

# DESTINY GARDEN SCHOOL

## August 2012 Report

by  
Simon Robertshaw



... I had arranged this trip for many months in 2011, and the chance to have a holiday in Malindi for a week and then to visit Destiny Garden School in Mombasa was an opportunity I wasn't going to miss!

This was the culmination of many months of planning, and its origin was at a meeting that took place in the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester where I met Judy Roper and Alison Lea at the end of October 2010.

I was asked to film the children at King's School Junior Division, Macclesfield performing a song that Alison had written to raise money for DGS and it was then that I found out that both Judy and I had grown up in Kenya (albeit at different times). I had just visited Kenya in 2008 so I was really up for another trip and I approached Judy saying that I would love to visit DGS, as I had just started sponsoring one of the children in class 6, Elisha Omondi.

I had met up with Judy on a number of occasions prior to the trip, and just before leaving, I was given 15 tracksuits and a number of wall charts to take to the children in our luggage. As well as this, a date had been set for Michelle my girlfriend and me to go to the school where we would interview Jacob, take footage of the children and their activities to provide High Definition (HD) video for the DGS website and to make a film for the sponsors.

On the 20th August 2012, Michelle Adamson and myself arrived in Mombasa, where we were greeted extremely warmly by Jacob, the founder and Director of Destiny Garden School and his driver and assistant Boniface (where we were whisked off to eat at the Mombasa Law Courts no less).

Arriving in Mombasa



Eating ugali + mbuzi at the Law Courts in Mombasa



... Michelle and I were then driven from Mombasa to Malindi with Jacob and Boniface, a drive of about two and a half hours to the Coral Key resort, just off the coastal road outside Malindi. We then gave Jacob the suitcase with the tracksuits and wall charts for the children before saying goodbye, and also gave him the money that was to be used for paying for a special lunch for the whole school when we returned to Mombasa on the 29th of August.



After spending a very relaxing week in Malindi however, we heard from a couple of Australians on the day we were to leave the resort, that there had been a great deal of violence in central Mombasa because the Kenyan Security Services had shot dead the Muslim cleric Aboud Rogo and there had been extensive rioting. After phoning Jacob (and phoning the British Foreign Office - who weren't any help!) he reassured us that it had only been sporadic outbursts in small pockets of the city and picked us up some two hours later...





We spent the night with Jacob and his wife Brenda, and in the morning we were driven to Destiny Garden School.

As we arrived, the children at the school poured out of the classrooms to meet us, it felt as though we were in a presidential motorcade!



We were shown around the school complex by Jacob, and we met Victor, the school manager who introduced us to the DGS teachers and each classroom in turn. I tried to make a point of saying hello to each one of the children, as they had been so very kind and given us such a fantastic welcome!



On our tour of the school, Victor explained to us what work had recently been done at the school, having had new solar panels, a new water tank and three sinks.



However, I was quite disappointed because having recently paid for the sinks to be installed, Victor told us that the water pump was broken and that it hadn't been fixed because the maintenance worker wasn't full time and therefore was going to be awhile before it would be back in operation. At the Destiny Children charity ball in aid of DGS, I pointed this out as a really fundamental flaw that while it was great that the children now had an opportunity to wash their hands from a proper sink, it was practically useless if there wasn't a full time maintenance person who could be on hand to fix this type of problem and to assure a constant flow of water. Added to the fact that the well was also not functioning as it was broken, it was fortuitous that the water tank held enough water to have enough fresh water for the whole school for the day at least.





As to how practical paying for a full time maintenance person would be I'm not entirely sure, but at least there should be the funds available and someone who could be brought in quickly when extremely important utilities are in a state of disrepair, so that the problem could be dealt with promptly and economically.

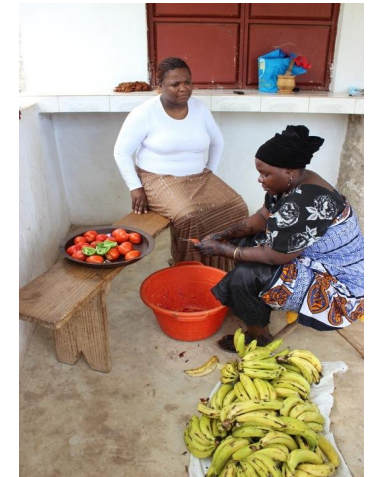
Could this be taken up at the next committee meeting?

