



July 2019

Dear friends,

Delighted to report that work has now started on the first buildings for the new Vocational Training Department at Umutara Deaf School in Rwanda, our main new project for the next few years. This development is in two stages, the first being to expand the existing work at the school, and then to build a new centre in the town of Kayonza, where the parent charity, Friends of Handicap in Rwanda, already have an office, a small vocational service plus a shop. During this first phase, a new dormitory and toilet block is to be built and two existing dormitories converted to workshops for tailoring and hairdressing. An open-air building is also to be erected for the Masonry and Construction Dept.

For Nyabihu School, also in Rwanda, our trustee, Teresa Quail, is taking the lead in a fundraising campaign to develop audiology services which we hope to be able to extend to other deaf schools across the country in time.

We wrote in our last Newsletter of our work with Rev Kamonyo Botanyi and his charity in the Democratic Republic of Congo, CENYESED, which runs three deaf schools. Kamonyo is the uncle of Elevation, the founder of Umutara. She lived with him and his wife during the Genocide, and this was where the idea for Umutara was born. Kamonyo approached our Africa Director, Howard, to ask him for help with a Business Plan for CENYESED, and the rest of this Newsletter is devoted to Howard's reflections with Kamonyo and his team. One of the major outcomes of this work was the decision to turn his school in Goma into a resource for deafblind children.

Howard is to help CENYESED to produce a specific Deafblind Business Plan later this year and, together with Eric Ngabo, the son of the Louis, the founder of

Nyabihu School, is to tour Rwanda to research the need for such a facility there.

The remainder of this Newsletter is a report from Howard on his reflections of working with the CENYESED team. It makes very interesting reading. The final paragraph briefly and effectively demonstrates what we and our partners are all about.

## Congo Story

Leaving behind the lower elevations of Rwanda's Eastern Province and the gentle busyness of Kigali, the old Toyota creaked and puffed its way through the long steep hairpin passes towards the mountainous north-west. The deep verdant green valleys for which Rwanda is known stretched out into the distance, interrupted occasionally by thick forests and modest farm buildings. Hopefully four hours of surprisingly good roads would see us to Rwanda's western border with Congo where we would cross into Goma and meet our hosts for the next week or two.

Prior to this, the first eight weeks of this new assignment during December 2018 involved working again with the Friends of Handicap Rwanda (FHR) team at Umutara Deaf School (UDS) through the winter season in the far remote north-east of Rwanda. This time had achieved its goal with all the familiar challenges and noises of business planning - carefully crafted schedules shot to pieces within days by the needs of family visitations, choir practice and goat feeding (the last possibly a misunderstanding), persistence, encouragement and threats saw the completion of a full Vocational Training Business Plan that would take FHR through its next five-years of development.

Nine months earlier, near the end of my first Rwanda assignment for DeafReach at UDS, I had met with the Rev Botanyi, the Uncle of Umutara's founder, Elevation. His deaf school in Congo had been a place of shelter for Elevation and her sisters during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Now in his late fifties, having set up three successful deaf schools in Kisangani, Kinshasa and Goma with his wife, both of them deaf, he now ran the deaf school and church in Goma.

Over that Saturday, as the worst tropical storm I had ever seen enveloped my little mud-brick house and

ripped up trees, this gracious gentleman shared his life story in the sign language, broken English and guesswork in which we operate. We discovered mutual friends in the deaf community, places we had both worked and most of all the same passion to see deaf children everywhere leading empowered and fulfilled lives. At the end of this conversation it was very easy to respond positively to his gentle request for business planning facilitation for his organisation.

Half-way through the journey from Kigali to the border we began to see the shapes of volcanoes, live and defunct, rising from within Volcano National Park made famous by the 1980's film "Gorillas in the Mist" – a truly stunning and brooding sight, that extends across the Rwanda/Congo border into the area surrounding the city of Goma.

Having been assured by our Rwandan and Congo colleagues and constant checking of various websites that the visa on arrival system was operating fine, we were about to become unstuck. Perhaps visa on arrival had been operating up to the moment that we went to the glass booth on the Rwandan side only to be told that visa on arrival had been suspended. Explaining my reason for crossing to Congo and repeating that I had been assured it would be OK, they let us take the long walk to the Congo side where the chap at the booth appeared to take pleasure in ignoring my "visa on arrival" answer by repeating "where is visa".

A giant in a uniform strolled us all back to the Rwandan side with smiling indifference to my questions. Locating a cheap hotel for the night back on the Rwandan border town, the following day the Congo team crossed the border and met with us to work out what to do. In the end we agreed they would return to Goma that day and in two days time take the bus to UDS in Rwanda's Eastern Province where we would live and work for the next 16 days.

