

Karibuni Kenya 2009

Thirteen of us arrived at Jomo Kenyatta Airport on Friday 23 January 2009 in varying states of wakefulness after a night flight carrying over 950 kgs of luggage between us! With strict instructions from Bill to walk through the 'Nothing to Declare' channel without looking at any of the Customs officials, we successfully arrived in the early morning sunshine to find only two instead of the three booked minibuses to meet us! Nothing really changes in Kenya! The drivers quickly phoned the office and another bus appeared and we with all the luggage were loaded. We arrived at the Methodist Guest House where our usual welcome waited for us.

Previous travellers to Kenya with the Trust will confirm that there's very little time to catch your breath on a Karibuni visit to Kenya, and Saturday morning we were back on the minibuses and taken to Kibera – the largest and worst slum in Africa – to visit the Tusaidie Watoto Saturday programme where about 260 children get extra lessons and activities every week and a good hot lunch. We spent time in the classes and heard some of the health, social and Christian education they are given by volunteers to supplement the lessons they have at local Primary Schools where each class has between 70 and 100 children to one teacher.

After lunch we divided into small groups and went with a project worker to visit a couple of homes with the children. Violet took us home with her and on the way Elizabeth, the nursery head teacher, told us that Violet was the eldest of 10 children. We arrived at the 2-roomed shack they live in to find her father was very drunk and her mother and the other children were in the back room together. We sat on the few chairs they had and the family came out to meet us – poor, skinny and silent, the children stood and looked at us with their very young mother. Then we heard a baby crying – lo and behold number 11 had arrived a couple of weeks before – he was brought out to meet us and promptly named 'George Smith' Otieno after the only man in our group! He was a poor little scrap and his Mum had little milk to give him – life will always be a struggle for him. We had a discussion with Dad about family planning, and later arranged for Mum to have an implant which will give her a few years rest from child-bearing. We also sorted out some baby clothes for him and some clothes and food for the rest of the family.

This experience set the pattern for much of our visit this year – even more poverty, hunger and need is there in the aftermath of the violence following the elections, made even worse by one of the worst droughts and famines in Kenya for decades. A year ago much of the maize that was ready for harvesting was recklessly burned in the fields by the rioters, many farmers were unable to plant in the months that followed because they were in 'Internally Displaced People's Camps' (commonly known as IDPs) and then the rains failed. Add to all that a soaring rate of inflation, which has not been helped by maize and fuel scams organised by politicians who then bought their way out of trouble. Even fairly well-off people are struggling to afford maize – the staple food for Kenyans – it would be like us having no potatoes and bread – and no alternative of pasta and rice as they are beyond the reach of most Kenyans. No wonder many Kenyans believe that God is punishing them for all the violence last year.

However, by and large, the projects continue to develop despite these challenges, but all are asking for extra funding to continue feeding programmes and to pay increased salaries for the staff who also need to feed their families.

It was very exciting to see the kitchen, built in memory of Joy's Mum at Limuru, in full use and over 250 children being fed each school day; to see the never-ending queues of people waiting for clean water at Wesley Empowerment Centre, Njoro – and to see the resulting improvement in health at both projects. When the annual health camp was held at Njoro by the Valley Hospital staff (Karibuni Trust pays for any drugs and treatments needed) the staff were delighted with the dramatic drop in worm infestations and diarrhoeal diseases.

At Maua Primary School the work party, working with three local fundis, (workmen) completely renovated one nursery classroom and made a good start on a second one – it was later completed by local people – and the children and teachers were very happy – it really was a transformation. No doubt we'll be asked to do the third nursery classroom next year!

Three of the projects are really struggling financially – Kibera, Meru Children's Home and Tharaka Women's and Children's Welfare Programme, and until they find more funding from elsewhere, which is difficult in

the current global economic climate, Karibuni Trust will have to pump more money in just to keep the present children fed, clothed and educated.

More children have done very well at the end of Primary School, including three boys from the Meru Township Programme who are all now in Secondary School. We met Henry who scored 391 out of a possible 500 and asked if any of his extended family could contribute to the cost of his education (our policy is to encourage cost-sharing whenever possible to discourage dependency and help people realise the money is not freely available). James, the cook in the project, told us Henry's story – for a year Henry has been living in the storeroom at the project because 'home' was impossible for him – both his parents are drunkards and all his nine older siblings are drunkards! You would not believe that this polite, hardworking boy could have come from such a home. Thank God he is now boarding at one of the best Secondary School in the District.

