

Christian Aid Week
9 – 15 May 2010

Let's End Poverty: a Christian Aid Week story

(This element is designed as an alternative to showing the video: Christian Aid Week: Let's end poverty, available on the Poverty: Let's End It DVD-rom.)

Before Christian Aid Week this year, a group of Christian Aid supporters visited Kenya to see first hand the transforming work of Christian Aid partner Maji na Ufanisi (MNU) – meaning 'Water and Development'. MNU has worked in Kiambiu, one of Nairobi's slums or 'informal settlements' since 1999. If it can secure more funding, it plans to begin work in the Matopeni settlement.

Rosalind McLaughlin, from Holywood, Northern Ireland, tells her story...

'We've travelled around Nairobi and we've seen all sorts of different areas: quite a contrast. Sixty per cent of the population – more than 2 million people – live in informal settlements. I was quite shocked.

In Matopeni...

'The first things we saw when we arrived in Matopeni were the results of the flying toilets. There's not a single working toilet here, so people go, put it in a bag, and throw it over the wall. And there is no official tap or clean running water. People have managed to access the water pipes below the ground – but the water is really filthy and carries typhoid.

'A lady called Catherine Kithuku showed us around. It was incredible. We were led along a walk-way that runs alongside the houses. It was constructed of planks that were half-broken and directly underneath it ran the community's drainage system. There were great big rats, and Catherine said when it rains her family home floods with sewage right up to the level of the beds, soaking the mattresses. Mosquitoes breed in the sewers, increasing malaria, and the children often suffer from pneumonia because of the damp. But the family has nowhere else to go.

'The dignity of the people here and the sense of community are very striking. It's about we, not me. Catherine has already formed a group called Arise and Shine that has organised rubbish collections and educated people about health and other issues. Catherine said she dreams of an environment fit for humans to live in. She said she believes in change. If MNU works in Matopeni, I believe she will see it.

In Kiambiu...

'By contrast, the people in Kiambiu are almost living a normal life. With the help of MNU, they have built five toilet and shower blocks and they've employed people from the local community to clean and maintain them. They charge people a nominal fee to use them and invest the money back into the community, for example to fund the building of more toilet blocks or emergency healthcare for families. They've also got clean drinking water now.

'We met another Catherine in Kiambiu, Catherine Nyaata. She has been a great mover and shaker in getting this project up and running. It's made a great difference to her life, her health and her children. She actually helped to build these blocks – to mix the cement.

Back home...

'I'd seen people living in poverty through television screens but I hadn't really grasped for myself what it's really like – the desperation, and having no means of providing the very basics for yourself and for your family.

'But I've also seen that if we're willing to do something, to make an effort, to put other people first, we can make others' lives a lot better. We don't even need a huge amount of money. Relatively small amounts bring massive, massive changes to many, many people.'

Acknowledgements

Many of the quotes, prayers and stories contained in this service have been taken from the dialogue between the supporters and the Kenyans they visited. Our special thanks to these dedicated people for sharing their words with Christian Aid and its other supporters this year:

1. Catherine Kithuku, Community activist, Matopeni settlement in Nairobi, Kenya.
2. Everlyne Kithuku, Catherine's sister, Matopeni settlement in Nairobi, Kenya.
3. Jeremiah Muli, Student, Matopeni settlement in Nairobi, Kenya
4. Catherine Nyaata, Community activist, Kiambiu settlement in Nairobi, Kena.
5. Sue Burston, Christian Aid Week organiser in Wooler, Northumberland.
6. Alison Clarke, chair of Christian Aid committee, Worcester.
7. Rosalind McLaughlin, Christian Aid representative from Holywood, Northern Ireland.
8. Rev Nan Wyn Powell-Davis, Christian Aid supporter from Mold, north Wales.
9. Pastor Delroy Powell, Christian Aid supporter from Tooting, South London.
10. Anthony Vennelle, Christian Aid Week organiser in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The other elements of this service were written and compiled by Jenny Ayres, Liz Baddaley, Laura Bardwell, Pippa Durn and Kate Tuckett. Special thanks also to CompassionArt for their partnership in Christian Aid Week 2010.

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