

IAFR KAKUMA WATER PROJECT UPDATE

Background

IAFR launched the Kakuma Water Project back in 2012. Kakuma town is located in remote northwestern Kenya, in its second largest county called *Turkana*. While Turkana is big in terms of geographic scope, it is sparsely populated due to the harsh climate and environment. It has borders with Uganda, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. Turkana is also the poorest county in Kenya.

Kakuma is a town in Turkana that hosts one of the world's largest refugee camps, with a population of nearly 200,000. It is also host to a separate camp for about 4,000 internally displaced Kenyans (IDP). These are people who fled to Kakuma during post-election violence in 2007-2008.

In 2012, a group of refugee church leaders told IAFR about the desperate need for a local source of clean water in the IDP camp outside of Kakuma town. We were surprised to learn that no one was addressing the need for water for the thousands of women, children, and men living in the camp. The IAFR Kakuma Water Project was initiated to address this gap. Our partner humanitarian agency in Kenya, National Council of Churches Kenya (NCCCK), agreed to partner with us in this venture. They handle the local contracting and logistics of the project as we make funding available for this purpose.

Success!

The terrain and geology of the region is complex, making it both difficult and expensive to drill a successful borehole. Our first borehole attempt was in 2013. We drilled over 350' and only struck mud. We have since drilled a series of unsuccessful boreholes. Finally, in December 2020, we struck a promising source of water that produces over 9,000 cubic gallons of water per hour! It is the second most productive borehole in the region. We thank God!

Complexity

But life does not often progress in straight lines. Eight years is a long time, and the situation in Kakuma changed as we pursued the project. A major change occurred this summer when two things converged.

- 1) The Turkana county government took upon itself the responsibility for providing water for its people last year. This was a good development. They proceeded to make two major changes that have impacted our project. First, they decided to have all boreholes feed water to a central municipal water tank from which water would then be distributed to different parts of the Kakuma community. And second, they took charge of assigning different humanitarian and development agencies to solve specific water challenges in the region. This meant that they now decide who will pipe water to the IDP.
- 2) A big international NGO called Oxfam (Ox for Oxford) drilled a successful borehole this summer. The Turkana government then assigned Oxfam responsibility to pipe water to the IDP camp. Oxfam began work on that project immediately and are about ½ way finished with the required work at the time of this update. I learned about this development in mid-December. Had the Covid pandemic not cancelled my usual fall visit to Kakuma, I would have likely learned about this sooner.

I had a long Zoom call with NCCCK about this and it is clear that the Turkana government is not going to change their decision to assign the IDP water solution to Oxfam. The government has assigned NCCCK (i.e. our project) an area of Kakuma called the "Highlands" that needs water too. Highlands is part of

Kakuma town and includes a couple of impoverished villages in the surrounding bush. After talking with NCKK, I agreed for them to proceed with the project in compliance with the government's mandate.

There several good things related to how this is working out.

- No one was even thinking of the IDP's need for water when we began the project in 2012. Now the government and other NGOs have become aware of the needs of the community and are responding accordingly.
- Our prayers that the IDP get clean water will soon be answered.
- God has heard the prayers of the people living in the Highlands and neighboring villages and is answering their cry for water.
- By investing in the host community near the IDP camp, we are helping preserve the peace between the IDP and the host community. It is a common issue in humanitarian work that the host community feels its needs are overlooked as the displaced population (refugees and IDP) receive all the attention and assistance. This stokes resentment and often leads to violence. By going ahead with this major investment in the needs of the surrounding host community, we are helping to preserve the peace.
- By complying with the local and county government, IAFR and NCKK are demonstrating respect to them. This might be tough for some Americans to understand, but the white industrialized world has often demonstrated a superiority complex in their dealings with African leaders, discounting their ideas and ways of doing things. By respecting them and their decisions – and by applauding their taking responsibility for getting water to those who need it – IAFR and NCKK are making a major deposit in our relationship with them. This may well help us in the future as we continue to develop our refugee ministry in Kakuma.

Perspective

Thomas Friedman wrote a book in 2016 called *Thank You for Being Late* in which he asserts that the pace of change in the world is constantly accelerating. He postulates that the pace of change outstripped our ability to keep up it in 2012. That was the year in which we launched this important project. Even in Kakuma, significant changes were happening as we relentlessly pursued this project. In the end, it seems God has been up to more than meeting the need for water among the IDP.

My hope is that those who generously and sacrificially contributed to the IAFR Water Project in Kakuma will be encouraged to know that God has heard our prayers and provided for the IDP – and that he has done even more.

A few encouraging facts about “our” borehole:

- 1) The borehole struck water at about 130 feet down.
- 2) It is the second highest yielding borehole in the Kakuma region, yielding over 9,000 cubic gallons of water per hour!
- 3) The water is currently being tested by the authorities to confirm it is suitable for human consumption. Everyone is optimistic that it will be high quality.
- 4) Once the tests come back confirming adequate water purity, the next step will be to install a solar pump and pipe the water to the central tank in Kakuma.
- 5) We will then pipe the water to the Highlands and build water kiosks (small buildings offering multiple water taps from which people can fill their Gerry cans).
- 6) If all goes ahead as hoped, the project could be completed by early autumn 2021.

Thanks!

It has been a very wild ride in remote northwestern Kenya. In many ways this success is a miracle. On behalf of the IDP and the people of Kakuma, I thank everyone who made this project possible!

Tom Albinson
President, IAFR