

LANGALANGA SCHOLARSHIP FUND

THE PATRON'S IMPRESSIONS

by
The Earl of Carnarvon

"Fiona and I have recently returned from a fascinating, inspiring and truly memorable trip to the Rift Valley in Kenya to see the schools and meet the scholars of the Langalanga Scholarship Fund. I say inspiring because whilst so much of media 'take' on Africa is of disaster, poverty and misery we saw a success story which is changing young people's lives and with them their country's future. Of course we saw great poverty and a dearth of resources compared to the UK but wherever we went we saw hope, enthusiasm and an enormous desire to learn, perhaps characteristics the UK population has derided for too long.

Parents know well that a good education is the finest gift that they can give their children but, of course for most in Africa, this is but a dream. For a lucky few in the Gilgil area of Kenya's Rift Valley it is a reality thanks to the work of the Fund.

The Fund awards 20-22 scholarships per year for secondary education. We visited eight of the twenty primary schools which are the source of these scholars. Most of these schools have excellent buildings, fresh water tanks, libraries, magnificent staffrooms, administration blocks and sports facilities provided by the Kariandusi School Trust (www.kariandusi.co.uk) which is linked to the Langalanga Scholarship Fund by virtue of having Harry & Alison Vialou Clark as the powerhouse behind the activities of both charities.

We arrived in Gilgil by light aircraft and were struck by the green and verdant landscape. This was in marked contrast to the semi-desert conditions a few weeks before after two years of damaging drought. The flight has a romantic "Out of Africa" appeal and on arrival at the grass airstrip we had a warm welcome from Harry & Alison in their friendly old Landrover so essential for travel on Kenya's roads and tracks.

We were soon off to visit Langalanga Primary School and our first view of education in Kenya. The immediate impression was of simple but well organised school buildings, a garden with trees and feeling someone cared. Above all, quiet discipline in the class rooms. In Kenya education is the surest way out of poverty. There is no welfare state so even less gifted children want to do their best. Teachers were looking after class sizes of about 50 students and, maybe because of this high number, were using methods of some 20-30 years ago in the UK. Effective none the less! Rural electrification is patchy in the area and so schools have to make the best of the old techniques of 'chalk and talk'. From what I could see of the syllabus for Maths and English those that did well in the national KCPE exams were up to the equivalent, or better, of their peers in the UK. The brightest can quickly catch up in computing skills as they move to secondary and tertiary education. Books are scarce but what few there are were put to full use. Writing and word skills are taught in detail on the blackboard so that before anyone even thinks of using a PC they are well able to write in their own hand. English is every pupil's third language.

Kenya's mobile networks are amongst the most sophisticated in the world. The ability to send cash payments electronically across the network with the Mpesa system was a great surprise. Once out of school many people have a mobile phone so a shortage of technology in school is not necessarily a barrier to future success.

Murindati Primary School is in a more remote area reached by a drive around and through small holdings. The tracks meander round people's houses and crops in a rather chaotic and unplanned way but finally we came to an imposing set of buildings with central columns with the motto "From Here We Rise" painted on the white arch above the front door. We were met by Mr Muya, the Headmaster, a strong character who gave us an interesting talk on the current challenges in education in this region of Kenya. One major issue is the lack of an affordable day, mixed secondary school for the hundreds of children that complete their primary education from all local schools in the area each year. The Kariandusi School Trust is trying to address this. There is also a serious lack of technical college facilities for those who are not up to university education. We met some of the Langalanga scholars who teach at primary level

before going on to their tertiary education. This is a system that works well and provides a much needed extra teaching resource.

Next day we went to Karunga Primary School for the more formal ceremonies and presentations of our trip. Karunga originally had very sparse facilities but the Kariandusi School Trust is building a modern quadrangle of buildings in an attractive setting. Fiona and I were part of the "breaking ground" ceremony for the new administration block. We arrived up a dirt track having passed through a small shanty village and were met by a group of beaming mothers who covered us in garlands, danced and ululated us into the school yard. What a welcome! - how seriously this group of mums are taking the improvement to their kids' school! We met Sammy Mbugua, the Headmaster, who must be one of mankind's most enthusiastic head teachers! There were VIPs present including the local Chief, and the Chairman of Nakuru County Council. We were given a presentation of music, dance and dramatics from different ages within the school and the local Church leader gave us a powerful hell-fire sermon from his Bible. We met some very bright Langalanga scholars who are now going on to serious courses in tertiary education. Many have achieved very high marks in the secondary school certificate and are destined for universities and very good degrees.

On our last day of exploration we headed up to Karuri Primary School which is a long way up the Turasha River valley in Central Province. The scenery is stunning and we could see why the colonial English liked their fishing lodges in the area. The school is above the river and clings to some steep ground so that there is only room for volleyball rather than football. We were presented with a rather expert display from the kids. There is a very well organised library and Harry pointed out the fresh water tank provided by a generous benefactor. There is no clean mains water so the specially designed water tanks are vital for the schools existence. The school has produced many Langalanga scholars despite its remote location.

In the eleven years since its foundation the Langalanga Scholarship Fund's trustees have awarded 198 secondary school scholarships to the bright and poor. It is heart-warming to learn of the successes of the scholars. The first boy graduated in 2009 with the top 1st Class degree in Electronics and Electrical Engineering from Nairobi University and now has a good job. This feat alone, of going bare foot on mud floors to being up with the best in the world in technology, shows why the Langalanga project is such a success and must be supported. The Fund can boast of three qualified nurses; three certified public accountants; a heating and ventilation engineer; a trainee doctor; two with 2/1 degrees and many others. None of this would have been possible without sponsor and donor support. My thanks go to so many of you.

Please consider sponsoring a Langalanga Scholar or kindly giving a donation to the Fund to support tertiary education.

Geordie Carnarvon"