

I am sure by now many of you have heard that the Horn of Africa is suffering its worst drought in 40 years. I know in UK you are undergoing Covid economic affects, the Russia-Ukraine war, election of a new Prime minister and at the time of writing possibly experiencing the highest temperatures ever recorded. However, of-course when times are tough it is always the most vulnerable that are hit hardest. Foreign aid has been slashed to countries like Kenya, we still only have Covid vaccination rate of 30% (and that is just one jab), and the future is uncertain for many.

As a mission hospital we continue to do what we can and believe God is with us, helping us to continue to serve Maua town and the surrounding community. We were blessed in May to be able to sink a second borehole within the hospital compound to supply both the hospital and staff with clean water. For many years we have relied on the local Mboone river for water, but in the last 5 years every dry season (we have 4 seasons a year – hot dry season, long rains, cold dry season, and short rains) the river has dried up. This is unprecedented but is a combination of drought and an expanding population. So, to have access to borehole water is essential. Only 3 weeks ago there were several operations booked in theatre, but the water had run dry – not even water for the theatre staff to scrub with! Staff had to run around collecting water in buckets for the procedures to continue. With the new borehole, when the storage tank and pump are completely installed, hopefully these will be stories of the past.



*Sinking the borehole & new water tower. Now waiting for the electric pump to start using the water*

The new borehole will be of massive benefit to the hospital, but this has little value out in the community where crops have failed, and life is particularly tough. Last month I had a 33 year old patient, Florence, dying of breast cancer. Her mother was caring for Florence, but mum did not have a bed, not even a mattress, so she was sleeping on the dirt floor next to her daughter. Even worse, every day mum had to walk 3 miles to fetch (contaminated) river water and carry the 20litres (20kg) of water 3 miles back home on her back. The family had had a donkey but sold it to pay medical fees for the patient. I bought Florence a new mattress and provided washable bed pads to protect it, so at least mum could sleep on the old mattress. As a hospital we found some jerry cans and took 80litres of clean borehole water for the family to drink. Perhaps even more than these things, our chaplain went and prayed for the family and the mum confided she had felt so helpless she had been planning to run away, but with our support she could continue caring for her daughter. 2 weeks later Florence died, with mum at her side. My staff were worried I might be disappointed that I had spent money on a mattress that Florence used for so little time, but every penny was worth it to know that Florence and her mum felt the care and love of Jesus Christ in Florence's last days.

To try and help in these times of drought we have revived our kitchen garden project in the community.



*Growing seedlings to plant in community kitchen gardens*



*Seedlings planted in gunny bags*

We identify desperate families with little land and provide them with 2 gunny bags, a 50litre water tank and seedlings. We then train the family on how to maintain the kitchen garden with minimal water, recycling any water used for bathing or washing clothes from the tank where the water is filtered through layers of sand and shingle. This will not provide enough for the whole family to eat but at least it is something when bellies are empty. We also plant 2 trees in the hope that in future the trees will provide fruits even in drought conditions.



*Building the kitchen gardens in the community generates a lot of interest!*

Life in Maua is exciting, never boring, each day brings new challenges and new ways to serve God's people. Please pray for all those who are struggling just to find water to drink and food to eat. Join with us in thanking God for continued health and strength and pray that we may maintain the enthusiasm to keep serving God's people in these challenging times.

Dr Claire Smithson, mission partner  
Barbara Dickinson, retired mission partner  
Both members of Lanchester Methodist Church