

One year on for East Africa...

Last summer East Africa was struck by its worst drought in 60 years. Thirteen million people needed outside aid to survive in a region that includes Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia. The response from parishes and diocese across the country to Trócaire's emergency appeal was remarkable according to **Justin Kilcullen, director of Trócaire**. One year on thanks to donations from Ireland Trócaire continues to support vulnerable communities in these areas but the agency believes it is now crucially important to support communities to adapt and cope with the long-term effects that increasing droughts are having on farms and livelihoods.



In July of last year when I visited Somalia as the UN officially declared a famine in the region and the country had reached its lowest point since the outbreak of war two decades earlier.

Tens of thousands of people died of malnutrition in Somalia and beyond. Many more fled to neighbouring countries and refugee camps, walking hundreds of miles in search of food.

Trócaire, through its base in Kenya, had scaled up its emergency aid to suffering communities well before this time. With each visit to dry rural villages in northern Kenya, farmers told our staff of their fears following repeated failed rains. Their food supplies were short and they didn't need an official announcement that drought was coming. They saw it in their withered crops, emaciated livestock and hungry children.

When the crisis took hold, the Irish Catholic Church, its parishioners and clergy, stepped in. Taking its place in the international response to the famine, the Church held a national collection on 23 and 24 July 2011. The Irish people came together in support of East Africa donating almost €6 million alone through their parishes and diocese, enough to feed thousands and save lives.

Just as the Church at home was at the heart of Trócaire's response, dioceses in East Africa channeled Trócaire's emergency aid to hungry families. The Diocese of Lodwar and the Diocese of Kitui and Meru in northern Kenya were central to our emergency food distribution, which fed over 110,000 Kenyan families. In Ethiopia we supplied meat and grain to 30,000 people and over 50,000 people took part in cash for work or food schemes.

In Somalia, there was a 400% increase in admission rates at our 12

nutrition centres, with malnourished children needing urgent treatment. Funds from the church collection allowed us to meet this challenge by providing special, high-nutrition food mix for starving children.



In Somali communities we distributed five-month supplies of food to 35,000 people, over 33,000 people received clean water supplies and we distributed water treatment tablets to 2,750 households to purify dirty water.

With so many suffering people having nowhere else to turn, it was a great reassurance for Trócaire's partners in East Africa to know that compassionate Irish parishes were supporting their work.

This year rain has fallen in East Africa, but at low levels. Because of climate change, rainfall patterns have changed in a way that makes severe drought in this region more likely. We must respond to drought before it happens and before people are starving. It is more important than ever to help local people build resilience through irrigation systems, growing hardier crops and developing water sources. We must recognise that by tackling climate change we are preventing future emergency crises.

Donations from Irish people to our emergency appeal allowed us to look ahead last summer, while responding to urgent needs. Drought-resistant seeds benefitted 50,000 people in Kenya and Somalia, giving their crops a better chance of surviving the driest conditions. In partnership with local organisations we built water tanks, wells, rain water catchment systems and boreholes to store water year round.

Today northern Kenya is showing signs of improvement. Life is still undeniably hard but it's incredible the change that rain, so often the missing ingredient, can bring. Soil has finally felt moisture, bringing life back to the earth. Grass and crops spring from the ground. It's like a different world.

People in Ireland are famous for their generosity and commitment to the world's poorest people during times of crisis. No-one is more aware of this than Trócaire. Therefore we feel a sense of responsibility not only to the people we support but to the people who generously support us across Ireland to speak up on behalf of the world's poor. Disasters such as droughts, famine and flooding are becoming increasingly common and it is time for Irish and international politicians to show leadership and tackle the causes and effects of climate change once and for all. The people of Ireland spoke last summer when they showed such solidarity with the people of East Africa. It is time our elected representatives followed this example and do what they can to prevent further disasters for future generations of the developing world.

Across the fields and homes of East Africa evidence of Irish generosity is everywhere. In northern Kenya, the people tell our partners and staff that they know two snippets of information about Ireland; firstly it is a far away land and secondly the generosity of the people of Ireland travels far and wide.