MiriamDeanFund

Winter Newsletter 2025

Dear Friends,

As we look towards the Fund's future, two themes in particular stand out.

The number of us who support the Fund continues to reduce. Our print run for recent newsletters has been 200 with quite a number of those left over. This is perhaps a natural course of events; those who personally knew Miriam and then Trevor & Val tended to be of their generation. We are regularly sending condolences and thanks to their families. As numbers reduce, so inevitably does income; in only one of the last 20 years has our income (excluding legacies) exceeded the funds we have sent abroad (graph overpage). We have just about maintained support to our seven partners, although the level at which we do so has reduced whilst, of course, their costs have risen. We have been able to do this because of legacies received over the years, but this cannot be predicted into the future.

Perhaps more significant is that, despite appeals and conversations, we have not succeeded in recruiting new trustees to take on the management of the Fund from the five of us. With one exception, we are all now approaching the stage of life where our ages determine our ability to carry on.

This combination of circumstances has led us to the very difficult decision that we should bring the affairs of the Fund to a close in an orderly manner. We do so with heavy hearts, but we have examined the alternatives and concluded that none is viable. For more than a year now, we have been working on a schedule of events to give effect to this decision and this Newsletter seemed the right time to let you know.

During our visits to partners this year (southern India in February and South Africa and Kenya last month) we have explained our situation and decision; we wanted to do this face to face rather than by video call. You may imagine a number of quite challenging conversations; the effect for each partner is rather different, but that is not to deny that those most dependent on us will face great difficulties.

A key reason for trying to do this "in an orderly manner" is to give everyone time to adjust, most especially our partners. Our reserves are sufficient that we estimate that we should be able to send funds at the same level as we have been in each of the next three years (2026-28).



Early childhood in South Africa

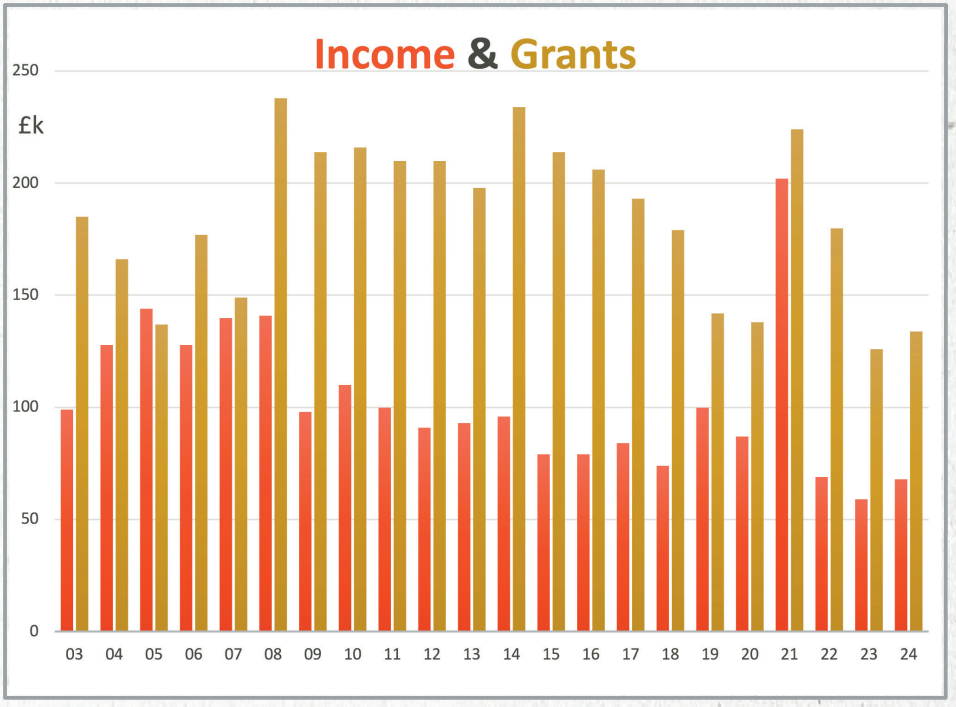
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An audio version of this Newsletter is on our website.

Our current plan is to cease 'normal' operations in the middle of 2028; we will continue to communicate with partners and send you Newsletters until then. Thereafter, we will need to complete a final annual report and we will have responsibilities to keep records for a further seven years.

As we have been working through this, we have already experienced that our ideas develop and that we need to seek and give advice and produce more details. We expect that this will continue, and we will keep you abreast of matters in future Newsletters. One immediate thought to leave with you: if you choose to continue donating to the Fund in any way until we close, we may be able to make our final grants larger, and that will enable the partners to be more resilient to this change whilst seeking a new way ahead.

We recognise that in many ways this is sad news after nearly 80 years of pursuing Miriam's vision. However there is more to do over the next three years, not least in helping our partners, and we are confident that you will continue your faithful support as we undertake the work ahead.



In 2021 we received a large sum from a family trust that was closing and we distributed that in 2021 & 22 to help pandemic recovery.

Africa visit – November 2025

Our last visit to our partners in Africa concluded just before we locked down for the pandemic. So, it had been over five years since we had seen the people, work and places, notwithstanding video calls in the meantime. This time four of us went along, first to South Africa and then to Kenya.

LOAVES & FISHES NETWORK, East London, South Africa

Pateka Mtintsilana, the general manager of L&FN, and our routine contact, met us from the airport, and later we had dinner with her and two board members, Zintle and Ntsikelelo. A wide-ranging conversation ensued: an update on L&FN's business, the state of the South African nation and world affairs.

