

# The Marquis Project

Linking Manitobans with the Developing World



## Marquis e-Newsletter, February 2025

### **International Development Week and Remembering Benito (Beny) Mwenda**

#### *Hello Marquis Friends & Supporters:*

February 2 to 8, 2025 marks the 35th Anniversary of **International Development Week**. This is a time each year when Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) like Marquis join with the Government of Canada to mark our contribution to partnering with communities and organizations in the Global South to help them meet their sustainable development goals. Marquis is proud of its 45 years of work in Manitoba and overseas to make a positive difference in the lives of many around the world. We recognize that there is still much work to be done and continue in our efforts to make the world a better place.



Image and information about International Development Week can be found on the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation website at <https://www.mctic.ca/get-involved/international-development-week>

#### Remembering Beny Mwenda

Rural community development suffered a great loss in December 2024 with the unexpected passing of **Beny Mwenda**, a longtime Marquis partner in Tanzania. Beny led the Tanzanian Society of Agricultural Education & Extension (TSAEE) and has been a key contact for Marquis which has funded small projects in the Lake Zone and Mwanza region for a generation. Many of us at Marquis have traveled to Tanzania to see their progress, help with their project work, and intern with their organization. Furthermore, many of us have hosted Beny and his wife Adelika, son Marco and TSAEE staff when

they have been in Manitoba to study or to speak to school, church and community groups about their work. We express sincere condolences to Beny's family, and our hope is to continue to support TSAEE in the future.



Beny Mwenda (far right) with participants of the Marquis – TSAEE project Facilitating Rural Youth to Increase Marketing Intelligence through Agro-based Community Economic Development in Tanzania, East Africa. This image has long been used on the home page of The Marquis Project website.

Dinah Ceplis, a former Marquis Board Member who traveled to Tanzania numerous times to spend months supporting the development work there, wrote the following Obituary to let Beny's many friends and colleagues in Manitoba and across Canada know of his passing. The Brandon Sun, Saturday, December 14, 2024:

#### **BENITO (BENY) BATISTA MWENDA**

Canadian friends are saddened to learn of the sudden and unexpected death of long-time colleague and friend Beny Mwenda on December 10, 2024, at his home near Usagara, Tanzania. He had just observed his 68th birthday and the 63rd anniversary of Tanzanian Independence.



## More Memories of Beny Mwenda



Beny had a 33-year teaching career in agriculture extension and farmer training with the Ministry of Agriculture Training Institute at Ukiriguru. At the time of his death, he was Principal at Kilacha Agriculture & Livestock Training Institute near Moshi. He studied in Egypt, Prague University, Brandon, and Tanzania. He completed his Master's in Community Economic Development in 2011.

Beny visiting the Marquis office at Westman Entrepreneurial Centre, Princess Avenue & 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Brandon, with then Marquis Board members (from left) Al Friesen, Naomi Leadbeater, Brandy Robertson, and Samantha Dellazay (front) in March 2016

Beny was the volunteer Rural Development Coordinator for the Tanzanian Society of Agricultural Education and Extension [TSAEE] in the Lake Zone. He received the 2018 Community Service Alumni Award (Rural Development, Class of '98) from Assiniboine College, the 2010 Global Citizenship Award from The Marquis Project, and the 2006 International Partnership and 2012 International Recognition Awards from the Agricultural Institute of Canada.

### From Decker Colony, Manitoba to Tanzania, Africa

The May 2016 issue of the Marquis Newsletter featured the headline: **Beny Mwenda's Trip a Success Thanks to Marquis Members!** with the following introduction to a lengthy report *"We are pleased to update our members that the speaker's tour with Beny Mwenda was a huge success. Beny was able to present to over 30 groups including schools, other non-profits, and a public coffee house hosted by The Marquis Project during his visit in March of 2016"*.

Beny's infectious energy, optimism, hard work, and support for all those around him, both in Tanzania and here in Manitoba, made the world a better place and changed so many people's lives for the better. His passing is a great loss to the global community.

One of the schools to host Beny was **Decker Colony School** which came about when Principal/Teacher **Mark Waldner** contacted Marquis to invite Beny to speak to his students. Beny was excited about the prospect of his first visit to a Hutterite Colony and was full of questions when Al Friesen drove him to Decker on a blustery day in March 2016. Following a warm reception and pleasant interactions with students, it soon became obvious that this would be the beginning of a long mutually beneficial connection between Mark and his students at Decker and Beny and his training project participants in Tanzania.

Beny is survived by his spouse, Adelika; his sister, Bette, nieces Janet, Esther, Paulina, Paulina's daughter, Clara; nephew, Deogratius; their families, and large extended family. He was predeceased by his son Marco in 2013. Burial took place in his home village of Kinywang'anga, near Iringa in southern Tanzania. Condolence messages for Adelika can be sent to [esther.mwenda@gmail.com](mailto:esther.mwenda@gmail.com)

Upon news of Beny's passing, **Mark** reminisced about their connection with Tanzania in a message to Al Friesen:



"We first got in contact with Beny Mwenda, in 2016 when he visited our school after I contacted Marquis. He visited again in 2018 and did a presentation for our school. At the time, we invited community members to listen in.

