



**March 2022**

Dear Friends,

### **FOCUS ON UGANDA**

We are devoting this edition of the Newsletter to Uganda where we have been working longer than anywhere else. It all began in the noughties when Anne Ryan, our Uganda Lead Trustee, and I were respectively Treasurer and Chairman of the UK charity, Signhealth. In 2009, after a series of meetings with key individuals across Africa, we decided that our first overseas programme would be Uganda, following a meeting with Joyce Nalugya, a psychiatrist and mother of a deaf child from Kampala.

Signhealth Uganda (SU) was established that same year, thanks to some support from Sense International and Paul Ssentenza appointed as Director. One of the first programmes to be supported was the Early Years' work which Paul is reporting on in this edition. You do not have to be working long in the deaf world to realise that intervention at the earliest possible moment is critical in the education of a deaf child. I do not know if it is still the case but in this country deaf children were admitted to school a year earlier than their hearing peers so that the crucial language milestones might not be missed. After Signhealth withdrew from overseas work in 2016, Martyn and Anne Ryan took on the funding of this work and Paul's report is a testament to their commitment and generosity.

This is followed by Rayuna's story, a girl who was identified by the Early Years Programme and provided with the education and social intervention she desperately needed.

Finally, there is a report from Howard, our International Director, on his work with SU in December 2021. Following this visit, he has been working with potential partners in Burundi over a 3 month period and we will be reporting on this in a later edition.

SU has been greatly supported by the UK charity, Signal, being the recipient of major funding projects for many years. One of SU's challenges has been to find a way of reducing their reliance on a very few funders and to develop new income streams. Their final programme with the True Colours Trust will terminate at the end of this year. This situation was apparent to all parties for a while, and it had been intended for us to mount a Business Planning exercise with them over 2

years ago, but COVID put paid to that. Eventually Howard was able to make it out to Uganda in December and his report completes this edition.

Rod

## **PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAMME 2018-2022**



### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This report makes a picture on the state of the preschool/ECD programme during the last four years that were set off with the sudden abdication of SignHealth UK as the main sponsor. This set a hard transition period both for the entire organization and specifically the preschool program that was only rescued with the bailout support from Deafreach (hitherto Richmond trust), Anne Ryan and other friends from UK.

### **2.0 FINANCIAL ACTIVITY**

In addition to the initial bail out offers, including the £ 6000 to safeguard the programme during the transition, managed and reported for via Signal; SU was fortunate to receive over £27,700 as kind support from Martyn and Anne that has kept the preschool programme alive in the last 4 years.

### **3.0 PROJECT PROGRESS**

#### **3.1 ECD/Preschool interventions**

In addition to the two main preschool programmes at Uganda School for the Deaf –Ntinda and Mulago School for the Deaf, the project continues to provide support to 4 other schools including St. Mark VII-Bwanda; Masaka School for Special Needs Education-Ndegeya; St. Anthony School for the Deaf –Nkozi and Good Samaritan school –Kitengeesa. Below is a statistical summary on the children directly reached by the program.

**Figure : Preschool Enrollment**

School	2019		2020		2021		2022	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>Uganda School for the Deaf</b>	8	15	10	11	18	17	6	16
<b>Mulago School for the Deaf</b>	13	19	17	16	27	19	6	9
<b>St. Anthony</b>	5	5	10	5	8	7	4	4
<b>St. Mark VII</b>	22	24	22	31	9	21	18	26
<b>Masaka SNE</b>	12	10	13	26	20	17	5	8
<b>Good Samaritan/ Kakunyu</b>	7	10	9	7	2	2	23	10
<b>Total</b>	67	83	81	96	84	82	62	73

