

Chris' blog from Kenya and Uganda, Jan / Feb 2019 – Part Two

This week I am working in a den of thieves. At least that's what Nairobi folk call the satellite town of Githurai, twenty minutes from the city centre along a six-lane highway. Githurai seems fine to me, and I am getting used to Taxify, a local equivalent to Uber, to get me there and back. It's the home of CVC – Christ Victory Centre – a refugee run CBO which provides a school for the children of refugee families.

These refugees are typically from Congo and South Sudan, and on arrival in Kenya the French speaking Congolese children are likely to be put into classes with much younger children. Older girls in particular find this a real disincentive to continue in education. So, the refugees have built a school for themselves, and are rightly proud that a good number of their students have gone on to further education in the Kenyan system.

The facilities are basic, but the teachers seem really committed. Three of them took part in the accounting training...



There are about 300 students in all. Families each pay a small amount for their children to attend (10 USD per family per month) and 22 of the students are sponsored by international donors. There is a simple school kitchen which has another international sponsor – the rice and beans I was offered tasted better than the grub I recollect from my own school days – and the CBO also runs a pig farm which it hopes will at some point provide revenue for the school. Hey I can now add pig farm accounting to my CV!

In the lovely melange of African religion, the refugee chairman was brought up a Methodist, spent his student years as a Pentecostalist, and when he arrived in Kenya was supported by a Quaker church, of which he is now a pastor. He tells me his vision is to run Pentecostal-type services in his Quaker church. Wow.

I was a bit less impressed with the third CBO I have been working with so far, let's just call it Project K. A European businessman on his first trip to Africa identified a need, enthused some locals to become trustees, formed a CBO and injected a modest amount of his own money. I believe he is trying to raise more back home, but meantime the locals are much more focused on developing their own businesses, and the CBO is still very much in a start-up situation until more funds arrive.

When I started my three days of financial management capacity building with Project K's local team, it soon became clear that the advice they wanted was not about charity accounting, but on commercial topics such as dividends and directors' share capital. That's fine, I have relevant experience through running my own company, but I would be pleasantly surprised if Project K is still in existence a year from now.

In my last blog I said I would say a bit about my weekend activities. The first weekend was spent camping with my host and his family in the Maasai lands near the Tanzanian border. Here is Kilimanjaro at sunrise from the door of my tent. I also saw the north side, with snow on the peaks, from the window of a plane on my second weekend, when I was flying to Lamu.



Lamu? As a fairly seasoned traveller (85 countries to date) this is a place I had not heard of before. I am sure some of my readers have, but for those like me who haven't then it's an ancient Swahili trading harbour, combining narrow alleyways with great architecture, ancient ruins, boutique hotels and stunning beaches reached by dhows, all on a small coastal island of northern Kenya on the Indian Ocean. Transport on land is by donkey or on foot. I reckon Sinbad the Sailor was there, and probably still is. Next harbour south on the ancient trade routes is Mombasa and then Zanzibar, next harbour north is Mogadishu. The Somali border is just six hours away on a small boat with a reasonable outboard motor. You can find Lamu as a pinpoint of safe green on the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office's map of Kenya – surrounded by orange (best not to go) and red (really no-go) areas for visitors. You get to Lamu by plane, and it's blissfully peaceful.



Back to Nairobi – I am sure many of you will be able to tell me the name of the famous previous owner of this farm “at the foot of the Ngong Hills”. Clue: Meryl Streep and Robert Redford. I visited it one afternoon after work.



Finally, a bit more about the local family I am staying with. The nine-year-old daughter is clever, sporty and a great conversationalist. She enjoys school, which is just as well It’s quite a long part of her day. She leaves home by 0630 for a 0700 start, and gets back home around 1600, ready for homework, dinner with the family and bedtime around 2100. When she does swimming training -

twice a week – she leaves home at 0515! I say this because people in the UK worry that Singaporean students are putting in more hours, and getting better exam results, than their UK counterparts. I wonder if folk in the UK should start looking over their shoulders at Kenyan students too!

There are two toddlers in the family as well, aged three and fourteen months. The three-year-old shares my name. I am finally learning not to jump when I hear the exasperated shout “Chris, put that down and come over here right NOW!!!” What’s that I am hearing now? “Chris, please come now, dinner is on the table”. Ah, I think that really is a summons for me – better sign off!

There should be at least one more blog after this one – I have a week left in Nairobi followed by a week in Kampala, two more refugee CBOs to get to know.

Chris