COVID-19 Community Response -
Kenya, Zambia & Malawi

Background

During these challenging times of COVID-19 the communities we partner with in Africa are facing very uncertain times.

Whilst confirmed cases of coronavirus in Africa remain comparatively low compared to Europe and the USA, these numbers are growing fast. Critically, Africa does not have the health infrastructure to respond to the pandemic. In Zambia there are 18 million people, but only 10 ventilators in the entire country. Imagine that. And the testing of people in rural areas, based
hundreds of miles away from hospitals, is impossible. As a result the African response has been to implement strict lockdown measures from day one to try and contain the spread of the virus. But this policy is causing great hardship and suffering as the majority of Africans survive by doing piecework and casual labour on a day by day basis and this is not possible during lockdown.

A new report by the Partnership for Evidence Based Response to COVID-19 (PERC) reveals some worrying findings about the impact of coronavirus on the lives of many Africans. Half of respondents to the survey, conducted in 28 African cities, said they would run out of money if they had to stay home for 14 days. The lowest-income households expected to run out of food and money in less than a week. In Kenya, many have admitted that hunger has forced them to violate stay-at-home orders in order to search for food. Our partner in Malawi has also shared video footage of impassioned demonstrations in his nearest town with people saying they would rather take the chance of catching the virus than dying of hunger. 60% of people responding to the survey said they did not have the space at home to isolate sick people, nor the money to buy face coverings or soap for hand washing.

Like in many other African countries, 80% of Kenya’s workforce works in the Jua Kali sector, Kenya’s informal economy. Jua Kali is a Swahili term meaning ‘hot sun’. The sector is so named because in its beginnings, Kenya’s informal economy was made up of workers who made and sold their products from makeshift sheds under the hot sun.

Most Jua Kali workers in informal settlements depend on daily wages from piecework or
selling their wares. With these wages, they buy meals for their families and put a little aside for rent at the end of the month and school fees for their children. The children, when they attend school, are guaranteed at least one meal a day.

Kenya’s government gave a cessation of movement order about three months ago. The order dictates that citizens must be in their homes by 7pm every evening and cannot leave until 5am the next morning. No movement of people is allowed between cities and schools are closed until further notice. This means reduced work hours which means reduced wages. The children are out of school and are no longer guaranteed a daily meal. Other problems compounded by reduced wages include lack of adequate sanitary products and water to keep safe, reduced access to healthcare due to the focus on the virus and lack of access to resources, internet and homeschooling facilities for the children.

**High Five Club Support:** At a time when the need is so great, we can often feel that it is impossible to make a difference. But our ethos at the High Five Club has always been to help the people placed before us, one person at a time. At this time we have responded to direct requests for support from 4 communities that we partner with in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia at a cost of £750 in total.

As reported last month through a donation from one of our High Five Club members, Ruth, we supplied the funds (£100) for the provision of hand-washing basins and soap, along with additional food, to help keep the 30 orphaned children safe at the orphanage run by our partner The Brown Munthali Foundation in Malawi.

And with a donation of £50 from another of our members, Lynn, we have also been able to provide soap, face coverings and hand sanitizer for the wildlife scouts and staff at our partner Mnkhanya Community Resources Board in Zambia.
With a donation of £100 from one of our well-wishers, Eva, who was due to visit one of the Maasai communities where we work but had to cancel because of COVID-19, our Maasai partner SEMADEP were able to provide bags of maize flour (for making the staple food in Kenya *ugali*) to Maasai women in Ewangan Village in the Masai Mara.

And finally in Kenya we have joined hands together to provide £500 to Bawa Hope, the fair trade crafts and jewellery social enterprise that we have partnered with for many years, to provide food parcels for the artisans they purchase crafts from in Kibera in Nairobi – Africa’s largest urban slum.

Bawa Hope helps provide livelihoods for talented, marginalised communities in Kenya so they can trade their way out of poverty. Bawa Hope artisans are all in the Jua Kali sector (self-employed) and live in informal settlements like Kibera slum. Bawa Hope make world class jewellery, but COVID-19 has slowed business down, leaving them with little work to place with the artisans. One of the artisans, a woman living with HIV, has six children. They are all at home with her and are no longer guaranteed a daily meal as the schools are shut. She must figure out how to feed them and pay for her HIV medication, which costs her $60 every month. This makes it impossible for her to pay the $100 a month rent. There is no way she could have foreseen the coming pandemic. This, sadly, is the situation most of the artisans that Bawa Hope works with are finding themselves in as the pandemic runs its course.
Bawa Hope, in the spirit of togetherness, is doing as much as it can to cater for the immediate needs of the artisans. But they cannot do this alone. This is where our collective support will help greatly over the next few months in providing food to the artisans and their families. With our help the artisans in Kibera are being provided with the staples – cooking oil, maize flour, wheat flour, green grams, beans, sugar, rice, tea leaves and salt.

We are also sharing their website address so that they can continue to do business and sell the artisan’s crafts online at this time of economic downturn in Kenya. Do take a look, and share, at http://bawahope.com/

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