

A primary school at Karambi - from Dorothy Nelson in Rwanda, Saturday 31 October 2009.



I would like to tell you about a school I visited last week. Karambi is a little village a long way from the main road. The motard didn't know it and we had to stop to ask the way a few times. As Daniel said it was over the other side of a big mountain, which was interesting from the back of the moto. I was warmly greeted by Jean-Pierre the Headteacher, who held my hand through most of my visit and was clearly delighted that a VSO volunteer had finally come to see his

school. He proudly showed me the sapling trees surrounding the school and pointed out that there really are 500 of them to match up to the one child, one tree initiative. He apologised for taking me into a classroom to chat before the tour, but he has no office or staffroom, so it was that or the yard and a couple of hundred children desperate to see and touch this weird-looking woman. I am pretty sure I was the first muzungu in the life of many of them.



We went into each of the four classrooms that comprise the school. Each holds about 45 children, just. The only light comes through simple unglazed windows with wooden shutters. In windy or



very sunny weather these are closed on at least one side, making it quite hard to see what is going on. The walls are rough stone and the floor pretty much like the red dust yard outside. The outside walls are made of mud brick.



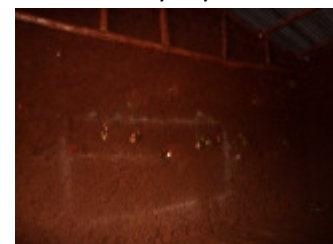
Teachers have put some pictures and diagrams on the walls in an attempt to brighten them up but they are desperately short of resources. As Jean-Pierre said, they have more money for town schools.

Primary schools in Rwanda have six grades so I was wondering where the other two were. We climbed a slope, past the one new room being built ready for January, to a half finished



church structure. Inside was a grade 5 class. The floor is (deliberately as a design feature I think) made of very rough stone in the half that has been laid, which was fairly treacherous to walk on and impossible for children to balance desks. It was very dark. I met the wife of the pastor of the church who seemed welcoming though bewildered by my presence.

That left one class unaccounted for. We walked off to the village, about 500m away. Lo and behold, another church, equally dark and ill-equipped for teaching. When I took out my camera, Jean-Pierre offered to bring in a blackboard so that you would be able to see that it is a classroom. I have artificially brightened these pictures so that you can see a little of what is there.





We went on a tour of the village, meeting the president of the village committee which is partly responsible for the upkeep of the school and also visited a little dye workshop, where the leader of the co-operative demonstrated to me how to make tie-and-dye cloth. An inquisitive little boy attached himself to us. Jean-Pierre was very keen

that I should take pictures of the modern buildings in the village.



We had a small staff meeting at the end of my visit. As usual, the teachers asked for help with learning English. They all seemed keen to improve the school and were very friendly and welcoming, so I wanted very much to help if at all possible. I will go out there again to do training.

I also dream of doing some kind of school partnership. If anyone wants to check out Global Schools Partnership, administered through VSO or one of the myriad other organisations that help with this kind of thing, or indeed just set up something informal, it would be fantastic.

[The Global Schools Partnerships website is at <http://www.britishcouncil.org/globalschools>

It includes full details, with application forms for grants for reciprocal visits of teachers etc – Ed.]