

Developing Local Funding in Kenya

How Cynthia Bauer is developing local funding in Kenya for her organization, Kupenda for the Children. What Kupenda for the Children is, how they are adapting to COVID-19, and more!

Introduction

Rob: Welcome to the podcast sponsored by the book [When Money Goes on Mission: Fundraising and Giving in the 21st Century](#).

We're here today with Cynthia Bauer from a ministry called [Kupenda](#), one that I personally am quite excited to be involved with, through the Westwood Endowment where I serve as a trustee, and how I've gotten to know this wonderful woman and this great ministry.

I'll let her tell the story of the ministry and her involvement in it, but first let me say welcome Cynthia and thanks for joining us today.

Cynthia: Thank you so much Rob, I appreciate it. So you want me to start by telling you about Kupenda?

Rob: Tell us about Kupenda and a little bit about yourself, and why and how you got started with Kupenda, and what Kupenda does.



How Kupenda for the Children Started

Cynthia: Sure, so [Kupenda for the Children](#) transforms harmful beliefs and practices around kids with disabilities and transforms them into ones that save lives.

And we do this through working with community leaders, with families, with people effected by disabilities, because the problem in places like Kenya and other countries around the world, is people with disabilities are often believed to be cursed by witchcraft, by demons, or that it's a punishment by God.

And obviously those kinds of beliefs translate into abusive practices, which sometimes have even resulted in death.

And the reason Kupenda exists is that I was told when I was back in grad school and doing my research on the coast of Kenya as a wildlife biologist, I was told that if I had been born in Kenya it's possible that I would have been killed because I was born without my left arm.

And I was raised to believe I could do anything and be anything I wanted to be, although my father, when I was born, did believe that I should be taken to faith healers.

So that was a part of my experience as well. My dad was a really young Christian, he thought that was the way God's glory could be revealed.

However, my mom, who was the daughter of a Baptist minister, thought perhaps God's glory could be revealed in other ways, and so-

Rob: Boy is that the truth.

Cynthia: And I think that that's one of the stories that I share when I'm in Kenya, which is where this all started.

Kupenda, by the way, means love in Swahili, and it's actually the word for love that's an action.

And it's a continuous action of love, because so many children with disabilities, and adults with disabilities are isolated and alone.

I think that loneliness is probably one of the worst experiences that we can all experience as human beings.

And so many people think more about the clinical care for people with disabilities, which is also important and also something that we do.

But we realize that if you can't change the attitude towards people with disabilities, it's not gonna matter how beautiful of a hospital you have, or how amazing of a special needs school you have, if children are locked in back rooms or tied to trees and told that they're demonic.

And we've seen that when we change this attitude, when we change this belief system, when we give them practical ideas and they come together as community leaders in their own villages and their own families, and come up with practical solutions, they're actually effective and long lasting.

Because we believe strongly in investing in the community to work with the people in it as opposed to depending on us.

So we don't build large buildings, we actually train community leaders and then they build the large buildings.

They build the schools, they go in there, the advocates, and they know that this is their work, and we're effecting lives for not just now but generations to come.

Families that once were told their children shouldn't exist, that were suicidal because their husbands had left them and they're bringing up these kids with disabilities on their own, they have said, "I was gonna commit suicide before we knew about this," or "before I joined a parent support group," which is one of the outcomes of the work that we do.

And she said, "Now the very people who told us "that we should kill our children "are now taking care of our children "so I can go to work."

And so that's just one example of the kind of success that we're seeing.

Rob: Well, thank you, Cynthia.

We're doing this podcast in the midst of a worldwide lockdown in the COVID-19 crisis.

Hopefully the podcast will last longer than the crisis and a couple of the issues that I wanted to talk with you about in terms of the ministry, will also be a part of this podcast.

But before we go into that, I think it would be very instructive for our listeners and viewers and readers to understand how you're adapting to the crisis, how the ministry in the field is adapting, and where you see things going right now.

So let's talk about something that's on the minds of everybody that comes to this podcast, and that is, "How do I fund what God has called me to do?" or, "How do I strengthen our organization?"

Let's talk about what you're doing in the field, but also what you're doing with your donors, and what their response has been.



Kupenda's Model of Disability Advocacy

Cynthia: Okay, sure, that's a lot of questions.

So the first thing I should probably make sure people understand is what our current model is.

We do do some direct support, we pay for school fees for kids, we do emergency surgeries, but our model is really based on one day workshops where we train specific groups of people.

It started with training pastors in churches because we realized that people were actually going to their pastor for magical healing instead of going to the doctor.

