

Farming *God's way*



Uel Marrs highlights this year's World Development Appeal and describes his recent trip to Mozambique to see some of the Appeal's projects in action.



Photography: Chris Nelson

Stepping out of the vehicle, it was shirt-sleeve weather for the small party who had travelled from Ireland, with temperatures not far short of 30°C. All the same, I couldn't help noticing that some of the local people were wearing woolly hats. On inquiring about this, it was explained to me that this was winter time in Mozambique!

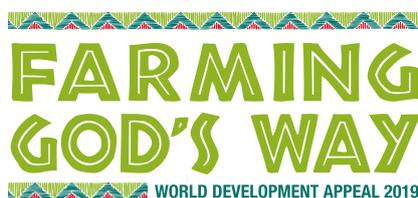
The country of Mozambique, located in the tropics, bordered by the Indian Ocean, is vulnerable to floods, cyclones and drought. 80% of the population lives on less than \$2 per day; 50% have no access to clean water; and 2.1 million people do not have enough food. This is compounded by the fact that, after the nation received its independence from Portugal in 1975, there were many years of civil war between warring factions who had struggled to reach what is still a tenuous peace agreement.

We had arrived in a rural area known as Inhassoro in the Inhambane District of the country. Weaving our way between the simply constructed dwellings, it became clear that we were being introduced to a community comprised mainly of subsistence farmers who had few material possessions. We had been briefed that about one third of that community were 'food insecure' and, for many, in each year, April to August were known as 'the hungry months'. They regularly came through seasons when they did not know where they would find their next meal.

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A welcoming party approached, coming from the small, mud church in the distance, dancing and singing vibrantly. One young woman with a baby on her back was leading the singing and wearing one of the woolly hats; one proclaimed boldly, "Love Worship!" As we listened to their praise we had a growing sense that whatever hardships they had to deal with from day to day, these were a dignified people who had hope in their hearts.

We processed informally along with our welcoming party into the church, a building that had been completed just six months earlier. To the side of the church you could see large holes in the ground from which the mud had been extracted to construct the building. Gradually a congregation gathered and mats were spread out on the dusty floor so that people could be seated, with plastic chairs at the front for the guests and the church leaders.



The pastor welcomed us warmly and took the opportunity to express deep appreciation for the support they had been receiving from Tearfund's partner in Mozambique, the Ecumenical Committee for Social Development (CEDES). Yet I found there was something remarkable about his words of thanks, for while the community had experienced material improvement in their livelihoods in recent years, the pastor's heartfelt thanks recognised that this was very much a result of the inspiring vision and ideas that the church and wider community gained from engaging in the Bible study programme provided for them.

Togetherness

Horácio Valoi, the CEDES programme director for the district, explained that the programme referred to by the pastor was entitled, Umoja, a Swahili word that means 'togetherness'. It recognises the capacity of every man, woman and child to come together and share in a vision for their future, one not limited by their context, culture or circumstances. Each one of the Bible studies had focused on stories of God's working in the world and had been key to empowering the church to achieve their vision. They had been encouraged to come together in cooperatives and to work together to identify and pool their resources, and to discover the resilience to work for that vision to become a reality.

CEDES also recognised that there were no quick-fix solutions but that as



communities work together, God has a purpose for them and with time they will come to lead and control their own development as they respond to their circumstances and are propelled into action towards improving their livelihoods.

One of the results was that within the church, families, and communities, relationships deepened, both with God and each other. What started in the church spilled over into the wider community, ultimately strengthening relationships between church and community as people recognised that they needed one another.

Using what you have

One of the series of studies was based on the story of Moses in Exodus 3 and 4. Having encountered God in the burning bush, Moses was called to rescue the children of Israel from captivity in Egypt. Yet having fled the royal courts of Egypt, Moses was now living the humble existence of a shepherd out in the desert, wondering how on earth he would accomplish what God was asking him to do. He felt so inadequate and was desperate for help for what seemed an impossible task.

What form did God's help take? Was it to provide Moses with an army or a handout of money? No, God's response was simply to ask him, "Moses, what is that in your hand?" Yet all that Moses was carrying was a simple shepherd's staff that he used for pulling sheep out of holes and warding off wild animals.

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It was something that he carried with him all the time to the point he barely even noticed he had it. It seemed that God's help was to be found in what Moses already had at hand, a simple staff that in time Moses would use to perform miraculous signs: thrown down before Pharaoh to become a snake; raised up to part the Red Sea; and striking a rock to bring forth life-giving water. This Bible study, and others like it, inspired the church and ultimately the wider community in Inhassoro to grasp afresh the truth that they had a God who takes hold of ordinary, everyday lives to accomplish some of the most extraordinary achievements.

In addition to the Bible studies, CEDES provided the church and community with training in conservation agriculture. In the past they had relied on 'slash and burn' farming over large tracts of land. This method depended on having access to a plough to turn over the land, being able to buy and plant seed, relying on expensive, chemical fertiliser that few could afford, and, not least, praying for it to rain at the right times! Yet drought was commonplace and invariably many in the community had to live through a hungry season, at best having one meal a

day, while at other times going without food altogether. As a result, one third of the households in the locality were food insecure.

