

My visit "Back to my African home"



It has been 2,5 years since I last smelled the dusty air that comes from a Piki Piki (a motorbike taxi) rushing past you on a dirt road, 2,5 years since I last heard the sweet voices of the Kimilili kids happily shouting "how is you" or felt the yummy juice of the mango picked from a tree run down my chin. I missed it, every single little bit, including the thin toilet paper (can you even call "that" toilet paper???), the "special smell" of the Kenyans (always sitting next to me in the bus!) and the dirty little hands of children pulling my hair in total amazement at its red colour. I'm back in my African home, after 30 hours of travelling I am overwhelmed. Overwhelmed by the progress CBSM has gone through thanks to the great local team and the many friends helping us to get these children to school.

It takes us over 4 hours with Phylis, our local CEO and my "Kenyan Mum", to show us the progress.

Main School building: We start with the main school building (used as Primary and Secondary School). The iron sheet walling on the first floor urgently needs to be replaced as the last rain has made the temporary structure very unsafe for our kids. One of the classrooms has had to be closed as the children could have easily fallen through the unstable structure. 4 years ago the iron sheets were put in place to create additional classrooms, but now it's time to replace them with proper bricks to create a permanent structure and offer a safe learning environment. A task with highest priority and thanks to our two former volunteers (Y. and P.), parts of the funding is secured. The work has started and we are excited to see the new safe classrooms.



Iron sheet walls need replacement



Foundation for additional classrooms



Current school building

In addition to the walling, the main school building lacks 6 additional classrooms that need to be built from scratch (foundations are in place). A monster task ahead of us, but "pole pole" as the Kenyans say: slowly slowly, one step after the other.



Some kindergarten children at morning assembly

Kindergarten and Special Needs School:

We move on to the Kindergarten, the "Early Child Development" to use the correct local term. Last time I visited, our youngest children were taught in mud classrooms as we didn't have enough proper classrooms. But now, thanks to the generous donation of Rotary Club Glattal and other friends, a semi-permanent school was constructed, using iron sheets and a cemented floor. The



Kindergarten and Special Needs School

Kindergarten has been moved to a separate piece of land, sharing the playground and the toilets with the newly opened Special Needs School. One of the classrooms of this new structure is now being used for the latter. It is here that we start the next leg of our tour.

Eagerly, I peep into the classroom. Three teachers are looking after 17 children with challenges, either mentally, physically or both. The teachers shout “Karibu” (welcome) and I walk in. The highly motivated and specially trained teachers introduce me to the children, explaining their backgrounds and their challenges. It is this moment when I cannot hold back my tears: many of these children were hidden



*Our Special Needs kids with teachers
Sophie, Elizabeth and Liliana*

away in their mud huts for years, now they have a chance to socialise, to learn and to grow. Since being at the school, some are starting to use sounds to communicate, are learning to feed themselves and – thanks to the work of our social worker Paul – three children have mobility thanks to donated wheelchairs and are happy being whizzed around on the playground by their colleagues during break.



Three kids enjoying their porridge

I learn that this is the only special needs school in this and neighbouring districts. Our teacher’s dream is big: creating a separate school with more classrooms to accommodate the great need of the many challenged children in the neighbourhood, opening a boarding section for those coming from far or needing permanent attention and getting a school bus to be able to pick up the children and provide them with a chance for a better life. My heart is bleeding: I can feel the passion, the dream, the need, yet I realize that this is as big of a monster task as completing the main school building. I thank the teachers for their amazing work and quickly turn away as my tears roll down my cheek.

Children Home: The tour continues with the Children’s Home. In January, a piece of land with a permanent house was acquired to accommodate the 17 girls that are currently sharing a mud hut with the 14 boys. The girls have not moved in yet as the water and electricity still needed to be fixed. Pat, our long-term volunteer (aka CBSM angel) has done an amazing work in transforming the dark house into a real home.



Mercy with her new blanket

A few days later the girls move in and are overcome with joy at living in a permanent house with running water, a tiled shower room, new triple decker beds, new mattresses, sheets and blankets as well as new buckets for washing, mosquito nets, plates and cutlery. The girls are over the moon, dancing and singing while inspecting every corner of their new home.