We support praying for healing, we support all of that, but we don't support it in place of medical intervention.

And we believe that kids should be accepted as they are, and that healing isn't always going to happen, it's actually more rare than it is common.

So then we also, we started working with pastors, saw that change, we work with traditional healers, we work with government officials, and we work with the families themselves in workshops geared around their particular area.

So with pastors, we talk about what does the Bible really say about disability, what does it say the church's role really should be, questioning some of the cultural norms that they hold to that people with disabilities should just be healed and that's it, and if they're not healed it's because of some kind of sin or something like that.

And the traditional healers, also usually one of the first people they go to.

And so what we've been doing, especially over the last three or four years, with support of organizations that we're just so grateful for, that Rob is connected to as well, we've been able to transform people's belief systems in such a way that these people who are doing really abusive rituals.

Or they had colleagues that were doing it, are now actually going into communities, training them and telling them what the true causes of disabilities are, and what we should be doing, and what their legal rights are, and where to go.



Adapting to the Reality of COVID-19

Our whole model is based on people gathering and then those people gather and then they train more, and so if you actually looked at our model, it looks like an infection model really, now.

And so, we're like okay, as soon as they closed the schools in Kenya, just like here, many people when they're closing the schools, they're very nervous about, what about those kids who depend on the food at the schools, for their livelihood.

And so for us it's the same issue only this is a developing country where the average income in the county that we're focused on, is less than \$2 a day.

If that, and they're in very rural communities, and so whatever is effecting people here, you can imagine what that must look like in a third world country, and then imagine that you have a disability as well.

And so we know that they're not allowed to gather either, they're also living like we are right now which is more challenging in a group that's so communal.

And so what we're doing, is saying, "Okay, what can we do, how can we right now, within days, change our model, from one of gathering to one that's using mobile phones?"

Because 90% of Kenyans have a phone even if it's just an analog phone, they still have a phone.

Our community leaders who have been trained all this time have actually had an investment in them in such a way that they actually have the ability and the skills to help these families right here and now.

And they know who they are in their community. So we have about 150 leaders, and each one has been asked to identify 10 children with disabilities in their community that they can keep following up on.

And that means they're gonna call them, they're going to use what we're sending them, we have about half of them probably have smartphones, the community leaders, we're sending them resources so they can read it from their phones.

We're actually fast tracking some of our resource development, which is things like, what are the causes of cerebral palsy, how can you take care of someone in a wheelchair at home, keeping in mind that sometimes the children that we've found, when they're at home, and have to use a wheelchair, are left on the ground just laying there all day, which is going to cause their muscles to contract and they'll be even more disabled than they already were, have bed sores and so on.

So keeping them moving, making sure they know how to feed children that have trouble swallowing because there are children we have known of that have choked to death when they've been at home because the families didn't know how to do it properly.

So we're fast tracking our resources trying to make it a very mobile app based project now.

Lots of phone calls and our director and many of our staff members are actually literally going into the field.

They just went out today and delivered food to 22 of our most vulnerable families, because those who were already poor, which is more than 70% of our families, that are below the poverty line in Kenya, those who weren't that way are now losing their jobs.

And in an industry that's dependent on tourism, some of the parents are pastors that are no longer getting their offerings, so these people need this emergency support right now.

And because of our community leaders, we're able to do it, we're able to get out there and educate and provide and hopefully keep these kids as healthy as possible during this pandemic.

Rob: Your leader in the field is-- we're getting some feedback, we're having issues with COVID-19 on our bandwidth and such, but, your leader in the field is named Leonard.

Cynthia: Yeah so I actually forgot to tell you about that whole part when I was talking about how [Kupenda](#) started.

So Kupenda started, like I said, when I was told I would be killed in Kenya if I was born there, but I was doing my research and every day I'd pass this school that had started for children with disabilities.

And the person who started the school is now my co-founder and director in Kenya, and that is Leonard Mbonani, who is a special needs teacher, he was doing assessments and then worked for a research institution geared around disability, and he is a close friend, he's like a father to me, and he and I are the co-visionaries.

Unless you have a co-visionary friend, it's hard to explain what that relationship is like, like he is awake at least as much as I am, he's probably awake even more because he knows these kids personally.

He sees them, he has it on his heart, and he's actually just, as of a year ago, he just stopped chemo treatment, so he's also a cancer survivor, so in the midst of COVID-19 we also get concern for his safety.

I'm telling him, "When we're talking about people going to the field, that does not mean you."

The people that are going to the field, they do have personal protective equipment.

