

# Standing strong: Buckner marks 10 years in Kenya

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NAIROBI, Kenya—Dickson Masindano will take all the help he can get for the [Buckner International](#) ministries he oversees in Kenya. But he wants everyone to know his goal is less, not more.

Children at the Seed of Hope orphanage and school in Kitale, Kenya, peer around the corner after class. Buckner operated the home and nearby community programs in this region since 2007.

Ask Masindano where he's headed with Buckner Kenya, which opened ministries here in 2001, and the passion pours out of him. "It's all about self-sustainability," he said. "Our goal is to do more with less."

And by less, he's talking about less dependency on outside sources of revenue to keep operations going. That's why the Buckner ministries in Kenya are diversifying and developing strategies that can stand on their own. From the urban slums of Nairobi to rural communities like Kitale, Busia and Bungoma, the Buckner Kenya staff is planting crops, generating bio-fuel by recycling cow dung, and operating health clinics that charge nominal cost-recovery fees for their services.

As the Buckner ministries in Kenya have grown over the past decade, the need to find additional sources of in-come also has grown. Today, the Buckner Kenya staff includes more than 80 employees, from house parents at the two orphanages, to farm workers and schoolteachers. It includes nurses, social workers, counselors, cooks and accountants.

Buckner Kenya started like Buckner's work in so many other places—at the re-quest of an existing organization. The Baptist Children's Center in Nairobi opened in 1989, the result of several groups coming together as the wave of orphans from AIDS/HIV was starting to hit Africa.



Children living at the Baptist Children's Center, operated by Buckner International, stand outside the home. Today, the home is the mainstay of Buckner's work in Kenya and includes the Munyao Memorial Baptist Chapel, Baptist Health Clinic, a school for 300 children from the nearby Mali Saba slum, a technology education center and a farm.  
(PHOTOS/Scott Collins/Buckner)

By the late 1990s, leaders at the center realized they needed professional advice on running the or-phanage.

That's when they heard about Buckner and asked for help.

When Buck-ner International staff from Dallas visited the Baptist Children's Center in 2000, it was home to about 60 children living in two crammed houses. And while the center's staff did the best they could, it was obvious the children's home needed help.

That's when Dickson Masindano showed up from Abilene. Masindano was finishing his master's degree at Hardin-Simmons University and was headed back to his home country when he was introduced to Buckner. By the time he got on an airplane bound for Kenya, Masindano was the first Buckner Kenya employee. Buckner Kenya applied for nongovernmental status in 2000. The next year, Buckner Kenya became operational, with the

Baptist Children's Center as its first ministry.

Today, the campus of the Baptist Children's Center is a bustling hive of activity. While the orphanage is the mainstay of the work, the site is also home to Munyai Memorial Baptist Chapel, Baptist Health Clinic, a school for 300 children from the nearby Mali Saba slum, a technology education center and a farm.

Along with the work taking place at the Baptist Children's Center campus, Buckner also sponsors about 90 children in foster and kinship care throughout Nairobi. Add that to the 22 children living at the orphanage, and Buckner has more than 110 children in residential care on any given day in the city—far more than 10 years ago, but with far fewer living in an institutional setting, always a goal of Buckner ministries.

Tony Wenani, di-rector of the Baptist Children's Center programs, said the children living at the orphanage to-day are among the “most vulnerable children in Nairobi. Many of them have been abused or neglected.”



Children stand outside the Herbert H. Reynolds Ministry Center in Cherangani, Kenya, on their first day of school. Buckner opened the center last year, which now serves as a preschool, houses Buckner foster care and kinship care staff, and provides a water well for the community and the Greater Zion Medical Center. (PHOTO/Scott Collins/Buckner)

Many are orphans due to the death of their parents from AIDS.

The goal of the Baptist Children's Center, Wenani said, “is to keep the

children at (the center) for as little as possible. We want to put them in families.”

