



COTRR
COMMUNITY ORGANISATION
& TRAINING FOR RISK REDUCTION



COTRR Newsletter Through a Co-worker's lens

Issue #1: August to December 2018

From the Editor

Never let the things you want make you forget the things you have...

This message was given by Newton Kamunge at the Annual Mentorship Day for the students in COTRR's Education Program on December 6th 2018. It perfectly reflects the philosophy of COTRR and its projects: With our future-oriented projects we enhance livelihoods of families & communities and empower women, but at the same time we never lose sight of our core values, never forget who we are and where we come from.

This issue provides information about selected projects, an interview with the COTRR Executive Director Asenath Wacera and an outlook outlining the way forward in the new year.

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Outlook and Acknowledgement

The following projects and activities are described based on my personal involvement in various field activities and monitoring trips.

Diversifying livelihoods, improving household nutrition

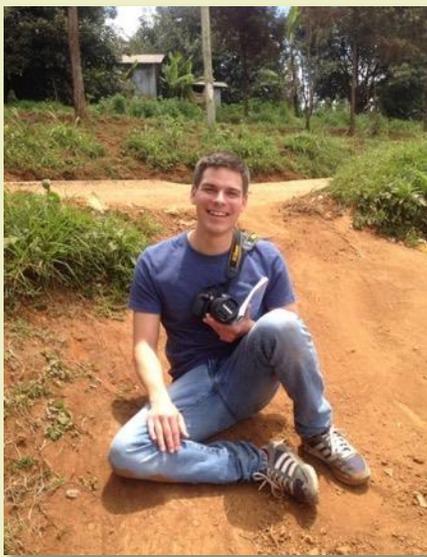
Dairy Goat Upgrading Projects

The success stories of the dairy goat projects in Kimathi and Nyanduma go back a long time. While the first goats in Nyanduma were introduced in July 2016, the first project in Kimathi even started earlier, in September 2015.

Overall, it can be stated that the development of the beneficiaries has been very promising. The families are profiting from the goats in various ways – first of all, the nutrient-rich goat milk is healthy and contributes to a balanced nutrition. Secondly, the manure as a by-product can be used as fertilizer for their kitchen gardens, and thirdly, they generate income from sale of male offspring and in a few years sale of milk.

“The dairy goats provide my special needs child with a nutrient-rich diet”

Beneficiary in Nyanduma



"On the ground survey", conducted by Luca Heim, Comundo Co-worker

Swiss mountain goat in the field

In order to fully observe the development of the families and their goats, it is essential to go on the ground yourself. Luca, Comundo Co-worker in charge of media, took it literally and examined Nyanduma's ground from near.

Dairy Goat Upgrading Process

In the beginning of both projects trainings were held for various target groups such as Training for Trainers (TOTs) and the Community Project Management Committee. The participants learned that on ideal conditions, the upgraded goat gives up to 4 litres of milk per day and takes a minimum of 7 years to get to the pure pedigree stage. The upgrading stages include:

- Step 1 – Original – 0% alpine
- Step 2 – Foundation – 50% alpine
- Step 3 – Intermediate – 75% alpine
- Step 4 – Appendix – 87.5% alpine
- Step 5 – Pedigree – 93.75% alpine

As of today, **63 families** have benefited with a total of **126 goats** from the project in the Kimathi region since the launch in 2015. In Nyanduma **20 households** have been supported with **40 goats** in total since the project start in 2016.



A beneficiary with her goats during a monitoring field trip in Nyanduma

Supporting household access to water

A COTRR/GOBA Water Initiative

Suswa/Naakurto, the third focus area, is on the floor of the Rift Valley and on the leeward side of the Mau Ranges – a drought and flush flood prone region. There is no river and the region is classified as arid & semi-arid, receiving inadequate and unreliable rainfall. The lack of secured water supply has been identified as the main problem faced by the community.

