



Protecting street and other acutely vulnerable children in Thika District.

March 09

Kenyan Food Crisis



The current situation in Kenya has left us unable to expand our school feeding programmes this year as we struggle to feed the children in our centre. In order to continue these programmes, we require urgent funding to help cover the increasing cost of food.

Nearly ten million people have been rendered food insecure after five years of drought in Kenya have created the worst situation in four decades. The drought affecting the country was declared a "national disaster" by President Mwai Kibaki.

Reduced production due to last year's post election violence has only added to the problems of the nationwide food crisis. The UN warned in January that 3.5 million people faced an immediate threat of starvation if food aid was not delivered, and this problem will only continue as most of these people have nothing left, they have sold everything they have to buy food.

Since this time last year, our food bills for both our Interim Care Centre and our School Feeding Programmes have almost doubled despite the fact that the number of children has remained the same. Last year, the children at our centre could have had three meals a day for around £300-£350 per month. Enough food for the same number of children this year costs us around £500-£550. At St Patricks Primary School, we are currently providing meals for 160-200 children each month but due to this huge difference in prices, unless we can find additional funding, we are going to have to look at reducing the number of children we feed.

At weekends and in the holidays, the number of children attending our Children's clubs has also hugely increased due to the lack of food at home. Over Christmas, when we asked the children what the best thing was about the Children's Club, the majority replied "we can eat here and that means we don't have to go to the street".

Teachers Strike Puts More Kids on the Street

Primary School Teachers all over Kenya walked out on strike in January this year leaving millions of children out of school. The strike closed most of the country's 18,063 public primary schools after 230,000 teachers refused to teach following a pay dispute with the government. This left 8.2 million primary age children out of school. Education in Kenya is seen as one of the few

ways out of the poverty trap and some children in slum areas, desperate to learn, attempted to organise classes themselves.

The impact of the strike was felt on our work in Thika as a huge number of children, with nowhere else to go, turned to the streets. The number of children at our Interim Care Centre doubled for the duration of the strike from 20 to 40, straining our resources further and putting added pressure on our staff. Our school feeding programmes at Garissa Road and St. Patricks primary schools were unable to function, leaving many children to go hungry. Many of the children at these schools rely on the lunch provided by us as their only proper meal of the day; the closing of the schools therefore left them with little alternative but to turn to the streets in search of food. A huge concern of our staff was that these children get used to begging and searching for money, therefore making it a difficult task to encourage them back to school when the strike finally ended.

A Gift for Any Occasion

You could support a vulnerable child or family in Kenya by buying a friend or relative an [AfCiC Gift](#). Help provide a child with a school uniform, a street youth with skills training, or an entire family with a food package. All of our gifts are designed to empower and protect the children we support and will give them the means to a brighter future.

New Approach to Reaching Children at Risk



Last year, we began running Children's Clubs in the evenings, weekends, and school holidays in order to reduce the number of children going to the streets out of school hours. We began with a handful of children but now have as many as 40 at a time. In addition to offering fun activities and a safe place for children to go, we have been teaching life skills to the children who attend. Our Children's clubs are also a useful means for us to identify those children who are vulnerable and in need of extra help. Children

attending in the past have been referred to our rehabilitation centre, assisted with school fees or uniforms, or their parents have been assisted through family sponsorship or business loans; so that families can support themselves and do not need to be reliant on aid.

This year we have decided to take a new approach by bringing the children's clubs to the schools. We have chosen initially to hold life skills classes once a week for those children identified as most vulnerable in two primary schools: Kianjau and Garissa Road. More street children come from these two schools than any other school in Thika. This change will put us in

a better position to identify further children in need of help and will be of particular help in targeting young girls who are being abused. One child is raped every day in Thika and it is only by getting closer to these vulnerable children and identifying those at risk that we can do anything about it. Our social workers will be available at the end of each class to offer individual counselling for those children most in need and, where required, to conduct home visits in order to further assess each child's situation.

A New School for Mary

Mary is 12 years old and deaf and mute. Her mother passed away two years ago leaving her four children under the care of their Step-father. The Step-father did not care for the children, leaving them for days at a time to search for casual work. Eventually some concerned neighbours brought it to our attention that they feared Mary was being sexually abused and we rescued her from her Step-father last year. Initially, we found a children's home to offer temporary shelter and took her to Nairobi for a medical assessment and special needs assessment. Thanks to her sponsor, Gina Gugliotta, we have been able to send Mary to Kamboi School for the Deaf and Mute where she is now safe and has a chance at a decent education and future. We visited Mary last month to check on her progress and found her to be settling in extremely well to her new environment. She is currently learning sign language which is helping her to communicate with the teachers and other children.

New Hope for Geoffrey

Geoffrey is the first born of three children in a single parent family. He was an able young man, working and earning a living for himself in one of the factories in Thika town. One evening, he returned late after a busy day at work and, while walking through the narrow paths of Kiandutu slum, where he lives with his mother and siblings, he was attacked by a gang of young men. The gang left Geoffrey for dead and it was only by extreme luck that he was found by his neighbours the following day and taken to hospital in a coma.

