

The Church of Ireland.....in Kenya: Bishops' Appeal Reports

By Lydia Monds

In 1992, bulldozers came during the night and razed 250 homes to the ground in Nairobi because the Government had sold the land for the development of industry and so needed the inhabitants to leave.

The Anglican Church in Kenya became involved and a desolate field 20 miles from the city was designated their new home. With no houses, no toilets, no sanitation or water, no schools or transport systems, and no way of earning a small living in ways the city had once provided, the community, now named the Soweto community of Kayole, had to work together to survive.

21 years later, in an unusually cold spell for August, I visited this community as the first of many projects visits in Kenya to see how the Church of Ireland, through its Bishops' Appeal fund, had impacted lives there.

The projects were funded through CMS Ireland and were carried out through the Church networks and by the hard work of local communities there.

By 1994, the Kayole community was receiving child sponsorship funding from Bishops' Appeal to send children to school. Today, they are proud of the achievements of these children, many of whom are bank managers, accountants and nurses and who continue to support the community and particularly the school which has now been built in Kayole and which educates 370 children.

The teachers, who accept lower wages than they would receive in other schools, spoke passionately about the achievements of the pupils, as well as the need for extra classrooms and a long-term solution to the absenteeism of female students due to the menstrual cycle.

A few years later, Bishops' Appeal funded seeds and the community was able to grow their own crops and become more self-sustaining in feeding themselves.

More recently, Bishops' Appeal supported the installation of gutters and water tanks in community homes and in the school. Inhabitants used to walk for miles to collect water; now it is accessible in the village.

One community member, Rachel, was particularly insistent that the message of thanks be sent back to Ireland. "Asante, asante, asante" (Swahili for thank you).

Their gratitude was tangible as was their resilience and collaborative hard work despite many setbacks from floods to fires to food shortages over the years.

Diocese of Kajiado

After Kayole I moved to the Diocese of Kajiado and spent the remainder of my time visiting projects with specific focuses on training, educating and supporting Masai communities.

The main Masai Rural Training Centre has a long history as a feeding centre that then developed into an agricultural and animal husbandry training centre. Recently Bishops' Appeal funded a new electronic water pump and tank that will allow the training centre to develop but that also provides water to the local town and to several local schools.

I attended a church service in Imberikani, where Bishops' Appeal funded the building of a nearly completed training centre that will provide literacy and IT skills to people in the surrounding area. We sang and shared together and later some members invited me to their homes.

Church workers arrived in the area in 2007 as part of a wider survey. The people were experiencing severe drought and were starving and so came running with baskets in the hope that the outsiders were bringing food.

The Church workers returned with food the next day and relations were built that have led to land being donated for a church building and this now soon opening training centre.

It is truly a remarkable and promising development.

The following day I left the plains and travelled to the rolling hills and the small village of Meto which is nestled two hours from the nearest town.

Some years back, the Church set up a small agri-vet there that sold certified seeds for maize, beans and other staple crops and vaccinations for cattle.

Bishops' Appeal provided funding for the set-up of this programme. Water was brought to the area and harvests and animals began to thrive.

However, other suppliers selling similar yet inferior products began to mushroom up in surrounding areas, undercutting costs. By the time people realised that the seeds and vaccines from these alternative, cheaper vendors were out of date, watered down or complete duds, the original agri-vet had gone out of business.

When I arrived, the local pastor showed me two ploughed fields, one that had been sown with certified seeds and the other with seeds that had been bought from the nearby town.

The first was flourishing, the second was showing no signs of growth whatsoever.

The lesson has been well and truly learnt and the Church is ready to establish some services in the area again.

I finished my visit by meeting students from Oloosuyian Masai Girls Secondary School.

The school is being supported by Tuam, Killala and Achonry diocese who have directed funds through Bishops' Appeal for toilets and showers for the school.

At the time of my visit, the girls had moved from sleeping in a classroom to their new dormitories and the septic tank for the new toilets was dug and awaiting completion.

There have been many partners involved in seeing the dream of this school become a reality and I was particularly inspired by the young women being educated there.

Some of them are from the communities I had previously visited, or even further afield again. They understand fully the difference this education will make to their futures and to their families. They spoke of their families' dependence on cattle and the persistent droughts that make diversifying from this an absolute necessity for survival.

Many of the mothers of these girls sell beautiful beadwork to pay for their daughter's school fees. CMS Ireland works closely with them in providing outlets for sales and in doing so raising vital awareness in Ireland whilst empowering Masai women to be in a position to provide for their families.

Bishops' Appeal has been privileged to partner with them, with the different dioceses of the Church in Kenya and with the people themselves to see people lifted out of poverty.

These are but of handful of examples of the work that Bishops' Appeal funds in any given year and indeed reflects decades of support around the globe.

This harvest we are praying for concentrated support so that vital projects in need of funding do not go away empty handed. And so, as a representative of Bishops' Appeal, whose funding is dependent solely on the committed giving of people in the Church of Ireland, I would like to echo Mama Rachel's words of gratitude: Asante, asante, asante: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Lydia Monds is Education Advisor to Bishops' Appeal For more information on Bishops' Appeal funded projects, on how to donate or to request a speaker, contact bishopsappeal@ireland.anglican.org.