

## Africans dealing with Africa's Giants

SACLA News editor DAVID LARSEN visited Kenya recently and found amazing inspiration from believers there for how Africans can take on the giants threatening their communities.

In the village of Kambakia near Meru, central Kenya, a miracle has happened. Evidence of this is that the Kenyan government has handed the management of a new police station in the area to a church. Kambakia Christian Centre now administers the police station on behalf of the state.

According to Edward Buria, leader of Kambakia Christian Centre such a thing is unheard of in Kenya. There are good reasons for the government to do so, however. When Edward and Fridah Buria first moved to Kambakia in 1984, the place was overrun by crime. Prior to Kenya's independence, the colonial authorities used it as a penal colony for convicted criminals and the village inherited a culture of crime, so much so, that the government had abandoned the area, removing the police presence.

"We witnessed heartless killings and violence in that community," says Buria. It was very difficult for the couple to raise their young family in that environment.

"It was like a dustbin," says Al Maingi, an elder at the church and resident of the area. "It was the main depot for brewing Changaa. One or two glasses of this and your knees are knocking." A crisis point came one evening when a woman came running to the Buria home, her arm dangling from the elbow after her husband attacked her with a machete. She was bleeding profusely and as Edward Buria rushed her to the hospital he was sure she would die. In desperation he cried out to God that if the woman died, he would know that God had not called them to Kambakia and he and his family would leave. If she lived, however, and he was sure she wouldn't, then he would know God had called them to persevere. Needless to say, the woman survived and God began to speak.

"Three weeks after that incident, God revealed to us the ancestors had given the village to demon spirits", says Buria. God also gave the Buria's a strategy to deal with the demons. At seven o'clock one evening they began to pray from house to house throughout the village. It took Edward and Fridah 12 hours to complete the task but the time was well spent. Overnight the atmosphere of the place changed and people began to get saved. As a result the couple started Kambakia Christian Centre, which today has close to 2000 members and is the largest church in the



Propped up: Kenyans have been aiding fellow Kenyans. The Samburu people have been assisted through a devastating drought, by Kenyan churches in Meru

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVE LARSEN/THE MEDIA BANK

region. In just a few years Kambakia village went from being an area to be avoided to becoming perhaps the most sought after real estate in the nation. And the police have moved back in, this time under the direction of the church.

The transformation, however, has taken hard work and careful strategizing. Many in the community once earned their keep growing dagga or brewing Changaa. To assist the community to earn an honest income, the church started a micro loan scheme, providing seed capital for new businesses. The scheme has provided several hundred micro loans and has proved so successful that the church planting movement they are a part of, Newfrontiers, has borrowed their scheme to implement in Ghana and other African nations. One example is a profitable printing press run by the Newfrontiers church in Mkubu. Buria's vision is that by the end of 2005 all the families in his church will be living above the poverty line.

Buria has also been passionate about making sure his people are skilled. The church has set up a bursary fund for their own church members who are pursuing higher education in college or university. They have also recently built the Isieme International Hope Centre in which they plan to have a fully equipped medical facility, a music

school with recording studio, a business training facility and a Bible School. They have also built a church centre for conferences which houses a radio station and local television station. For some years Buria has been running a programme broadcast on national television called 'Miracle in a Village' aimed at dealing with real social issues from a Christian perspective. Just before the Kenyan elections they tackled the topic of politics - highly volatile in Kenya. After the programme they received over 1000 calls to their call centre. A senior politician called in to say he was 'glued to the screen,' and the director of Plan International said to Buria, 'If ever there was a day you have had an impact on this nation it is today.' They certainly played their part in what was a miracle peaceful election at the end of last year.

The Newfrontiers Kenyan churches have also been involved in poverty relief among the Samburu people in the North of the country. Traditionally nomadic people who survive by tending livestock, their way of life was devastated by severe drought which began in 1998 and continued for over three years, killing most of the Samburu cattle. Newfrontiers had initiated seven congregations in the area and with the assistance of Newfrontiers in the United Kingdom they helped with emergency food, a water scheme and restocking of cattle.

There have certainly been setbacks. In March this year Buria was shocked when his team went to Samburu to find that some people, even in the church, had starved to death. The team had been trying to wean the Samburu off the emergency food, only providing

nutritious cereal for children. But the people had become dependent on their scheme in spite of their attempts to restock the area with cattle, granting the people a means to a sustainable livelihood.

Newfrontiers Kenya, however, has proved to be an exceptional example of innovation with limited resources in the face of grave challenges facing the nation of Kenya. "I have so much faith that the Kenyan shilling can do it. I don't look to the dollar or the pound," says Buria.

In Newfrontiers Africa we have to find ways in which we ourselves can fund things. There is money in this continent. Christians in the West do so much because they can interact quickly with one another and move resources around. Just imagine how wonderful it would be to have the church in Accra supporting the Samburu's. The days of ignorance are over. We will be able to speak to the West face to face in our generation.

As a leader Buria has been able to accomplish an extraordinary amount. He has a secret though. Just as I am about to leave he takes me by the arm and says, "If there is one thing I want you to communicate to the churches it is this, that none of this could have been possible if Fridah and I did not entrust projects to Christian professionals in our midst. As church leaders we need to totally let go and as the Scriptures say, 'entrust to reliable men...' Fridah and I know our limitations, and we are free to release others".

Reprinted with permission from Asambe Times: Newfrontiers Southern Africa