



## Advantage Africa is Responding to the Food Crisis in Kenya

Since our last newsletter in June, a humanitarian emergency emerged across large parts of East Africa and the rapidly spiralling costs of provisions threatened many families in our partner communities with serious malnutrition.

Burgwin Muthoka wrote to us from Kibwezi District in eastern Kenya, the area most affected by the drought amongst our partner communities. He said: *'Rivers are drying up and schools are closing due to lack of food. Food prices have gone up dramatically and maize has increased from 20 shillings a kilo to 50. If we don't get urgent support, people are really going to suffer.'*



Orphaned children receive food aid in Kibwezi

Advantage Africa has always focused on reaching the most vulnerable people and particularly those affected by HIV and disability who are often overlooked in times of crisis. So in July, we launched our food crisis appeal and sent a copy of Burgwin's letter to many of you, with a request to help those most in need.

The appeal has since raised nearly £3,000 and we are so grateful to everyone who made a donation. Your support is enabling Rescue Team to provide nutritious food to 140 orphans and 50 people with HIV, the Kibwezi Disabled People's Organisation to reach a similar number of vulnerable people with protective rations, and the Sikizana Trust to ensure that 300 malnourished children identified by local clinics can regain their health and strength.

We're still receiving reports of malnourished children from the Kibwezi District Nutritionist and the needs remain great. We have therefore decided to keep our appeal open at: <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/advantageafrica>.

In this issue we highlight some of the people who are being assisted by the appeal and focus on how our work in Kibwezi District is also building the longer term resilience of vulnerable people to improve their health and livelihoods.

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**For more news please 'like' our Facebook page**

We know Facebook isn't everyone's cup of tea but our Facebook page provides an immediate, regular and detailed insight into the work of a small charity making a big difference in Africa. Recent posts highlighted how we make grants to partner organisations and the building of a new nursery school in Bajjo, Uganda.

You can see pictures, videos and news from events. It's a great way to keep in touch with our work, tell others about it and interact with us through your own comments and views.

## Advantage Africa at work in Kibwezi District, Kenya



Food aid arrives at Mbila's small home

### Reaching Disabled People in Need

Kibwezi District is an arid area in south-east Kenya characterised by low rainfall, frequent droughts, environmental degradation, bumpy dirt roads and inadequate services. Most people rely on subsistence agriculture to survive and the rising costs of food and basic education mean that grinding poverty is a daily reality for thousands.

Life in Kibwezi is especially hard for disabled children and adults, who are always the poorest of the poor and are frequently excluded from school, healthcare and jobs because it's traditionally believed they're cursed and worthless. At times of drought like now even the most resilient are pushed to the limit of their abilities to cope.

Working with Agnes Musembi and the Kibwezi Disabled People's Organisation (KDPO), Advantage Africa is helping to bring immediate relief and sustained hope for the future. With funds from our recent food appeal, 140 people are receiving regular food aid delivered by motorbike, often to some of the District's remotest locations. *'Life is tough right now as there has been no rain since last December', says Agnes, 'so we prioritise the children and elderly who are most vulnerable'.*



During the current crisis, maize is distributed fortnightly to disabled people in their homes

Mbila, who is in his 60s, is one example of the people benefitting from the food aid. Mbila was bitten by a snake while sleeping and his nervous system was so damaged that he can no longer stand or take care of himself. The neighbours do what they can to help but are struggling to feed and look after their own families. There are also local traditions to be addressed to allow his only relative, a woman, to help him keep clean.

Agnes has just the experience and empathy that's needed to help Mbila, because her leg was amputated after a snakebite, aged six. She's been fighting the stigma surrounding disability ever since. She tells everyone living nearby about the food for Mbila with firm but compassionate words, explaining their role and what needs to be done to help him stay healthy. Mbila's face lights up.



Mbila

### Project Insight

KDPO's membership of 1,500 people is spread over several thousand square miles. Agnes has lived in Kibwezi all her life but says the motorbike Advantage Africa helped them buy last year enables them to reach disabled people like Mbila in remote places she 'never knew existed before'. As well as helping meet needs arising from the food crisis, Advantage Africa and KDPO create opportunities for disabled people through mobility aids, home-based care, vocational training and the greater inclusion of disabled people across the District. A motorbike like KDPO's costs £800 plus £50 per month for fuel.



Mulwa and group leader Grace (left) visit people living with HIV to advise about medication



Muthoki (right) dances at HIV outreach events

## Moving Forward Amid the Crisis

People with HIV need a good diet, protection from opportunistic infections and plenty of emotional and spiritual support to maintain a positive outlook. As their immunity falls, antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) become increasingly important. HIV counsellor Mulwa Kamba says: *ARVs may be free but that doesn't help if you're living with HIV and can't afford the fare to Mbirikani (the hospital where ARVs are dispensed, more than 100 miles away). As well as food, Advantage Africa's support for bus fares is vital for people living with HIV right now.*

Advantage Africa's holistic approach and a network of eight support groups are ensuring that those made vulnerable by HIV can survive the current crisis. But it's also vital to help people with HIV to become self-reliant. With this in mind, we're about to help 25 women in Kalulini village to start keeping poultry; the eggs will provide them with a useful income as well as essential protein.