We actually were supplied with that just yesterday, so that our occupational therapists, our driver, and the community, and they can go out.

And they're also giving the families not just food, but they're giving them things like soap and hand sanitizer, and explaining to them the COVID-19 response.

And also making sure they understand what that means for them as people with disabilities.

And our director in Kenya has said, "In the midst of this pandemic, we will not let even one child be lost."

Rob: Yeah.

Cynthia: These children are our responsibility.

Rob: Well, thank you for that, and the inspiration for all ministries that are facing how to adapt to the reality of COVID-19.

I'm glad that I was able to have you speak about how you're adapting your field work, even though your model is to bring the children to you and then bring the training out, how--

Cynthia: And bring children out of isolation too.

Rob: Yeah, we're gonna see a lot of creativity come out of this, and it'll be interesting to see how this impacts long term the way you're able to do your job and do your work there.

It may actually give you expansion models that you would not have considered or may not have adopted as soon as this brought on.



Engaging with Donors During COVID-19

Rob: If I can shift us over now to talking about finance, one more question in terms of what are you doing in your own fundraising work right now with your donors.

And now that you can't get out and do visits, or hold events which I know are a part of how you do your funding.

Tell us about what that's like for you right now.

Cynthia: Sure well we were actually supposed to be on a three week documentary tour with three of our Kenyan students and two of our Kenyan staff here in the United States right now.

We have a documentary about three students who climb Kilimanjaro and the story of [Kupenda](#) is told through the lens of these three kids and them overcoming this obstacle of climbing.

So obviously that was a real big disappointment for us, we're hoping we can do it in the Fall, and we'll let you know, we might actually be coming to Washington too this time.

Rob: So you're showing the film in churches or movie theaters?

Cynthia: We're showing it all kinds of places, so some are churches, we actually were supposed to be part of the Boston ReelAbilities Film Festival, and they ended up doing it virtually on the 22nd, which was great.

But we were gonna be hosted by Gordon College, a Christian college near me, was gonna actually be the ones that fly them in, to come and do a Q&A afterwards to actually ask the kids themselves.

Rob: Wow.

Cynthia: So that's why they see a disappointment, and you know, we're a small organization, we're a small organization with a big impact.

The last year we benefited the lives of over 40,000 children in five different countries.

And so as we're going forward and trying to figure out how to deal with this response, and all the nonprofits I think in the world right now are really scared.

Not just about their own personal wellbeing and that of their loved ones, but what is gonna happen to my organization that's based on people giving when everyone else is nervous.

So in terms of what we're doing is making sure that we are continuing to talk to many of our supporters about what's happening, what we're changing, and also to express sincerely our gratitude for what these supporters have equipped us to do.

Because if it wasn't for the supporters over the last 20 years that we've had, being able to build into these community leaders and these families, to equip them with the knowledge and the skills to actually do the counseling we need them to do right now, we wouldn't be able to do what we're doing right now.

We wouldn't have the people, and so I want them to understand that they're part of why we can do this, and asking that they continue on with us 'cause I think in the midst of this very dark time, I think that there's a lot of focus on the negativity, which there's a lot of it, but what we wanna help people understand is that there's hope, is that we know that we actually can save a life.

They can be part of saving lives, and I think that's gonna give people light, I think it's gonna give people hope to know they can make a difference in the life of a child with a disability who is probably poor and probably wouldn't have a chance if it wasn't for their support.

And at the same time what we're being able to do, is the models and even the things we've just done in the last week or two as we're trying to adjust what we're doing, is we're part of some international groups that are working all over the world, groups that are connected working with World Vision or Catholic Relief Services, very large organizations that are asking what can we do with disability, and they're saying, "We don't have anything, any guidance on what to do with children with disabilities right now in the midst of this crisis."

But we just made a two page guidance that we can share with you right now, that we're already using with our community so everything we do in Kenya, we're able to share what's happening with the international community so that they can model it for their kids with disabilities in the communities they're working in.

And I believe our impact is exponential because it's hard to track how much of an influence we have.

Rob: Yes.

Cynthia: Because in that way.



Donors' Response During COVID-19

Rob: Well and it's also the focus that you have that an organization, a very large organization, has their foci spread across a whole range of pathologies and challenges, and to find somebody that knows what they're doing and actually has something that works, and that can be adapted into their work is a real boon.

So as you're contacting your donors and your supporters, what's their response been? Are they staying with you?

Cynthia: So far.

I've been talking to mostly supporters that are probably at the top level of support that we get.