**M=Male F=Female**

### 3.2 Key Observations

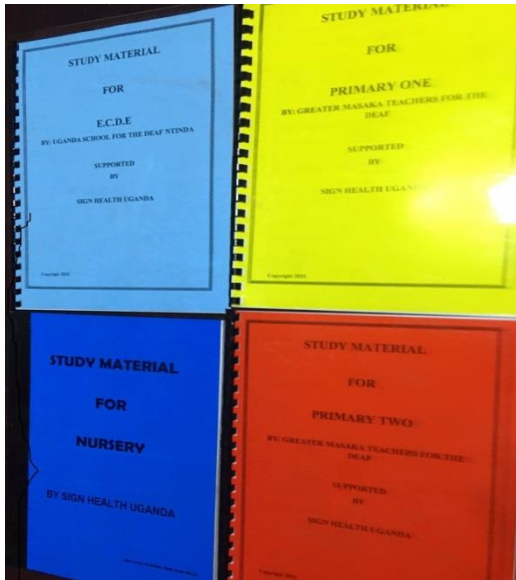
For the interest of attribution, the table above has only considered children supported under the preschool programme with a total of 577 directly reached during the last years. Further deriving from the figures in the table above , there has been a gradual steady increase in the number of preschool children supported by the programme , save for the two years that were constrained by the COVID-19 outbreak. The general school enrollment had also reached over 3000 children and progress was only curtailed by the COVID-19 situation . For instance, the total number of children registered at the two main preschool Programmes had reached 46 at Mulago and 35 at Ntinda by end of 2020 but with the COVID-19 lockdown & related restrictions, the number collapsed to 16 and 13 respectively by June 2021.

However, as will be shared more later, the situation in each school is different with some schools such as Uganda school for the Deaf, St. Mark and MSNE improving in programmes while others such as Mulago and Good Samaritan getting more constrained in the COVID-19 aftermath. For Instance Good Samaritan has lost funding for its core existence and set to cease – at the moment children are being

shifted to other schools, including Kakunyu, a parents' school that is taking on children with multiple impairments.

### Equipping learning facilities

All schools were able to acquire child friendly teaching aids, including booklets developed by teachers themselves in different areas of learning (reading, drawing, science and math) and other classroom materials that eased their work.



With these booklets and learning materials have been, teachers have been able to following up stranded in homes, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown .Deaf children did not have any other source of learning unlike their hearing counterparts who would somehow benefit radio and other media programs organised by government and other educational actors – *A piece of testimony from the deputy head teacher Mulago is attached.*

In yet another milestone, 3 of the schools (Ntinda, St. Mark and Masaka SNE School) have expanded their learning facilities with additional space and play equipment. For example St.Mark VII has been able to mobilize funding for a completely new ECD wing at the school to cater for only preschool children. As part of the project collaboration with the school, SignHealth Uganda is planning to beatify this new wing with murals, other artwork and learning materials towards a more friendly facility for preschool deaf children.

### Staffing and facilitation of teachers

Besides maintaining teachers in the supported schools, the preschool programme has attracted more appropriate teachers and instructors for deaf children. With the support provides, at least 4 teachers from each supported school have undergone refresher training in Deaf methodologies and supporting deaf children at school.

As a more technical development ,Uganda school for the Deaf was able to acquire two qualified preschool Deaf Teachers (Charles and Priscilla ) taken over as the running of the preschool program with increased stimulation of learning abilities in mother tongue and interest of the learners .



**Pricilla inspiring learning for the preschool Class  
-Ntinda**



**Charles in action at Uganda School for the Deaf  
-Ntinda**

While all supported schools are also utilizing deaf assistants to augment language acquisition and socialization, the model at Uganda school for the deaf is a key landmark as the first opportunity for completely deaf teachers to be fully in charge of the class.

### **Academic and Social progress:**

Children have been progressing well in all learning areas (numeracy, reading, writing, communication and socialization) with the addition usage of the interactive communication board that amplified SL language acquisition and interaction between teachers, parents and children. Academic social progress of these children has continued to be celebrated with colorful graduation ceremonies for the main supported programmes at Ntinda and Mulago.

There has been a good balance of indoor and outdoor play and socialization with provision of equipping of play areas and stimulation play materials at all the 6 supported schools. Children also , their teachers and parents were also supported with a series of talent development activities , exchange visits and exposure opportunities including interschool visits and trips to key national landmarks such as the zoo.

### **Children's Health and wellbeing**

Improved nutrition and feeding supported by the project has helped the teachers and children to focus on learning with no major welfare issues in the main project schools.

The programme had built a good system between all supported schools and health workers who had been trained with deaf awareness and communication skills. However the outbreak of COVID-19 has curtailed all existing referral patterns and the project is only crawling back with health related linkages and the current cohort of children have not undergone hearing assessment and other medical screening.