Like the Buckner programs themselves, both Masindano and Wenani want the children and families to become self-sustaining as soon as possible.

“Initially, the (Baptist Children’s Center) model was keeping the orphans here, but we know better now,” Wenani said. “They become too dependent on the institutional setting if they live here. The best thing we can do is find ways that we can keep them in the community.”

To accomplish that goal, the orphanage has become more of an assessment center where children are cared for and counseled while the Buckner staff determines the best place for each child. Most children move from the center to foster or kinship care, where they live with a trained foster family or with relatives, all under continued monitoring from Buckner caseworkers.

“A child should be able to look back and say, ‘If it were not for Buckner, where would I be?’” Masindano said. “We want to give them an inheritance, because in Africa, an inheritance is very important. So, we can give them an inheritance of a basic education.”

That inheritance is also being offered for children living near the center who attend its school. The families pay a school fee—what Masindano calls “cost sharing.” The school enables Buckner to reach into the entire community.

“All children are vulnerable regardless of where they live,” Wenani said. “So, we want to offer holistic care to the children here and in the community as a package. There is too much emphasis placed on orphans sometimes and not enough on vulnerable children who are at risk of being abused or neglected. We are trying to prevent that.”

And while both Masindano and Wenani emphasize self-sustaining models for Buckner and the families they serve, they want groups from the United States to know they still are desperately needed in Kenya.

“We need the groups to keep coming and providing medical, technical and educational support,” Wenani said. “That’s very, very important. Sometimes the most important thing you can do is just play with the children and spend time with them.”

Sammy Nyongesa estimates the tomatoes growing in the greenhouse at Seed of Hope Orphanage in Kitale will top 2,600 pounds a year. More than 40 acres of corn and beans encircle the children’s home, and in a stall at the back of the campus are two new calves that soon will join the growing herd of cows furnishing milk for the children.

Nyongesa is the farm manager at Seed of Hope, and the work he and his crew do is moving the orphanage and its ministries closer to self-sustainability. Like Tony Wenani in Nairobi, Director Esther Ngure is creating independence for the Seed of Hope ministries in Kitale and the children who live there.

Located in northern Kenya, Seed of Hope was founded by German evangelical missionary Carsten Warner. Three years ago, Warner approached Buckner about taking over the ministries when he moved back to Germany, with the promise that Warner would continue raising support for the work—a promise he is keeping.

Since then, Buckner has expanded work in and around Kitale. Current ministries include the Seed of Hope orphanage; foster and kinship care; two medical clinics; a school for children in grades 1 through 8; an early childhood center known as the Kay School after Roy Kay, grandfather of donor Katy Reynolds; a church located on the school grounds; and the 40-acre farm.

Nearby in the village of Cherangani, Buckner opened the Herbert H. Reynolds Ministry Center last year, which serves as a preschool for neighboring children, houses the foster/kinship care staff that oversees more than 50 children in the community, a water well for the community, and the Greater Zion Medical Center, built by the Greater Mount Zion Baptist Church in Fort Worth and opened this past summer.

Ngure said about 70 children live at the Seed of Hope Orphanage.

And while the campus is the center of ministry for Buckner's work in Kitale, multiple programs serving the community extend the ministry's reach far beyond the orphanage. Programs like home-based care enable needy families to receive support. Currently 12 families, mostly parents who are HIV positive, receive assistance.

"The goal is to ease the burden of the families who have a heart to help their children but don't have the financial support to take care of the children," Ngure said. That small investment allows the children to stay with their families rather than being moved to an orphanage or left homeless. She added that the hope is to have "well-balanced children who become good parents who are able to stand on their own as adults."

Ten years after he started all this in Kenya for Buckner, Dickson Masindano knows the key for the next 10 years and beyond is self-sustainability, wherever Buckner starts new programs. That remains a primary criterion for him.

"We need to do that for the betterment of ourselves," he said. "If you're not doing something about self-sustainability, you will just leave empty buildings."