



This edition's theme: Focus on our Work in Kenya

In this edition of *Milestones*, our Kenya Programme Manager Rob Alej shares some highlights and impressions of his recent visit to Kenya:

Challenges Persist

I lived in Kenya for two years in the 1990s, and have made many return visits since, so the country and its people have a very special place in my heart. Returning feels familiar, but I also know I'll encounter new, fascinating and often difficult situations in the course of my work with Advantage Africa. Right now, the challenges are as acute as I've ever seen them and include recovery from the pandemic, escalating prices, political unrest and the worst drought in 40 years.

Life for most people in Kenya is harder than ever, and especially for the vulnerable families that Advantage Africa exists to support. During my trip I visited many such families and was reminded that with the absence of any meaningful welfare state, their major source of help is Advantage Africa and our partners. That's why your support is appreciated and valued, now more than ever.



Planning with the teacher training team.



Using role play to train teachers how parents can support school-leavers with learning disabilities.

Training Special Needs Teachers

I began my visit at our partner the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE). This national organisation is based in the capital city Nairobi and is responsible for training special needs teachers from all over Kenya. Advantage Africa's 'Bright Futures' project partnership with KISE enables teachers to support students with learning disabilities to successfully make the transition from school into productive adult life in the community.

Working with my KISE colleague Flora and others, we trained our second group of 20 teachers in the life-changing model of school-to-community transition first developed at Advantage Africa's partner schools in Mitaboni and Thinu, which I also visited. It was thrilling to see the commitment of the trainees to ensure students with learning disabilities don't get 'stuck' in school without plans for their future. The team have now trained 40 teachers from all over Kenya in effective transition, with each teacher helping up to four students each year to leave their school and start a small enterprise such as keeping goats or making popcorn. By helping their families weather the cost-of-living crisis and overcome poverty, this project couldn't be more timely, and it was wonderful to see its impact multiplying!



Children enjoy learning in our partner schools in Kenya.

Recent Impact with KISE and our partner schools

- 40 teachers trained
- 27 young people made successful transitions so far
- 65 children with disabilities in education

£30 could provide training manuals for our next group of 20 teachers

£280 could enable a young person with disabilities to establish a sustainable enterprise



Francis has left school and is looking after sheep on the family smallholding.

Promoting a Better Environment, Livelihoods and Appliances for People with Disabilities

From Nairobi I travelled 130 miles south-east using the recently-built railway to the town of Kibwezi, where Advantage Africa supports two partner organisations. On arrival, the heat and dryness of this semi-arid zone is immediately apparent, and in contrast to the relative cool of Nairobi. Here I was working with Agnes and her team from our trusted and long-standing partner the Kibwezi Disabled Persons' Organisation (KDPO).

KDPO support people with disabilities to access appliances, improve their livelihoods and overcome discrimination and abuse. In addition to planning and monitoring projects from their tiny office, I always travel with their resourceful team to visit some of the 1,000+ disabled people we support, often in remote locations, and living in the most challenging circumstances imaginable.

Using motorbikes to navigate the mud roads and paths, we travelled for 40 minutes to visit the Kanyungu Group, one of the 20 village disability groups that KDPO has founded and nurtured. Their 26 members, all people with disabilities or parents of children

with disabilities, welcomed us warmly. The leaders showed us their impressive tree nursery established with support from Advantage Africa. The nursery is providing an income for the group as well as encouraging sustainable tree-planting in this deforested area where essential shade and firewood are in desperately short supply.

The group members told me about their other achievements and challenges; such discussions are a vital time of listening, appreciating and encouraging each other. In this dry area with limited access to water the group was appreciative of the storage tanks we'd provided to harvest water from roofs during the rainy season.

After much hand-shaking, we went on to visit several homes of group members who had received training and goats to boost their livelihoods. It was inspiring to see how this activity had greatly improved their incomes and resilience.

Recent impact of our support to KDPO

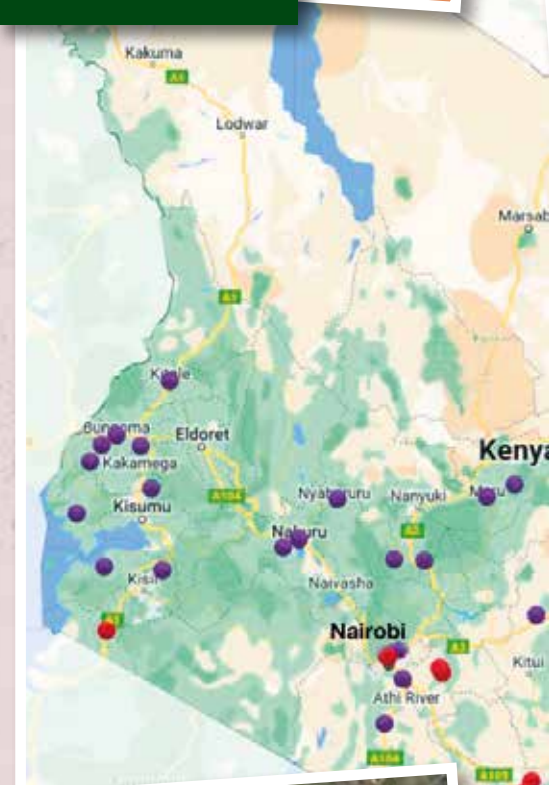
- 35 people trained in goat rearing
- 190 people fitted with wheelchairs
- 90 people received other appliances

£75 could provide goats for milk and income

£25 could provide a subsidised wheelchair for mobility and independence



Keeping goats for milk and income.



