

Week ending 5.2.10

This really is the week ending 5.2.10, apologies for last week's oversight and any subsequent confusion. I must have been getting excited about my planned monthly skype call to Dale; a bit of an anticlimax as the connection was appalling- we had an SMS conversation instead.

The conference of Monday and Tuesday we hope will prove useful, as we coerced Nuha into the direction we intended to take. It was good to hear from the employers/ VSO's partners here what they felt about their volunteers – somebody appreciates us. The hardest part was to keep a straight face when one speaker struggled to pronounce 'o' as anything other than 'uh' and 'u' as 'er' when he repeatedly used the word 'focus'. It was surprisingly tiring – but I suppose we could blame the sea air, the conference was held on the beach in an open walled, palm roofed sand floored restaurant area. Agendas, unsurprisingly, overran but I did get a dusk swim in the sea on the 1st February and reflected that a year previously I had been one of the few staff to make it through the snow to man a school with 1-2% of its pupils when I was supposed to have started my working role in Rwanda. I did think that maybe The Gambia was a better option than Rwanda; swimming in a refreshing sea would have been unlikely at 2000m above sea level. The schedule did mean that I failed to run my rugby training session in Serrekunda, but the lieutenants I had recruited last week did fill in without persuasion.

Rugby was top of the agenda on Wednesday as I met with the Vice President and Margaret Medland, an altruistic Brit who runs a charitable organisation when she visits a couple of times a year. The promotion of Tag rugby is one of her projects, and we met to discuss the best use of the arrival of 3 junior coaches from Kent. I heard the 'talking up' of the VP again about the intentions for rugby in the Gambia while Margaret was asking for the paperwork, that was left with them last March, which will allow them to access further support from the RFU. Anyway we have more of an idea of a schedule to utilise the coaches; the unfortunate thing is their arrival coincides with some of the visit of Mum and Mike.

Sport was still high on my agenda on Thursday when the staff of the College were summoned to listen to the University Vice Chancellor assure us that the amalgamation of the institutions would make things better for all of us and the Gambia as they would build a 'world class' university. We were briefed to arrive early; I refused expecting an hour delay but took some reading material – an Official document outlining the Ministry for Youth and Sport development's plans for the last 10 years. I didn't have time to read it as the gaffer entered on time! However, I did sit centre front row so he could see the aforementioned document (he's the one who doesn't want a sports field where he could create his graduation hall now suggesting it might be too noisy to have students participating in sport close to the Chancery!). I didn't come away with any further confidence; the guy liked his own voice and managed to repeat some soundbytes 3 times (eg, to lift Gambia out of poverty {with graduation halls!?!?!}) and sounded a bit like Tony Blair of the mid nineties. He even proposed that the agricultural students and all lecturers should have a 20m x 20m farm patch to generate more income for the University, backed up by the President's policy (we incidentally learned that he is the Chancellor) that the people should 'go back to the land', to stop urban drift. So what are the chances of having a sports field, and world class university, when we all be hoeing the land? I really want to tell him what I think, backed up by the sports policy, but I don't want to put the Head of the school of Education in an embarrassing situation – so I am learning diplomacy.

After dropping the kids at school on Friday, I made a point of making a visit to the hotel to welcome the new volunteer arrivals. They look incredibly 'white' – pasty and unhealthy as though they haven't been out in weeks. But to draw parallels I must; the volunteers that arrived with us, and the experienced ones here, attended their 'leavers workshop' on Friday also; so soon we will be the only ones left and feel incredibly ancient compared to the next newcomers.