

CONCERN worldwide

Tanzania 30 years: 1979–2009

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Philipo Mkuye,
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Concern Worldwide Tanzania

Concern Worldwide

Concern Worldwide is an international humanitarian organisation dedicated to reducing suffering and ending extreme poverty. For 40 years our focus has been on improving the lives of the poorest people in the poorest countries of the world.

Concern in Tanzania

In 1978 the first President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, invited Concern to implement community development projects in Iringa Region in central Tanzania. Over the next decade Concern Tanzania provided training and education to local organisations and communities in agriculture, water, micro enterprises and health. From 1997 Concern Tanzania expanded its work to three regions on the coast – Mtwara, Lindi and Dar es Salaam – and opened refugee camps in Kigoma and Ngara in the northwest, providing humanitarian aid to refugees until 2008.

Since 2000, Concern Tanzania's work has developed into two main programme areas with a strong focus on advocacy to influence the policy forum; governance; rights-based programming; and mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS, equality and disaster risk reduction. Concern Tanzania now implements all programmes in partnership with local government and civil society organisations.

Concern Tanzania's goal and programme areas

Concern Tanzania's strategic goal is to improve the livelihood security for those living in extreme poverty. The programme sectors are as follows:

Agriculture

Over 80 percent of Tanzanians rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, and 90 percent of the country lives on less than \$2 a day. Concern Tanzania's agriculture sector programme targets the poorest rural households in order to improve their food security and income by ensuring access to agricultural services and inputs; improving agricultural practices; improving access to market information so farmers can sell their produce; and ensuring households claim their right to land ownership.

To implement these activities, Concern Tanzania works with 15 partners – nine civil society organisations and six district councils.

Water and Environmental Health

Currently 38 percent of Tanzanians do not access safe water and over half of the population isn't using improved sanitation facilities, increasing the risk of water-borne and vector diseases. Through the water sector programme Concern Tanzania is increasing communities' access to safe drinking water by constructing/rehabilitating water sources close to villages and training villagers on how to maintain them; delivering sanitation and health awareness; and researching local vector-control and water purification methods.

To implement these activities, Concern Tanzania works with nine partners – six civil society organisations, two district councils, and one health institute.

30 years of poverty alleviation

To mark 30 years of working in Tanzania, Concern Tanzania Programme Support Officer, Isla Gilmore, visited Concern's original programme area, Iringa, to speak to participants of the first projects – in agriculture, water, horticulture and forestry. After writing up their stories, the following three articles were published in the Guardian newspaper in Tanzania. Anne Barrington, the Irish Ambassador to Tanzania, acknowledged and supported the articles, which were printed over the New Year holiday, 2009.

30 years on: marginal farmers' plight in a changing land

Famine and drought have both visited the rural people of Tanzania in turn. Concern Worldwide, Ireland's leading NGO, looks back on three decades of working to achieve food security and agricultural transformation for the country's poorest farmers

Eighty-seven-year-old Petro Lupituko has seen many changes in Ismani Division in Iringa Region over the decades. He arrived here in 1951 when it was still a jungle, and animals – giraffes, elephants and zebras – roamed. It's hard to imagine. These days the sun is merciless, the rain is sporadic on the dusty dry plains, and harvests are sometimes poor, like they were this year. But, he says, it used to be much worse.

Until the 1950s, Ismani Division was covered by dense woodland which provided a habitat for an abundance of wildlife and a small population of pastoralists. In the early 1950s the area attracted commercial farmers because of its fertile soil for maize production. People began to migrate there to work on the farms and to escape famine in other parts of the country. In those days Ismani was called the 'breadbasket of Tanzania' producing a significant proportion of the country's marketed maize and some tobacco. However, by the 1970s the fertility of the land had been depleted, large areas were deforested and productivity had decreased dramatically. "When I came here there were many trees", Petro remembers, "but people started to cut them down to make room for their farms, and to use for firewood. There were no laws, people used the land and then moved after a couple of years when the ground was infertile". Some years later, Petro recalls, it was a semi desert; villagers could see for miles in the distance and there was no protection from the wind.

