

The 5000Plus Vision in Partnership with Grace Development Foundation Transforming Communities

Report prepared by Tim Powell 5000Plus Associate March 2018

KIKONGE - Where the trees grow.



If you visit Kikonge in Kenya today, you will find a village surrounded by trees, with lush greenery, and healthy animals grazing, but it wasn't always so.

Back in 2007 it was very barren. Farmers had chopped away most of the trees to use as fuel for fires for curing tobacco leaves, the local cash crop, leaving the area pretty bare. The people who lived there seemed to be in a similar state. Philip Jombo, a local resident, told me that there was no work going, very few businesses of any sort, and poverty was acute.

At this time in Homa Bay, Rob and Jane Garratt were starting to teach their 5000Plus vision. A young pastor, from Kikonge, named Kennedy Ojunju was invited to attend the seminar, and although quite a long journey at that time, he made the effort to go and attend.



Ken & Hellen with Winston & Alphonse in 2007

There he heard the vision of 'the answer to poverty starts with what the poor have, not with what they don't have'. He heard teaching on the story of the feeding of the five thousand, and learnt that if he's willing to use what he has, offering it to God, and working hard, even five loaves and two fishes can produce enough.

Kennedy didn't speak to Rob or Jane that day, but their words had sunk into his heart and mind, and though he didn't realise it then, his life had just taken a new path, one that with the help of Jesus would bring much blessings to many people.

Returning to Kikonge, he, along with his wife Hellen, organised a meeting to tell people what he'd learnt, and to discuss what they could do, and 38 families came together. They were excited at the idea of starting with what they had and to let God work with them, but their resources were so limited they couldn't think what they could do. Kennedy had a eucalyptus tree that he'd been given years before when he was at school and that had grown well. This was their starting point; they'd all plant seeds from this one tree, and see what they could do.

About six months after this, Ken was rung by the organiser of the seminar, and told that Rob and Jane were back in the area and would be visiting Kikonge the next day. When they came, Ken and others could show them 18,000 small saplings ready for sale that



Saplings ready for sale

had been grown starting with seeds of that one original tree! Soon after this, the saplings were being planted in the land and the transformation had started. As the people had already started on their road to change with the trees, they were quick to absorb further ideas from the 5000Plus seminar.



Claris by one of her first trees

Claris Akumu was in the original group and she talks of the changes that have happened in Kikonge since then. She herself planted many trees; she estimates 600 over the years. But selling some along the way has enabled her to start many other projects. She planted cassava and maize, and other crops. She's done very well with local hens, earning a good income over the years, and now also has two oxen and a cow. She says with a smile, that she tried goats but they died, so she moved on to other ideas. All this started with the simple teaching that we start with what we have, and her first great experience of planting eucalyptus trees. Along the way she has been able to buy clothes for her children and pay their school fees, and has been able to build a good house for her family.

But Clarice, like so many other people in the world of Grace Development Foundation (GDF), didn't keep the good news to herself. She has happily shared her knowledge with others, and as an Area Project Volunteer (APV) has worked hard to help new people start their own projects.

Meanwhile trees were still being planted; Kennedy estimates that after three years as many as six hundred families were involved in tree planting in one way or another. And as the trees grew and transformed the landscape, the lives of an increasing number of people in the area were also being transformed.



Young trees in Kikonge

Like **Kennedy Akondo**. In 2010 he was feeling pretty helpless and hopeless, but he was led to a faith in Jesus, which in turn opened him up to hearing more about the 5000Plus teaching. Now he says this opened his mind to what could be done, and the crops he started growing then have given him an income he didn't have before. He's built an improved house for his family, and is planning for a further improvement soon. And, of course, he planted trees, which have grown and will bring some useful money in when he comes to sell some. He says the trees have made a huge difference to the area and has encouraged many people to try other things too. His wife has started various projects buying and selling, which has increased their family income.



