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EDITORIAL

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Aid efforts bear fruit in Africa

Across so much of Africa, poverty, disease and despair seem overwhelming, but that doesn't mean individual action can't have an impact.

Private Colorado groups are solving problems that haven't been addressed by governments and big non-profit organizations. The positive results stem, in part, from a willingness to tackle problems without political agendas or rigid ideologies. The groups also work directly with rural Africans to mutually identify problems and find solutions.

Nearly 13 million African children have been orphaned by AIDS. More than 300 million Africans lack safe drinking water. Most Africans live on less than \$1 a day. The 1994 Rwandan genocide killed 1 million people in just months but ignited a decade-long war that engulfed nine nations and left hundreds of thousands of people trapped in squalid refugee camps.

Most African governments are corrupt, with leaders embezzling foreign aid and national revenues. Confronting Africa's entrenched woes is like standing at the base of a gigantic wall: one hardly knows how to surmount or dismantle it.

Against this formidable barrier, some Colorado non-profits are making remarkable contributions, as shown in last week's series by Denver Post reporter Bruce Finley and photographer Helen H. Richardson. Many times, the groups get pleas for help via cell-phones, e-mail and other ways that bypass government agencies and foreign bureaucracies.

In Tanzania, an experimental children's center provides basics that the government ignores, such as food, basic schooling and a place to sleep. The center sprang from conversations between the village's children and Oregon-based Africa Bridge, Denver-based Lundy Foundation and Denver businessman Vic Dukay.

In Rwanda, Longmont-based Engineers without Borders helps bring small-scale electricity to rural communities.

In Malawi, villagers are getting clean drinking water thanks to Water for People, a program of the Denver-based American Waterworks Association. Like millions of Africans, Malawi's rural villagers must haul water in buckets from distant and filthy sources, and many thousands of Africans, mostly children, die each year from cholera, typhoid, dysentery and other preventable water-borne diseases.

The new clean drinking water wells will save lives and offer a subtle economic boost: If villagers spend less time hauling water, children will have time to attend school, and adults can be more productive farmers and workers.

These Coloradans have embraced an old proverb: It is better to light one small candle than curse the darkness.

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For more information about how you can help contact Vic Dukay, PhD. President
Lundy Foundation 300 W. 11th Ave Suite 15-B, Denver CO 80204 USA
P-303.825.0888 ext.3 E-mail- v.dukay@att.net