President Nyerere made it compulsory for the rural population to live in villages under the Ujumaa scheme, and it was 90% successful by the end of the 1970s. Around 72% lived close to health facilities but, despite this, when Concern's Irish volunteers arrived in Ismani Division in 1979 they encountered severe poverty, ill health and food insecurity. Without trees there was little rain, poor soil fertility, and crops barely grew.

Petro emerges from his dark house into the midday sun, stooping slightly and smiling through big white teeth; he's clutching a framed certificate. He points around his farmland to tall skinny trees he planted in the early 80s, for which he received incentives – trousers, a jacket, 30,000 TSH and the certificate. He was a key farmer in Concern's original project – the organisation's first move away from emergency relief to long-term development. Many farmers resisted planting the free tree seedlings, despite the establishment of bylaws, due to lack of knowledge on the benefits of trees and concern that they would reduce space for farming. Petro was one of many 'progressive' farmers with the capacity to plant hundreds of seedlings to support the regeneration of the forests and to encourage others to do the same. "I planted 14 acres of trees and I always advised people to plant to avoid drought, but it took a long time for Concern to convince people. Some farmers didn't plant all of their seeds, and of course now they regret it when they see the difference in production on the other farms."

Mama Mkundi, a 58-year-old horticulturalist who worked with Concern in the 1980s and 90s describes the health of the villagers in Ismani in those days as "terrible". "There was a problem of skin diseases" she recalls, "due to deficiency of vitamins from fruits and vegetables". Many villagers talk about there being no fruit trees or vegetables in the area at all and never having even seen a vegetable before. "Their skin was dry and full of rashes. People only ate ugali and cow peas, every day, for their whole lives." Mama Mkundi assisted Concern to set up a vegetable nursery to research the fruit and vegetable varieties suitable to the environment. Carrot, tomato, onion, spinach, eggplant, Chinese cabbage and sweet pepper succeeded, and seedlings were produced in the nursery to distribute to villagers. Each household received five fruit trees to plant next to their houses and women were trained to establish small kitchen gardens to grow vegetables for consumption. Maintaining them required very little time and labour and therefore they were extremely popular with the women, who endured the burden of long working hours. The women learnt how to irrigate them water they used to wash dishes.

Concern worked with the government by seconding agricultural workers, in addition to training young villagers, to work as extension officers in Ismani. The extension officers taught and encouraged communities to plant trees, grow vegetables and improve their agricultural techniques on their farms. One of them was Yogen Ndage, now 42, from Njombe in Iringa. He began working with Concern in the early 1980s. Yogen had limited options after primary school, and so Concern gave him an opportunity to work

and learn. On arrival in Ismani for his new role, Yogen recalls the difference in the environment to that of his home. "It was really dry here and there was little water. There used to be a pond but it often dried up. We depended on water from the pipes but it only came once a week. Through my work with Concern I started assisting people to cultivate fruits and vegetables. We saw the impact very quickly." Schools were benefitting from producing seedlings and Concern had established many nurseries in the area to ensure local access and income generation. In the mid-1990s Yogen established his own nursery and to this day he still produces vegetable and fruit tree seedlings for the surrounding villages. His work over the years gained him the respect and trust of his community, and they recently elected him to be village chairman. "I feel that the whole village can benefit from my experience, and that makes me feel good, especially as I can see people teaching others what they know about agriculture and trees."



Mama Mkundi with the tree planted by President Nyerere in the early 80s

Techniques such as making organic fertiliser from animal manure; proper land selection and preparation; seed spacing; selecting and producing quality seeds; crop diversification; and using oxen for ploughing dramatically increased production from around 1–3 bags to 15 bags of maize per acre. And the introduction of fruits and vegetables into the area visibly improved health and eradicated skin diseases. "Farmers didn't know what an agriculturalist was" says Mama Mkundi. "There were one or two but they didn't have any transport so they couldn't visit the farmers. "Concern introduced them to this division, and increased knowledge on trees and agricultural production. Many things really worked, for instance, everybody here uses oxen now instead of hand hoe to plough. Ismani Division was one of the poorest places in Iringa Region because of drought but these days it's not too bad. I think that around 60 or 70 percent of all trees here were planted by Concern."