**Interclass through play –Mulago**



**Joint graduation ceremony for Mulago and Ntinda**

### **Family awareness and Outreach**

Family and community based support have been in vogue as the friendly way of reaching children who were largely stranded at home during the past two years. In addition to assessment and guidance in care and support for deaf children, community follow-up visits by teachers have helped to offer hope and emergency assistance for children who were stranded at home during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The element of signlanguage /communication training had been thriving in all schools but got to a standstill with the Emergence of COVID-19 and the movement restrictions that ensued. The team only improvised with handout awareness materials which only reached few families but plans underway to share more tools via the schools.

## **4.0 OTHER BEST PRACTICES**

### **Meeting with Partners on ECD and Special Needs Education**

The project team made follow-up meetings with different school leaders and government officials to share on developments and challenges in ECD and Special Needs education. Key issues followed up included funding for preschool education; supporting teachers and provision of instructional materials and low performance of Deaf children.

While all this remains work in progress , government despite its limited budget support , has continued to offer goodwill for deaf education to the extent field visits and follow-up by teachers was recognized as essential work unabated by lockdown measures. The meeting points have also been vital in building cross learning and sharing of tools, including learning materials developed at different schools.

## Deaf friendly tools and messaging

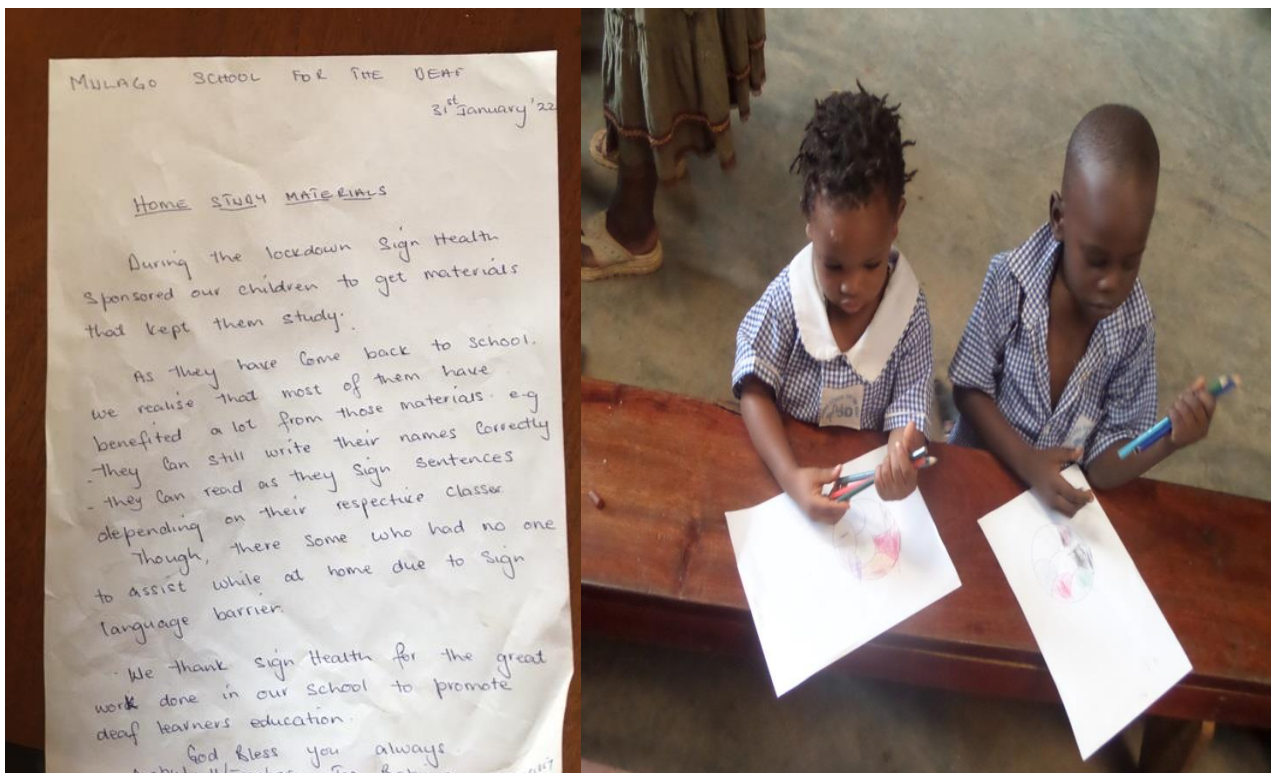
The project team has worked with teachers and deaf young people to develop different deaf awareness and instructional materials including; the ever in demand communication board and deaf friendly COVID -19 messages (including clips and charts) -some of these broadcast on national media.