The schedule for our day at the school was to involve us filming the children and the teachers as though it was a normal day at the school, as this day had been specially arranged as it was still in the school holidays (I believe it was a 70% turnout!) so we felt very privileged that everyone had made such a special effort on our behalf.

I had a Canon 600D camera that takes HD film, so Michelle and I took as much footage as we could of the children being taught in their classrooms, with Michelle documenting it with photographs...



The preparation for the meal for the whole school had been extremely well organised and the new kitchen was really put to the test. A goat was slaughtered earlier on in the day as meat is not something the children get to eat regularly at all, and bananas for dessert was also a treat for them. This was a real surprise, as we thought that bananas were readily available as a staple part of every Kenyan child's (and adult's) diet.



The new kitchen





All the children had been waiting extremely patiently for their food, and it was quite overwhelming to realise that for approximately £100 we literally fed the whole school. We really do take such things as a normal healthy and well balanced diet for granted back in England, and I was very humbled with how calm and well behaved the children were throughout the meal session.

It's also a testament to Jacob and Victor and the fantastic staff at DGS that they work extremely hard to maintain discipline and encourage respect amongst the children.





Happy children!



The tracksuits that had been donated by Abercrombie (UK) that we had brought with us in our luggage were shared amongst the Nursery girls who had participated in the National Music Festival, and some of the children that had been picked out by the staff that were in more need than others (ie. needed clothing) and again, an orderly queue was formed of very excited children.







One of Jacob's visions for the school is to achieve academic excellence which to us, was really obvious as we had witnessed a class being taken and the standard of teaching by the teachers was excellent. However, Jacob seems to be taking a two pronged approach towards propelling the school to greater heights, and that is to create a 'super sports' school, which also encourages the children to excel in sports, albeit primarily at football. With a boys and girls football team they are surely on to a winner.





300 keepy uppies!

The DGS boys' team + girls' team



warming up the teams

Jacob showing us how it's done



Over here..!



It was time to carry out what we had planned all along to do, and Jacob and Victor gathered all the school to the large tree on the side of the football pitch where we interviewed Jacob with the children surrounding him.



After Michelle had interviewed Jacob, we were introduced to Faith Chari, who is in KG 3 and is sponsored by Michelle. Michelle was extremely interested in talking with Faith, and took this rare opportunity to ask her how her education was going and congratulated her for coming third in her class that month.



And so it came to the end of our amazing (and intense!) day at Destiny Garden School, but Jacob still had a surprise for me. After we said our goodbyes and thank you's to the staff and children, Jacob told me that my sponsored student Elisha Omondi (class 6) had not been at the school that day, and even though it wasn't compulsory, he wanted to know why he hadn't turned up even though he knew that we were there.



Jacob suggested that we visit him and his family as he didn't live far from the school, and was on the way back to Mombasa.

We found ourselves being led to Elisha's home where we were introduced to his mother and brothers and sisters, and as this was a surprise visit we were all a bit nervous. It was totally eye opening being in his home as it was literally one tiny 4m x 5m space that had been separated by a blanket that made the distinction between the bedroom and living room and kitchen.



It was overwhelming how poor his surroundings were, with the lack of sanitation and basic hygiene, yet here was a young boy doing extremely well at school academically and an upstanding member of his class. That really blew me away.

I have nothing but admiration for what Destiny Garden School has set out to achieve for its future, and I was extremely privileged to have been able to visit the school and see first hand the developments (and problems) that the school encounters on a daily basis. There is so much more work to be done but so much has been done already, and the evidence is right there to see.

What was also incredible was to encounter the spirit of the school which you can't feel from looking at a DGS report, so I would encourage those people that would like to go who either sponsor or support the school financially (or other) to discover the brilliant things that go on there.

Finally, I wish to thank Judy Roper for all the support and encouragement she has given me over the last two years in fulfilling another trip of a lifetime. I plan to go back to the school in 2014/15 so it has really helped lay the groundwork for the work I have ahead to help the school again.



Jacob, Boniface, me and Victor relaxing with a Tusker or two in Mombasa after the visit