Petro also continues to serve the community thanks to his early work planting trees for Concern. People now come to buy logs from him, and he cuts the trees in such a way that they sprout new branches at a high speed. "I know the profit of planting trees" he says, "the seedlings I planted were free from Concern and now I make money and help the community. Since Concern came there is less drought and less hunger. The weather still affects production but the situation is much

better." Now, he says, there are many nurseries where people can buy tree seedlings for just 100 shillings.

Poverty in Tanzania is often described as a 'rural phenomenon'. Today over 80% of the population of Tanzania lives in rural areas and relies on agriculture as a main source of income. Concern prioritised agriculture from the early days, and still believes that improving agriculture will relieve the suffering of the country's poorest people who depend on the land for their livelihood – marginal farmers. However, over the years working in the sector has been fraught with challenges. In addition to poor climatic conditions and shortage of skills/training support, external factors and the dramatic changes in policy has affected farmers' ability to produce beyond subsistence level. By the end of the 1970s, world recession loomed. Tanzania's exports reduced in price and its imports increased. The government fixed the prices for crops at a low rate, and, even with high subsidies, the cost of inputs were too high for many poor farmers. During the 1980s the gains in the government's 'basic needs' approach began to diminish; Tanzania became more dependent on external aid. After the economy collapsed in the mid 1980s as a result of socialist policies and the Ugandan war, the government, in line with International Monetary Fund restructuring, withdrew incentives for agricultural production. For example subsidies were removed on fertilisers, and cooperative societies were privatised leading them to buy grain from farmers at the lowest possible price instead of the one designed to protect farmers and encourage farming as an economically viable activity. With no guaranteed market and low prices for their crops there was no incentive for farmers to farm intensively. The current government is advocating for more private sector investment in



Petro Lupituko with the trees he planted for Concern

the sector to boost production, but with little large-scale infrastructure planned to reduce the dependency on rain-fed agriculture; farmers still produce little and are still trapped in a cycle of aid dependency.

Despite progressive laws and reforms, the political and cultural challenges to transforming the agriculture sector remain. There has been little growth in the agricultural sector in the past decade due to years of low investment. Currently there is a shortage of extension officers limiting farmers' access to best practices and innovations in farming. There are delays in funds reaching districts to support poor farmers; and there is low awareness on and little financial prioritisation for acquisition of land. Rural populations historically have limited access to productive assets, including land, financial services, livestock and education. Food security at the household level in rural Tanzania is further affected by the reinforcement of factors such as poor food budgeting; exclusion of women from decision-making processes, poor management of their harvests and general patriarchal traditions; and lack of support mechanisms for poor farmers to sell their produce at markets.

However, in 2009, on the 30th anniversary of Concern's agricultural work in Tanzania, the Tanzanian Government announced a 30% increase in the agricultural budget.

Despite criticism and uncertainties about how Kilimo Kwanza – 'Agriculture First' – will benefit the poor farmers and transform the agriculture sector in Tanzania, the government has shown a commitment to the sector and a push towards the achievement of its target of 7% agriculture sector growth for 2008–15.

Snapshot of agriculture in Tanzania

- Agriculture is dominated by smallholder farmers cultivating average farm sizes of between 0.9–3.0 hectare each
- Around 70% of crop area in Tanzania is cultivated by hand hoe
- Agricultural growth 1998–2007 was on average 4.2% compared to 6.3% economic growth
- Extension officer: farmer ratio is currently between 1:10,000–1:20,000
- Women make up the main part of the agricultural workforce
- The Global Hunger Index ranks Tanzania's level of hunger as 'alarming', at 24 from the bottom of 84 countries ranked.

In a different part of Iringa Region, Rachel Ngawo, a 64-year-old widow with orphaned grandchildren to care for, knows Concern's current work well. She defines her life as "a struggle", a result of traditional practices that deny women land-ownership rights. Rachel always believed that it was illegal for women to own land; she relied on a small harvest of maize and rice and a couple of chickens for food for her family. When her husband died she didn't know how to make even minor decisions for her family, and her in-laws came to take back her house and her land.