Projects aimed at ensuring secure access to water have already been implemented in this region, where the majority of the population belongs to the Maasai tribe, dedicated almost exclusively to livestock. The most recent activity involved the distribution of water tanks to twenty-five vulnerable families characterized by low income, widowed and orphaned households. With the tanks, the families will be able to harvest the rains that the country receives between October and December and have water to use for January and February which are usually the driest months in the year; the tanks couldn't have come at a better time. Both the Suswa/Naakurto community and COTRR are extremely grateful to GOBA for their contribution towards addressing the water problem in the area.

Inside story: 10'000 litres tank for a women group

In addition to the 25 benefiting families the project also benefited a women group consisting of 20 members with a 10'000 litres tank. The group has shown great initiative by purchasing a two-acre piece on which they have grown crops such as maize. The group yearned for a tank which would allow them to tap into irrigation; the regulations of the institution availing the water is that one has to have a water tank in order to irrigate their land using their water. With the 10'000 litres water tank that the group has received through GOBA's contribution, the group will be able to make the most out of their two-acre land and even diversify into crops that earn much more than maize as a result of having water for irrigation. The project also helped to construct the concrete slab on which the tank has been placed.

Since COTRR started its Access to Water Projects in 2012, up to today **170 families and 2 schools** have benefited from water tanks – and that's by no means the end of it ...



Matters transparency... beneficiaries sign to receive their water tank



A beneficiary with her new own tank



Bringing/rolling their water tank back home

Providing sustainable livelihoods

Shoat Distribution Activity

Similar to the dairy goat upgrading projects in Nyanduma and Kimathi area, in the communities in Suswa COTRR implements projects aiming to promote, improve and diversify livestock options as well. Due to cultural habits and prevailing climatic conditions here instead of goats we provide so-called shoats (see green box to the right) that are helping the families to enhance their livelihoods. The conducted activity at the end of October in Suswa included a short introduction about shoat keeping held by Suswa's Subcounty Officer for Livestock and some words from Alice Waringa, our Programs Director.



Providing information as a crucial part of *Empowering Communities*

After the talks the beneficiaries signed/fingerprinted for their shoats in a show of accountability which is a strong pillar of COTRR. The women queued in a disciplined manner, although one could truly see and almost catch the excitement with the hands. Each of the 23 new beneficiaries received five young and healthy shoats. Earlier that morning when we were leaving Nairobi Reuben, my co-worker, looked at me and asked: "Man, are you ready for today's procedure – it's going to be hectic." As I've never experienced such an activity before I wasn't quite aware of the meaning of *hectic* at that moment. But I realized what he meant first hand when the beneficiaries started receiving their shoats. It felt like break time in a primary school – everyone was busy running around everywhere.

Sheep? Goat? Shoat!

For all those who have never heard of a shoat, don't worry – neither have I before! Literally translated the word means young piggy. But that's not really it here. Personally, I would describe it quite simply as a sheep adaptable to dryer weather. Concerning their characteristics shoats show quite a thick, full coat like sheep and just like goats prefer to graze on anything they can, including leaves, twigs and anything edible.



The distribution of the goats required every woman's and man's power

Once the beneficiaries received and managed to keep the shoats together it was a great pleasure to see them walking away leading their new family members back home. The opportunities these animals offer to the women's families are broad and promising. For all of us the upcoming follow-up visits at the beneficiaries' homes will be of great hope and an activity we are all looking forward to.

