

Visiting Bomalang'ombe By Tom Hendrickson, President, Iringa Hope April 2019

Recently Sandy and I visited Bomalang'ombe. We were there to talk to the members of the Bomalang'ombe Iringa Hope Savings and Credit Cooperative Society (SACCOS – a co-operative S&L), the Iringa Hope Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Society (AMCOS – a Farmer's Co-op), and leaders of the village. We often come here to see how things are going, visit with the members, and talk to the parish about any issues they have. This year we are also asking small groups of members to talk about what changes Iringa Hope has made in their parish.

Last year Iringa Hope received a grant from the Peter J King Family Foundation to build an Integrated Development Center (IDC) here. The IDC provides an office for the SACCOS, an office for the AMCOS, a meeting room, and a small warehouse for the AMCOS. The warehouse provides a place for Iringa Hope to send fertilizer and seeds for the members to buy with their loans from the SACCOS. The people of Bomalang'ombe are very appreciative of this since they find these things hard to buy in the village and even when they do they are often cheated with poor quality and “fake” supplies. One member told us that having the IDC in their village “made farming easy” for her. We think that none of us would agree that swinging a hoe all day is easy!



Last year Iringa Hope built an IDC at Bomalang'ombe.

There are 68 families which belong to the SACCOS and the AMCOS here. With an average family size of 6.4 this means that Iringa Hope is serving 435 people – a large portion of this congregation. The membership here tends to be limited by the amount of money that they have to loan the members. The chairman told us that if they have enough funds they will grow to 120 families in the next two years.

Loans here tend to be small (a few hundred dollars) but they make the difference between these families living in extreme poverty or earning a good living. We have found that with a small loan the members are able to increase their incomes three, four, or fivefold!



We held our meeting in the new warehouse.

After greeting everyone and having chai (tea), we held our meeting. Today we have brought along Venance, our agronomist, who hopes to teach the members about using herbicides on their crops. This has become a big topic of interest since our families are now experiencing a shortage of labor to hoe their fields.

When we ask why there is a labor shortage one woman smiles and tells us, **“We can now afford to send ALL of our children to school! Weeding used to be their job. Now they are in school instead.”** What a nice problem to have.

After the meeting Sandy got a group to discuss how Iringa Hope is affecting their village. Among the things they told us were –

- We now are able to send ALL of our children to school with our profits. Many of the members are also able to send their children to trade school and college.
- ALL of our families now eat much better. There is no longer any malnutrition among the members of Iringa Hope.
- Most of our members now live in brick homes with solid roofs. Most of them have or are getting plumbing and electricity.
- Our families are healthier and get treated when they are sick. We all can now afford to go to the clinics and buy medicine. There is less malaria since we can all now use sleeping nets and buy medicine when we are sick. Dysentery is now longer a killer for our members. We now can afford to get this treated.
- Our church offerings have greatly increased. The members of Iringa Hope are giving three or four times as much money so our parish has gotten richer.



After the meeting Sandy had a discussion with some members.

The discussion continued with many more things being mentioned by the members. Everyone agreed that things are much better for the members of Iringa Hope and for the community at large. As they continued to talk, they mentioned that there were more jobs in the village, there were more shops offering things they used to have to go to town to buy, etc.

As we were getting ready to leave, they told us, “Please thank our friends in the US for their help. Let them know how grateful our families are for them thinking of us. God Bless you, you are changing our lives. Asante Sana.”

While these families are now on their way to a better life there are still many, many families waiting to join Iringa Hope. It takes only \$500 to help a family escape rural poverty.

If you would like to help people in your village contact Iringa Hope, PO Box 21055, Eagan, MN 55121. You can also email us at iringahope1@gmail.com. If you would like to receive our newsletter send us a note and we will add you to our list. There are over 450 people who have subscribed and the list is growing!

Blessings

Tom and Sandy Hendrickson