When Concern came to her village in 2007, she attended a human rights training session, which helped her to understand that she can have some control over her life. Through the training she learnt that there is a law in place to protect the rights of women like in her situation, and she was able to stop her husband's family from taking her land away from her. Rachel has since been an active participant in various programme activities such as the village land registry and irrigation canal construction. She is now a member of the farmer field school in her village where she learnt improved agricultural practices and tested new varieties of crops and seeds. In 2009 the farmers tested maize and rice varieties. Her land has been demarcated and she is waiting to receive her land ownership certificate. It will allow her to secure credit for investment. Her confidence and business skills have improved; in 2008 she leased some of her land for 60,000 TSH per acre. Rachel recognises the benefits of women owning land; to her

women can not do well in feeding the household without a land entitlement. She thinks this will give women confidence to utilise the knowledge of the improved agricultural practices they are learning. "It is a pleasure and comfort for a woman to have food to satisfy her family, I feel proud now I can do that." She says.

This is a typical story from participants of Concern's current agricultural sector work in Tanzania, which focuses on the right to food and land in nine districts. In addition to improving agricultural practices, Concern's current work establishes, revitalises and strengthens institutions such as land tribunals and land registries, village and ward level governance committees and farmers' associations, provides training on laws and policies there to protect human rights, and establishes citizen's rights monitoring groups to monitor and report on violations. Working entirely with partners, including the government, Concern is playing a part in strengthening civil society in rural Tanzania. Chairing and sitting on the board of the Agriculture Non-State Actors Forum (ANSAF) and Policy Forum respectively, Concern aims to pass on the views and needs of farmers to the district and national government and advocate for policy change. Concern's vision is not only that farmers become food secure through increased production but that they participate in decision-making process and become active members in the transformation of the agricultural sector from its current state to one that has the needs of the poorest farmers at the core.

So what has Concern learnt over the past 30 years? Gearóid Loibhead, Concern Tanzania's Assistant Country Director, says "In Concern we passionately believe in the potential and capability of extremely poor people to bring about change for the better. Our experience in Tanzania copper-fastens this belief as we work bottom up, relying on local context and believing in local creativity, trialling initiatives, seeking the small things that make a big difference, and depending on feedback to tweak and change until we find the things that work".



Before and after: Ichenga Farmers' Training Centre, Njombe, Iringa, in 1980, and 2009 from the same spot. All trees planted by Concern.

Three decades, four women, one life-changing project

Members of a women's group in Iringa prove that small development projects done well can make big changes to the lives of the poorest people in Tanzania

The walls in a small office in Mangawe Village in Iringa Region hold many stories. Stories that once seemed impossible and far fetched to some. For 27 years the women of this village have gathered in this two-roomed office to chat, learn, sew and discuss what is happening in their lives, community and country.

"In past times we were so scared; every day. We had no education, we didn't sit with important people and we could never speak our minds. We wouldn't even dare to vote in the village elections. Because we are women. Imagine", explains Renatha Kahwili.

Renatha is part of a women's group set up by Concern Tanzania in 1982 to improve the agricultural production and nutrition of the members, their families and the wider village. When the organisation came to Renatha's village all those years ago it was the lifeline they had been looking for. "Women and children were in bad health here" Renatha recalls, "we had some food, but instead of eating it we sold most of it. We wanted to grow beans, ground nuts, sunflower and vegetables. But we didn't know how to. It was too dry here for us to cultivate".

Today these basic problems have been erased and these women's lives have changed beyond anything they imagined. Improved agricultural techniques, such as making organic fertiliser; preparing land and planting new crop varieties; using oxen for ploughing; and small livestock keeping, have increased production even in this dry and harsh climate; and skills such as making fuel-efficient stoves; proper nutrition; and sewing have benefitted their health and income generation. The group received a milling machine and three sewing machines for their businesses, which they still use today. "We are seeing a lot more production compared to the former years", explains Edita Enock, a member of the group, "we have small kitchen gardens

where we grow vegetables in the rainy seasons and we use the water in which we wash our dishes to irrigate them. Children and adults no longer suffer from the former skin disease that many people in the village had because we eat better food, and we can even afford to pay for extra tuition for our children".

The wider impact of this small project is a credit to the diligence and fortitude of rural women and the appropriateness of the training Concern gave them three decades ago. Renatha now sits on the village council, something she never thought she would be capable of. She explains, "before there were never women on the government here, women were too scared to talk, and they refused if they were selected. So we didn't have any female representation in the decisions made for our village at all".

This is in spite of the fact that Tanzanian law states there should be a minimum of eight women in every 25 members on the village council representing the citizens. Some villages have less, some more and some none at all.