The next morning, we visited three Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDC) quite close to each other in the Scenery Park area of East London which is significantly deprived. Each of these, catering for infants from around 6 months to 4 years, had previously been a part of the L&FN programme and a relationship is maintained so that, for example, new ECDC staff members could access training. It was particularly good to see the warm greetings between Pateka and the leaders of each ECDC. All sorts of materials, from containers to fence panels, are used in the construction of the "classrooms". In one case they occupied the back-yard of the leader's property. The care with which L&FN had trained the staff was evident from policies on the walls for seemingly every eventuality to the songs that all the children joined in with.

L&FN'S Centre is now provided gratis by the owner of a paint warehouse, and we viewed the training room etc. before attending a prize-giving ceremony in the former showroom. Speeches and a-capella singing accompanied the awarding of certificates and simple gifts in which we participated.

Whilst we are not the only source of funds for L&FN, their concerns over grant awards from other bodies remain. They are doing superb work in supporting learning for pre-school age children and giving them a flying start in life.



Robert with ECDC children

COOPERATIVE ORGANISATION DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE, Nairobi

Nicholas met us late on Sunday afternoon from the airport and we had our first experience of Nairobi's very busy traffic in a car loaned by a church friend for our visit. Later we all had dinner (including crocodile meat!) with Agnes and Alan (Buchen, the fourth member of the CODI team was away).

We had a useful meeting with Nicholas the following morning; he was remarkably positive in response to our wind-down message and very grateful for the support to date, noting that he counsels people facing significant changes of circumstance and would apply his experience to CODI.

The CODI Centre is two small rooms in the Kawangware area. We hadn't appreciated fully the difficulties that continue with maintaining the Centre; this was the 12th since our last visit! Nevertheless, it provides a space for after-school study and to train barbers etc. Some five schools, with whom Nicholas maintains contact, nominate pupils around age 15 to benefit from coaching as exams approach. After some years of uncertainty, the curriculum has now stabilised and we have offered to help with providing new text books.

Near to the Centre are the chickens (also moved since last time) which have been established to help provide income. Two youths get a small sum for managing the flock of around 70 birds and the venture is breaking even.

We then headed out to visit some of the 27 barber shops set up by CODI. Around five are experiencing some difficulty due to their locations, but the others continue to provide a livelihood; Mike, for example, had been in business for 15 years. We stopped at three, and hailed others as we passed by. It seems that the laundries are having more of a struggle; as economic circumstances have worsened, people have taken to doing their own laundry or reduced the frequency of use.

We have reported previously on Kenya's problems; they persist and make life difficult for everyone; CODI is doing its best in very tough circumstances to serve the young men of Kawangware.



Andy gets a haircut from Mike

Snippets

In the Newsletter a year ago we paid a special tribute to Sister Rani Joe who had led the Special School at Mannackanad for over 20 years and noted that she was, in effect, starting again in Maski, Karnataka. We have continued to be in touch and have shared the news of our eventual closure and made it clear that we could not start out funding her as before. However, it did seem to us that a critical need was a vehicle to bring deprived and disabled pupils to a place where they could be educated as appropriate. We sent her funds to enable her to buy such a vehicle and hopefully we will have a picture for the next Newsletter.

In our discussion with Nicholas at CODI regarding the wind down of the Fund, he told us the mantra he teaches when counselling those facing difficult changes in their circumstances: "ACCEPT; ADJUST; ADVANCE". This helps to set a positive mindset and some stepping stones in handling change. It seemed to us that this is something we would all benefit from applying when needed!

At St Nicolas Church in Newbury we held our annual coffee morning; particular thanks to those who came along to help and support – there were some great cakes. We also joined in a Sunday Mission Fair with other charities that St Nic's supports. These took place over a month before we were ready to release (in this Newsletter) the decision about our closure. We trust that those we engaged with in these two events will understand that this was simply a matter of slightly awkward timing. We continue to value the special support that St Nic's provides and hope that will continue to the end.

Small print: We are sending you this newsletter because you have indicated your consent, or you have previously donated to us. You can change your consent by contacting us. We promise to keep your details securely and will never pass them to a third party.

MiriamDeanFund

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About the Fund

We are a small charity, founded in the late 1940s, when it operated out of Miriam Dean's home.

We reach overseas to some of the world's poorest people in partnership with established local groups, providing financial resources to turn their ideas into a positive reality. Our partners work in: physical & mental disability; education & training; health and the elderly. We are in touch with them regularly.

At home, we aim to maintain personal contact with our supporters, hoping to make the Fund feel like an extended family.

We do all this voluntarily. We have no staff or premises and minimal expenses (covered by income from funds awaiting allocation), so that we can send overseas every penny given to us in donations. This year that will be over £140k.

Miriam wrote in the early days of her recognition that she could "lift only tiny corners of human suffering". We accept that today but still feel motivated to follow where she led.

Postscript

Africa – what an experience! Two small partners and the change they make really brings this statement alive. We have seen Loaves and Fishes Network change the lives of small children, born into extreme poverty, so they are given the educational start in life that makes the difference in future schooling – may they use it well.

We met street boys who have seen friends die in gun crime and realise the choice for growth is to choose life itself. What a privilege it is to be part of their rehabilitation by supporting the small organisation that catches them and shows them a new path.

Sad is the day when we will walk away, but walk we must; with trust, faith and love. Our sadness is tempered by the knowledge that, together with you, we have brought positive change to countless lives.

Do please stay, our loyal supporters, the future is theirs but we can still play our part.