New beds

The boys, who have kindly helped with moving, look a bit taken aback. When we next continue the tour to visit their current home, I understand why. The mud huts are grim, the sunshine hardly enters through the small windows, the mud walls and floors feel damp and the sleeping situation is more than disastrous. New mattresses, sheets, mosquito nets are required. The washing room and toilets are in separate mud huts. I feel sorry for the guys and promise to continue working on improving their living standards as well. Pole pole, step by step. Another monster task, but one that I will work on with all my passion.

Staffroom: While we walk back to the school grounds, I learn that a staff room is needed. The teachers do not have anywhere to sit while correcting exams, preparing classes or to take a break. An iron sheet structure has been started with local funding, but the structure cannot be completed due to lack of further funds. “Oh, that’s peanuts” I think. Let’s get this finished! The next day, 6 workers are on the ground preparing the floor of the new building.



Iron sheet staffroom from outside

I’m pleased, at least one thing that could easily be solved.



Staffroom being prepared: levelling before adding the sand cement mix

School kitchen: As we walk along the school ground, Mama Beatrice comes along with a big bucket on her head. She is heading to the school kitchen to prepare lunch for the children. The bucket is full of maize and beans and I – after failing to carry the heavy bucket on my head – follow her into the school kitchen. The structure was first built by our volunteer Christine 5 years ago, about 3 years ago the mud structure was replaced with a semi-permanent iron sheet structure. While Mama Beatrice starts the fire and the little room fills up with smoke, I learn that there are big plans for the kitchen too.



Current kitchen: stoves falling apart



Our cook: Mama Beatrice

The kitchen itself is too small and in addition, a dining room is required by new regulations from the government. Pat shows me her “dream kitchen” where the kitchen itself becomes a smoke free environment by integrating the 4 huge cooking pots with a single chimney. One side of the kitchen is open towards the new sitting room, just separated with a counter that would get used to serve the food to the children. This would not only satisfy the Ministry of Education requirement of a dining room for the school children, but it would also comply with the Department of Child Health and Safety regulations. In addition, our children’s home could use this facility as well for their meals. Another monster task to turn this dream into reality, but thanks to the generous donation of our volunteer I. (will be used to buy the four big pots!) we are one little step closer.



Our youngest children enjoying lunch



Enjoying the shade on the play ground

Number crunching:

After nearly four hours of admiring the work done, dreaming of new structures and sharing ideas we walk back to Pat: time for a chocolate milk and some mangoes off the tree! But with just a week on the ground, there is no time for big breaks. We start the number crunching with the following rough result:

- 10'000 CHF Walling
- 25'000 CHF Permanent home for Children Home Boys (including new land and permanent structure)
- 19'000 CHF School kitchen and dining room built with permanent foundation and iron sheet walling. The permanent foundation is required to be able to replace the iron sheets with permanent bricks at a later stage. This will require an additional 11'000 CHF for bricks, cement and labour).
- 36'000 CHF to buy additional land to at some point in the future separate Primary and Secondary school (as required by the Ministry of Education)
- 180'000 CHF Additional 6 classrooms on the main building, 30'000 CHF each
- ??? CHF to complete the vision of the Special Needs School. This is too big of a task and will have to be considered at a later stage. Please let us know if this project might interest a sister charity or individual to fund.

I feel overwhelmed and don't dare to add everything up. But to quote Walt Disney:

If you can dream it, You can do it!

And, who would have imagined that the little mud hut from 6 years ago could ever have transformed into what it currently is? Keep dreaming!

I have left Kimilili with a bag full of great experiences, a heart filled with love, admiration for the local team, impressed by how our CBSM children are benefitting, as well as the knowledge of having the right team and supporters onboard to continue dreaming big. I feel humbled to be part of the CBSM family and would like to say from the bottom of my heart:

ASANTE SANA

I would like to invite you to go and visit the CBSM children. They love to play with new friends and I'm sure you will lose your heart just like I did.

If you are a buddy of Bill Gates or would like to help yourself, I would be grateful if you get in touch with me.

To all my friends and family:
Thank you for being by my side while dreaming big!



Agnes Ellis

For CHF-donations

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Please remember:
All donations go 100 % to Kimilili to support the school building for our 300 orphans