

Notes on my trip to Zambia



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1.0 Outline of the visit.

We arrived in Lusaka on the morning of the 27th and took the bus up to Kitwe. (This took much longer than expected and we arrived at night). During the next seven days we stayed in the executive suite at the YMCA. It was built in 1957 and although younger than either of us looked older than both. During our time in Kitwe we were looked after by Friends of the Street Children (FOSC), our partners in the Kitwe project, who took us to outlying townships, even as far as Chililabombwe west of Chingola, where many of the street children come from. FOSC showed us the three different houses they run to shelter children in Kitwe, while they try to reintegrate them with their families, and they showed us the two dormitory blocks, which we have built at Kawama. We also spent much of our time accompanying the street workers on their daily walks through the town and the market and to their street classes.

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On 4th October we flew back to Lusaka and then to Mfuwe where we were driven to one of Robin Popes camps: Nkwali. The next day we stayed the afternoon, the night and the morning at the village of Kawaza where we saw the classrooms that Romilly's Foundation has built. We then spent the next two nights at another of RPS's camps before flying back to Lusaka.

2. KITWE.

2.1 Where do street children come from?



Street children in the making at Chililabombwe

We were told that the world norm for royalties paid by mining companies is 3%. The Zambian government is only paid 0.6%.¹ Very little of the increased value of copper production finds its way down to the lower levels of the community. This is a complaint, which you hear again and again.



Sitting of mineral wealth: the pipe carries waste from the mine to a slurry lake. The girl is carrying dry slurry from the lake to the village where it will be used for building. For many Zambians this is as close as they get to a share of the copper boom.

¹ This information was supplied by John Taylor, CEO of Microlink, a Zambian ISP.

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Certainly in the townships around Kitwe there is very little sign of it. Ragged children in filthy clothes play in the streets, wells draw water in close proximity to longdrops. The only business is brewing lethal illegal alcohol. The government provides free education up until the age of 7, and in some of townships it fails even that meagre promise. In the townships the sense of poverty is overwhelming.

These communities have very little to offer their children. The prospect of earning a living in the market at Kitwe, guarding parked cars or portering must seem attractive. When there is no food at home, your mother rejects you in favour of her stepchildren, and your drunken stepfather beats you it must seem hard to resist.



The people on the left are digging the foundations for what they hope will be a school in their village.. If they can raise 15% of the cost they believe that the government will provide the rest. Christopher Mulenga, our host, was doubtful that it would.

2.2 AIDS:

Aids creates single mothers who shift their priorities from the children of their first husband to the stepfather, or who, if they remain single, find it more difficult to provide for their children. However we met a surprising number of women who despite their own lack of earning power had chosen to divorce their husbands and live on their own, because their husbands drank too much and beat them.² FOSC say that street children started appearing after the end of the socialist economy.

² I was told that most of the children that the FOSC deal with are HIV positive, but anti retroviral drugs, which are now available are only administered when the CD4 count has fallen to a certain level. Anti retroviral drugs would be inappropriate for children on the street because their use demands discipline in taking the drugs and a careful life style: sleep, exercise, fresh vegetables etc., without which the drugs damage the liver. Most children taken into care by the FOSC are screened. Access to a CD4 machine at hospital is expensive though.

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The woman on the left is a grandmother whose dead children have left her two grandchildren, who are cared for by FOSC because her house is too small for all three. The woman on the right divorced her husband and farms 1.1 acres. How will she pay for her children's education?

Once on the street addiction to benzine mixed with paint solvent, a sense of independence, the camaraderie of the gang, the ability to earn limited cash often outweigh the discomfort, disease, and the brutality. Girls find that they can survive through prostitution. The longer a child is on the street the more difficult it is for him or her to reintegrate with family and school life. Even if an older street child would like to reintegrate the training, which would allow him to survive economically, is too expensive.



Older boys share a meal of sheema, the white maize in the box, and sweet potato leaves. The water bottle probably contains solvent. On the right three younger street children with an older man at night.

