

# “The Old Muendo Is No More . . .”

by Jim Bowman

“I am now the new Muendo.” He squinted up his face, gesturing emphatically to make his point. “The old Muendo is no more . . .” Muendo is describing the life-change he has experienced now that his family has access to water.

Muendo lives with his wife and three children in the small village of Kangemi, in an arid region of Kenya. “It has been four years since we have harvested any crops. The rains have failed . . . during the hard times, we survived on one meal of plain ugali (thick corn meal mush) per day. Our children were forced to withdraw from school because they were too hungry to study. We adjusted our stomachs to hunger.”

“We had no water here. We had to walk 10 kilometers every day to get water. The trek took almost the entire day. My wife had to leave the children at home alone. I was out trying to find any kind of work. When I was lucky, I would find work that paid 70 shillings (95 cents) per day. But it was not enough to relieve the hunger. It was a very hard time . . .”

This was before the community, with Mennonite Central Committee support, built a "sand dam" across a seasonal river gully to create a sustainable, year round source of water.

“If you don’t catch the little water that does come down this gully, you cannot go and get it back,” declares Joshua Mukusya, director of Excellent Development. Excellent is one of the two partners MCC relates to in its water source development program. Joshua had assembled the villagers under a tree in the African way.

The objective of a sand dam is to “harvest” the little water that does run in the gully in such a way that it recharges the under ground water aquifer.

A concrete barrier is built across the gully. When the rare downpours come, sand is washed in behind the dam. And there, safely stored beneath the surface, is the life giving water.

“There was never enough water even for washing our faces,” continued Muendo.

“In the mornings we would give a little to the dog and chickens. The rest was used for cooking and drinking.”

“But now I am the new Muendo. I am the first person in our village to grow vegetables using water scooped from the sand. I am also the first to earn any money from selling vegetables.” Pointing to his small plot of tomatoes and kale, Muendo relished the new found emotion of being a creator, an artist. “This small plot earned me 1,300 shillings (\$18.00). And that is in cash! In this village, we rarely have cash like this.” Mwendo then swung around and ushered us over to a larger plot of newly planted tomatoes and kale. “With this planting I hope to earn 4,500 shillings or more.”

“This sand dam has changed everything for us. My three children are back in school. My wife no longer has to trek for water. I am able to help others. I can give some money to the church.”

“The old Muendo is no more. I am now the new Muendo . . .”