

## Zoe Empowers Kenya Update: May 2020

by Perpetual Mati, Zoe Kenya Communications Facilitator

### Zoe Youth Become Leaders in the Fight Against COVID-19



*Street children in Maua learn about COVID-19 prevention and handwashing from a Zoe participant*

The global outbreak of COVID-19 has affected many countries, including Kenya. Lives have been lost and businesses affected. To cushion Zoe Empowers participants from the pandemic, program staff in Kenya trained empowerment group members on hand washing basics and provided hand washing containers, sanitizers, and soap. Equipped with this knowledge and resources, these program youth have taken on the role of spearheading mitigation efforts in their communities by teaching community members the importance of hand washing, social distancing, wearing masks, and avoiding crowded places. They made a special effort to reach out to the elderly and street children who have been greatly affected by the pandemic.

Empowerment groups like Light Karerene (image right) undertook to visit the elderly in their village who had been neglected and could not access food due to the lock-down and closure of businesses. They shared with them food, handwash soap, and sensitized them on how to protect themselves from contracting COVID-19 virus.

While everyone stays in the safe cover of their home during the lockdown, the homeless children have nowhere to go and no access to basic supplies. Zoe Kenya participants have been in constant contact with these children. In addition to teaching them the basics on handwashing, Zoe provided them with handwash stations, which they placed strategically around town, and provided them with masks.





*Zoe girls with the handwash containers they received from Zoe to facilitate handwashing at household level.*

### **Zoe Kenya Program COVID-19 Innovations and Initiatives**

During the COVID-19 government restrictions and containment measures, Zoe staff cannot hold regular group meetings and for many months could not meet with the children individually. They have however been in constant communication with Zoe beneficiaries through phone calls and bulk messaging. This way, the staff have been able to stay abreast on how the families are doing and encourage them to stay strong and take care of their income generating activities. Similarly, the empowerment groups cannot meet centrally so group leaders have taken it upon themselves to visit members at their homes to see how they are doing. The five group leaders in each group - chairperson, secretary, mentor, treasurer and group pastor - have each been assigned five members to visit individually.



Because of the heavy toll that the pandemic has had on businesses, Zoe participants have been encouraged to take up alternative businesses that are relevant at this time, like selling face masks and making soap and sanitizer. This is helping cushion the households against hunger while also building their resilience to the negative impacts of the pandemic and providing a service to the community. Empowerment groups and individual households have been encouraged to increase their farming activities to take advantage of the on-going long rains, and ensure that even after this difficult period of the pandemic has passed, the families will still have plenty to eat and will not suffer hunger. Since the groups cannot work their shared farms together, they organized shifts; splitting themselves into groups of five.

*Winrose of Weru Kathathene selling masks*

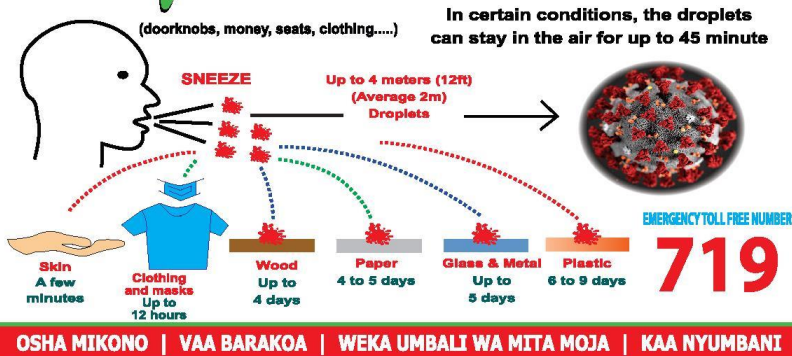
"Boda boda" (public transport motorbike) riders provide quick and affordable transport to nearly all areas. They serve a big chunk of the population, including the children and families that Zoe supports. As part of community engagement, Zoe in Kenya engaged these riders as a measure to fight the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Zoe brought together leaders from every "boda boda" station and sensitized them on COVID-19, and issued them handwash supplies and face masks to help riders at the various stations protect themselves from the disease. They were also issued with reflector vests bearing information on the virus, including a hotline they can call for any necessary assistance. This initiative was done in conjunction with the office of the DCI (Directorate of Criminal Investigation), which is an arm of the Kenyan government.