When Geoffrey regained consciousness, he was paralysed down one side of his body from head to toe. His mother has been fighting to pay the medical bills ever since on the small amount of money she could make washing clothes around the estates. Our outreach staff came across the family last summer and, after assessing the circumstances, were able to offer them family sponsorship. The mother has since been supported to buy a camera to set up a small photography business, while Geoffrey, with his limited ability, has enrolled in skills training to become a mobile phone repair man. The full cost of his course will be ksh 14000 (approx. £130) therefore limiting the number of youths we can assist in this way. Geoffrey is doing exceedingly well and is extremely happy to have been given the opportunity to retrain and have a positive future.

If you are interested in supporting a family like Geoffrey's, please visit the [family sponsorship](#) section of our website.

Ruiru Outreach for Street Youths



11 Following our success in Makongeni in 2008, we recognised the need to extend our Outreach Programme for street children to the Ruiru area in November. At this initial stage, we are visiting Ruiru once a week to hold group and individual counselling sessions, conduct home and school visits and engage the children and idle street youths in fun activities.

A large part of the problem in Ruiru is the older street youths who are unable to find work. These are the youth who end up involved in petty crime, gangs and drugs. So far, we have been able to assist three of these boys into skills training and have several more waiting to begin. We are also in the process of approaching local companies to encourage them to consider these youth when casual vacancies are available.

Although much of our focus is on these older boys, we are also assisting a number of younger children to stay in school. Parents struggling to meet the costs of schooling have been assisted to buy uniforms and we are conducting home visits to assess the situation of several more vulnerable children.

Benson's New Career



Benson is one of the boys from Ruiru who we have assisted to start skills training in carpentry. Benson's father recently passed away and his mother is struggling finding work as a casual labourer so he is determined to start up his own business in order to provide for his mother and siblings. Training takes place daily and Benson has not missed a single day, his tutor is delighted with the progress he is making.

Internally Displaced Family's Business Success!

Mearcy, her husband and two children were displaced from Kakamega during the post-election violence that took place in Rift Valley Province early last year. Tribal hatred stemming from political dispute resulted in the burning of houses, stealing, and killing of people.

This family managed to escape from Kakamega, where they had a lucrative business, and arrived in Thika on a lorry last February. With no way of supporting themselves, Mearcy and her family stayed in a camp in Makongeni where they had no source of income and her children, unable to go to school, were going hungry. It was in this situation that Mearcy's family were identified by AfCiC Outreach Manager, Evans Munyinyi, through our Internally Displaced Persons programme.

Upon approval of her business plan to sell cabbages at Makongeni market, we decided to support Mearcy by offering an interest free business loan of ksh 8000 in September. The business turned out to be very successful with Mearcy making a good profit and becoming the first person to complete successful pay-back of her loan. We then provided Mearcy with a second loan of ksh 15000 at an interest rate of 1% which she used to expand her business and has once again completed.

Mearcy is currently on her third loan and is now able to pay rent on a house and provide for her family, including supporting her two children through primary school. Thanks to our IDP programme, Mearcy and others like her have become self-reliant and are able to build themselves a happier, more secure future.

Kiangombe Slum & Thika District Hospital

In the lead up to Christmas, the staff and children from our Interim Care Centre joined with other NGOs and local businesses to pay visits to Kiangombe slum and Thika District Hospital. There are two purposes to these visits, the first being to offer the families support and encouragement and to bring Christmas cheer to those who need it most. The second purpose is to show our boys, as part of their rehabilitation process, that there are others in difficult situations who have found ways of managing conflict in their families and have stayed together.

In Kiangombe slum, gifts are brought to a group of very special Grandparents who, having lost their own children to AIDS, are starting parenthood all over again, bringing up their grandchildren. The majority are unemployed and/or living in abject poverty, but their dedication to their orphaned grandchildren will not let them give up. These families are excellent role models to the children at our centre and this visit at Christmas brings motivation to them as well as the families we visit.

Visiting the hospital at Christmas time reminds us that there are other vulnerable children in Thika, not just those on the streets. AfCiC staff and children joined with other community organisations to decorate the hospital and hand out small gifts to those children who could not be at home over Christmas. "Christmas is a time of year to give something back and share with one another", said Josephine (ICC Manager), "those who had nothing to give gave their time".

Thika Women's Prison

Throughout the year, our staff visit Thika Women's Prison every Thursday to provide child therapy sessions to the young children there. Women with very young children are forced to keep them in prison with them, so our staff bring toys and structured activities in an attempt to break the routine for them and show the children that there is a world outside the prison. Women with older children however are often forced to leave them at home alone. Our staff assess the situation and conduct home visits as required in order to determine whether the children are safe and, where necessary, to find an appropriate and safe environment for the children to stay while their mother serves her sentence. Most women in prison in Thika are there because they have been brewing chang'aa in order to make enough money to feed their families, or as a result of their husbands' crimes.

On Christmas Eve, our staff combined with the Red Cross to visit these women and their children bringing gifts of clothes, food and toys. The day was spent talking, offering words of support and singing carols together. At the end of the visit, one of the inmates gave words of thanks expressing the appreciation of all the women who were delighted to see that people are thinking of them and their children.

Eleanor Harrison, Director AfCiC Kenya

With your support AfCiC has reduced the street children population of Thika by over 50% in the last 4 years. Post election violence, chronic food shortages, unbelievable corruption and economic crises are tragically putting this success at risk. We are dedicated to assisting families to support themselves effectively and to ensuring that every child is able to access "free primary education" in Kenya. Please help us to continue this important mission.

Thank you!

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Questions or comments? Email us at Kenya@actionchildren.org