



ADVANTAGE AFRICA
SUPPORTING INSPIRATIONAL PEOPLE

Advantage Africa News

Issue Three, September 2004

I have always thought that babies and children are quite sweet - from a safe distance I have noticed that they are noisy, messy and demanding but definitely fun and appealing. If I'm honest though, I would smile and cluck unconvincingly when colleagues brought their new babies in to work and duck back to the safety of my desk and in-tray as soon as I could politely do so. I couldn't grasp what all the fuss was about – why did people swoon, sigh and gibber so much once they became parents?

But then our daughter Dulcie arrived and I understood. Holding my own tiny daughter for the first time was an experience which knocked me sideways with a sizeable sledgehammer. I'm not one for melodrama or overblown statements, but I knew that I would die for her in an instant. I found that the love of a parent, indeed of a mother, for their child is something of extraordinary, overwhelming power.

Understanding that fiercely protective love has given the horrific events of Darfur and Beslan and the death of nearly 100 children in a recent school fire in India even greater impact and poignancy. Such events defy comprehension and are beyond anger. But similar obscene injustices occur daily. Every day, thousands of mothers with no access to anti-retroviral, or often even pain-killing, drugs die from AIDS. I have met mothers like this, dying in absolute anguish over who will love and care for their children, ensure that they have enough food to eat, can go to school and are not exploited or abused. And every day millions more precious children are denied their basic rights to an education, participation in their community and, quite simply, a chance in life because they have some sort of disability.

How does that quote go? Something about 'all it takes for evil to flourish is for good men (and women) to do nothing'. For the inspirational people with whom Advantage Africa works, despair and hand-wringing is not an option. They stand alongside people living in the most desperate circumstances and support them in challenging the immense hurdles they face to living, or dying, in dignity. They show us, as does the birth of a child, what selflessness, grit, hope and of course love, can achieve in a messed up world.

Thank you for your partnership with us in supporting the work and ideas of such inspirational people.

Jane Betts, Trustee

New Look

Advantage Africa has received an invaluable grant from the Christian Initiative Trust towards designing a logo, (which you can see at the top of this page), printing letterheads and producing our new appeal leaflet. We have enclosed a copy of the leaflet with this newsletter for you to see; please pass it on to a friend or family member who may be interested in our work.



Teacher Veronicah Indwale provides a role model for nine year old Everline following the death of her parents. Read more about Veronicah inside.

Who Needs Safe Water?

We all do! But for nearly 60% of people living in rural Kenya, this is a distant dream.

Imagine living on your own in a place with no piped water, no family living nearby and virtually housebound by leprosy in your feet. This is the situation that Margaret Agutu lives in. For her, a visit from the members of the Obambo Water

Group carrying a jerry can of water provides a real lifeline. The Group are now collecting rain-water - the safest form of water in rural areas - from the Obambo church roof in a tank funded by Advantage Africa.



Above left: The water group bring food as well as water to house-bound people like Margaret.

Above right: One of the water tanks on Obambo church.

Left: The Obambo Water Group

Right: When water is scarce, one bowl is used to wash a lot of clothes!

Below left: Rainwater is safe to drink without treatment.

Below right: The tank built by LDK and Advantage Africa in the Ronda Orphan Centre.



Securing a reliable supply of safe water is also a problem for people living in slums. The water tank built by Learning and Development Kenya (LDK) with support from Advantage Africa in the Ronda slum of Nakuru has benefited four hundred orphans participating in LDK's education and feeding programme.

Someone to Look up to

Spending time with Veronicah Indwale at LDK's nursery school for orphans in the Ronda slums of Nakuru is an inspiring experience. Veronicah is quiet and self-effacing but her devotion to the children in her care is clear from the way she consoles a troubled girl and joins in an impromptu game of hopscotch with her class.

The children's laughter conceals the difficult lives that they lead when they return home from

LDK's centre after receiving what for many will be their only meal of the day. Veronicah says: 'Most of the families in this area simply can't make ends meet and many end up brewing chang'aa (an illicit liquor) to make money. The families are dysfunctional and we are dealing with the effects of child abuse, wife battering, alcoholism and prostitution here. I've found my work so challenging'.

Advantage Africa is supporting Veroniah to undertake a course in early childhood development. 'It's an important course because young boys and girls in slums are often left in the care of untrained teenagers who lack the skills to look after vulnerable children', she says. 'As well as childhood development, health, personality, language and so forth, I have learned listening skills and how to help the guardians of these children to make better, informed choices about their lives. Sometimes they come with such harsh words and I've learned how to get them to calm down and talk through the problems that they have'.



Overcoming Stigma



In many African societies, disability is often seen as bringing bad luck or as the punishment for something evil that a disabled person's parents have done. The result is that many disabled children grow up isolated from their communities. When such beliefs become entrenched, the fear of ridicule leads parents to keep disabled children hidden indoors. UNICEF estimates that less than 2% of disabled children in developing countries go to school because of stigma, lack of facilities and trained teachers.

