

## **THE MOTHERS, FATHERS AND CHILDREN OF THE MAASAI URGENTLY NEED YOUR HELP. PLEASE DONATE TODAY.**

Dear Friends,

**I have just returned from Kenya where I was overwhelmed by the devastating impact the famine is having on the communities in our Imarisha Maisha project.**

*Having experienced the famine first-hand, we can't continue to do what we have always done and I am writing to ask for your urgent help.*

**We simply must act now to ease the suffering of good people devastated by famine in Kenya and if you can, please make an especially generous donation.**

I'd like to share a little of what I saw: I expected it to be dry, hot and dusty—but it was the landscape devoid of living vegetation and the deathly silence permeating the air that really shook me. It's very hard to imagine people existing in this harsh environment, yet somehow they do.

Last year I read about a mother of two whose life had been transformed through the Imarisha Maisha program, so while in Kenya I asked to meet her to learn more of her story. Her name is Feli.

We approached Feli's village slowly to avoid our vehicle creating yet another unwelcome dust storm. The experience of excited children rushing to meet us, so common on previous community visits was strangely absent.

Millicent (the program manager) led me towards a ramshackle wooden structure. As we approached, a tall woman who somewhat resembled Feli appeared in the doorway. The Feli I'd seen in pictures was tall and strong with the sparkle in her eyes of someone who had proudly achieved something significant.

*This was clearly the same woman, but the horrible impact of the famine now seemed to sit heavily on her.*

We were introduced to Feli's three children, including her three-month-old baby. The drinks we brought were quickly distributed and as we sat on a mat, Feli began to update Millicent on her family and community. Not understanding the Maasai

language, I listened to the tone of Feli's voice and watched her facial expressions, hoping for an insight into what was being said. *Her voice was flat and her face gave little away, other than suggesting that the last six months had been exhausting.*

I'd read how the lives of Feli and her family were transformed through the Imarisha Maisha program. A training program had enabled Feli to join a women's group and earn a living keeping sheep, goats, and poultry.

Together with her husband, Feli also participated in a positive relationship program resulting in her husband no longer using physical violence against her. Instead, she was empowered to make decisions for the family. Feli's dream of her children completing their education beyond primary school appeared to be becoming a reality.

**Where once there was a glimmer of hope, famine now threatens to rob these dreams.**

**I know kind supporters like you will find this upsetting—and I am sorry if it does—but I am sure that if you feel like I do, then watching this situation unfold is not an option. Your kind donation will provide much needed funds to support this program and change lives.**

My conversation with Feli would continually pause as Millicent translated her comments. Feli's husband previously worked as a warden on a ranch, however the famine ended his employment and he now travels searching for work. With him away, and many of the support groups struggling to meet, Feli and her children are at greater risk of those who prey on families isolated by the climate disaster. Feli is concerned about their safety and tries to ensure that her children are close by, but worries about her eldest sons journey to and from school each day.

With no crops and limited access to water, and in an already dire situation, Feli is now forced to further ration the little food she can afford for her family.

In November, after receiving reports of children fainting at school from hunger and malnutrition, we were able to use a bequest from a wonderful supporter to provide an emergency three-month feeding program for the 900 most vulnerable families and over 48,000 children across 77 primary schools.

**However, in February this year the funds ran out, returning the community to acute hardship, and it is to supporters such as yourself that I must now turn.**

**As I visited primary schools in Kenya I felt the deep appreciation for our help and an overwhelming sense of gratitude to our donors. But I also felt a terrible sense of guilt that the program now faces an uncertain future.**

*Seeing children the same age as my own, I can't help but make the comparison, and wish we could do more—I know that with you, we can.*

Sometimes I saw a smile on Feli's face that reminded me of the photos I'd seen six months ago, but it was rare. We heard that with families desperate for food, the older children in the community were being forced to leave school to try and make ends meet. This is a choice you and I will never have to make, but it is a choice thousands of families here must.

*Our schedule meant that all too soon our time with Feli came to an end. As we said our goodbyes, I wondered what Feli thought of me, and what she thought about us?*

Her life has been turned upside down. I know she appreciates the impact of the Imarisha Maisha program and the life-saving emergency feeding work, yet, right now, these are of little comfort as she can only see the ongoing crisis her family must face each day. I studied her face for clues but saw only that of an exhausted young woman who looks much older than her years.

We drove towards our next visit in silence. The questions in my head were too complex and, if I'm honest, too angry for me to express. I was angry, but it was hard to know where to channel this emotion. **For some reason the verse in Matthew where Jesus says that God sends rain on the just and the unjust alike came to mind and I prayed that rains would fall on Feli and her community.**

Millicent and the team of the Imarisha Maisha program with the Anglican Diocese of Mt Kenya West have worked hard to fight for the safety of children and the rights of women, and to ensure sustainable incomes for families like Feli's. They are also physically impacted by the famine themselves and emotionally drained by the countless stories of despair they carry with them.

Millicent and her team have made so much progress, they fear that their years of effort to improve their communities may also evaporate in this drought. **We cannot let this happen.**

**As one of our faithful supporters I know that with your help we can be there in this time of need. Your generosity and compassion inspire me. And at this time we simply cannot leave Feli, her family and thousands like her to fight this famine alone. You can be there.**

**Your kind gift will enable Millicent and her team to provide urgent support to these communities and will help the vital Imarisha Maisha program to continue.**

The good people of Kenya are exhausted. Please give generously and please pray that the work already started will continue to transform the lives of people fighting desperately for the survival of their families.

With my sincerest, deepest thanks.

Yours in Christ,

**Jo Knight**  
CEO, Anglican Overseas Aid