Making a home visit



## Muthoki's Story

After her husband died, Muthoki lived for many years with fear and uncertainty; she was always ill and had terrible mouth ulcers. Things got so bad she was admitted to hospital and word went round that she had finally died. People came to her home asking when her funeral would take place.

Muthoki's funeral never did happen. She laughs out loud and exclaims 'Thank God, Hallelujah!' as she recalls the story of how she came back from the brink. With support from Advantage Africa's partner Rescue Team, Muthoki had an HIV test which confirmed she was HIV positive. She began taking antiretroviral drugs, received nutritional support and eventually returned to good health. She joined the Ngai Nde Kimena support group, where twice a week 30 women living with HIV meet to help each other in all aspects of their lives.

The people helped by this project now help out in other projects. Every week, Muthoki and her group members assist Rescue Team in their outreach and care work. They collect firewood and cook kitheri (maize and beans) in enormous pans to provide a nutritious meal for 140 orphaned and vulnerable children. Muthoki says: *'I like helping out and I want people to know that you can't catch HIV by sharing food'*.

Muthoki's smile, energy and her dancing are infectious, and you'll be hard-pressed to find a stronger advocate for reducing the spread and impact of HIV in all of Kibwezi District.

## Project Insight

Rescue Team's three professional counsellors provide HIV tests and support clients to protect themselves and others from infection. One approach is 'ABCD': **A**bstinence, **B**e faithful, **C**ondoms and **D**iscover your HIV status. It costs £10 for women like Muthoki to travel to Mbirikani to collect their ARVs and have their immunity monitored. £1,200 provides training and materials to enable women like those in Kalulini to start keeping poultry.

## Encouragement in Hard Times

Like many small charities, Advantage Africa is struggling in the current economic climate and we're encouraged by *every single donation* you make. When one reader of our last newsletter sent us a generous cheque for £3,000 for Rescue Team's Kids' Club we were overjoyed! Personal contact is important in all our fundraising so please let us know if you'd like more copies of this newsletter to pass on to friends and family with a simple post-it note, letter or some verbal words of encouragement.

Jill—

Just wanted to let you know about this charity I like who fight poverty in Africa. Please have a look at this newsletter and consider supporting their great work!  
Take care — Angela

## Running, Swimming, Baking, Singing ...

Our five London 10k runners together raised £1,200 as they pounded the capital's streets in July. The 2012 race takes place just before the Olympics start and promises to be the best ever so please contact us if you'd like a place.



More recently, Tom Bartlett raised £1,550 by completing his 10th half and 10th full marathon. Tom says he's now retired from marathons so we're looking for other brave people to take on the challenge of 26.2 miles by signing up for the first Milton Keynes Marathon on 29th April 2012. Please call the office to claim one of our guaranteed places.

Determined eight-year-old Lily Carroll raised £95 in sponsorship by swimming 15 lengths of her local pool. Her friends Dulcie, Jo, Sally Andrew and Niamh raised £92 by making delicious cakes and biscuits and selling them at the Olney Cherry Fair.

The Milton Keynes Community Choir's 'People Get Ready Concert' was a wonderful, memorable event and raised £893 towards our work.

## Getting Ready for 'The Big Give'

The Big Give initiative aims to help *'donations go further'* and Advantage Africa is taking part in their 2011 Christmas Challenge. We're now seeking pledges of £500 or more from individuals, companies, churches or trusts by 18th November. Subject to certain conditions, the Big Give will double all the pledges made in the New Year. That's an investment in changed lives in Africa with a return of 100%! If you'd like to make a pledge, please contact us as soon as you can .

# theBig Give



## Making a Difference

Advantage Africa's Director Andrew Betts says: *'During my last visit to our Kibwezi projects I saw disabled children enjoying school, orphans receiving nutritious food and gaining life skills, people with HIV living healthy, productive lives and disabled people becoming independent with wheelchairs and appliances - all because of your generous support.'*

*'Some of our early Kibwezi projects are being sustained locally, like the unit for disabled children at Kisayani School now funded by parents and the Kenyan government. I so enjoyed meeting Julia there (pictured left) and seeing her feeling valued, fulfilled and happy. She's a real symbol of the long-term development we're all working so hard to achieve.'*

Advantage Africa supports the ideas and work of inspirational people in Africa to overcome poverty and disadvantage. We work in close partnership with determined individuals and community groups, supporting their ideas and plans so that disadvantaged people can improve their lives. This particularly includes people who, alongside poverty, face prejudice and stigma as a result of disability or HIV. Advantage Africa provides encouragement, resources, advice, training and links to other sources of knowledge, skills and funds.



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