So began a familiar daily ritual. "Nescafé" and toast at 7.30am then setting up the white board and chairs on the patio looking out to the Ugandan mountain border. From 8.30am (at the beginning) through to 4pm we worked steadily and slowly through all the strategic thinking that goes into developing a clear business plan.

Strategic planning is relatively underdeveloped within NGOs in Congo and Rwanda. Seen as a luxury by some, even those who do see the value struggle

to release the time needed to achieve a professional plan. As ever, we began by answering the question, "why does it take 2-3 weeks to achieve a business plan?" The team were assured that by the end of the 2-3 weeks, none of them would be asking that question and all of them would be very tired! In fact business planning can sometimes take 6 months to bring an organisation to united agreement about just what they want to achieve over five years and how it will be implemented and funded.

The key steps of the business planning process itself are relatively straightforward to appreciate. Firstly, to enable the organisation to see clearly their present point of development, and then to decide the absolute priorities they want to achieve, what these will cost and how to fund and implement them. Achieving real understanding and agreement of priorities, together with good detailed budgets and viable action plans are what takes the time, while good facilitation avoids the easy temptation to offer solutions and instead helps to work through the implications of all their ideas and so reach their own best solutions.

Sounding obvious in principle, in practice the temptation is strong to bring personal solutions into challenges when a team has gone quiet and is mentally willing you into being a fairy godmother. Good judgement is needed to balance keeping the process moving while avoiding creating a business plan for which the facilitator is now responsible.

The organisation, Nguvu Yetu Center for Special Education for Deaf Discriminated Children (CENYSED), were represented by a wide-ranging group of specialisms. Kamonyo, whose benign leadership was dispensed via a beatific smile and gentle Sign Language, a finance manager, a head of school and a sign language interpreter.

Having not worked through this process before, attention was given to explaining what we were seeking to achieve and the stages involved. This can be challenging enough in straightforward circumstances in the UK, but with up to three spoken languages and three sign languages in play it was essential to first get an agreed process of interpretation in place. With experimentation, it was as fascinating as ever to watch the transfer of quite complicated thinking through these languages, pausing often to check accuracy and to switch interpreters to avoid over tiredness.

At its best, business planning can be enlightening and stimulating while of course quite a bit of the time it is steady work and detail. Accurate budgets are tedious and few get excited about SWOT analysis, while working through Vision and Mission can really help draw a team back into the passion they have for their work. A key moment comes when the full budget is completed and for the first time an organisation really knows just what its plans for the next five years are going to cost. The CENYESED team, always a very laid-back group, became noticeably quieter at that point.

Well before the 4pm stop point each day, team thinking would slow and minds clearly drift with the warmth of Rwanda's gentle winter flowing across the balcony. With a short time in which to achieve the goal, balancing encouragement with discipline was always a challenge.

The darkness of evening arrives early this near to the equator, with the team sometimes getting into football matches with the kids, "make sport" as Dominique's attempt at exercise to assuage post-40s guilt, choir practice, church meetings or a trip to the local market while my time was of necessity mainly taken up writing the day's deliberations into the plan and preparing the next day's focus.

Our two and a half weeks flew by, some days making good headway, other days struggling, but steadily focussed on the outcome of a plan that would help the organisation to develop, grow and seek funding from major funders. Moments of breakthrough came, particularly as they began to see the disparate functions of the organisation in a more coherent whole and how they could be better managed and explained to funders. A key highlight came when the team caught a stronger sense of their own place within the organisation.

The greatest change in strategic thinking came with the decision to develop an entirely new programme to meet the educational needs of the deafblind people that had been coming to their attention. Another new programme was formed to bring together into a strategic focus all the disparate media opportunities they had engaged with over many years.

On the final day, before their long bus journey back to Goma, we took stock of what had been achieved in those 16 days. A little further work still needed to be done via email on the budget detail, while a full

business plan had emerged to further develop the eight programmes of CENYESED over the next five years at a cost of \$2.7m. For a modest sized NGO in Congo, this was admirably ambitious and would require much work within CENYESED to achieve.

Completely at ease with this challenge, Kamonyo had recently sold his large house to downsize to something simpler, releasing \$30,000 to achieve completion of half of the building of the new deafblind school in Goma. The same faith in God, together with the hard work which had seen deaf schools built and flourish in Kinshasa, Kisanagani and Goma, showed in his gentle smile. In his acknowledgement page at the beginning of the CENYESED business plan, Kamonyo concludes with these words:

"Some large organisations who worked in the rural areas of Eastern Congo have had staff kidnapped by rebel militias and are now afraid to go the villages. For me, God has called me to go. We do not go without thought of safety, but if I die and save 5 or 10 deaf or deafblind children then that is OK."

Personally, this time was a reminder of the great privilege of supporting this work and the joy of working with ordinary people prepared to do the extraordinary out of faith, hope and love. What could be better?

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