# ZOE KENYA

## Life Span of the Corona Virus on Surfaces

*Be Informed* **STOP THE SPREAD!**



To sensitize the Zoe children and the community as a whole on COVID-19 facts, these stickers and flyers were distributed widely in areas where Zoe operates and shared with public forums like police stations, dispensaries, and market places.

### GENERAL PROGRAM UPDATES

#### Table Banking Taken to a New Level

All groups organize table bank projects to create a fund for providing low interest loans to each other and as a means of growing their savings through the accumulation of returned loans and interest payments which are paid out periodically as dividends. Blessed Kimachia, Inuka Kinisa, Winners Mautine and Furaha Antuambui groups decided to combine resources and create a larger table bank project. The groups meet twice a month and pool resources to create a common kitty which forms the loaning base. This concept of the four Zoe groups forming a communal table bank project has not only enhanced the economic status of the households but also increases their connection to each other and to their community. The households look out for each other and develop business relationships beyond their empowerment groups. This has enhanced networking and levels of psycho-social support among these households.



*Ebenezer Ntunene, Joy Tuuru and Weru Irindii groups in their demonstration farm.*

### **Networking Through Farming**

There are 19 demonstration farms across the Zoe Kenya Empowers program. These have gone a long way in improving the lives of empowerment group households by teaching them best practices on farming as well as providing them with a dependable source of food. This initiative is conducted with help from the Ministry of Agriculture and Syngenta, a local agricultural body helping farmers improve their yields. The produce from these farms also goes into food banks, helping cushion the families against drought or other crop disruptions.

### **Status of Crops and Harvest**

Due to sufficient rains during the October to December growing season, empowerment groups and households in the Zoe Empowers Kenya program experienced good harvests. This has helped secure the families in terms of food supply and has also helped provide additional income through the sale of the produce.



*A member of Joy Tuuru with their corn harvest and members of Imani Kirindine with their April 2020 harvest of carrots*

In early February 2020, many parts of Kenya experienced an invasion of desert locusts that have attacked farms and destroyed crops and vegetation. The locusts also invaded some areas of Tharaka Nithi and Meru counties where Zoe operates. Local government agencies embarked on a massive spraying exercise to eliminate the locusts which have helped. At the same time, Zoe participants were encouraged to take up multiple businesses and increase farming activities during the long rains to ensure they can meet food security challenges. Additionally, the concept of having communal food banks has taken root in empowerment groups and these are providing a resource for families in the eventuality of poor harvests.

### **Recent Distribution of Resources**

Agricultural inputs: In October 2019, Zoe supported the 19 empowerment groups which had begun meeting in July 2019 with farm tools and planting seeds to start them on the path to food security by growing their own food. The 35 empowerment groups recruited in January 2020 received their farming inputs shortly before the onset of the long rains in March 2020.



*Honest Kalerene with the farm tools they received from Zoe*

School fees: In January 2020, Zoe Kenya supported siblings from the first-year empowerment groups with funds to cover school fees. This has ensured school retention among these households and resulted in better performance at school since children were not sent home for non-payment of fees.

Water tanks and blankets: After training on health and hygiene, the 579 families that entered the Zoe program with the July 2019 recruitment were supported with water tanks and blankets in November 2019. The water tanks have gone a long way in facilitating safe water storage for household consumption. The blankets both provide warmth and protection from insect-borne diseases like malaria.

Business grants: Having started various income generating projects in the last year, participants from 37 empowerment groups that started in January 2019 received a second batch of business grants in January 2020. The grants went into the group's table bank kitty and the participants received it in the form of soft loans which they are paying back to the group at a small interest, according to group consensus. This is helping grow a bigger resource pool which members can use to grow their businesses and acquire other assets/investments.

The members of the 35 groups which began meeting this past January received their grants and those who had vocational skills prior to enrollment received start-up kits to enable them to start their trade businesses.



*Pamela of Hope Tiira with her hairdressing start-up kit*



*Bonface of Hope Kaibu with his mechanics kit*

### **Event Highlight**

In January 2020, Zoe Empowers Kenya held a graduation ceremony for 15 empowerment groups that had graduated in December 2019. The event held in Maua was graced by different government leaders among them the Chief Officer for Youth and Gender from the Meru County Government who commended Zoe for the good work they are doing.



*Zoe participants from Tharaka Nithi County entertain during the 2017-class 1 graduation ceremony in January 2020*