Education Sponsorship Program

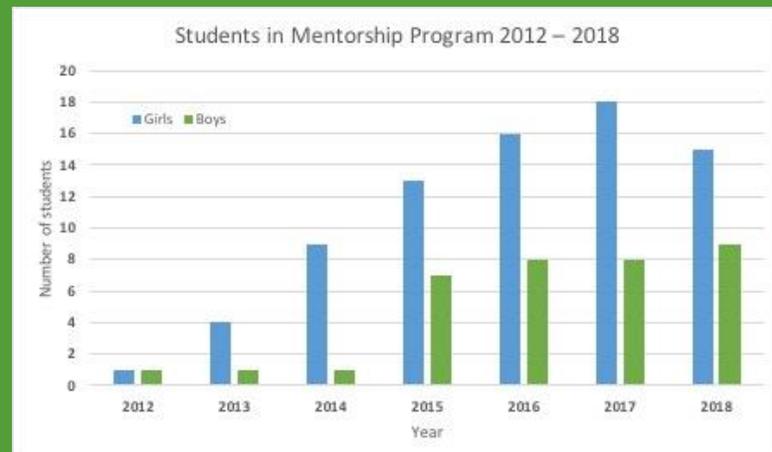
Students Mentorship Day 2018

This year's annual Mentorship Day for the students of COTRR's Education Program was held at the Oak Place Conference Centre in Nairobi on December 6th 2018. With great satisfaction, the students and the three Field Officers Joram Maina (Murang'a), Monicah Wairimu (Nyanduma) and Theresiah Wambui (Suswa), were welcomed punctually at 9 a.m. and the session was opened with a common prayer. After this, both Asenath Wacera Maina, Executive Director, and Alice Waringa Karanja, Programs Director, addressed the group. The main message was clear: COTRR first of all wants to thank and congratulate the students for their hard work over the past school year, being aware of their challenging conditions at home. Additionally, it was also emphasized several times that the seriousness and academic achievements of the students are of paramount importance for a brighter future. Nothing comes by itself but with the right attitude and the knowledge of COTRR's support the students can fulfill their dreams and become pilots, doctors and engineers ...

“I remember I had no hope to join school but you gave me hope and I have come this far. I will never take this for granted.”

Charity Kishoyian, 19 years

Number of students over the past years



It can be noted with great satisfaction that over the past 6 years a clear trend towards an ever-increasing number of students can be observed. There is great confidence that other students in our program will be able to follow the pioneer student's example, Faith Muthoni, and realize their academic dreams at the University.

Inspiring, fresh, encouraging

In addition to the COTRR staff two and a half guests also attended this year's mentorship day. Two and a half because Newton Kamunge, one of the guests, enabled a Skype call with an inspiring and successful Kenyan, Geoffrey Mathare, who illustrated his career steps from basic school education to top-level positions at Microsoft and Coca Cola. The talk was enormously stimulating for all participants, including the COTRR staff. Besides important advice, it also showed the possibilities of today's technology and the enormous importance of communication, which Newton Kamunge was trying to emphasize. In a small session he withdrew with the boys and specifically addressed the issue of communication among them.

Mary Mugure, the second guest and speaker, is 25 years old and today a practising doctor. Her moving story starting from a difficult childhood and from financial and social hurdles during her education up to her dream job touched and encouraged us all.

Students Mentorship Day 2018

Since some of the students live with their families in quite remote areas they had to get up pretty early that morning to make it to the Mentorship Day in Nairobi. Hence, to be ready for the full program it is of significant importance to warm up both, mentally and physically.



Warming up mentally and physically

The aforementioned input by Newton/Geoffrey via Skype call had multiple purposes. Firstly, with respect to today's job requirements there should be a focus on the importance of communication and the use of up-to date techniques. Secondly, Geoffrey Mathare is a very inspiring example of someone who successfully managed to leave the circle of poverty and build up opportunities step-by-step. Last but not least, providing the chance to talk to a person who has been working for world-wide known companies such as Microsoft and Coca Cola might be a once in a lifetime event.



Talk via Skype call with Geoffrey Mathare

Student's Activity: Dreams & ideas for innovation

Towards the end of this year's annual Mentorship day the students were encouraged to work in groups on a team building activity. In order to get as balanced groups as possible, the students were distributed according to their school level. The exercise was to read through newspapers and pick articles, photos, words and statements which are depict how they would like to change their country and the world. It was a pleasure to see that despite the long day and the enormous information content of the day, the pupils were still motivated and eager to discuss with each other. The presentations of the individual groups then had to be kept a little short for time reasons, because a decent group photo was of course not to be missing at the end. Nevertheless, this activity certainly also contributed to the fact that the pupils were able to chat and interact with each other.



Team building activity to bring the students together on a table

In order to make to most out of the limited time with the students the team is working on some ideas for next years' Mentorship Day. It is a great pleasure every year to see the personal growth of the students – and that is not only meant in terms of physical but also in mental and personal development.