Changing farming practices

So what had God made clear during the Bible studies? What had the people come to see as locally available resources that were readily at hand, ones they had not seen before? As a result of the cooperatives, large plots of land were broken down into smaller beds for each person. Instead of using a plough, hoes were employed, and each family was able to tend to their smallholding. While they couldn't afford chemical fertiliser, they were able to gather up chicken manure from the yards of their homesteads and occasionally collect some bat droppings, which together with last year's plant debris such as ground nut leaves which are high in zinc, contributed to making a natural mulch known as 'God's blanket'. This helped to maintain the water content in the soil, to reduce soil erosion and served as an organic fertiliser.

Seedlings were planted one by one, being carefully spaced, and these farmers visited their plot each day diligently weeding. In this semi-arid region, impacted by climate change, rainfall was unpredictable. So in addition to praying for rain, they hand-dug shallow wells as near as possible to their plots so they could water them daily. If they struggled to buy a watering can they improvised by punching holes in the bottom of a



plastic juice bottle. All in all, these new approaches to farming ultimately led to a better quality and quantity of crops, such as kale, cabbage, carrots, onions, lettuce and green peppers. On top of that, they found they were even able to produce a harvest outside the normal growing season!

It was exciting to hear the farmers tell their stories of inspirational Bible study, new farming techniques that were reliant on local resources, and the wonderful impact on church and community life. Later in the day we had the opportunity to drive out to see their plots just a short distance from the church, and it was then that the full impact of what had been achieved was brought home to us. After travelling along the main road, down along a dirt track through the bush, we arrived at a flat, expansive area where the community were cultivating their plots.

People could be seen dotted here and there, tending to their crops. One by one, as they saw us approaching, they set down their tools and converged on our vehicle. An older lady started to sing a chorus and one by one all the farmers joined in, joining together to welcome us on our arrival and then taking a moment to pray with thankfulness for this occasion. These hard-working folk had a quiet joy about them, a sense of togetherness, of thankfulness, of anticipation and hope in their hearts, despite all the back-breaking work they were engaged in. The fruitfulness of their labour was clear to see, despite the

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fragility of their environment and the lack of rainfall in that region.

It was a delight to see all the greenery spreading out across the otherwise arid plain. They continued to share their stories of blessing, highlighting the significance of conservation farming techniques, and insisted on providing us with gifts from their harvest – some of the biggest cabbages I have ever seen!

Now these farmers not only had enough food for their families but a small surplus that they could sell. With a little extra cash coming in and with training from CEDES' 'savings and loans', self-help groups began to spring up, as did small businesses. Families began to make improvements to their houses, to educate their children, and to put an offering in the basket at Sunday church services. In the case of the congregation we had encountered, they had been able to move from meeting under a tree to having a semi-permanent structure, the one we had visited earlier in the day. Here people were growing more resilient and hopeful about the future. All of life was changed for the better and every facet of life was

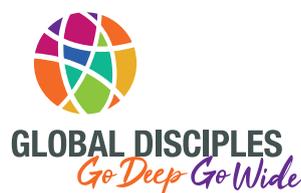
being transformed. Many were delighting in the faithfulness of God and finding their worth in him through this church and community transformation process.

How to offer your support

Psalm 126:6 says, "He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him." Your support of the 2019 World Development Appeal will enable organisations like CEDES and others to engage with some of the world's poorest people, implementing good sustainable development practices and seeding the hope of a more secure future, where communities work together to enjoy the fruits of the resources and resilience within them. By prayerfully and practically contributing to this year's Appeal, you are demonstrating God's love for those struggling to survive in dangerous and fragile states around the world.

Learn, pray, and give through the resources provided by World Development, online at www.presbyterianireland.org/world-development

Uel Marrs is PCI's Secretary of the Council for Global Mission.





Ministering *to* ministers

Niall Lockhart outlines the work of PCI's panel that is focused on how the Church pastorally supports ministers and their families.

I grew up in a manse. I have many memories of meetings in our lounge, callers at our door, and phone calls at varying hours of the day and night as my mum and dad engaged with the pastoral needs of a congregation.

As a family, the congregation where my dad served throughout the length of his ministry was in the fullest sense 'home' for us. At every stage along the way we were blessed with friends who did life with us and people of all ages who genuinely cared for us.

Yet looking back it's maybe only now that I realise there was one thing that,



Niall with his father

growing up, I didn't have. I didn't have a minister. We didn't have a minister. Of course technically I did, but that minister was my dad.

The questions: 'who ministers to the ministers?' and 'who ministers to their families?' are questions that naturally arise within our Presbyterian way of doing things. Our General Assembly has a panel for the pastoral care of ministers and their families, which sits under the Council for Training in Ministry.

The existence of such a panel does not single ministers and their families out as being either special or unique. All individuals and all families, within our Church, need pastoral care. However, what it does seek to ensure is that ministers and their families do not get overlooked.