

# Genieri Collections - Newsletter No.8 - December 2017

## The Result.



Our return to Genieri was almost uneventful, with the car running all the way up-country without failing, albeit sometimes only on 3 cylinders. That couldn't last of course, and within 36 hours it had sprung a significant fuel leak. Henry and I could have fixed it in 10 minutes, but in a village of about 700 people NO-ONE has a car. Hence - no screwdriver, and certainly no hose clips. Guy came 10km. from Soma and fixed it effectively, and all for the princely sum of about £7.00. In any case the Village was totally delighted to see us again, and of course the children were causing a very noisy version of total mayhem.

This time Henry Hewison (aged 13) accompanied us, kindly released by his school, Ellon Academy, as they felt the trip represented good education all on its own. Henry agrees with the Academy, and says that the trip will colour his views for some time to come.

## Progress with food security

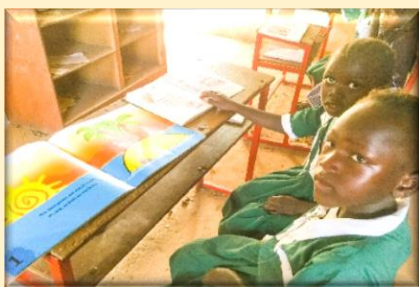


To our delight we found that the feeding situation is better than good. The children are well fed, and we even saw very minor left-overs being handed back to the kitchen. The rains have finished and crops are being harvested (particularly rice), so the households themselves have enough to feed.



But this comes with a note of caution, as the headmaster himself said "just a few weeks ago you would have seen a lot of pinched faces". We've made a great difference but aren't done yet, as their "Hungry Season", running from July to September is still very lean for them. We don't like to think what state the children would have been in without the single meal you provide for them every day. With an eye on that we've managed to salt away a little money (the Pound continues to get stronger against the Dalasi), and if things stay like this we'll be able to send them a wee bit extra over the hungry period to help them get through it. We've just about got on top of this issue, nearly there.

## Books and Clothing



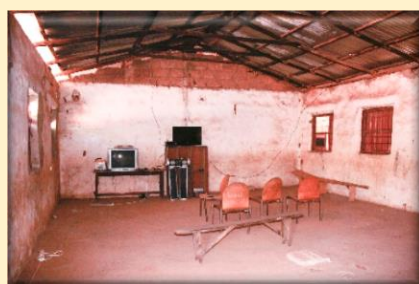
26Kg. of high quality clothing and kiddy books were delivered to the Day Care Centre, again to much glee. Almost all of this was collected and donated by the Wellgreen Nursery in Stirling, thanks to one of our donors Helen Findlay.

Helen, you just don't know how much joy you brought to these little guys, and how much you've enhanced their early education. Young Christian was one of several children who presented the goods to us just before departure.

## Schooling



Henry had a complete ball doing a bit of teaching in the Centre, and empathised particularly well with all of the children. Facilities are very poor indeed and teaching aids almost non-existent.



I think the photograph of the television room/classroom tells the tale better than any form of words.

We're personally supplying some animal photos for the nursery to help with early spelling and writing, and Henry also donated 4 handballs for the smaller children to play with.



Interestingly in one of the classes many of the children had a reasonably sized sheet of paper, and were colouring in some drawings, and some of them were managing "wiggly elephants". This represents material consumption unheard of until quite recently. This is in sharp contrast with not so long ago.

In 2012 I asked "How do you sharpen pencils?", to which the headmaster replied "I bought a razor blade – *at my own expense*". Changed days indeed.



Education is so very much valued by the children themselves, particularly the older ones, some of whom attend school in the local village of Kaiaf, about 1 mile away. They can be seen studying and doing homework, with perhaps a single small torch or candle between half a dozen of them. They are persistent and determined to do well, boys as well as girls. Henry noted that a 13 year old girl was at the same stage in the mathematics syllabus

as he was, but also noticed a significant difference between actual attainment levels against those we might expect at home.



So, that was the village for 2017, hopeful, positive and definitely progressing. It's slow going, but that's a component of African development. Henry



is doing his bit here, conduction tasks which are archetypically “women’s work”, and the confusion shows in the faces - well done Henry - wish I’d thought of that.

## What Next?

**Hygiene** is the simple answer. A short examination of the Day Care Centre toilets was more than enough to suggest that these should come to the **very** top of the list. They are quite beyond horrendous, and are a ready built and very effective means of disease transmission. Some of the smaller nursery children are afraid of these toilets, and simply refuse to enter them. They use the schoolyard outside for toilet purposes. It is reported that “**Open defecation is a major cause of mortality among rural people (in Africa)**”. Toilet paper was not visible, and no hand washing facilities were available. Shudder.



It's also really, really easy and cheap to improve significantly, and with minimal ongoing revenue expenditure. Revenue expenditure is a project killer in Africa.

We're proposing to them a small project in 3 parts:

1. Provide for the coating of the existing internal toilets walls with non-porous material and light coloured washable paint, and perhaps replacement of the current stone plinths with porcelain ones.
2. Provide facilities for hand washing, and assist with a robust education program to reinforce the value of this.

3. Provide an additional toilet, proportionately sized for the youngest children, bright, light and airy, and built of modern non-porous materials that can be kept clean easily and at low cost.

We're hopeful of getting village buy-in over the next few weeks (not a foregone conclusion by any means), as without it the venture will inevitably fail.

If donations keep coming in we should be able to fund this from our meagre reserves without compromising feeding, but every little you give helps a lot.

### Getting back home



Quite uncharacteristically the vehicle ran all the way from Genieri to our hotel without a murmur, albeit progressively getting a bit slower as the journey went on.



Even more improvements were visible on the road, with fewer

military checkpoints, and only one sighting of troops on the road. These guys were relaxed to say the least, despite being stationed on the most sensitive piece of soil in the whole of The Gambia, the place is becoming positively chilled-out. Perhaps they're taking lessons from Sophie!

Back to a very comfortable hotel, with blissfully silent aircon, good steaks, and eggs and smoked salmon for breakfast. Or, as Henry might have said "anything but rice".

### What else

## For a much broader picture – just explore below

The children you feed



Some village people



To Give



The Environment



Our Website



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