



April 2020

Dear friends,

I hope that this first Newsletter of 2020 finds you safe and well during these unusual and challenging times. While things seem to be settling down here, other than the looming peak of infection, it is a very different story in Rwanda, where the President, ahead of most countries in Africa, ordered a very early lockdown. By contrast, in neighbouring Burundi, no civic action has been taken at all, as of the time of writing. Both of the Rwandan schools we support have closed, and all our work is on hold for the present. The major problem there, unlike here, is that most people are so poor that they cannot store food, and so there is an immediate hunger problem. Indeed one of the ministers has publicly stated that many people, if they do not die of the virus, will die of starvation.

### **APPEAL FOR FOOD FOR RWANDA**

Our partner at Umutara School, Dominique, is also the local Baptist Minister, and he has established a FoodBank to help out the local community. As soon as we heard this, our trustees donated more than £3000 in a day from their own money, and we have already sent out a large donation to Dominique. If any reader would like to help with this effort, please donate via our bank, The Cooperative. The Sort Code is **089299** and the Account Number **65889415**.

The main article in this edition is a report of our International Director's visit in late 2019 to Congo (DRC), Burundi and to undertake a Research Project to identify deafblind children and adults in Rwanda, accompanied by Eric Ngabo from Nyabihu School. This is followed up by an article by Teresa Quail, DeafReach trustee and Audiology Lead, on the start of Audiology in Education in Rwanda. Finally, a parent writes from Burundi, where DeafReach and Aurora are working together in support of a new Parents' Association.

#### **TVET at Umutara**

As Isobel Blakeley reported in our last Newsletter, our project to build a new Vocational Training Centre has been moving forward apace, at least until the recent school closure. In addition to the new dormitory, toilet block and water tank, we have now funded the conversion of the 2 former dormitories into the new Tailoring and Hairdressing workshops. In order to get the new TVET registered with the Workforce Development Authority, as a result of which Umutara can offer recognised qualifications, each of the 3 departments (the third is Masonry) need workshop equipment for 25 trainees. Thanks to fundraising successes both by DeafReach and by Umutara, we have almost reached our fundraising target for the tailoring equipment.

#### **A new Deafblind School for Congo**

At the start of the year, our volunteer architect, Stephen Waldron, visited our Congo partner, CENYESED, in Goma, which lies just over the border with Rwanda. Its leader, Rev Kamonyo Bosanyi, undertook a Business Planning Exercise late in 2018, supported by Howard. This led to a decision that what was needed was a deafblind school in Goma. Stephen is currently awaiting the outcome of land surveys by a local engineering firm, following which he will design the new buildings, which are also to include a conference centre for the town.

Please keep safe. Rod Clark, Chairman, DeafReach



**Umutara School participates in Deaf Awareness Week in Nyagatare**

### **“Why would you go there?”**

A visitor to my office, who himself has worked in Africa, on overhearing that I was shortly on my way to Congo asked why on earth would I be travelling there. It’s not an unreasonable question, since Congo is generally rated as just about the most impossible place on earth for sustainable development due to its post-colonial history, weak state and multiple militias. Add to this the presence of Ebola in the north east and it’s not hard to understand why the INGO and business communities and indeed most of the world has largely abandoned Congo.

There is an alternative proposition-that this is exactly where INGOs and determined development are most needed, and perhaps where the ideal of the Millennium Development Goals within the slogan, “no child left behind”, should take us. DeafReach believes so, and I was delighted again to be working with an organisation unafraid to do this, insisting there should be no place where deaf children and their families cannot be empowered by appropriate education and training. DeafReach in any case had a wonderful standard bearer for this, Doreen Woodford, who throughout her “retirement” as a teacher of the deaf continued to work ceaselessly for deaf children all over the world, and who had visited the deaf school in Kisangani, Congo, years before to strengthen the teacher training there.

This visit was to take in Burundi too, another place where most INGOs long ago departed. Little Burundi, about the same size as its Northern neighbour Rwanda (comparable to say Wales) has endured civil war for several decades, only fairly recently emerging tentatively into a more normative state through peace agreements. The toll of murder, rape and pillage by all sides in the conflict had left Burundi decades behind the strong continuing development of Rwanda since the 1990’s, but

throughout that time, several deaf schools and initiatives had maintained their faithful work in Burundi.