## Follow-up on stranded families and incidents of domestic violence

The team has been able to follow-up and offer Psychosocial support, including relief items (including Food and other material support), especially during the trying time of COVID-19 restrictions. – Special recognition of Deafreach partners who helped to reach over 75 deaf young people/ families in Masaka and Kampala with food relief during the hard times around Christmas last year.

## 5.0 Summary of Achievements , Challenges and Plans

### Key achievements



- Increased enrollment and retention of deaf children in schools. For the past 4 years this program has attracted a significant number of 577 deaf children most especially those at early age of 3 years to go to school unlike before.
- Acquisition of deaf teachers teaching the deaf children in ECD program, with the existence of this program now we have deaf people who have qualified as ECD teachers to come and teach the deaf children including the two at Ntinda who are managing the entire programme.
- Improved parent's participation and support for deaf children language by parents. With the intervention of many parents of deaf children can now communicate with basic sign language

and gradually beginning to contribute on school requirements-e.g. at Ntinda parents are willing to pay for children accommodation as part of the tentative COVID-19 Measures.

- Improved teaching and learning facilities such as access to the communication board, pictorial teaching aids and health tips.
- Increased skills development and education at early age for deaf children. With this program, many deaf children have been helped to join school early, socialize and develop their talents. We can hardly find children above 7 years of age in the supported schools due the regular mobilisation, guidance support for families in conjunction with parents groups.
- Deaf awareness for the general community. This program has facilitated awareness increased sensitivity for deaf children as observed in the community participation in identification and referral of deaf children to school. A special case of CRO Masaka which has gone further to sponsor a deaf child is attached below.
- Offering a chance for learning during lockdown. The preschool program offered the only opportunity for deaf children to continue with educational support during the COVID-19 restrictions, while other programs were tailored to hearing counterparts.
- Increased hope among stranded DYP /families during lockdown. In addition to the food relief, the project coordinated regular field support visits that not only helped recued stranded deaf young people, but offered a belt of psychosocial support and guidance during the trying times. Support teams including parents' leaders, deaf young people and teachers were always available to offer help.
- Contributing to organizational Survival. Without a doubt, the kind support for the preschool programme and related bail out from Deaf reach offered the lifeline on which all SignHealth work and organizational survival is anchored.

### **Key challenges**

- Increased vulnerability of supported schools and families especially due to emergencies. Some project schools like Good Samaritan in Masaka are threatened with closure due to loss of funding; many families of deaf children are unable to meet the minimum requirements such as accommodation fees and scholastic materials for their children hence causing a heavy toll on the program.
- Shortage /breakage of learning facilities (space, beddings , furniture and general teaching aids) –especially at Ntinda, Mulago after the long lockdown
- Missing medical assessment and follow-up of children with additional complications.
- Unfulfilled promises of government to support the ECD programme – Still a long way in spite the good will and recognition of the significance preschool education for deaf children.



- Incidents of gender-based violence and child rights abuse continue due to limited community awareness programmes and family vulnerability especially over the last two years
- Increased inflation and spike in cost of operations-fuel process have more than doubled. The case of a bar of soap that has jumped from less than a pound to now 3 pounds in some hard to reach places!
- Generating the required funding for SignHealth Uganda. A window of hope exists with a new business plan developed with support from Deafreach.

### **Key Activities planned for next period**

- Investment in customised teaching aids/learning materials that can be used at both school and family level.
- Building a home learning strategy to improve bridge instructional gaps and follow-up of deaf children as a lesson derived from the lockdown
- Developing a programme for psychosocial support, follow up on stranded families, restoring hope and safeguarding of children from abuse and neglect.
- Reviving communication training child care and protection training for parents and caretakers.
- More engagement with local authorities on support for deaf education. This is an on-going venture with government and other partners gradually recognising the unique challenges of deaf children.
- Marketing the SU business strategy as a strategic development and resource mobilisation tool.

### **5.0 Conclusion**

As the SU family and preschool partners , we are humbly indebted to Martin ,Anne Ryan and Deaf Reach friends for the kind sacrifices towards the preschool programme as our signature intervention and helping to keep SignHealth Uganda alive. You have added a lasting smile to deaf children, SU team and their families.



