



COVID-19 and Sub Saharan Africa

Angela Docherty reports

The pandemic we're now living through is truly global and no country, no culture and no community is unaffected. In a little less than the twelve weeks since New Ways directors Angela Docherty and William Carson returned from visiting the projects in Turkana (Kenya) and Ethiopia, our plans, hopes and expectations for this year have had to be completely re-thought and revised.

Africa is behind the curve when compared to the US and Europe however there are additional negative factors, not least the overall health of the general population in most African countries and the cramped conditions many of the poorer live in the wider Africa community.

Although Kenya has had a low incidence of COVID-19 so far, and cases appear to be localized to the south, we still have visitors to the area including lorry drivers that may have travelled north from more populated areas, so projects still need to follow Government guidance. The team in Turkana, has had to close 3 primary schools and all of the 18 nurseries that we support. Indeed, only a few weeks back, two of the team, Scholastica and Lenny, whom some of you will know, had to cut short their UK visit and rush back to Kenya before international flights were no longer permitted to

land in the country. In the other areas in which we work, closures are also taking place. In Malawi all schools are closed, in the Sudan, travelling between estates is forbidden and all educational establishments are closed, and in Ethiopia too, schools are closed and travel is restricted.

While there is a sense that people in these areas die of so many diseases and this is just one more threat to a precarious existence, protective measures are being taken. Some of the measures which are easy to implement in the UK are more difficult in Africa. Right now, we're seeking funding for an urgent hygiene project in Turkana so we can distribute soap, sanitizer and water as well as arrange community-based seminars to explain to the people why this is so important. Many in Turkana already have very fragile health given the shortage of food, a significant increase in malaria, and increased incidence of cholera as we have had a lot of rain - as is often the case, good news is accompanied by bad!



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Benson Emoru, a grade 8 student in Todonyang, tells us his wish is 'for the corona to end in order for me to sit for the national exam and accomplish my ambition of joining secondary school. My favourite subject is science.

During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic schools were closed, but I am undergoing tuition with help from some of the students who have finished their secondary school, who also benefitted from the same sponsorship program like me.'



We also need to continue to raise money to pay the teachers we support and for the feeding programmes that we fund. We expect we will see an increase in malnutrition as no nursery schools are open, which means no food is being prepared or distributed at this time. Here in London, and on the ground, we're looking at ways to address this including allowing mothers to come to the nurseries to cook the food and then looking at a way to distribute this to the children.

Good progress is being made here - our partner organisation, Mary's Meals, has developed an approach which involves prepared meals which can be collected by parents and this is being rolled out in Kenya, Malawi and elsewhere.

But it is the urgency around our preparation for protecting the communities from COVID-19 that is pressing. We know from our experience how quickly we can improve health outcomes with early intervention – and soap, sanitizer and water, is as simple as it gets.

Two Trips and Two Perspectives

Turkana Trip 2020 – William Carson (Director of New Ways UK) reports

After nine years, I finally set foot back in Turkana in January 2020. Angela and I had arrived in Nairobi on Sunday evening, January 12th to begin a weeklong trip to visit as many projects we support as possible and meet our friends and partners in MCSPA.

What struck me most on this trip was how much more established the projects were that we support there, accompanied by a very real sense of achievement, which was well deserved – but only as a platform for greater challenges ahead.

Back in 2011, the heat, the dry air and the overall remoteness of Turkana were absolute. Our friends and partners in the field from MCSPA were battered and bruised but steadfast in their determination to deliver on ambitious projects, in collaboration and partnership with the Turkana people, to help improve nourishment, advance

education and to deliver water infrastructure and long-term sustainability in agriculture.

I remember the first time I visited one of the rock dams we had supported. Before that first trip, I had written up the project report and



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included several photographs the team had sent to London. But only when I was standing by the dam itself did I realize that I had never imagined that the person taking the photograph wasn't standing on some road or carriageway that ran alongside the dam. In reality, there was no road, not even a dirt track. The dam was quite literally in the middle of nowhere. So often I had queried the time and cost to mobilize labor and machinery to build infrastructure in Turkana, and though I was told on many occasions that this was due to the difficulty in getting on site, it was only when I stood in the silence of the harsh, semi-desert landscape, that the magnitude of the effort needed on all parties, was self-evident.

Roll on to my recent visit, and this time there were two project stand outs. Before and between trips, I had worked on a number of proposals which quite honestly raised eyebrows for the challenges they presented.

The first was a water infrastructure project that supplies water for more than 200 children at the nursery and primary school at Todonyang as well as local agriculture projects and shepherds and their livestock. The second was the agriculture project in Lobur. When the proposal to build 'furrows in

the desert' came to New Ways for consideration, it appeared to take the small vegetable garden concept that was already in practice to a completely new and audacious level. In 2011, I visited the project when it was just getting started. The rows of hosepipe that ran across sandy trenches with one giant water tank to provide irrigation was indicative of the size of the prize, but also the many hurdles that might beset the project deliverables. On my recent trip, the nine years absence had been clearly well spent in Lobur! The agricultural project was now an oasis of vegetable produce – beetroot, pomegranate, peppers, chilis, potatoes and kale!

These are just two examples of striking successes in Turkana that I was able to see firsthand. Many of our supporters may never get that chance but it is testimony to the hard work and perseverance of the MCSPA team on the ground and the resilience of the local Turkana that help and contribute to these major infrastructure projects that benefit so many, year after year, where at one time there was only wasteland and hardship.

Two Trips and Two Perspectives...

Ethiopia – New Horizons and Challenges

Angela Docherty, New Ways CEO

Towards the end of January 2020, I was able to extend my trip to Turkana and visit the new development project we're supporting in Ethiopia. Accompanied by two of our board directors, Fernando and Lenny, I spent the three-day trip getting to know and understand the challenges of the location and the situation for the Nyangatom tribe – a very similar community to the Turkana. They were so impressed by our visit that they donated food for our dinner!

Ethiopia borders Kenya to the north and the climate is very similar to Turkana. The Nyangatom also have a very similar culture, and like the Turkana, are semi-nomadic and live off their animals. However, they are further behind the development curve as they have not had the 20 years of support that we've been able to help fund in Turkana.

Visiting the project took me back to the very early days of my first trips to Turkana with New Ways. There is very little in the way of even the most basic of facilities for the team who have committed themselves to supporting the local population long term. There's no Development Centre – just basic quarters, a dispensary and a workshop to maintain machinery and vehicles. The project team arrived 5 years ago and realized they were starting with a blank canvas. New

Ways has funded part of the development set up and it was a great opportunity to see what the area was like and how the project had evolved. They've spent 4 years in tents so living in quarters is a step up as the Development Centre takes shape and eventually they will get a proper house and be able to employ local staff and then these will get the staff quarters in due course.



The key challenge remains access to water. The rocky terrain means the water table is quite deep below the surface while their typical formation makes them unsuitable for rock catchment dams but similar challenges have been met and solved in Turkana. We've already been able to support the building of a nursery school with two bathrooms and the team are building showers too.

It was great to see these first elements of development first hand and to reflect on what the team has achieved in a few short years. I very much look forward to my next visit, whenever that will be possible, to see the next phase come to fruition.