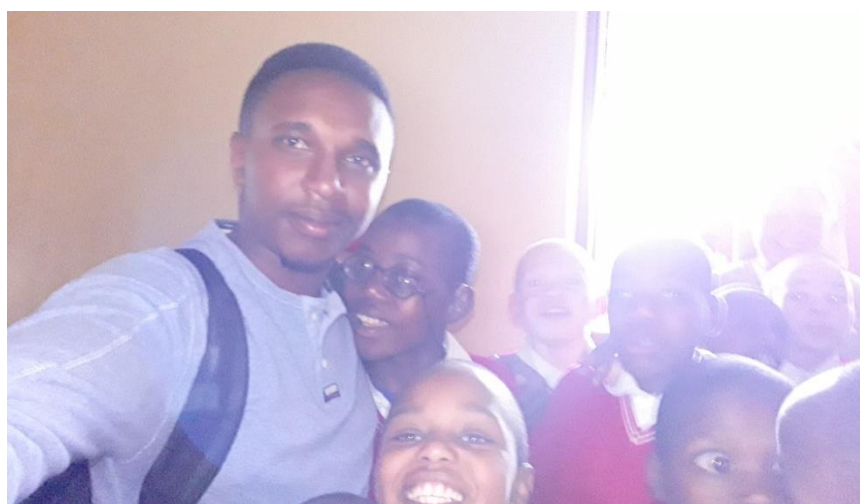
DeafReach had recently been asked by another deaf-focussed UK INGO, Aurora, if they could amalgamate with DeafReach, and it was through that initiative that I had the privilege to visit deaf initiatives in this place where the famous phrase of “a terrible beauty” could well apply.

Finally, this trip would take me back to Rwanda, a country that had won me over with its vitality, beauty and friendliness on my first visit two years earlier. Now on my third trip, this time the purpose was to carry out action research to discover the overall situation of deafblind people in Rwanda, with five weeks of criss-crossing Rwanda by car to visit all relevant organisations and individuals.

Flying first into Rwanda, I was met by Eric Ngabo, my twenty-three-year-old driver and interpreter with the kind of ageing but well-serviced Nissan that is a favourite of so many I/NGOs there. Eric was the most well-read person that I had yet met in Rwanda, and conversation over long hours of driving all over the country during those five weeks ranged widely, from disability, deafblindness and NGOs to the troubles of the North of Ireland and Brexit. His clarity on those last two completely outshone every conversation I had had in the UK and he rapidly developed into a second researcher. DeafReach Trustee, Teresa, was also with us for a few days at the end of her time of providing training in deaf schools and research on audiological provision.

The three of us initially visited organisations relatively close to the capital, Kigali, encountering excellent people working hard to empower disabled people, With Teresa reluctantly departing for home, our focus then rapidly extended outwards, to the far west, east, north west and finally the far south west of Rwanda, visiting deaf schools, blind schools, mixed disability schools, specialist and integrated schools, government offices, I/NGOs, voluntary organisations, federations, individuals and civil society organisations.

Our initial 20-question quantitative survey was soon sidelined by the reality (not unexpected) that so little was known about deafblindness, switching into the more open-ended qualitative approach necessary to obtain the widest possible overview. These interviews would constantly unearth further lines of inquiry and clues to the whereabouts of deafblind children within the system.



**A deafblind boy with Eric: Driver, Translator, Researcher and Commentator Extraordinaire**

We had the great fortune on visiting the Rwanda Union of the Blind to spot a group of westerners signing in another room and discover that the Swedish Federation of the Deafblind was on its last day

of a joint initiative of training in Rwandan Tactile Sign Language. An excellent evening of sharing at their Hotel ensued, and this contact, begun way back through the previous work of DeafReach Chair Rod Clark via Sense International, may well become an excellent partner to further initiatives emerging from this research.

The following day we were due to drive to the far South West of the country and the Swedish group were delighted that we could also take three of their training group, one of them a deafblind lady and two of the members of the Blind and Deafblind Association in Rusizi. These ladies provided a wonderful overview of their work from the perspective of one of the very few groups in Rwanda that were active with deafblind people.

Steadily a broad picture emerged, firstly confirming the initial impression of an absence of hard data, understanding and provision for deafblindness in Rwanda, while discovering the exceptions to that. Interviews throughout sought to address the question, "If a mother brought a deafblind child to you seeking help, what would be the next step?"

The answer from this wide range of actors was primarily that they would not know what to do or what to advise, primarily due to an absence of knowledge of this disability, its prevalence and what assistance was available.

However it was also wonderful to discover some early initiatives: The Masaka Centre on the outskirts of Kigali with its training programmes in Rwandan Tactile Sign Language; The Blind & Deafblind Association in Rusizi; The combined partnership of the Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB) with the Swedish Federation of Deafblind (SFDB) to formalise and develop the Rwanda Organisation of People with Deafblindness (ROPDB).