Lesa Musyoki, Co-ordinator of the Ngelani Rural Development Centre (NRDC) in Kenya says about this stigma 'Some people are still asking the same question that people in the Bible did about the blind man – was it his mother or his father that sinned? I tell them the answer is the same today as it was then – it was neither!'

Thankfully, such questions are few and far between at Mitaboni, where more than forty children are attending the Special School established by NRDC and Advantage Africa. All the children play and mix freely with those from the adjacent primary school and some of them share lessons too. Their parents are increasingly involved in managing the unit through their termly meetings, which also provide a great source of support for each other.

In the rural village of Kisayani, Agnes Musembi is as passionate as Lesa about overcoming

Inspirational activists for disabled people: from left to right Agnes, Silas, Kilelo and her daughter Nzisa, Susan and Lesa. Some of these people are no strangers to stigma themselves as a result of their blindness, leg amputation and severe learning difficulties.

stigma and securing rights for disabled men, women and children. So much so that she founded the Kikumbulyu Disabled People's Organisation (KDPO) to help disabled people work together to address the challenges they face.

At Kisayani Primary School, disabled children are being integrated into mainstream classes with the support of Silas Mwango, the District Officer for Special Education, but there is need for a special unit, similar to that at Mitaboni. The unit will be for those that Agnes calls the 'totally hidden' children with severe learning disabilities. Advantage Africa, KDPO, the Kisayani Primary School and local community are now planning to build and open the unit in 2005.



As superstition and prejudice towards disabled people is being replaced with understanding and respect, these children at Mitaboni are integrating into their community with new-found confidence.

Fighting the Spread of HIV/AIDS

Nearly 50 people attended a workshop facilitated by Advantage Africa in Obambo in June 2004 to learn and discuss how to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS in their community. The workshop resulted in a new scheme to enable villagers to attend voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) at the nearby Siaya hospital. Men and women now receive assistance towards their travel costs to Siaya, and the take-up has been encouraging. Pastor Jack Okoth says 'more than 50 people have gone for testing already. Knowing your HIV status is an important step to making responsible decisions when it comes to this disease'. Jack has now been asked to represent the churches in the Obambo area in a Ministry of Health HIV/AIDS programme; this will lead to further awareness-raising activities as well as action to care for people living with AIDS and their families.



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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/AIDS. Advantage Africa provides encouragement, resources, advice and training as well as links to other sources of knowledge, skills and funds.

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Funding News and Needs

Advantage Africa is now being supported by one of the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts. Two churches have also adopted Advantage Africa as their 'charity of the year' and one of these has pledged £50/month for five years! The regular monthly donations of nearly thirty individuals are enabling us to expand our work across Kenya, where we will soon be working in five locations.

We are now seeking funding to enable us to establish new partnerships with inspirational people and their communities in Uganda, expand our growing training programme and construct a borehole and two new special units for disabled children in Kenya, which each require approximately £10,000 to complete. Your support will help us turn the derelict workshop at Kisayani (above right) into a thriving facility for up to fifty disabled children like the one at Mitaboni (below right). We also welcome specific support towards renting an office in Milton Keynes, from where we can effectively manage and run our growing activities.



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I'd Like to Support the Work of Inspirational People in Africa

Every £1 you give to Advantage Africa goes a long way: ●£5: a school desk ●£20 HIV/AIDS training ●£100 an ox plough ●£300: one year's special needs education training ●£1,000: a tank for safe water ●£5,000: a kitchen for a city slum orphan centre.

1 Here's my gift of £ payable to Advantage Africa; OR: I would like to make a regular gift of £ to Advantage Africa every month by standing order (a regular gift is especially valuable as it helps us and our partners to plan ahead) starting on: (date).

Bank/building society name and address:

Account name:

Account number:

Sort code:

Signature:

Date:

Instructions to your bank or building society: Please pay the amount above, starting on the date indicated and on the same day of every month thereafter to: HSBC Bank, 19 Midsummer Place, Milton Keynes, PO Box 1888, Coventry CV3 2WN; sort code 40-33-33; account name Advantage Africa; account number 81549200.

2 My name and address:

3 If you are a UK taxpayer, please tick the adjacent box to add 28p to every £1 you donate at no cost to you. I am a UK taxpayer and I would like Advantage Africa to treat this donation or standing order and any future donations as Gift Aid donations. I understand that I must pay an amount of Income or Capital Gains Tax in the relevant tax year equal to any tax reclaimed by Advantage Africa in that period.

4 Please send this completed form to: Advantage Africa, 3 Lowland Road, Tattenhoe, Milton Keynes, MK4 3AP. **Thank you !**