"I still remember how he inspired some of our moms who asked him if they could make blankets, or some other items that would be of use in Tanzania. His response: he really doesn't want "stuff" for his people. He promoted the idea of building capacity through education and by

Beny (front right) with then Premier Greg Selinger (front left) and other dignitaries at National Fair Trade Conference, Winnipeg, 2016



providing people with long term planning skills. In the end, we decided to support TSAEE by creating a school organization we called "Cookies for Tanzania".



Students (L – R) Carrie Waldner, Natalya Waldner, Renae Wipf, Adelheid Waldner at Decker Colony School prepare cookies for sale to raise funds for Beny's projects. (Photo Credit: Mark Waldner)

“We baked, packaged and sold chocolate chip cookies and other items and raised thousands of dollars which ended up funding multiple projects. We kept the support going for quite a few years and by 2020, we had raised over \$10,000 for the TSAEE. We were still supporting Beny at the time of his passing; in fact, I had reached out to him a week prior to his death in December, asking for a list of projects so that we could choose one or two to fund. Although he indicated he'd get back to me within a few days, he passed away before that happened.”



Beny showing a Tanzanian shawl to students at Decker Colony School (Photo Credit: Mark Waldner)

“Going back to our fundraising: a few years ago, we changed our focus from selling cookies and are now making and selling chocolate products.

“With the same group of students from 2018, who are now adults but are still supporting the school, we turned raw cacao beans into saleable chocolate bars. We called our chocolate "Dekoa" (a play on Decker and Cocoa).”

(Submitted by Mark Waldner)

Mark and his students have also created a short video from 2020 which shows the school's involvement in the project,

which goes far beyond simply baking and selling cookies. Visit - <https://www.nextvista.org/cookies-for-tanzania/>



Dekoa chocolate bar produced by Decker Colony School to raise funds for Beny's projects in Tanzania. (Photo Credit: Mark Waldner)

## Memories of Beny – Zack Gross

**Zack Gross, Marquis Board Chair** and for twenty-five years the Executive Director, worked with Beny, visited him twice in Tanzania, and hosted him here in Manitoba. One of Zack's children interned with TSAEE, and two more of his kids, daughter-in-law, and his wife Jennifer also visited Tanzania, and all came away inspired about local impact of Beny's work. At the same time, they recognized that there was still much that could be done to support small business development, sustainable agriculture, improvement in the place of women and youth, availability of health care, and more.

Beny wrote an email to Zack years ago thanking Marquis for sending young Canadians to work and learn with TSAEE, for financially supporting many small projects over the years, and for contributing to his own sense of motivation and making him feel part of an international movement. Beny was always looking for practical, positive tools to fuel development in his region and that has always been what Marquis is about.



Zack Gross, wife Jennifer Thompson (back row second and third from right) and children Zoe (far left) and Ben (far right) visit Tanzania, with Beny (front centre) and family.

The Marquis Project is investigating a way to celebrate Beny's life with a bursary to aid students in agricultural or environmental management. More news on this to come...





**Benito (Beny) Batista Mwenda, 1956 – 2024**  
(Marquis file photo)

### The Marquis Project’s On-Going Programs

Marquis continues with its **Women’s Tailoring Project** in Uganda, and its **Women Farmers Project** in Tanzania, and is looking to add a new partner with a new project soon. We’ll have more information on funding for these projects in our Spring Newsletter.



Kusaidia African Life Tailoring Project (Photo Credit: Daved Gamey)

We want to thank the **Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC)** and the **Blennerhassett Family Foundation** for their continuing support for our work. We also want to express our gratitude to the **Hartney United Church Women** and **John & Kathy Knowles** of Winnipeg for their most generous recent donations. Of course, we would not survive and continue our work without the steadfast and heartfelt support of many donors who contribute monthly or annually. Thank you!

We also thank our volunteer Board – **Patricia Malcolm, Lindsay Hargreaves, Tony Berezowecki, David Gamey and Zack Gross**. Also, our thanks to **David McConkey** and **Mark McConkey** who have revamped our website and committed to add new information as it becomes available. To check out the new site visit: <https://marquisproject.com/> And thanks to **Ingrid Gatin** and **Lindsay Hargreaves** for the successful October Fair Trade Treat initiative in Brandon. Except for some professional services, Marquis is a completely volunteer-run organization.

We ask for your continued support for our projects overseas and here at home with a tax-deductible donation. **Just click on the “Support Marquis” button on the website (top right corner) to make your donation.** Due to the recent postal strike, CRA has extended the deadline for claiming 2024 donations to February 28, 2025.

### Community Notices



**February – 10th to 22nd**



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