It was also hugely encouraging to hear from amongst the many dedicated people that we met a clear and warm desire that there should be a full response in Rwanda to the needs of deafblind people. DeafReach thinks so to and will use the Action Research Report from this trip as a resource for opening out this conversation with others.

Leaving Eric to take the car back to the depot in Nyabihu, I flew from Kigali to Bujumbura, capital of Burundi, for a five-day overview of deaf and deafblind initiatives. The differences with its northern neighbour were immediately visible, contrasting Rwanda's determined economic and social resurgence since the 1994 genocide with a country that had seen almost continual conflict throughout that same time period. Bujumbura though located beside Lake Tanganyika with sandy beaches had a rough appearance, its roads often damaged and public transport system struggling to cope.

To the east of the capital, the road climbed steeply into wooded mountains and the view looking back across Bujumbura and Lake Tanganyika was idyllic. A 3-hour drive through these mountains brought us to Gitega, the second major city of Burundi, with its strong Catholic influences in its churches and schools. Here we met with a wonderful lady called Spes Bandora who kindly spend 4 hours discussing her deaf school and showing us around.

**Burundi deaf children with natural joy and smiles .....**







..... (ahem) slightly less so when asked to pose for an official picture -always happens!

Spes had felt a clear call of God many years earlier to use her educational skills to help empower children with disabilities, particularly deaf children. In as country as poor and war torn as Burundi, this school had not only served these children throughout the long years of civil war but was just beginning to develop a wonderful new initiative for deafblind people.



Another day took us to the far north west of the country near the border with Rwanda to see the site of a new deaf school that is part built. This initiative had developed with the strong support of the District Governor, and we followed his truck to the site accompanied by a squad of well-armed army bodyguards, an image which I had not contended with since visiting deaf initiatives in Afghanistan back in 2001. A half-finished shell, the building both inspired and depressed, hope and challenge in the same image, perhaps in my mind symbolic of this beautiful and yet scarred country. Aurora are seeking to raise funds for the completion of this project that has great potential to serve deaf children and their families in that region.

The forthcoming elections (March-May 2020) were viewed with trepidation by my guides as a possible flashpoint for a return to fighting, and I promised to pray for a good outcome and a time of stability and re-building.



### **The half built deaf school in North-West Burundi**

Bujumbura has a large deaf school and it was wonderful as always to walk around, meet some of the children and see the teaching taking place. The Headmaster had led this school for many years, also pastoring the deaf church, a quiet man who spoke briefly and with clarity about the work and needs there. Most of the INGOs had left Burundi years before, sometimes continuing to run some initiatives from a base across the border in Rwanda or another nearby country, while a few signs along the road showed the continuing presence of some UN departments and one or two INGOs.

One day was spent in Bujumbura visiting the various civic society or representative organisations, among whom the Association of Parents of Deaf Children stood out as a beacon of light. Warmly and thoughtfully led by Mr Salvator Kabundege, a classic example of parents determined that their deaf children would live empowered lives through the best education possible, changing the attitudes of neighbours, friends and community.

It was easy to feel at home in the Catholic Training Centre in the heart of Bujumbura where simple but reliable accommodation and meals were provided in a place of warmth and steadiness. My schoolboy French was adequate for greetings, but not the mealtime discussions. Five days of excellent visits and discussions left me sure that I would be back here before too long, and that DeafReach/Aurora had a continuing role to play in supporting great deaf initiatives here.

For now, Congo beckoned, and a short flight back to Kigali and a lift from Eric took me to the same border at Gisenyi/Goma from which I had been smilingly ejected earlier in the year. But this time, clutching a passport with a pre-booked visa, it was the simplest border crossing I had ever had in Africa. Agizo, nephew of my host Kamonyo, and SLI par excellence, strolled across nonchalantly to the mid-point between the two countries, his six foot seven of calm always a welcoming sight, and took me across to meet Kamonyo. He was as I remembered him from working with his team on a Business Plan back in Rwanda, warmth and charm expressed in that mixture of sign language, interesting English made more interesting with my lip reading and the international language of gesticulation and humour.

Goma is located along Lake Kivu, and in the shadow of the same high mountain range that houses the famous mountain gorillas of Uganda. Rwanda and Congo. Some of these mountains are also live volcanoes, with Goma located just 12 miles from one that erupted about 15 years ago, covering Goma in a layer of ash and lava. The city was re-built on that lava foundation, with apparently undiminished enthusiasm for new and bigger building development, of which many appeared half-built. Puzzled by this in light of being told that the permanent UN monitoring station was predicting another such

eruption within the next two years, I temporarily shelved the questions that came to mind until the Business Planning was underway.

