



**Faith Kimongoro Working Group
of Orphans and Vulnerable Children**

Meru County, Eastern Kenya

*Enrolled in the ZOE Orphan Empowerment Program
in 2010, graduated in 2012*

**Hope Companion partners with
Sun creek United Methodist Church**

Challenges Faced by Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Kenya



Kenya

Population: 38.6 million

Location: Eastern Africa

2.6 million orphans and vulnerable children (in 2009)

46% of population is living below the poverty line

19% of all children in Kenya are living in poverty

Over the past few years, the number of orphans and vulnerable children living in Kenya has been escalating at an alarming rate. In 2004, the number of orphans was estimated to be 1.8 million and by 2009 that number had grown to **nearly 2.6 million**. Over one million of those children have lost their parents to HIV/AIDS-related complications. Many of these children are deprived of their basic needs due to high levels of poverty. **Nearly half of the population lives below the poverty line, out of which 19% are children.** Kenya's rural areas in particular struggle with a very high poverty rate.

After their parents die or become disabled by illness, Kenyan orphans and vulnerable children as young as five years old become both mother and father to their younger siblings. Those whose parents suffer from HIV/AIDS face an additional burden of care as complications develop and worsen over time. Children are forced to drop out of school as they try and provide basic necessities for their siblings. Orphans must try to find work wherever they can due to their lack of education and resources: laboring in fields, tending cattle, carrying water for neighbors, or other back-breaking tasks. When they are able to find work, orphans are often paid unfair wages because they have no alternative but to accept whatever is given. In exchange for working from sun up to sun down a child would receive barely enough pay to feed his or her siblings. Some will work an entire month for the equivalent of \$10. When there is no work, they must beg for or steal food to ward off starvation. Survival becomes a daily struggle.

The cost of basic needs such as food, clothes and medical care quickly become too much for these children. Working becomes even more difficult for them as their families begin to suffer from hunger and disease. These child-led families become trapped in a perpetual cycle of poverty. They work day in and day out for whatever meager amount people will give them while continuing their descent into increasingly desperate poverty.

Living in extreme poverty without the support of their parents, orphans are vulnerable to additional kinds of exploitation. Neighbors and occasionally relatives can take advantage of them because they know that there is no longer an adult to enforce the children's property rights. As a result, the land and property left to an orphan by his or her parents can easily be stolen or sold. One child in ZOE's empowerment program had her land stolen and farmed by an unscrupulous uncle after her parents died. Only after intervention from ZOE and fellow orphans in her empowerment group was she able to get her land returned for her to use.

Orphans are also vulnerable to physical abuse. These children are beaten, and sometimes mutilated, after they are driven by hunger to steal small amounts of food to eat. Girls are subject to sexual exploitation

when they face the hard choice of selling their bodies for food or watching their families go hungry. These orphaned girls must then bear the scars of emotional trauma, occasional pregnancies and the possibility of living with HIV/AIDS.

Many of these children live in communities where there are widespread misconceptions about the causes of HIV/AIDS. After their parents die from HIV/AIDS-related complications, they are shunned by neighbors and community members for fear of catching the disease, which they may or may not have. Orphans find themselves isolated within their communities, surrounded by those who are unwilling or unable to reach out to them.

Thanks to the partnership of Suncreek United Methodist Church, **62 orphans and vulnerable children have overcome these challenges.** These children have completed the three-year ZOE Orphan Empowerment Program and are now able to fully support their families.

Names of Graduates

Florah Kananu
Fridah Makena
Raphael Mwiti
Janet Kathambi
Florence Karimi
John Kiriimi
Danike Kiriimi
Catherine Kawira
Tripoza Twanina

Bernad Mutuma
Evangeline Ntinyari
Stephen Mutuma
Nancy Gatwiri
Boniface Muthomi
Sabina Nkirote
Silas Munene
Trisia Kagwiria
Janet Kinya

Florence Mukiri
Eunice Kathure
Joanina Mukombiro
*Lydia Gacheri
*Jedida Gitura
*Fridah Mukethi
*Anthony Muriithi
*Harmony Sheba

All of the children above are the eldest child in their family. These children are now able to fully provide for all the basic needs of themselves and their younger siblings. ** The children marked with an asterisk were adopted into the group by the initial working group members. The original members of the working group that lived near them saw that they were suffering in poverty after their parents died or become terminally ill, and invited them into the group.*

Pathways out of Poverty

Through ZOE, these children have transformed their lives, leaving behind the cycle of poverty forever. Thanks to your support, they now have:

- **A Secure and Stable Source of Food**
- **Vocational Training and Small Businesses**
- **Ways to Prevent Disease and Stay Healthy**
- **Spiritual Growth**

A Secure and Stable Source of Food

Securing a stable and nutritious supply of food was ZOE's first priority when the Faith Kimongoro Working Group of orphans began the Orphan Empowerment Program.

ZOE worked with each family to secure access to enough land to grow food. Every orphan family in the group has learned to cultivate their land, ranging from small gardens to large farms. Members of this group worked together to prepare their land for planting with tools provided by ZOE.

When every family's land was ready for planting, ZOE provided each of the families in Faith Kimongoro seeds for various crops to cultivate their land.

Children in the Faith Kimongoro Working Group learned about seed preservation, so that they could provide their own seeds for future growing seasons. They learned the proper way to handle seeds from their garden until they are ready to be planted again for the next season.



