

Stefan Ulrich– Nairobi, Kenya Summer 2015

This summer I travelled to Nairobi, Kenya as part of a volunteering project from Pembroke. A group of us, five undergraduates from a variety of classes, fundraised throughout the year and then travelled over for four weeks of our summer. The charity we were visiting is called Maji Mazuri and currently features a Pembroke alumnus on its board of trustees.

Maji Mazuri is an economic development charity which was founded by a current professor at the University of Nairobi, Dr Wanjiku Kironyo in 1984. Currently the charity runs several projects in and around Nairobi: The Headstart primary school and Youth Group in Mathare Valley slum in the heart of Nairobi; The Kaserani Children's Home for special needs education and a secondary school and farm in Kiserian just outside of Nairobi.

After a quick lay over and 12 hour tour of Dubai, we spent our first week touring the projects and getting used to our new surroundings as well as the hustle and bustle of Nairobi. Driving into the corrugated iron shacks of Mathare slum, gazing out over the rusty sea they form or our reception by the children of the Headstart primary school were incredibly striking and memorable experiences. We very quickly settled in with our foster mother, a lovely single mother called Esther, who is a friend of the charity. During this first week we also got to see a few attractions around Nairobi such as the AFEW giraffe sanctuary and parts of the centre city.

Over the next three weeks we got more and more involved with the projects of the charity. My personal highlights were helping out with physiotherapy for the special needs children in the Children's centre and teaching science in the Headstart School in Mathare. One morning on our drive over to the school, usually a one and half hour trip in the crippling Nairobi traffic, it was sprung on us that we were to teach a class. Liam and I decided that we would take on a "ask us anything about science or how the world works" lesson with a group of forty 12-13 year olds. We hoped that between a physical and biological second year Natural scientist we should have everything covered. We were amazed at the energy and knowledge of some of the kids and felt that our much more open approach to teaching science would help inspire more minds than the wrote learning of the Kenyan system. Hopefully the girl who asked "what do you call someone who studies the stars?" may actually become a cosmologist.

Due to various logistical challenges such as riots and military action as well the visit of Kenya's favourite son Barack Obama, we began to become slightly frustrated with our lack of hands on time at the projects. Fortunately, I believe our biggest contribution to the running of the charity will be the reports we produced for the UK trustees which covered areas such as difficulties with staffing and potential strategy issues. We also advised on areas such as fundraising and website design. We all felt this was a really valuable way of developing and giving back some of the extracurricular skills we had learnt outside of Cambridge.

Overall I felt it was an incredibly valuable experience and gave me an insight into a completely different side of the world from the Cambridge bubble. I thank college very much for helping me with the funding for my trip.