

ZAMBIA FEBRUARY/MARCH 2007

This trip did not have a promising start!

Having sent off the latest 40 foot container from Devon which was packed to the gunnels with every conceivable UK resource, including all our school bags and books, and a grab your camera moment when I saw a stainless steel */kitchen sink/*/ being packed in for some other project I followed it out to Zambia only to arrive in such unusually severe rains that access to anywhere useful was impossible.

The construction of the last few kilometers of road to Kachale Village site was on hold and everywhere I looked new dams had sprung up, old ones had burst and a typical walk took us knee deep through several rivers! Thank goodness it was warm.

So with no hope of visiting Kachale, I headed for our families still in the Liteta leper village.

That first visit was not encouraging. The village seemed depleted and sad. Several people just seemed to have disappeared, there had been many deaths and the hot, damp weather had brought with it many infections. As we slipped and slid along the muddy paths, past newly planted but now drowning banana plants, there seemed to be an air of soggy depression. Our little choir had lost their leader but with the energy and resonance of African singers they were determined to greet us in their accustomed way (and thank all of you in the UK) .by singing and dancing. However, this heartfelt welcome was instantly interrupted as we were deluged during the first song. We all ran for the shelter of a crowded and very smelly, dark room to continue the greeting and to listen to stories of storm damage.

How hard life is for these people yet there is always this generous welcome before we see to the feeding of the youngest children and before we attend to the sick. Theres the baby who was born breach at the Liteta government hospital and suffered a dislocated arm during delivery which is now paralysed; little Ester has a hook worm badly infecting her foot as it furrows its scavenging route under her skin and shes given one Piriton tablet from the same hospital. They have also tried to sling Beatrices fractured arm hanging it by the un-splinted, very swollen, broken wrist. She comes to tell me that it hurts. We try to distribute the resources we have brought with us but most of the labels have now been washed off by the heavy rain. We can do so little and the futility of the situation suddenly seems enormous.

However, I took a break, the rain stopped and equilibrium and progress was rapidly restored! So I'm pleased to say that when I left Zambia, in April, all that Id hoped to achieve was achieved. And all the School for Africa support, along with the 10,000 I was able to hand over on your behalf, was honoured and received with tumultuous gratitude.

The 16 kilometers of hand dug, dirt road, out to Kachale Village, is now a veritable motorway (until it rains!) and we have 9 houses built in the village, two bore holes (with rather wretched water) but, of course, no electricity.

The school site has been cleared of trees although the rich undergrowth sprung up again overnight in this warm, moist atmosphere. A practical and sturdy design for the school building has been decided upon but it is agreed that, as a temporary measure, we will begin by using one of our new houses to educate the first few children.

Fostina Mwanamonga, a retired headmistress, is happy to join our untrained Rebecca as another teacher. This was a coup indeed, as you'll not find many teachers who are prepared to come and work in the bush but Fostina already lives in a nearby village only 4 kms away so as confirmation of employment we gave her a bike!

We are calling our school The Natimwa (happiness in the local language) Learning Centre. It is not to be known as a school as this would then give us all sorts of ridiculous prescriptive measures to cope with (bit like the UK really!). And we are going to start by using the Zambian Educational Broadcasting Programme. This, mysteriously, comes over infinitely better than any of the teaching I've seen, in the many schools I've visited. It is also economical on teachers (we only have 2 at present) and the government promise 3 days free training, teaching books and 3 wind up radios, as support.

So the new and the old villages are still in the transitional period and although things are slow and often disappointing, there is a huge amount being done. I just wish I could bottle the gratitude, the generous spirits and the children's laughter from our village and bring it back for you all to share!

I will be seeing many of you before I return to Zambia in September and I look forward to showing you pictures of the first of your school bags arriving in Africa and in sharing stories of the excitement and delight you gave so many of the Zambian children.

Thank you to all of you for your compassion, good faith and generosity.

Trish Fenwick