

EXETER THIKA LINK REPORT APRIL 2021

General news

The short rains in October were somewhat inadequate and now the long rain season has begun with much prayer that the rain will be sufficient for a good harvest in Thika. Following a very long lockdown all the schools returned in January, but Covid numbers have risen sharply resulting in a new lockdown in five counties. This means no travel between counties, which cuts Thika in half, making life very difficult there at present. Lockdown means a night-time curfew, restrictions on gathering, schools are closed again and church services are on-line only. Medical facilities are over-stretched and the vaccine roll-out is moving slowly. Our prayers are much needed at this time for our friends, who continue to trust God and encourage one another, but life is tough.

Thungururu 'Farming God's Way' Project

Hot sun in January and February helped with drying the crops produced by the project farmers, with one farmer saying she harvested nearly four times the amount she managed in the past. The farms of the trained farmers had a remarkable difference in crop performance which has attracted many other farmers to join the training scheme. The field officer is now seeking to widen operations and has held community meetings in three new areas where new farmer groups or 'Freedom from hunger' groups have now been formed. Thanks to some great donations towards the project, the field officer will continue to be employed with our help for most of the current year. He is encouraging tree planting and planning to involve school children in environmental conservation. Natural pesticides are being made and community saving for water tanks is ongoing.



Maize planted in a piece of land using zai pits as way of moisture and fertility conservation



Maize planted in a piece of land (same day) using the normal way.



A farmer tends her tree nursery. In the background are container vegetable gardens for intensive kitchen gardening



A farmer happily displays bananas (harvested in the dry period) grown after harvesting water in trenches

Umoja Project (Church and Community Mobilisation)

Through Umoja bible studies, the participating churches are awakened to see that they can meet their own needs without outside help, and that they can also reach out to their community and enable sustainable development in a great variety of ways. Benson is the Umoja coordinator in Thika Diocese and the project has now been running for nearly six years with remarkable results.

Benson says he is well aware that funds mobilization may be difficult this year, with the phasing out of support from Tearfund and the Devon-Thika Umoja Project. They had earlier thought Umoja funding would be integrated in the general diocesan budget (mainly quota allocations across all parishes). However, the parishes are already struggling to raise their normal allocations. In fact, he says, the bishop has been so gracious to the parishes by reducing the targets due to COVID (which they are still struggling to raise). He planned to have a forum with the Bishop, Administrative Secretary and all Archdeacons in March to deliberate on sustainable Umoja management and resource mobilization and hopes to have fruitful discussions that will speak to the future of Umoja in Thika.

Umoja implementation is being moved from local church gatherings to the prayer cell level. Prayer cells are home based fellowships where Christians within one locality from a certain local church meet for deeper prayer and the word during weekdays. Here, there is more time for Umoja bible studies and taking grassroots actions.

Benson has identified five key people to train as 'Trainers of facilitators' and their training is going ahead. He has held reflection meetings with the facilitators in each of the Umoja parishes and continues to mobilise the 'Common interest groups' which are mainly doing poultry keeping. Rev Leah, the children's minister at the Cathedral, is working on a manual for Umoja with children and youth.

The plans to launch Umoja in each of the four Archdeaconries in April may have to be put on hold for the moment, but the aim is for the Bishop to envision each Archdeaconry Council and task them to implement Umoja in all their parishes. This, together with the training of the five 'Trainers of facilitators', will make the spread of Umoja possible in many new areas and ultimately right across the Diocese.

No stories or pictures for you this time, but we hope you will feel as excited as we are at the strategies Benson is putting in place for the future. The Devon-Thika Umoja Project can be justly proud of what has been achieved in our partnership over the six years it will have been running by the end of 2021, when our commitment to support comes to an end. Of course it would not have been possible without our generous supporters and the working partnership with Tearfund which enabled it all to happen. Meanwhile, for the rest of this year, we need to continue to give as much financial support as we can, to help Thika get over the serious problems caused by the pandemic, so they are in a position to take Umoja forward sustainably into the future.

Parish Links

Several Devon parishes are communicating with their linked parishes in Thika using Facebook, WhatsApp or other media platforms. These tend to work better than emails but there's nothing like a phone call or SMS for instant communication. It's so good to know how to pray and also to be upheld by the prayers of our friends who certainly know the power of prayer and live every day trusting in God's strength and protection.

What about visits?

As we said in the last update, with the Lambeth Conference postponed to 2022 we are just wondering whether it might be possible to invite some folk from our linked parishes next year - maybe in September 2022. Of course we have to wait for now to see how things go, but those linked parishes which indicated that they would like to be involved might be able to continue to make preparations and we will get in touch when things become clearer.

For more information see the Overseas Links page on www.exeter.anglican.org
or contact Thika Link Secretary thika.link@exeter.anglican.org