### **I NOW COMMUNICATE WELL WITH ANYONE**

Mugabekazi Rayuna, aged 9 years, is among the beneficiaries the ECD program implemented with support from DeafReach. She is a pupil at Masaka School for Children with Special Needs Education (MSE) currently in primary one. Ruyuna has a humble background as child rescued from the street by one of the partners (Community Restoration & Outreach-CRO ) in Masaka disability network, having been abandoned by her own family who could not cope with a deaf child!

In the year 2018, she joined school under the ECD program and got enrolled in baby class where she was helped to develop her sign language communication, socialize with other children and begin her education journey, but without parental support at the time.

At school (at MSNE) Rayuna was introduced to and gradually inducted into basic sign language communication, progressing from gestures to signing, reading and writing.

She became one of the active pupils and has progressed well, learning to sign her name from baby class. She was easily promoted to middle class and later to top class where more skills in language development and identification of objects. By the time she completed preschool last year, Rayuna was able to communicate well in sign language, interact with friends and clearly construct good and meaningful stories.

Rayuna was one of the children followed up during the (COVID-19) lockdown last year and she was excited to see her teacher who also handed over some simplified booklets. During the community follow-ups, in conjunction with CRO, the school was eventually able to locate her parents in one of the slums in Masaka –There are ongoing efforts to bond the child with the family with emphasis on communication and care obligations. There is good progress and the family is scheduled to make a mentorship visit in care and support at the school at the end of this month.

Unlike other children that have not gone through the preschool program, who encounter a lot of difficulty in communication, Rayuna is one of the enviable children in her primary one class as a very happy child, confident sign language user, good socialization and interpersonal skills.

She is proud to sign :

**“Me communicate good sign language.”**

### **Letter from Uganda**

Arriving at Entebbe airport and traversing Kampala to reach the SignHealth Uganda office on the other side of the city is normally a familiar but fairly intense process. This time, however, it is different.

Covid appears to have traumatised Uganda. The arrival complications are expected- testing at the airport is gentler and more pleasant than the departure one in the UK, and soon it's good to be back out into the warmth of a Uganda night. Kampala is eerily quiet.

One of the busiest and most intense cities I have encountered, it now feels like a ghost town. Traversing it to the office usually takes 3 hours, but this time it is 45 minutes, and it becomes clear that the city is under curfew. This begins at 7pm, I later discover, and runs to 6 or 7 the following morning. The usual smog and acrid taste of vehicle fumes are entirely absent, and after a long flight it's a relief to be able to stretch out and relax.

SignHealth have moved from their previous offices to a quieter suburb, cutting costs during what has been a tough two years of Covid since I was last here. One of the new office rooms has been fitted out as an annexe to avoid hotel costs and better manage Covid challenges. The mosquito nets are new, as is the bed, and my only thoughts are to prop my case against the wall and turn in.

It is the first time in 20 months that DeafReach have felt able to give the go ahead to Africa travel, and we have planned this trip carefully to try to avoid the risk of getting stuck and not being able to do the work. So much opportunity has had to be put on hold, and now we want to make full use of the Covid “lull” knowing that things could so easily change again.

SU Uganda are an excellent team-one of the best I have partnered with, and they are ready to get going the following morning. Paul, the CEO, is a familiar warm face, and after introductions to the 4-person team, we move quickly into developing a 5-year Business Plan. The feeling with this Team is good, with a strong and immediate sense that this will be a profitable time.

I am sometimes asked why DR insists on Business Plans and Funding Plans before it will engage with Partners and projects. Plenty of large organisations, including INGOs, never used to bother that much, and some still don't. For many people, it is not an exciting activity, however live and dynamic we always try to keep the facilitation.

At the beginning of every plan facilitation, the team is asked what their expectations of this time are – why do they want a BP and what do they expect it to do for their organisation? Responses are always fascinating, while a key purpose in asking is to ensure that there is real ownership of the Plan. They are told clearly that this is not training or advice. The work is done by them, and all the decisions within the Plan are made by them. Facilitation simply steers them through a process while asking all the right questions.

For me, there are two key reasons for business planning. Firstly, there are many people and organisations with wonderful ideas but who are struggling to put them together in a clear way. Internally, the BP helps them clarify what they want to do, in what order of priority, what it will cost and how to achieve the funds. Secondly, looking outwards, it enables them to articulate and share a clear and attractive vision with funders, governments and other key stakeholders.

