

REFLECTIONS FROM MY TRIP TO KENYA

A vision of encouragement and hope



“I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong hills.” That was the first sentence I heard from the movie *Out of Africa*, based on the autobiographic book by Karen Blixen. And that was how I became interested to go to Africa, and Kenya specifically.

Over the last 10 over years, I have visited my good friend Gabriel Teo in Idsowe, a village 200 km north of Mombasa, the port city of Kenya a few times, and most recently this July with a group of friends. Gabriel has lived 17 years in Idsowe, and he founded Tana River Life Foundation (TRLF), a charitable organization in 2006 to carry out long-term integrated human development programmes in this area of rural communities, especially among the marginalized and economically disadvantaged.

And it was during my recent July trip that I found many occasions to be optimistic and hopeful. I got to know many young people who have benefited from the TRLF’s programmes and I am very impressed and heartened to see how they are living their lives to the fullest and determined to make the best out of opportunities they are presented with.

MUSA (Moses) – I came to know Musa several years ago. Back then, he was taking an electrical course with the aid from TRLF. He was always friendly and respectful, deeply appreciative of assistance he was getting. When I met him during this trip, he had since become a certified electrician for the village and surrounding area and has recently married. I see that he is a responsible hardworking young man who is making a decent living and with his earnings and his time. He has helped to repair his mother’s house so that she can have a more comfortable living environment.

In addition, he built his own house from scratch and he is hopeful that in time he can make his house even better (from a house made from mud to a concrete house). What is even more encouraging is that he is giving back to his community by becoming a volunteer with the foundation, guiding and leading the youths and young people who are now the beneficiaries of the foundation. During the trip, he opened his home to us and introduced us to his family. I am happy to see a confident young man who has benefited from the foundation’s assistance and chosen a path to build his own life as well as those living in his community.



Youths with Gabriel Teo of TRLF

MALINDI – Malindi is a young man who recently completed his “O” level equivalent education with the help of TRLF. He comes from a small village Maziwa and led us on a tour of his village, invited us to his house and introduced us to his mother and siblings. His father passed away while he was still in primary school. With the help from the foundation, while still in school, he repaired and completed his family house. And he worked on his family farm to produce vegetables and with the sale, he managed to save and buy furniture and furnishings for the house so that his mother can live comfortably. Come September, Malindi will start his course in masonry and building technology in a training center in Mombasa. I am hopeful that this young man is going to become a responsible adult and is able to give back to his community as well.

These 2 individuals, among many others, left a deep impression in me and despite the many physical inconveniences (no electricity some days, no running water some days, long bus rides on not-so-smooth terrain, old and poorly maintained guesthouse) I enjoyed my trip to this little village Idsowe and TRLF and to find pockets of life and hope in other parts of the world – far away from the comfortable big city of Singapore.



Kindergarten teacher with the children in school

TRLF is presently building an integrated community center – Emmaus centre project (ECP) on a 12-acre plot of land in Idsowe village donated by the local community. Owned and managed by TRLF, the center will house a nursery and primary school, a library, an IT facility, a mini-auditorium, cafeteria and hostels, an entrepreneurship center for youth, sports facilities and the TRLF administrative center. The ECP is intended to become a model human resource development center promoting learning and sustainable community development in Tana River County.

Focus Pilates Singapore will be donating S\$5,000 to support the Emmaus Centre Project. We are excited to be part of this journey to build individual lives and thereby entire communities!

You can read more about TRLF and Focus Pilates' contribution by visiting the following websites:

<http://tanariverlife.wordpress.com/focus/>
www.tanariverlifefoundation.org