From left to right Janet Wivaha, 56; Edita Enock, 40; Renatha Kahwili, 46; and Eveta Mponda, 38

Ensuring that women are on the board is only the first step in realising women's rights to participation and representation, says Aswani Adams, Rights-Based Livelihoods Programme Manager at Concern Tanzania. They have to be active. "Women should represent other women; they need to be a part of the process. They experience problems in a more severe way and have different priorities to men, so representation is essential, and it is their right to be there."

Concern's current programmes in Tanzania are based around the right to food and the right to land, with a strong focus on participation of the citizens and accountability and transparency of those in power – often the village and district government. In Concern Tanzania's current programme villages it is common to see females gaining confidence to put themselves forward in the elections with the support of their husbands, and speaking their opinions in the presence of men. They gain this from training they have received from Concern Tanzania's partner organisations on laws that protect their rights, and practical positive experiences of gaining their land certificates and marriage entitlements.

When Concern came to Mangawe Village its focus was not specifically human rights. In the early days the organisation implemented forestry, water and practical community development activities to boost businesses and to increase the health of the women and their families. Many of these activities are replicated today. The empowerment these women gained has stood the test of time and justifies the organisation's move into 'rights-based' programming, which aims to provide information and support to citizens on their rights to food, land and participation. This method of working encourages village leaders to live up to their roles and responsibilities; and increases coordination of all parties involved in agricultural transformation, from citizen to national government. "We had never had such a group in the village" says Renatha, "we learnt the importance of having a chairperson, a treasurer, and a secretary. We learnt about leadership, financial management, and accountability. It's the reason why the group is still running today. Before this education we would have never dared to be among members of the village council; but our group is successful and now we are scared of nobody. We have been elected on to the village council because of our good work, and now we always speak our minds".

The women have replicated the structure and management of the group by forming other groups, supported by other citizens in their village and surrounding villages who have been learning from their skills, and they teach others in the village. "We use this room to talk to other women" Renatha says, "because Concern taught us that there is a law to protect us when we need help. If a woman in the village is having problems with her husband, for example, if he wants to take all the money from the harvest or he comes home late and drunk and beats her, she comes to us and we advise her on what to do. She can go to court. Sometimes men come to us too, and they complain about their wives. We try to help people. It's something really good that came from this project."

The female perspective on the village government is proving to be positive for the wider village. "Because of the seminars we attended back then, we know what is right and wrong. It has given us the confidence to speak out, oppose decisions and make our own minds up. We have seen many changes in ourselves", Janet Wivaha, a member of the group and the village council, says. These changes have prompted acceptance of community- and female-centred decisions, previously non-existent in Mangawe Village and sadly still characteristic of many rural villages in Tanzania. For instance, in order to benefit the whole community, the women proposed that the village contribute to the upgrading of their milling machine to a diesel one. "This was a women's issue" Janet says; "it is only the women that are using the machine, so it is our way of helping them".

Currently, the women on the council are obtaining funds from each citizen to support the 67 orphans in their village with school fees, uniforms and daily support. They hope to build a shelter and give them the same opportunities in education that other children have. The women have set up an account for the funds and established a committee with democratically elected members to run the project. "There are seven people on the committee" Renatha explains, "and I look after the account. We have a secretary, a chairperson, a treasurer and board members". Amongst the board members are three of the orphans, aged between eight and 14. "Concern taught us how to do this" she says, "the district community development officer comes to the village now so we get extra training, but we learnt all that we know about setting up and maintaining committees through the work Concern did with us all those years ago."

Amongst the major impacts that the group has had on their lives, the women list increased agricultural production and food security as high on the list. But the changes in themselves are what they consider

the greatest impact that this small community development project has had. Renatha, with pride of achievement, smiles and looks to her fellow women in the room, “we are a good example to this village and surrounding villages of what is possible. We still struggle to cultivate because of the weather conditions, but we have improved. We have our own money, our own voice, and over the years things have changed. We now have our own farms and we can provide the best for our children. Nothing is more important than being able to provide.”