Interview with Asenath Wacera, COTRR Executive Director

1. What makes you proud of being the Executive Director of COTRR?

Many things! Looking back at the journey we started 10 years ago, and appreciating how far we have come. COTRR was just an idea in our minds (Alice, Ruth and myself) and today we have a fully-fledged organization.

I am extremely proud of the organization culture Alice and I have created here at COTRR and the fact that we have a dedicated team both in the Nairobi office and the field offices that epitomizes passion, commitment, honesty and a giving attitude.

Above all, I am proud that COTRR is a change agent, supporting families and children of the last mile. The growth of the Education Sponsorship Program warms my heart knowing very well that we are giving families the sure opportunity to break their cycle of poverty.

2. Which challenges has COTRR faced during the past years and how have they possibly changed in recent times?

Like most non-profit organizations, our key challenge has been financial capacity and sustainability. That has not changed much; nonetheless, it has trained the COTRR team to use resources efficiently.

Closely tied the financial handicap, is the overwhelming number of families that need support towards self-reliance and resilience.

3. What are your energy sources to engage yourself in the work and to make the world a little better every day?

I think this comes from deep within me... It's tough witnessing families and communities leading desolate – COTRR gives me the ultimate opportunity to be part of the solution. As a high school teacher of Literature, I came across the *Opus Dei congregation clarion call*, Work as a Means of Sanctification- doing everything as if you are serving God. COTRR gives me the best opportunity to achieve this. This is it for me!

When we touch a family, a child, that energy is renewed ten-fold.

It is trying to be the change I want to see...



4. Seeing the progress of the projects and visiting the families, what impacts you the most and makes you want to continue?

A trip from the field will always have two effects on me: One, I am always energized when I witness the lives we are touching – that they can put food on the table for their families, and that we have given them opportunities to improve on their livelihoods. The desire to reach more families is fanned.

The other effect is the frustration. It is depressing – to say the least – to visit families in Kenya leading destitute lives. That is unacceptable in any civilized society like ours!

I tell myself. We are doing this right, we must push ourselves. So, we are in this for the long haul...

5. What was your most special moment in 2018?

My most special moment in 2018? Visiting one of the COTRR beneficiaries in Murang'a. He is a single father taking care of three children, and has been supported by COTRR to undertake dairy goat farming. Within a short time, he has grown his breed and has moved to the level of a farmer promoter. We listened to his inspiring story, looked back to the first time we visited him, fully

appreciating the transformation in his circumstances and appreciating only too well that he is a true testimony of what well thought out community development initiatives can achieve. I am happy that we have been part of his journey.

6. What do you like the most about Kenya and what are the best characteristics of Kenyan people?

Kenya is undoubtedly a great, beautiful country endowed with the best that the world can offer. The weather is simply amazing- a perfect balance between the cold and hot. The breath-taking landscape, the lush plains – all a sight to behold! Our beaches are stunningly inviting, not to mention the exotic wildlife. Indeed, Kenya is home to the Big Five, no wonder our country has been fondly referred to as ‘The Africa Safari Central’. And I dare not forget the magnificent Mt. Kenya. Every human soul that walks on Mother Earth must experience Kenya.

And this beautiful country is inhabited by warm, really warm people. Friendly and extremely helpful too! It’s always amusing when you ask a rural Kenyan for directions, and they quickly offer to take you to your destination. We also face difficulties in a stoic way. You only need to visit families struggling with the very bare minimums to appreciate this. And to witness that no matter the struggles, Kenyans will always have smiles on their faces. A resilient and enthusiastic lot too! You want to be around Kenyans.

7. If you were able to change three things in the world and in Kenya in particular, what would that be?

Interesting question. I would overhaul the political leadership in Kenya because I believe it has an impoverishing effect on our people.

The corruption culture is really a human rights issue in Kenya-that would have to change too. Finally, I would really want to be part of the process that can change Kenyans’ voting behavior. We repeatedly elect greedy leaders who think of nothing else apart from their own comfort.