We had agreed I would stay with Kamonyo primarily for safety and time reasons, sleeping, eating and working there, and the simplicity of this arrangement really helped enable the work over the following two weeks. The main purpose of the time there was to facilitate a business and action plan for CENYESEDs latest initiative, a deafblind school. Two weeks of intense work saw this achieved, and it was good to also have the time to train some of the CENYESED team in the fundraising that would be essential to achieving their project.

Kamonyo is a fascinating chap. Becoming completely deaf at the age of 16, he managed to channel his initial despair into a life of service to God and the deaf community within which he is revered, developing deaf schools in Kisangani, Kinshasa and Goma in a country where few INGOs believe such development can be sustained. The first two schools in Kisangani and Kinshasa were subsequently adopted and funded by the Government as public schools which continue to thrive and serve the deaf community. Returning to his area of upbringing, two further deaf schools were developed in the rural areas outside of Goma together with a whole range of support programmes to get deaf graduates into work.

I had first met Kamonyo while working with another DeafReach partner in Rwanda. Following a day of fascinating conversation, he asked if DeafReach might facilitate a Business Plan for his organisation CENYESED to which I was very happy to concur. During that time in the final two days that he felt a call to develop a deafblind school in Goma.



**Site for planned deafblind school in Goma**



Having downsized from a large house to a modest one in the wake of his wife's death, he had released the capital to build a deaf school in Goma City. Now, at the age of 57, having spent 37 years developing deaf education, he decided this should instead be a deafblind school, despite having no training or knowledge of this specialism. Surprising? Well perhaps, but this is so often how new initiatives happen, through visionary people who will give their lives to serve God and other people



### **Kamonyo at a UN meeting in Congo**

Earlier in this report I mentioned that a visitor to my office in the UK asked of Congo and Burundi, “Why would you go there?” When you meet with people like Spes Bandora and Kamonyo the answer is simply the privilege of supporting wonderful ordinary people implementing amazing visions in extraordinary circumstances, transforming the lives of deaf and deafblind people and their families.

Mr Howard, International Director, DeafReach

March 2020

### **Audiology in Education in Rwanda**

This article was written by DeafReach Trustee, Teresa Quail, who is a Teacher of the Deaf and an Educational Audiologist.

DeafReach's Audiology in Education programme is taking shape albeit slowly, since it requires support from the developed world, and is therefore currently hampered somewhat by the coronavirus pandemic.

This is a brief update of the project to date. Basic hearing testing is undertaken by the use of audiometer machines. As with many such technical devices, audiometers need to be kept true from time to time, a process that is called calibration. There are no audiometer calibration services in Rwanda and those services available in Kenya and South Africa are costly. Therefore most, if not all, donated audiometers will not have been calibrated since they were gifted. A generous gift-in-kind was made by a UK company to calibrate the audiometer at Nyabihu School in Rwanda that had been in the school for five years so that all of the pupils, including new arrivals, can have their hearing tested with confidence.

It had been hoped that Elie, the headteacher of Nyabihu, who has been trained in the use of the audiometer could cascade his training to his peers at Umatara school as they don't yet test the hearing levels of any child. However, Elie has since left the school to embark on VSO project work in Rwanda. Nevertheless, the efforts



were not in vain as I had learnt, just after our Training Group visit last October, that there is a qualified audiologist, Brother Peter, based in a school for the deaf in Butare, South Rwanda. So after establishing contact, another visit to Rwanda was arranged in February 2020 to meet and work with Brother Peter.

This visit was attached to the travel agenda of an existing deaf education volunteer project in Kenya. Within the 72 hours available many goals were achieved. With the superb attitude of Brother Peter and his colleagues, a Rwandan led training programme was started within 24 hours of my arrival in Rwanda. I arrived with an ex-demo audiometer which also has tympanometry (which measures middle ear function), donated by Interacoustics, hearing aids from Oticon and funds to purchase a laptop so digital hearing aid equipment could be used. Delighted with the equipment and training resources provided, Brother Peter happily agreed to lead on initial audiology training with Rwandan schools for the deaf. As a result, Emmanuel, a teacher at Nyabihu, had some intense introductory level audiology training on the Butare school site with a further week planned in April (subject at the time of writing to the coronavirus status restrictions in Rwanda).



**Headteacher, Brother Jean Bosco Ntamagiro and Brother Peter Claver, Audiologist accepting audiology donations**

During the interview element of Howard and Eric's deafblind research last October visit (see accompanying article) I met senior staff from Groupe Scolaire Filipo Smaldone Kigali, a deaf school run by Italian nuns. At that stage I learnt they had audiometers, donated from Belgium, but didn't know how to use them. Within a week of the February visit, Brother Peter and his assistant trainer, Deo, had visited the school and trained five staff in the basics of Audiology and audiometers. A week's training was also planned with Omar Kayigi, the Head of the Umatara school for the deaf, which may have to be postponed due to the global coronavirus pandemic.