Kennedy Akondo

Many people in the Kikonge area speak of how much their lives have changed for the better. **Jane Adhiambo** has more reasons than most to appreciate the changes in her life. When Rob, Jane and Ken visited her in 2008, she was sitting on the ground outside her small house, paralysed from the waist down and unable to walk. They prayed for her, and she was wonderfully healed, able to walk to the church which had grown out of what was



Jane and family in 2009

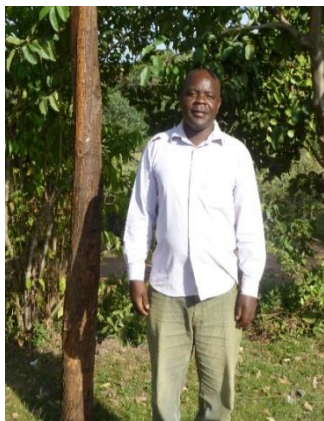
happening in the area. She was eager to hear how she could further improve her life, and started various projects. Jane was given a goat from the GDF 'Loan-a-goat-scheme', and did well with them, returning two to GDF over time, and breeding and selling goats along the way to pay for school fees and a



The church in Kikonge

new house, including being able to have furniture for the first time. She has planted maize and groundnuts, and has 3 oxen that plough her land and that of others, and through these income generating projects she has been able to build other houses for her sons, putting the eldest into college. Oh yes, and did I mention, she's planted over 100 trees!

Going back to **Phillip Jombo**, he reminds us what the area was like in 2007. He had no money himself, with no idea how to earn some, and was living in a barren landscape with



Phillip Jombo

most of the people living apparently barren lives. He was one of that first group who planted the first seeds, and then learnt through the seminars of how it is possible to take the little you have and produce something bigger and better. He says that it was a good lesson for him, that starting small was the best way, and growing gradually. He was one of the first people to receive two goats on loan, which he repaid with three, and then continued to breed and sell them as a valuable source of income. He's been able to build a new house for his family, and is deeply grateful for what he's received from the teaching of 5000Plus and GDF. It's a gratitude that is active as he's done much to help

others learn how they can improve their lives. He talks proudly of how much his home area has improved, with many small businesses, a bustling market, and a much more positive attitude to life from the locals. And he loves his trees!

Phillip also mentions what a blessing it's been to the area having the new well available in times of need. On some land owned by Kennedy, and with some financial help from 5000Plus, a well has been dug that gives a good quantity of clean water. When the river dries up, this well is opened twice a day to allow people access to clean water, which has literally been lifesaving in recent serious droughts and cholera outbreak.



Well in Kikonge



First seminar in Olasi

In the very early days of the changes at Kikonge, Kennedy went to visit a few people he knew in a village not too far away called Olasi. He was talking them through the 5000Plus vision to give them an idea of what could be done. Whilst there he met a lady called **Plister Panyako**, who joined the group and was captivated by what she

heard. She arranged for Rob and Jane to come to Olasi on their next Kenyan trip, which they did, meeting under a tree, and bringing people to faith in Jesus as well as teaching how to manage your loaves and fishes. This is not the place to describe the Olasi story, that would take too long, but from that first small meeting, and the astonishing people who live there, Olasi now has a growing church, over three thousand livelihood projects providing income that wasn't there before, and a completely transformed community. I mention it as it perfectly illustrates the wonderful way the GDF message spreads from village to village and from area to area, as the people of Olasi have in turn reached out to people in many areas around them.

I spent a delightful day driving and walking around Kikonge with Kennedy, stopping to talk to people along the way. Everywhere we



Avenue of trees leading to house

went there were new houses, and always there were trees planted alongside. Kennedy says the population of the local area is about 3,000, and he'd estimate that at least 1,500 of them are involved with planting trees at one level or another.



Ken with one of his first trees planted

He pointed across to the hill the other side of the river and pointed out a large spread of metal roofs, homes that didn't exist ten years earlier. And if we walked around them we would find nearly every one with its own trees.

The trees are beautiful, and have transformed the environment over the last ten years. But they are also like a parable, showing how the lives of so many people have also been transformed. The people smile when they talk about their trees, and they are right to be proud of them. They can also be very proud of what they have achieved, for themselves, for each other, and indirectly for many people around Kenya.

I know that they would join me in saying as a final comment 'To God be all the Glory'!



New houses on the hill

Kennedy Ojunju, from attending that first 5000Plus seminar in 2007, has partnered with Rob and Jane and together with them started Grace Development Foundation (a Kenyan registered Non-Government Organisation). Today he is the national Director of GDF, managing over 500 community trainers, and is also representing 5000Plus in spreading this amazing vision into Tanzania and Uganda.