



## **Learning to Make a Difference in Kenya**

An account by Head Boy Joe Patrick

As far as experiences go Kenya is right up there. It is a magical place that can't be described using words alone. One of the most noticeable thing is the friendliness of the people there most of whom have next to nothing bringing the English equivalent of £2.50 back to their huge families every week. However this doesn't seem to dampen their spirits. The main job that there appeared to be was working in the markets with makeshift stools or bombarding the matatu's every five minutes like a swarm of vultures. Very rarely making a sell the self esteem for these men must get low. Many time one would say no and the occasional time that we said yes to a much needed fresh bottle of water we would be attacked by every man in sight with a bag of nuts on him hoping to make the killer sell. But imagine in all of the setbacks the motivation of providing for your family. Kenyan men are incredibly proud – this I feel is one of the main reasons why every one of them is so nice. There immense generosity is infectious and making close friends fast is easy, sometimes almost too easy. This may simply be due to the colour of our skin. Walking around town we would constantly be point at and shouted at; “muzungo!! Muzungo!!” meaning white skinned – this was not meant to be racially discriminating at all – quite the opposite. After all of the political and social history of eastern Africa and the colonials there is surprisingly an immense respect for the white people. Many children that we visited had never seen a white man before. There is also the financial side of things. To most Kenyans they know the colour of white to mean money

which in relative terms to them is understandable. The colour of green is seen to mean luck in Kenya if not the rest of Africa for one simple reason – green is lush. It symbolises a good harvest and therefore health also providing the opportunity to make some much needed money.

Whilst in our stay in Kenya we visited some amazing people and there are a couple to mention. Rachael was a seventy three year old lady – all of her children have died and she lives alone looking after her grandchildren and great grandchildren of which there are about twelve in total. She greatly wishes that her respective daughters can go to school so they can have successful lives and support their own families the way that Rachael is supporting her own. For a woman of seventy three with the burden that she has and to work staying alive is a struggle but she told us that she wants god to bless her with many more years to watch her children prosper as she is determined they will do no matter what stands in their way.

As a safety net for Matt and I, we were lucky that a local boy named Emmanuel was asked to show us around and take care of us in the unfamiliar environment that we found ourselves in. Emmanuel was a true gent and always put us first. He was keen to show us his background and the way that he himself had lived all his life. This included funding his own school fee's by climbing up fifteen to twenty coconut trees three times each day to 'tap' them for alcohol. Most coconut trees being no shorter than a tree story building and using no safety equipment Emmanuel was dedicated to bettering his life for himself and his family. During our stay we were lucky enough to travel to a nearby town and trek to a village where Emmanuel lived. He lived alongside his grandfather for most of his life along with many of his other siblings and other family. His grandfather truly was an amazing man. If I say to you that the current life expectancy in Kenya (let alone for rural Kenya) is around forty five, Rachael is an amazing age at seventy three however Emmanuel's grandfather being eighty four is truly inspiring. These people have nothing. We sat with him for the whole night and even with a huge language barrier we were able to communicate on so many levels – clearly Emmanuel had taken a lot of his social skill from his grandfather. We danced, played music and feasted on freshly slaughtered chickens later retreating for bed in a hut constructed with nothing more than some sticks, mud and faeces. It was the Kenyan experience that we wanted and even more than what we dreamed of. We did no safari we did not need to. Our Kenyan experience was magical just the way it was and we would not have wanted it any other way.



Joe & Matt (Head Boy Kings of Wessex)



Joe using the local school