Members of the Kanyungu group at their tree nursery.

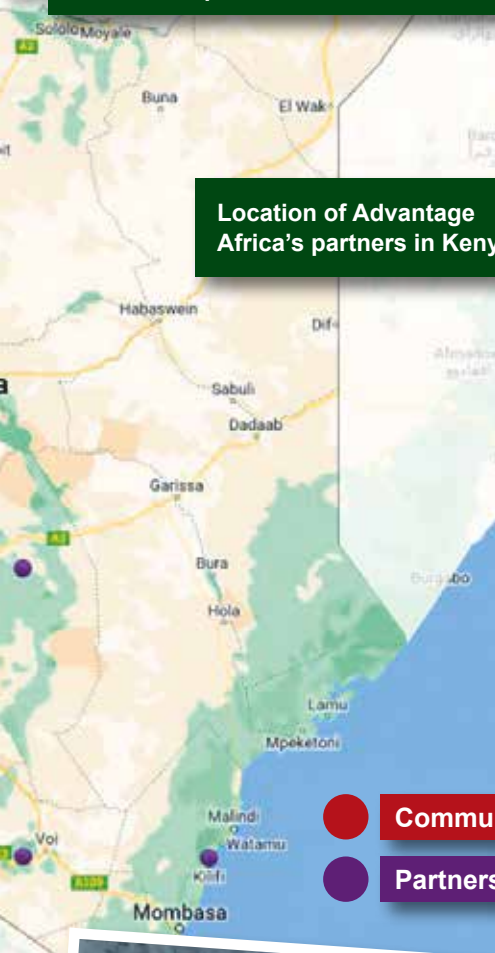


KDPO make home visits to people with disabilities

At the Heart of their Community



Mwanzia (left) and Burgwin (right) of Rescue Team inspect the trees they recently planted in the nursery school compound.



Location of Advantage Africa's partners in Kenya.

My next stop was our other long-term partner organisation in Kibwezi, Rescue Team for HIV & AIDS. They provide HIV counselling and testing, home-based care for people affected by HIV and education and support for vulnerable children, young people and sex workers.

Amongst our packed agenda for my visit was to spend time with the staff at Rescue Team's nursery school which we built together in 2014. Recently we have been developing the grounds of the school, cultivating lentils and planting drought-resistant trees for mangoes and timber. Economic and environmental sustainability are always on their agenda and we discussed other ways to generate income to help the school pay for the teachers and learning materials.

I was impressed and encouraged, as always, by the optimism and commitment of Rescue Team's leader Burgwin and his team in adapting to the current challenges, including the drought and changing climate.



Preparing to campaign on gender-based violence.

Together, we've also been helping women and girls to challenge gender-based violence as well as developing an ambitious project to bring safe drinking water to 1,000 people.

Recent impact of our support to Rescue Team

- 2,141 people accessed HIV tests in one year
- 225 sex workers empowered to protect themselves from violence and exploitation
- 2,000+ people reached at public rallies on HIV & AIDS

The site of the planned water project. More tanks and a water kiosk will be added to provide safe water to the local community.



HIV testing and counselling.



Children at Rescue Team's nursery school.



£10 could provide a vital support visit to a family affected by poverty and HIV

£1,000 could help fund the planned village water project

Bringing Light and Love into Difficult Situations

Given its far-flung location in the south-west corner of Kenya near Lake Victoria, I'm always struck by Migori town's size, hustle and bustle. Here, we work with Migori Women with Disabilities Group (MWDG), which is led by two amazing and kind-hearted women, Sheila and Rodah. Visiting the homes of some of the marginalised people they support, brings into sharp focus Advantage's Africa's mission of helping people with extreme and multiple challenges to improve their lives. Poverty, disability, poor physical and mental health, exclusion and abuse sometimes all combine in one family to make life almost unbearable.



Clinton with Sarah (left) and Rodah (Right).



Sheila and Rodah are bringing light and love into such difficult situations. One of the homes we visited was that of Sarah, a single woman whose deaf daughter died several years ago. With the support of people like you, she has now opened her home to a disabled and orphaned teenager called Clinton. She says 'My daughter may have gone but at least I can help another disabled child'.

This is the first time Clinton has been living in a family since he was deserted by his mother when he was nine years old.

The incredible compassion of people like Sheila, Rodah and Sarah, who live in poor communities themselves, always inspires me. They're shining examples of how Advantage Africa's partnerships with inspirational people in Kenya are enabling vulnerable children, women and men to overcome poverty and disadvantage and find hope for the future. Thank you for your help in making this possible.



MWDG are bringing light and love to people with disabilities through the support they provide to their mobility, livelihoods and emotional well-being.



Recent Impact with MWDG

- 30 people provided with fitted wheelchairs
- 200+ people supported with emergency food supplies
- 20 people with disabilities trained in business skills

£100 per month can fund the salary of a community worker like Sheila or Rodah

Milestones is published by Advantage Africa, who support people affected by poverty, disability and HIV to improve their education, health and incomes. Our work helps people to help themselves and build a better future for their families and communities.

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