We are waiting to hear if our graduates from last year have got the places on the courses they hope for in Government Universities. The three girls have all decided to go into nursing and will do Diploma Courses which they will probably upgrade to Degree level later.

Our three weeks after the group came home were pretty gruelling in some ways – financial problems at some, which were not totally unexpected, staffing problems at others, and at all of them the problems caused by the 25-30% inflation, (yes it rose even more during those weeks) the maize and fuel scams (the MPs responsible bribed their way out of trouble and the people were furious) and the general feeling that the coalition Government is falling apart. Many feel that there could be worse riots and violence in the future than happened last year and we experienced a change of atmosphere among them – no longer positive about the future, but very pessimistic. We can only hope and pray that the politicians come to their senses, because as the global problems begin to bite there it could ignite again.

When we went back to Njoro we saw the result of there being no rain for so long – it was like a desert and we hardly saw any animals – again a few zebras and only one baboon! And we haven't heard from anybody that the rains have properly started yet.

Our visit to the coast went well – we went straight from the airport to Hunajeza Women's Group, Nyalani and spent most of the day there. We arrived at the Methodist Church where the project is based and met the children who by then had finished their meal (our plane was nearly an hour late leaving Nairobi!) but they were given permission to wait to meet the visitors and stayed to sing for us – the coast people sing like angels – fantastic. Then we went to see the kitchen/dining room/office/storeroom they are building and which we said Karibuni Trust would make a donation towards if they were making progress – well it was nearly up to roof high, so they're doing really well raising money locally. Then it was time to go to our friends' home just a short walk down the hill, and suddenly the whole group of women came dancing and singing up the hill to meet us and 'dance' us down the hill – it was magic! Everyone was just laughing and singing – it was so joyous! Then we had our lunch – rice cooked in fresh coconut milk and stew with chapattis – delicious – followed by mandazi (the ones like doughnuts). Eventually we were able to leave after we'd given them the case packed full of clothes, etc and there were enough T-shirts for each of the women to have one. We finally reached the NCKK Jumuiya Guest House at about 7.30 p.m. so too dark to see much, but our room was one of five self-contained ones in a of large bungalow – a huge room with a super-king-size four-poster bed – it was just lovely. We had a walk along the path by the sea in the moonlight to the dining room and the food was great.

The next day we went to Upendo in Kilifi about an hour away on the main road by matatu. But first we had to get to the main road – 3kms and far too hot to walk it. The only vehicles available were motor bikes and no way would we go on one without a crash helmet! The receptionist was just phoning for a taxi – very expensive – when two new guests arrived and one of them said he would take us to Kilifi! In the end they took us to the main road because his boss's car passed us on the track and they had to get back to the conference they were attending! We went by matatu and had a good day there – it's an excellent project with a great women's group running it – no problems with management and organisation there. Next time we go we have promised to stay for a couple of nights with Grace and her husband, and then go for our couple of nights break. We had to get a tuk-tuk from the bus station in Kilifi to the project, and the chap tried to charge us Kshs 200! We laughed and told him we'd been before! It should have been about Kshs 50 – we gave him 100 as times really are hard, but told him not to cheat visitors in future!

Then it was a tuk-tuk back to Kilifi, a matatu back to near the guest house, (would you believe that we had a flat tyre in the matatu, he didn't have a spare and we had to wait for another matatu to come along to lend him his spare!) then we were mobbed by motor bikers who all wanted to take us to Jumuiia! Eventually one of the lads accepted we wouldn't go on one and phoned a friend with an old banger and he took us back. We were straight into the warm swimming pool when we arrived back – absolute bliss and a stones throw from our room. We loved it there, but not sure if a group would want to stay there – no alcohol and no evening entertainment – Masai dancers, acrobats, etc. But for us it was just what was needed for the next 2½ days. On our last evening and until we left for the airport we were the only guests there as most of the guests are there for conferences – we don't know how these places survive. We'll certainly stay there again.

One other item of news – the container was released on the Thursday before we left, so we were able to help Peter Rash and his friend Jack from the UK to deliver goods to Kibera and Embakasi in the Land Rover they had taken in the container. They are now back in UK and have delivered the goods to Maua and Meru which is brilliant. The rest will have to be sorted by folk there. They have also brought back the rest of the Christmas cards, so we will get going on them after Easter.

Pray for Kenya where the Government is not very stable and the coalition appears to be falling apart, many are worried that if there is another election there would be worse strife than last year, and it is estimated that 10,000,000 people are at risk of starvation. Pray for the children, families and staff in the projects where Karibuni Trust is involved and where we are very much 'a part of them'.

Bill and Joy