Asenath has a strong educational background and a passionate commitment to the empowerment of communities. She chose this path when she devoted herself to the topics of rural sociology & development and social change in her undergraduate studies at Kenyatta University. In her PGDE (Post Graduate Diploma in Education) with the focus on Research Methods in Community Development she graduated with a Distinction. In 2005 she also completed a Master in Communication Studies at University of Nairobi. Asenath was then able to transfer her educational background to her professional career. After teaching Literature/English at Nairobi School for 10 years, in 2006 she joined the Organization RINCOD (Revitalization of Indigenous Initiatives for Community Development) as a Programme Coordinator. Since 2008 Asenath has been the Executive Director of COTRR and responsible for promoting and strengthening the positive image of the organization among key internal, external and local publics.

8. Where would you like to see COTRR in 5 years?

We are slowly but surely building an organization that will be a leader in the community development arena. In 5 years, I believe we will have achieved both our programmatic and financial sustainability objectives, and that we will have expanded our program areas as well as increased our reach to populations in dire need of our services. Furthermore, I am optimistic some of the students in the sponsorship program will be in the job market. This is ambitious, but do-able.

“We know Asenath as a gifted leader, a skilled communicator and a great motivator. She is a true inspiration to the COTRR-Team.”

Hellen Wambui, COTRR Co-worker



Outlook 2019

2019 offers the COTRR family yet another opportunity to contribute towards the realization of the organisation vision: “Resilient Communities with Sustainable Livelihoods.”

Journeying with communities in the South of the Rift valley and Central Kenya in the last 10 years has confirmed our purpose: to support communities at the grassroots level in organising and empowering their members to manage their resources, identify and own their development agenda. We take pride in the impact that meagre resources, great partnerships, community ownership and professional guidance has blended, giving hope, love and making a big difference to lives and livelihood of families of the last mile.

In 2019, we soldier on guided by our diligent Executive Director, with a stronger energetic program team, a wealth of experience and determined Community Project Management teams to touch more lives, appreciating lessons learnt for enhanced project delivery. To this end, COTRR will endeavour to:

1. Engage more groups from a gender mainstreaming lens with a bias on women groups as women become increasingly fundamental to households and community sustainable development.



Participation by all stakeholders



Empowerment of communities



Accountability and professionalism



Equity and justice



Sustainability of programs

2. Strengthen our community network of volunteer groups to revitalize indigenous knowledge on community resilience building and hazards risk reduction to ensure food and livelihood security for better health and improved household incomes.
3. Education sponsorship and mentorship of academically able children from our areas of operation to ensure better future for the households. Expand the Education sponsorship programme to reach more deserving children including those outside COTRR project sites.
4. Document COTRR growth and development through various media.
5. Consolidate our research and innovation department to continue engaging with likeminded organisations, the government and academic research institutions for increased productivity and incomes through diversification of sustainable livelihood streams and entrepreneurship.
6. Expand our networks and establish partnerships towards programmatic and financial sustainability for the organisation development and community initiatives.

We look forward to a great year! Alice Waringa

Acknowledgment

The development of this newsletter that looks at COTRR work and projects through the lens of our very able Comundo Co-worker in charge of media has been an exciting journey and I would like to acknowledge the collective effort from the COTRR team both in Nairobi and in the field.

It is a point on presentation of COTRR's effort to strategically transform lives through its integrated resilience building interventions, and the sustainable approaches in achieving this task by walking with families greatest in need.

I note with gratitude the tireless team effort to ensure that available resources reach the most deserving of the populations in the most efficient way.

I want to thank the COTRR Project Officers under the able leadership of our Programs Director, and the diligent Field Officers for relentlessly spearheading actions that have allowed the production of this newsletter. It has been a privilege to be part of this passionate, energetic team that gives life to project work at COTRR.

Asenath Wacera,
Executive Director-COTRR

Alice Waringa,
Programs Director-COTRR



For further information about COTRR, the projects and opportunities to contribute and support us you can visit our website or use our contact information below. As a non-governmental Organization, we are always open-minded and welcoming to new partnerships.

Impressum

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An integrated Approach

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