There are only nine schools for the deaf in Rwanda, which is geographically the size of Wales. Currently only three have audiometers. Hopefully, with this Rwandan led peer-to-peer training scheme established, all the schools can develop the related skills required in an educational setting.

As with most audiology services across the world, networking and cascading of knowledge is vital. Brother Peter now has established contact with audiology-in-education colleagues in Uganda, Kenya and DR Congo. Once the global pandemic is behind us, an audiology-in-education sub-group within the DeafReach charity will be formed with input from specialists across the UK.

## Parent talk: Parent Sharing Experience on Raising Two Deaf Children in Burundi

My name is Marie Ange NIMPAYE, I'm the mother of two beautiful deaf children, a daughter aged 13 and a son aged 4 years old. When my daughter was born, I did not realise that she was deaf until she was 1 year old. It was the same with my son. During the first year I kept talking to my children in the normal way, but at some point I felt that something was amiss because they would not pay attention to my voice. At this time I had no clue about deafness as there was nobody who was deaf in our family.

With no audiology, children's service or information on deafness, I struggled at first to accept that my children were deaf. I did not know what to do or where to look for help or information. It was very depressing. But I became accustomed to it and accepted that my children are deaf. I still struggled to communicate with them though as I didn't know any sign language and there was no support groups or information for parents of deaf children. We had to make up our own signs to try to communicate, but it was not full communication, just basic things.



Me in action



Me & other parents

There were times when my daughter would get angry with me. She was so frustrated that I couldn't understand her. I couldn't understand why she was unhappy, or what she wanted. I was upset too.

The situation was no different with my son. I struggled to bring up two deaf children in my home without any support from the government at all. There was no social or health service to support us, I felt helpless.

Things started to change when my daughter was five years old, I learned that there was a school for deaf children in the capital Bujumbura called EPHPHATA School for Deaf. I went

there with my daughter and I was happy to enrol her there. It is a boarding school, which means that she has to stay there.

My daughter would only come home during the school holidays (Christmas, Easter and summer). I started to notice changes in my daughter. When she returned for her first school holiday, I was surprised to find that she could write words and numbers (mom, dad, 1+3=4,) like the other children in the neighbourhood. It was obvious that she was trying to talk to us using sign language, but the problem was that no one at home could understand her or reply to her. Neither I, nor my husband, nor either of my other children could communicate by signs. This meant that the frustrations continued for my daughter and for us.



Me sign language spelling

One day, a teacher at our daughter's school told us that there is sign language training for parents of deaf children. My husband was very interested in this training and he started to attend this sign language training.

After this training, my husband could communicate with our daughter in basic sign language (greetings, express some basic needs, ...). My husband's understanding of basic sign language has made our daughter much more attached to him than to the other members of our family. Our daughter felt comfortable with my husband. Both could communicate easily and tell each other stories. It comforted our daughter. I found myself using my husband as interpreter between our child and the rest of the family. However, my husband and our daughter taught us some signs that allowed us to communicate a little with her and also her little brother.

Later, with funding from an association called "Aurora Deaf Aid Africa", training was organised for parents of deaf children, which I attended. With the signs learned in this training, I can easily communicate with my daughter using these signs. And this has contributed to the development of both of our children.

Thanks to the sign language training received by my husband, and later by me, communication is no longer an issue in our family. Our daughter now feels accepted and comfortable in our family. We now have another deaf child in our family, and we communicate with him in sign language too, and it works well. I benefited greatly from the sign language provided by Aurora and it brought me together with other parents which make us feel like a peer support group, we help each other. I would recommend the sign language training to other parents who have deaf children.

I am also one of the founder members of a new parents' association called the Association of Parents for the Education of Deaf Children in Burundi (APEES Burundi). Through this organisation we hope to spread awareness of deafness and be a valuable source of support for deaf parents across the country. We also hope to raise the issue of the needs of deaf children with the Burundi government to ensure they provide for the education needs of deaf children, and recognise and provide for their wider rights.



Me and my daughter chatting





**31 Sutton Road Shrewsbury Shropshire SY2 6DL**

**T: 01743 358998 M: 07984 662165**

**E: [info@deafreach.org](mailto:info@deafreach.org)**

**W: [www.deafreach.org](http://www.deafreach.org)**

**Charity No: 262962**