

# Reaching Wajir with Clean Water

## **WATER PROJECTS BUILD MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS**

Wajir, Kenya is not a place known by many people in the world. But for Maji-Tech, other NGOs, and a network of church partners in the region, it has become the center of response to a severe water and food crisis.

The district, a somewhat remote region in northeast Kenya, is populated almost exclusively by a Somali tribe that is 100 percent Muslim. The people of Wajir have not seen significant rainfall in 4 years. This means there have been no successful crops, and a crisis has hit. Not only have most crops failed, but up to 80 percent of livestock have perished. The impact on families throughout Kenya, Tanzania, and beyond has been unbearable.

The troubles have been so severe that the President of Kenya declared a state of emergency. Maji-Tech responded quickly, mobilizing a water well drilling crew from neighboring Tanzania. The crew drove about 20 hours on a dirt trail, overcoming many logistical and bureaucratic challenges to get the equipment to Wajir.

They identified seven of the hardest hit villages and began to drill for water.

According to Peter Nuthu Mwangi, General Treasurer of the Kenya Assemblies of God, "Water is the main problem. The rains are very low, and now with the drought, it is killing all the animals. Cows, goats, sheep, camel – they are dead. People are left without income resources, and without food."

"We are so grateful for Maji-Tech to respond," Nuthu

Mwangi continued. "So far they have done 3 wells – two in a place called Dunto, and now they are in Ngumayo. The community is very grateful and appreciative. They are welcoming us, and asking us to receive land from them as a gift because, to everyone, water is life. They have been longing for clean water for many years, but they have never had a permanent water spot. Now after getting it, the community wants those who brought it to be their friends, to be closer."

The unique relationships forming in the area are also noticed by Bruce Collins, General Manager of Maji-Tech. "We're working closely with the district government, and it is exclusively Muslim," he said.

"So these people are seeing that it is the Christians who are coming to help. We've gone through quite a bit of trouble to get there, enduring quite a bit of bureaucracy including getting the machine cleared and doing it at our own expense. So it's a good witness."

Offering a good witness – showing God's love through good works – is the intention of the church coalition.

The long-term plan is not just to provide clean water, but to provide the Living Water, Jesus Christ.

"Eventually we are planning to send missionaries," Nuthu Mwangi said. "We are preparing them to minister in this area. Right now, the people of Wajir see that it is people of God who are responding to their needs. We want to tell them that on top of the water, we have Living Water. So this is our door opener. It is an entrance, a gate-opening project."

As more wells are drilled, the communities will be better equipped to respond to other basic needs. "Besides the lack of food and water, there is the need for education," Nuthu Mwangi said. "Wajir only has a few government-supported teachers. For examples, for grades 1 to grade 4, there are 213 children but only 2 teachers. Another school had 240 children with only 2 teachers. And another one had 195 children with only 6 teachers. They also need classroom buildings, as they are currently meeting outside under trees.

"The other need is medical services. People in Wajir must walk for miles before reaching a medical clinic. It is at least 30-40 km [appx. 20 miles] to get a clinic, and in some places they must travel almost 150 km [appx. 90 miles] to get medical help."

Maji-Tech plans to stay in the area for a few months. Though the drilling itself is likely a two-month process, Maji-Tech will not leave the community with just a borehole. "We'll get the wells test-pumped and determine the yield," Collins said. "We'll work with local water authority and determine the best way to deliver water to people. When we leave, we want to see people using the water."

The church coalition will stay even longer, helping the community wherever possible.

"We see God in this work," Nuthu Mwangi said, "because it is not usual for Muslims and Christians in this area to work together. Now the government minister for regional development – a Muslim man – is calling us Christians often. He says that the community is appealing, saying, 'Come, we want to be friends with you, we want you to stay with us.' Whenever we make a trip, the Somali governmental leaders in Wajir host us, coordinating our ground transportation and other needs. It is very unusual."

This unusual attitude speaks to the way a crisis causes people of different faiths to come together. For Maji-Tech and the church partners, it is an opportunity to share God's love and provision with people in need.