And everyone has said, just and even without me asking again, it's like, just know our support's not gonna change, we're not gonna stop our giving.

So I think that that gives me a lot of confidence, there are some foundations that are providing emergency grants to deal with some of the COVID-19 response, and so we have an amazing development director who's getting on all of that grant writing, and we have that development director because of you guys, the support of getting her in the first place, so we're just writing lots of those emergency grants.

She's an amazing writer, and I'm usually the one talking to the people and then I tell her what we've talked about, and then she writes the grant, that's kinda the system--

Rob: That's a good system Cynthia.

Cynthia: Yes.



The Impact of Developing Local Funding in Kenya

Rob: Okay, so let's just wrap up the podcast with one last thing, 'cause you mentioned the development effort that we encouraged you with through the Westwood Grant, helped you get an executive director.

The reason we were bringing this podcast on right now was to talk about what you and Leonard did in Kenya to develop local funding through that same grant.

And so can we just end with that hopeful story about how that took off and what the impact on Leonard and his team in Kenya was, and what the impact on you, and your team here was, when you tried to do some local funding.

Cynthia: Yeah, so 25% of our income last year was actually from Kenyan sources, so on the ground in the Kenya, at least 25%.

And when I say that it's because when we invest in them, we do very few brick and mortar projects, we don't build schools, but last year the community that we were working with, they built a school, which was just opened in January.

And so they're raising the funds locally, they're also, in addition to funds that are coming through the organization, one of the big things that Leonard feels very strongly about, is transforming the government, and how they're actually funding things as well.

So we've been able to get the government to build vocational schools, we've been able to get them, give scholarships to children with disabilities.

And we've been able to actually get funding for people to actually translate for children that are deaf at schools where they wouldn't have been able to go before, which is what the government is supposed to be doing, and so because of all those efforts we're actually able to be more sustainable from a community level.

So we figure anything we do on this side as an investment, that's gonna be multiplied.

Rob: Right.

Cynthia: So every dollar we give is gonna equate to \$1.50 in Kenya, because they're gonna raise money or, whatever we're doing, they're gonna raise more.

And some of it is more difficult to track because it's hard to know, 'cause all of it does not come through us, which we think is the right way to do it.

It doesn't always help us with our books, because it's not coming through us, but it is really great to see that it's more sustainable that way.



The Goal of Being Forgotten

I think one day, because of the way we do it, Leonard and I actually have a goal that maybe most people wouldn't quite understand.

We have a goal to be forgotten in the communities in which we work in because we wanna hope that we have done such a good job to transform culture, to transform the governments in which they live, and that funding is no longer an issue.

That they just take for granted that they actually have the ability to have access to everything that everyone else does.

And so we think that this is the best way-- so I've been told that getting 25% of our income from local sources is a big deal, to me it was just-

Rob: It is.

Cynthia: What was natural to do, as our community.

Rob: Well, two things.

One, having a succession plan that says I wanna be forgotten, is one of the most admirable organizational development goals I think you can establish.

Because it means you're gonna be constantly devolving the work to the local leadership, you're going to be encouraging their entrepreneurship, their leadership, you're gonna encourage the Cynthia's of their country to get started and get their own, get into the mix of helping in this issue.

It's a great organizational goal, and one that I think we all should really pay close attention to.



Developing Local Funding Through the Use of Challenge Grants

Rob: And one last little part.

There was a Challenge Grant that was given to you to raise actual cash directly to match the challenge, and why don't you just conclude by telling us how that went, and how much Leonard enjoyed that actually, we learned later.

Cynthia: Leonard said it was really helpful for him to have that challenge of having to raise, I think it was, it was a small amount from some people's perspective.

But for Kenya it was quite large, and not only did they have to raise it, they had to report on it which was really helpful too.

And he said this is motivating for us, and when we see this challenge it actually shows us we can do it.

Rob: Yeah.

Cynthia: And it's motivated them to continue to do even more.

Because they didn't just raise what they were required to, I think they doubled it actually, from what they were--

Rob: That's right, I remember that part of the story.

And I wanted to include that in this podcast for those of you that are engaged with us right now on this podcast that are givers, and or making significant sized grants in terms of the amount of dollars that you're giving to organizations.

You can encourage them to develop local funding through the use of Challenge Grants and Kupenda is one example of that.

Cynthia, I'm just really blessed to be talking with you today and very encouraged by how you're all reacting to this COVID-19 crisis.

Thank you so much for being with us today.

Cynthia: And thank you so much for being a support of this and making this possible.

Rob: Yeah, it's a privilege.