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HOPE FOR RAIN

CrossFit community funds construction of life-changing dam in Rabai, Kenya.

BY DALLIN FRAMPTON

All photos: Courtesy of Dallin Frampton

Sickness and dehydration are common in Rabai. Once full, the dam will provide 5,500 people with a reliable source of water during the long dry season.

As the sun slowly crept up and over the heat-scorched hills in the middle of Rabai, Kenya, we pulled our shirts off and hung rings over a mkupha-tree branch for a workout of muscle-ups, air squats, running and burpees.

It was 6 a.m. on a Thursday morning in November 2015, with 85 percent humidity and the temperature already well over 90 F. Kenya is hot in the middle of November—really hot. Our expedition group knew before breakfast that it would be the hottest day yet, so we threw a few extra shirts in our backpacks, well aware we would go through them all before noon.

Our group was made up of my wife, Carlyn; my father, Jason Frampton; and multiyear CrossFit Games athlete Dan Bailey. My wife and I were on hand to coordinate various projects and make sure the expedition went smoothly, while my father tagged along to break ground on a water-cistern project funded by his company, Ken Garff Automotive Group. Bailey was there to hand over to the Mwanjama community a school building he funded completely on his own.

The trip to Africa marked the 12th expedition CrossFit has been part of. Since 2011, CrossFit Inc. and its affiliates have participated in starting and finishing school buildings, constructing pit latrines, nailing desks together, and celebrating success stories with community elders in various villages. Affiliates and CrossFitters around the world fund the projects by donating through Hope for Kenya.

This trip, however, was different than previous expeditions: The green light had been given to move forward on the biggest project to date, and our first step was to find exactly where we were going to put the damn thing. We had to be sure of location: A dam isn't something you can move later. After bringing in multiple hydrologists, geologists and land surveyors, we had three potential spots.

After we made our selection, we brought in a front-end loader to start digging a massive hole. To catch enough water, we had to go deep, but we also needed width to strategically catch runoff from nearby villages. The deeper and wider we dug, the more we had to pile up soil on the walls of the dam to ensure the structure wouldn't rupture. The placement of the entrance was also key: We had to be

CrossFit is changing lives from the ground up—literally.

Locals will also benefit from a garden beside the dam and fish released in the water collected by the dam. Both will help diversify a diet currently based on corn.

Aside from this filtration pipe, the entire dam is constructed with earth.

QUICK STATS: RABAI SURFACE DAM

CAPACITY
3 million gallons

COST
$50,000 US

SERVES
5,500 people daily

MAY AVG. PRECIPITATION
9.3 inches

FEBRUARY AVG. PRECIPITATION
0.6 inches

Sources: Dallin Frampton/Climatemps.com

sure everyone can access the water no matter how high or low the waterline is.

Digging out the bottom of the dam took the longest. We had our front-end loader on site for the better part of two weeks, digging deep and wide to ensure we could store 3 million gallons. The clay-like soil in this area of Kenya is perfect for the construction of a dam. The soil allows the landscape to be molded into a giant bowl and ensures the water won't seep away when it stands for long periods of time. Aside from a large filtration pipe in the middle to allow for proper drainage, the dam is constructed entirely of mud and clay.

Ringing in at just over US$50,000 and spanning the length and width of a few football fields put together, the surface dam changed the landscape of Rabai forever.

Although many areas of Kenya receive ample amounts of water throughout the year, Rabai, about 12 miles northwest of Mombasa, isn't on the list. The locals have adapted very well to the semi-arid climate and the dry months of the calendar, but adaptation simply hasn't been enough. These people are constantly sick, and many die each year from dehydration or contaminated water. To remedy these problems, we plan to leverage the short April-June rainy season, catching and storing every precious drop in the manmade reservoir.

Every day, about 5,500 people will benefit from this surface dam. To put things in perspective, 3 million gallons would allow 1,000 people to each pull two 5-gallon buckets out of the dam daily for 300 total days. The normal dry season in Kenya lasts about 240 days, from July 1 to Feb. 28.

This dam will provide more than just water: It's going to create a new and everlasting ecosystem. Once the dam is completely full, sometime around June, a few thousand fish will be released into the water, providing a new and essential source of protein for the locals. The fish will solve other problems by feeding on algae and insects—specifically mosquitoes.

A perpetual garden will be constructed in July on the lower side of the dam. Filled with local fruits and vegetables nourished by a renewable water source, the garden will provide essential nutrients beyond the current diet of corn for all three meals.

CrossFit is changing lives from the ground up—literally. This water source, along with a little hope and a can-do attitude, will alter the trajectory of the villagers' lives. Instead of struggling with disease, dehydration and poor nutrition, they'll be moving toward health, longevity and wellness. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dallin Frampton manages the global philanthropic efforts of CrossFit Inc. He's managed the construction of 16 school buildings, hundreds of desks, and dozens of pit latrines and water cisterns. He owns CrossFit SpearHead in Salt Lake City, Utah, and runs it along with his wife, Carlyn.