These three weeks will be intensive and full-on. Ideally, as generally happens in the UK, we would do this in shorter chunks over nine months or more, but that's just not viable in the circumstances. So it is a shorter focused time, engaging a lot of strategic thinking and emotion, but at the end, if the process has gone well, it can be transformative, both for individuals and for the organisation.

We have discussed and agreed the time schedule for the next 3 weeks, so the next ritual is turning off all mobiles and placing them in a bowl on the far side of the room during working time! It's done with grins, groans and some rolled eyes, occasional attempts to retain a second phone and some good natured banter.

This team have been working together for quite a few years, and their experience and strategic thinking quickly show through as we move through the process, beginning with the very familiar “Vision, Mission and Values”. Always good not to skip through this part, as in so many organisations the strategic thinkers have reams of ideas and hopes of new directions, which the old Vision and Mission may now not embrace. It is a catalyst to help them see that everything is on the table, all ideas are open for consideration. That in itself can be a breakthrough in some cultures.

Piled plates of traditional Ugandan lunch cooked by the two wonderful deaf ladies keep everything well fuelled. By 4pm, everyone's looking a little wiped out, but we are moving ahead well, with real understanding of where we are going. A good first day, and I'm happy to do a little planning for tomorrow and turn in.

By morning, the deep red dust from Uganda's soil has seeped under the doors and through the window mesh, and shaking it out of clothes becomes a daily ritual. These gentle and cooler early hours are my favourite time for thinking and planning – even though this is the cooler time of year, it quickly turns tropical, always a challenge for strategic planning.

Day two moves along quickly with a very live session on SWOT analysis (interrogating the organisation and its environment according to Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats), a

key methodology for helping the team to see their organisation and work strategically. Then on to risk analysis, organisational structure and past income and expenditure, not exciting but important.

Then we move into discussion of existing and future Programmes, the stuff that the team does, where their hearts are, and really want to explore. This is a dynamic team, always coming back with new ideas and new ways to do things, and for several hours the discussion flows freely, working through all that they want to achieve over the next five years, how much it costs and how to get it funded. They already have a good Annual Budget system in place for the whole organisation, and they are able to fairly quickly develop that into a 5-Year Budget.

The completion of the 5-Year Budget is almost always a critical moment in the planning process - where the team can see clearly what it is going to take financially to implement all their existing work and dreams. For some organisations with low financial planning, it may be the first time they have ever seen what it actually costs each year to run their organisation.

Not so for this team, who have solid financial skills and planning, but they have a serious challenge coming up shortly. As with so many countries in the region, Covid has hit them hard and caused many difficulties to both the work and its funding. By the end of this year many of their major grants will be coming to an end, and though they have been working hard to draw in new support to replace this, the environment for this is very tough indeed. Two days are spent analysing all existing and potential sources of funds, and a full Funding Plan is written up to meet this challenge. DeafReach believes in this great team and will seek to do all it reasonably can to support them and help them find funding.

By Christmas, the bulk of the BP is written up, with a first draft made available to the whole organisation and its Trustees. It's a good feeling to review it with the Team and again feel the passion of the team for putting it all into practice. Christmas is a little unusual as Covid necessitates being sensible and avoiding risks that could scupper this trip (and the travel on to Burundi for another 3 months). I stay at the annexe rather than accept kind invitations, with some take-out, familiar DVDs and a little more work to finish off. The supply of fresh coffee in the suitcase helps too!

The last two days are used to review the first draft of the BP with the whole of the organisation who are scattered in programmes across Uganda. Sometimes these reviews don't work with the wider team not getting the value of it all. But this time it's encouraging to see everyone get stuck in, passionately challenging and proposing. Paul's maybe a little worried that this may feel like a major re-write, while I assure him that it's great that they are emotionally attached and engaged. The final product will be all the better for it.

Nearly a month has passed, and except to visit the hospital for a challenged stomach and a covid test, the whole time has been indoors, discussing, interrogating and writing. The finished Business Plan, 5-year Budget, Funding Plan and Action Plan look good. Will they make a real difference over the next 5 years. That's down to the Team. At the beginning I told them that in my experience some of these BPs can unfortunately be wasted, lying in a drawer gathering dust. But I am sure that will not happen here, not with this team, and it's been a true privilege to work with them and share a little of their lives and work.

The warm send-off stays with me as I board the flight for Burundi and a series of wonderful new opportunities in a land that few have heard of and which has too-long been abandoned by much of the international community. That's another story though.

Howard

February 2022

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