Members of the Faith Kimongoro Group hold the bags of seed they received through ZOE.



As a group, the members of Faith Kimongoro grow maize on a large farm. To begin this project, ZOE provided them with a micro-grant and seeds. Together, group members tend the farm and the harvests are shared among the group.

Every family received training in animal husbandry during one of their monthly meetings with ZOE's staff. In order to provide fertilizer for crops and a reliable source of milk, ZOE provided the group with four goats. One family would care for each goat until it reproduced. They then would keep the kid and pass the goat along to another family in the group. This practice has already provided the group with six kids. As these goats continue to reproduce, all the families in the group wanting to own a goat will be able to.



Silas Munene holds the goat he received through ZOE. Silas and the other members of the Faith Kimongoro Working Group learned how to care for and raise a variety of farm animals, including cows, goats, chickens and rabbits. When this goat reproduces, he will pass it along to another member of the group, and keep the kid for himself. This goat will provide Silas and his family with milk to drink, fertilizer for their garden, and soon, offspring to sell.

Diversified Sources of Income

Every family in the Faith Kimongoro Working Group has been trained by ZOE in small business management. They have learned to open bank accounts and identify potential business opportunities in their communities. Together, orphans in this Working Group learned about bookkeeping, inventory management, and other good business practices.

Additionally, ZOE provided the funds and resources necessary for interested orphans to apprentice with local professionals to learn a vocational trade, such as tailoring or hairdressing.

When these children were ready to go into business for themselves, ZOE provided them with micro-grants, micro-loans, and start-up kits that contained the necessary “tools of the trade.”



Florah Kananu shows some of the beans and grains she sells in her village.

Sabina Nkirote is one of the members of Faith Kimongoro Working Group that learned how to manage a small business. She received a micro-grant through ZOE, and used it to buy beans, grains and other food items at wholesale to sell at market several days a week. The income has enabled her to cover all her operating costs going forward, as well as provide basic needs for her younger siblings.



Catherine Kagwiria, above, and her older sister Lydia were struggling to survive after their parents died. Through ZOE, Catherine and Lydia learned to sew. They apprenticed for several months, and after their training was complete, they received a start-up kit that included cloth, scissors and a sewing machine. Using these resources, they have been able to open their own shop.

Through ZOE, the children in Faith Kimongoro have started:

- Three tailoring shops
- Two barbershops
- Two restaurants
- Four auto repair garages
- One mobile phone repair shop
- Three food and grocery kiosks

Additionally, two children who had excellent grades were supported to attend secondary school and are doing very well.



ZOE helped many of the younger siblings in the group return to school by providing school fees and uniforms. Their older siblings are now able to cover these costs.

Ways to Prevent Disease and Stay Healthy

Many members of the Faith Kimongoro group suffered from preventable diseases when they joined ZOE's orphan empowerment program. ZOE's social workers taught them important lessons to help them stay healthy, such as boiling water before drinking it, washing dishes, and the proper use of mosquito nets.

After several home visits to ensure the children were implementing the healthy living practices they learned, ZOE distributed blankets and mosquito nets to the Working Group. These items help the children protect against insect-borne diseases such as malaria.

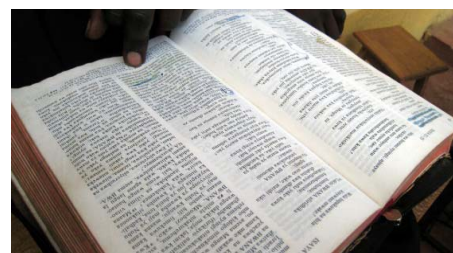
Through ZOE, the children in Faith Kimongoro also learned about HIV/AIDS, including how to prevent contraction of the disease, and how to care for those who were infected.



Two of the children in Faith Kimongoro, including Tripoza Twanina (left), received new homes for their families. ZOE provided the building materials, and the Working Group members (and for Tripoza's home, some members of Sun creek UMC) helped in the construction.

Spiritual Growth

Each weekly meeting and monthly training for the children in Faith Kimongoro included a time of worship and prayer, often with pastors of local churches. ZOE social workers used Bible lessons as a basis for the life skill lessons they taught the children each month. In both word and deed, the children of Faith Kimongoro Working Group grew in their faith.



Helen Mukiri's Story

Helen Mukiri, 18, lost both of her parents five years ago to HIV/AIDS-related complications. She was only 13 when she became the primary caregiver to her sister, Grace, now 14, and Bernard, 12. To survive, the whole family worked on their neighbors' farms. Helen and her siblings were paid very little, sometimes with just a little food. They struggled each day in poverty.

When Helen joined ZOE's Orphan Empowerment Program, her life began to change. She learned many skills to help care for her family, such as farming, disease prevention, and small business management. Helen learned about child rights, so that she would never again be exploited.

Using her new skills and a micro-grant from ZOE, she has opened a stand selling grains and beans in her community. The income from this business has allowed Helen to feed her family and provide some basic necessities. When she is not working at her stand, Helen is apprenticing with a local hairdresser. Soon, she will use her new skills, along with a start-up kit of combs, a sink, a mirror and other materials, to start an additional hairdressing business. Together, these two businesses will enable Helen to fully provide for her siblings.

Thanks to your support, Helen and her siblings have broken a cycle of exploitation and poverty. They now have a life full of promise and hope for the future.