Another successful women's project: Sister Romana Nyakasonga, 52, says that 'everything good that has happened here is because of Concern'. The women received training in agriculture, horticulture, small-livestock, and how to run the groups – for instance leadership, accountability, and accountancy skills. Many women in the group have since joined and established other groups, sharing information. Some have joined the village government and others now have high posts in the Umoja Wa Wanawake Tanzania – Tanzanian women's union. Romana says 'Concern gave us this opportunity; more than that, Concern took us to different places to see what other people were doing and this made us strong'.

A lifelong humanitarian

Concern Worldwide has been working in Tanzania for 30 years. One man has been there from the beginning

“Our aim was to stay for two weeks only. But when we arrived at the stadium and saw the refugees, we were shocked. There were hundreds of thousands of people living in the stadium. There was no water, no toilets and not nearly enough food.”

Katron Thomas was a driver with Concern Tanzania in his home town Iringa. He was tasked with delivering supplies to Kasulu District in Kigoma Region, which borders Burundi in western Tanzania. It was November 1993, and violence in the wake of the assassination of Burundian President Melchior Ndadaye had resulted in hundreds of thousands of Burundians fleeing to neighbouring countries to escape brutal killings. Kigoma received over 230,000 refugees in the space of three weeks. Unprepared for the influx, the government congregated the crowds together in the Lake Tanganyika Stadium until NGOs established refugee camps.

Katron remembers too well the Burundians’ distress. He was 24 years old with a wife and baby in Iringa. On encountering the refugees, he knew he wouldn’t be home for a while. “The situation was very scary. I had never seen anything like it. People acted in a strange way. They were taking the dirt from the cars and smearing it over their bodies and faces. Many times when we walked to the car crowds of people surrounded it, all of them grabbing the dirt to put on them. We were nervous. But when we approached they always dispersed so we could get inside. All around us children were crying from hunger. There were no toilets, and when we entered the stadium we had to watch where we stepped because the floor was covered in defecation.” Katron stayed in Kigoma for one year.

NGOs relocated the refugees to six individual camps with full services. Cholera had already claimed the lives of hundreds of people. “People were sick; they had sore eyes and the air was heavy with illness. We had injections to prevent us from getting sick too. It took about three weeks for me to feel okay in these surroundings. I knew I was there to help the people so I had to get on with it. The best thing for me was being able to get clothes to children who didn’t have any and biscuits for them from our store. It helped to take my mind off what was going on.”

Concern in Kigoma

Concern employed 100 staff members in Kigoma. The main task was to distribute food and non-food items to the camps. The staff members were mostly from Tanzania, some redeployed to the region and others employed locally – drivers, ‘turn boys’ (drivers’ assistants), technical staff, supervisors, and store keepers. There were six emergency international staff members from Concern’s head office in Dublin. Concern assisted in the construction of roads and bridges to enable supplies to pass through easily.

Katron was promoted from driver to manager, supervising 30 cars, 30 drivers and 30 turn boys transporting and distributing weekly food rations within the camps. “It was hard to coordinate all those cars in that situation” Katron says, “because most of the drivers weren’t working for Concern before, so they didn’t have the same experience with Concern’s procedures. Often they would drive to pick up supplies but not return at the time I asked them to.”

Katron recalls that whenever the Concern car drove through the camps hundreds of people ran towards it. “They didn’t care about the other NGO cars so much because they knew we were the ones with food. Of course the others were important – we needed the water and sanitation, and the medical services – but people always wanted the food.

After a short time life in the camps settled and Katron could see the difference in the behaviour of the refugees. But he admits to being scared of them for some time. “There was a little violence in the camp but there was always tension”.

Tanzania is a peaceful country where the founding father Nyerere’s biggest legacy can be seen in the harmony between the country’s 120 ethnic tribes. Katron, a Tanzanian Christian, has dedicated his life to

humanitarian work. “The refugees in our camps were religious people. I often thought ‘why can’t they sit down and talk together?’ I began to understand that violence continued because people had lost their families, everything, and so the need to take revenge just never stopped.”

The early days of Concern in Tanzania

In 1978 Nyerere invited Concern, then an international humanitarian organisation working in 13 countries worldwide, to set up operations in the country. It was the first move away from humanitarian work and into long-term development Concern would make. Concern set up projects in agriculture and horticulture, forestry, water and sanitation, and community and women’s development.

