

Connecting lives



Gata, the wife of a village chief, has led her community to end domestic violence

Welcome to Connecting Lives! In May this year, Alex and Richard Stark from Bath visited Malawi to capture Eagles' impact on film, giving you a more intimate glimpse of how lives are changing in the villages. This issue features their pictures, impressions and some of the stories they heard. A larger selection of their photos and a short film will be released later in the year!

Malawi village ends domestic abuse

Equipped by Eagles to identify their own problems and find solutions, Karumba village in Central Malawi, prioritised the high levels of domestic violence they faced. Marriages were deeply troubled - many men spent their evenings with prostitutes instead of their wives. Led by the chief's dynamic wife Gata, the village brought these issues out into the open for the first time. The greater communication between men and women brought more understanding. Patient counselling helped heal many marriages. Gata is proud to say that there has been no domestic violence for a long time:



"Now families are living in peace . The violence and injustice that used to happen in our marriages are now over."

Does Eagles' work stand the test of time?



Kamkwere community designed and built an earth tank to harvest rainwater

Four years after he last worked with Kamkwere village in Central Malawi, Cuthbert (Eagles Church Mobilisation Coordinator) put the sustainability of their work to the test. He turned up with Alex and Richard, with no idea of what he might find. Some might consider this risky during a very intense filming trip... but it's an indication of Cuthbert's confidence in Eagles' mobilisation process! He was delighted to see that the village had continued the work it had begun with him.

They were still growing diverse crops that helped provide food all year round. They were still making fertiliser for their crops out of local materials and planting trees to improve the environment. They were also still using participatory drama to catalyse discussion about sensitive issues like sexual violence and stigma against those living with HIV. They engage their audience and challenge their thinking by getting them to decide the characters' next moves. They then facilitate everyone to agree an action plan to address the issues they have raised together.

Even more impressively though, the community had widened and developed the work significantly. In the intervening years, they identified other issues and took action. Cuthbert, Alex and Richard discovered that one year ago the village began their biggest project to date - to tackle the increasing effects of climate change. Raphael, one of the facilitators that Eagles had trained, explained:

"We saw that rainfall was now unpredictable and that affected the food availability in our village. So the community met together to discuss ideas. We decided to dig something to catch rainwater. So now even if the rains fails, we can still water our crops and get a harvest."

Together they built an earth tank that is now 21m by 16m and 2m deep. The village can irrigate at all times of year, so their crops are thriving - and the animals too. No one goes hungry anymore. And their plans continue! According to Raphael:

"We are now planning to expand the tank and bring in fish to provide added income."



Kamkwere women sing and dance to celebrate their success

Only because of Eagles...



Sampson Chidule, chairman of the pastors' and community leaders' committee in Mpyupyu in southern Malawi, explains how the churches and community work together, since Eagles trained them:

"Before we started working with Eagles, chiefs and church leaders were working on their own, so things were not going well. But after Eagles came, they taught us that to be effective in development and to help the vulnerable, church and community have to work together.

We support the vulnerable (including the elderly, disabled, widows and orphans) with basic necessities. We also help people affected by Cyclone Idai— people whose houses collapsed. Before Eagles, people living with HIV were discriminated against. But now we see we are all made in the image of God. So now we work with community leaders to care for them and set up support groups.

We also know that for our community to get better, we need education So we began four nursery schools. We are working with the community leaders to ensure that children attend classes by holding awareness meetings and creating village laws for parents who don't send their children to school. If parents don't take responsibility to send their children to school, they are killing the future of our community.

Eagles taught us to care for the environment. We used to cut trees down carelessly; but now every time we cut one, we replace it with ten! Our mountain was heavily deforested. Now we are proud to say we have trees again and it is looking beautiful. We have a committee trusted to look after the forest. People must ask their permission before cutting a tree. Eagles also showed us fuel efficient stoves – this saves a lot of trees as they use less firewood – and rubbish pits to throw litter.



The Mpyupyu Village Chief works in the community forest that they have created—for every one tree they cut down, they plant another ten.

Before Eagles, there were also not enough toilets, leading to lots of disease. We had a problem because the texture of the soil here is loose so whenever we dug a toilet, it collapsed. But now we have found a new way to build them that lasts. We have also dug three shallow wells, protected with bricks from getting dirty, and constructed bridges.

We are only doing any of this because of Eagles. I know that if Eagles came here 20 years ago, our country of Malawi would have changed."

Seeing Eagles through fresh eyes

Richard and Alex (photo right), who filmed *Eagles*, share what has struck them during their visit.

What has been your best moment?

Richard: One of the best was the singing of the women from Kamkwere village, celebrating their success.

Alex: I think how proud and eager all the different villages were to show off the things they've achieved.

What has surprised you?

Richard: How much communities achieve with so little!

Alex: The warmth of the people, their eagerness to welcome us, and their friendliness with each other.

*From what you've seen, do you think there is anything that makes *Eagles* different from other organisations?*

Richard: The way that they give people the ability to solve their own problems – as Victor says, walking with the community, not giving them the answers.

Alex: It's that longer lasting and more personal relationships are formed.



"Dependency keeps us in poverty, the feeling that you can do nothing on your own. Malawi remains poor because we have not harnessed what we have. Eagles helps people to see that they have resources and talents to use to change their situation."

Cuthbert Gondwe, Church Mobilisation Coordinator (above)



"When Mpyupyu told me, 'we don't need others to develop us any more - anything outsiders can do, we can do ourselves!', my heart filled with joy and I thought: 'they have got it!'"

Jimmy Likagwa, Church Mobilisation Coordinator, (above)



"I know 2+2=4. It's very easy for me to tell a community that - for example, to train them how to increase food security using conservation agriculture. But what happens when they then come across 7+3? If I've failed to equip them to find their own answers to different problems, then I've failed."

Victor Muhogho, Director (photo left)