2.3 The age of street children.

Some are very young indeed, born on the street because their mothers are already street children. If possible the babies of street children are taken from their mothers and put into care.³ Blind people live on the street and their children live there from birth. Young street children are often appealing, but when they reach adolescence become less so. They may then go through a second rejection when the people who had supported them find themselves winding up the car window. Some of the older street children are really not children at all. Some have survived prison.

³ We visited one of these orphanages. It was very simple. I thought it was excellent. There were lots of very nice carers. In fact it was delightful. The children seemed very happy. I could not imagine that the equivalent in the UK would have been anything like as nice.

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3.0 *The Friends of Street Children at Kitwe. (FOSC)*

The FOSC was started by a local priest, who has since left the area. The workers are all local Zambians. They are incredibly dedicated. There are two prongs to Friends of Street Children's approach to the problem: The **outreach programme** and the **reintegration programme**.

3.1 *The Outreach Programme.*



The Outreach Programme: street teaching. Some of these are children of blind people

The outreach programme aims to count and collect data on the street children, gain their trust and either reintegrate them with their families directly, or persuade them to leave the street for one of the half way houses. In order to establish a link the outreach workers patrol the streets daily, talking to the children. Twice a week they give classes in the street and three times a week run literacy classes. They go out at night to meet street children at least once a week. The FOSC and the town council run an office/clinic next to the library manned by staff and a nurse where children can go for help and for health complaints.



Street Teaching for older boys at Destroy Corner: The older boy struggles with his two times table. Some sleep it off. One inhales solvent

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Even if they do not persuade them to leave the street, contact with the street-workers is important to the children. Right. Zacharia in yellow is an ex street child, now street volunteer. He acts as a minder, protecting street workers like Meya (right) from disruptive or violent boys.

We were very impressed by the dedication and skill of the outreach staff. The latent and sometimes overt violence of the older boys, the hideous grime and poverty, the filth in which they live, make the walks through the streets of Kitwe and its market gruelling. The outreach staff are gentle but firm. Meya, the woman, who does the street teaching, seemed to be particularly gifted. The dedication and at times bravery of the street workers is moving. The sight of the young children being taught on the street is touching. Nevertheless this is only the first part of the process of returning a child to its family.



3.2 Reintegration.

A seedling is planted at Kawama

The children need of their own volition to leave the street as soon as possible and be sheltered at facilities like those we built at Kawama while the FOSC locate their families. Many of the children will also need time off the street in order to dry out and be rehabilitated before being rejoined with their families. It may take time to persuade the family to take them back.

At the moment the FOSC rents two houses in Kitwe, one for girls and one for boys. We visited both of these. They are impressive. The children seem very happy. The one for boys at Chibusa had a big garden where the boys grow vegetables, breed rabbits and chickens and have a banana plantation.

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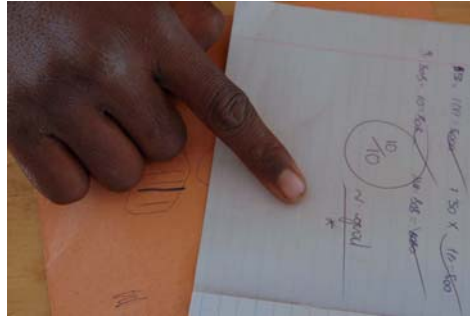
The garden at Kawama should soon be as productive as this one at Kibusha home

The chickens they raise are a particularly important part of their economy and provide the main source of meat. The children are taught skills like gardening, rug making, and bead threading. The aim is to return them to their families as soon as possible, but since the families often rejected the child, rebuilding the relationship takes time. The aim of the Kawama site where we built two dormitories is to bring all the elements of reintegration together making it no longer necessary to have the two rented houses.



Planting and teaching at Kawama

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3.3 How successful are FOSC?

The number of street children is difficult to track and varies. FOSC reckons that there are between 150 and 250 children living on the streets of Kitwe at anyone time. Given the levels of poverty in the Copperbelt townships it is surprising that there are not more. Last year FOSC managed to reintegrate 85 children, though 12 have subsequently come back onto the street.