It was not the first time Katron had experienced a crisis so huge. In 1991/2 he witnessed first hand the worst hunger that Tanzania has ever seen, as drought hit the entire region leaving millions of people at risk of starvation. Concern distributed food to villages in Iringa – a region with pockets of severe poverty already suffering from deforestation and lack of rainfall. “People were really hungry back then. I could tell how bad a place was because of the state of the dogs – if their rib cages showed and they were very thin it meant that there were really no scraps for them to eat. Goats and cows would just drop down and die. It was frightening, especially because at that time some of my family lived in that region, and they were really suffering. It was very hard for me at work because Concern was encouraging people to reduce their cattle so that they could regenerate the forests, and the people resisted. But many years later the very same villagers who resisted shook my hand and thanked me for not giving up on them, even though they gave me such a hard time. Even now they still talk about it when I see them in the villages.”



Katron returning to the Concern-established adult Ichenga Farmers’ Training Centre in Njombe where he learnt how to cultivate vegetables. With him, Regina Kihwele, who has been the head teacher there for 20 years

Katron has grown up with Concern and has devoted over half of his life to its mission of helping the poorest people achieve major improvements in their lives.

Concern came to Katron’s village in 1980 to encourage farmers to plant the tree seedlings. In those days parts of Iringa were deforested and dry; villagers described it as “a desert”. This was the result of mass migration within the district to areas well known for their fertile land and productivity for maize. Many villagers moved into these areas to seek individual land and to

work on commercial farms during the 50s and 60s. By the 70s, most trees had been cut down for firewood, for building and to clear way for farms. Very few were replanted. Villagers speak of “seeing for miles” and “roofs blowing off houses”. Progressively there was less rain, and decreased soil fertility due to lack of vital tree nutrients. Farmers could no longer cultivate crops. Food insecurity and ill health grew.

Katron was 14 and had few options for his adulthood. He was not selected to progress into secondary school after Standard 7, and his only choice was to become a small-scale farmer in his village in Njombe. Concern employed him as a gardener and through this work over the next few years he studied

agricultural practices at a newly-established Concern farming training centre. “I learnt how to make organic fertilisers from the horticulturalists at the centre and how to cultivate the crops. Concern was focusing on small gardens and vegetable growing because at the time there were no fruits and vegetables in the area and people were very unhealthy.”

His new life as a driver and logistician began when he was 16. He impressed the Concern directors and he was keen to better himself. “Now I look back and I feel fortunate compared to many people in my village. Without my life with Concern I could not support my children, my wife and my family back in Iringa. My sister died and left two children whom we are all supporting. One of them has just finished Form 4 and is waiting to hear if she can progress into Form 5 to do A’ Levels. I want the same for my children, because having only completed Standard 7; I know how important education is.”

Katron is now based at Concern’s head office in Dar es Salaam, coordinating logistics, cars and drivers. He has witnessed the change in the organisation over time, from volunteer-based to a professional NGO with wide networks and funding from institutions such as the European Commission and the Irish Government. One thing hasn’t changed, Concern’s continued commitment to the poorest people in Tanzania in areas that no other NGOs have worked. The 62-strong workforce enables people to secure their land rights, improves agricultural production; supplies clean water and improved sanitation; and works to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS in its programme areas – all with a strong focus on the most vulnerable people – women, children, the aged and chronically sick.

These days Concern no longer implements programmes directly, but instead empowers small organisations based in the communities to work with the people, and to grow into better managed and capacitated establishments. Concern works with the government to support them in their work, and ensure that when Concern is no longer here, the work will continue. Concern strongly believes that with empowered communities and proper and timely implementation of laws, the poorest farmers will cease being passive recipients of aid to active members of society and an agricultural industry.

Demonstrating investment in people is a fundamental value at Concern Worldwide. Concern Tanzania is proud that it employs 97 percent of its workforce directly in country. Katron is one of six staff members that have been with the organisation for over 20 years. “Over the years I have seen the changes in people” Katron says, “in children’s health, in agricultural practices and food security. And Concern values people. No matter where they are from – white or black, European or African, Concern stands shoulder to shoulder with the people. I hope there’s no need for Concern in another 30 years, but if there is I have no doubt that the good work will continue.”



Katron in his home village with his mother, who he thinks is around 80 years old.