, toys, would you assume they are unhappy because of that? What do these pictures tell you?



Why do kids here not have toys? Usually because their parents can't afford them, but also because there are just very few toys available to buy, except in the big cities. I've never seen Legos, puzzles or even blocks for sale here. Sometimes there are used stuffed animals in the market, or plastic dolls. There are always balls. But that's about it.

With or without toys, though, kids all over the world play. So, what do kids do here to play? They have lots of moving around games – clapping, singing, jumping, dancing,



hopping games. They make a "ball" out of certain leaves and play hacky sack (hitting it to each other with the sides of their feet). Girls pretend to cook by grinding leaves on a large stone or brick, using a small round rock to pound them, putting several small rocks together for the cooking fire, mixing dirt and water in a



small tin can, and so forth. The boys make amazing trucks from old tin cans, cut up old flip flops for tires, or from

the dried stalks of millet and sorghum plants. They also make glasses from the inside pulp of plant stalks, and use clay to make sculptures. Old pen caps and the plastic circles from the ends of old batteries become spinning tops. They blow rubber bands on the ground in the dirt, inside a marked out circle, where they try to hit targets (kind of like marbles). They roll old bike tires with sticks. They make "flutes" with



a dried plant stalk and a small gourd. Sometimes they make kites out of old plastic bags and sticks. Obviously, kids here can be very creative!



themselves. Instead, they seem to believe that toys are more fun when a lot of kids can enjoy them, especially younger brothers or sisters. So, toys break and wear out really fast – but that doesn't seem to bother anyone. As long as the toys have made some kids happy along the way, that seems to be the important thing!

Even though they don't have many toys, I've noticed the kids are pretty good at sharing what they do have. You'd think that if they only had a few things, they would be stingy and keep their stuff to

That kind of reminds me of something Jesus said: "Real life is not measured by how much we own" (Luke 12:15). And also, "A person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God" (Luke 12:21).

## QUIZ

1. Why do most kids here not have any, or many, toys?
2. Are they sad because of that?
3. What kinds of games do they play, and what kinds of toys do they make for themselves?
4. If you had no toys, do you think you could make up your own games and toys with ordinary stuff you find like wood, cans, leaves, rocks, etc? What kinds of things would you do or make?

Try going for a few days without any of the toys or games (including computer games and tv) that are store bought. See how creative you can be making things up!



Legos are one of our favorite toys!