3.4 Long term reintegration.

If he has not acquired skills a child's reintegration is threatened by the same problems, which sent him on to the street in the first place. Technical education is relatively expensive. Some of the best schools are some distance away, which adds boarding to the cost. A term at the Mobile Mission, considered to be one of the best schools, costs 1.2million kwacha or about £150. It is hardly surprising that at least some of the children who have rejoined their families end up on the street again. One important element in the Kawama plan is to build and equip workshops to teach the children skills⁴ with which they can earn a living.

⁴ Many of the boys we talked to wanted to become tailors. There are several tailoring shops in the market where men with sewing machines cut out and make suits of traditional African design of the colourful cotton prints, which now come from China. One imagines that being able to repair mobile phones, computers, cars as well as plumbing, electrical installation, and driving would also be valuable.

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3.5 Kawama.

The kitchen in one of the two dormitories built by Romilly

We were shown a rough sketch of the plan for the Kawama site. It includes dormitories like the ones we have built, classrooms like the one built there by a British school. Local children would be invited to go to school there too, so that street children could mix with ordinary children. The plan also showed workshops for skills training, vegetable gardens, chicken sheds, fish ponds, and an indoor games room. Oddly there was no provision for a football pitch.

At the moment the FOOSC work from 5 different locations. They would still need the town centre drop in office/clinic but Kawama could reduce the number of sites to 2 and have a significant impact on time wasted travelling between sites and their vehicle fuel bill.



3.6 The buildings at Kawama.

The lunch in one of Romilly's dormitories

We visited the Kawama site twice. Our buildings looked brand spanking new. As well as shower rooms and bedrooms each has staff accommodation, a kitchen and a large tiled living room with sofas, armchairs, a dining table and chairs.

By the time that we arrived there were only 10 boys there for a capacity of 30 because FOOSC have been unable to find adequate staff. At the moment the boys are being taught by one of the carers, Susy, who is by training a dietician. I felt that they were functioning on a skeleton crew.

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A bedroom at one of Romilly's dormitories in Kawama.

The borehole has not yet been connected to the plumbing system so they are using mains water.

The lack of a perimeter wall means that others come and go as they like. I saw people from the adjoining village helping themselves to the water. The first day that we arrived there were 10 boys there, the next day there were 7 because 3 had decided to go back to the street. Two of these returned having rendered themselves insensible with glue and having been beaten up.



Moses and his barrow at the market.

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4.0 Post Script: Kawaza Village

Children dancing in the village

Kawaza village is where we built the two classrooms for the primary school and is, about halfway between two of RPS Safari Camps.

Before we left for Kawaza we had tea with Jo Pope. She was said very clearly that Romilly's first donation of £12000 had completely changed what she had been able to achieve at Kawaza. It gave others the confidence to invest large sums and set the ball rolling. Last year they received \$100,000. This year they are set to receive \$200,000.

We met the head master, David. He proudly showed how they had been able to double the number of children attending the school, and raise the age at which they left school. We attended a class. The children sang for, us which was very moving.



*These boys had volunteered for extra English on Saturday morning.
Teacher: 'Can any body give me a sentence using 'your'?'
Thomas (left): 'I keeled your neighbours cheekin'*

We spent the night in Kawaza village. We stayed in a mud hut. The village women danced for us. It was really great fun. The difference between the atmosphere in the rural village and that of the townships was extraordinary. In the rural villages there are no signs of wealth. The fields are cultivated by hand. They have no mobile phones, no telephones and no television so they have little idea how poor they are.

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The houses contain nothing, but provided the rains come and provided they are not badly flooded there is enough food. Ominously the rains come later every year and last year brought floods. Their culture and their village life appear to remain intact. They seemed to be genuinely relaxed and happy. They appeared much, much happier than those in the townships around Kitwe, where there sense of poverty and desperation is oppressive, and infinitely happier looking than many going to work on the London underground.



Mining township roof



Village roof