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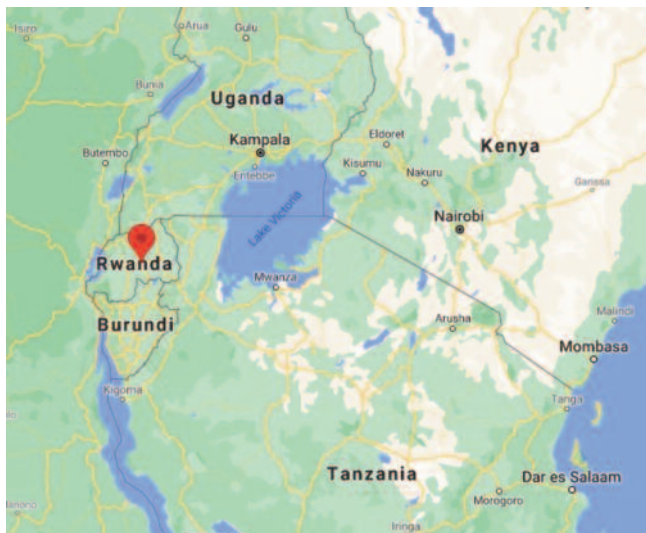
Spring Update 2021

Very Warm Greetings,

I hope this letter finds you well and in good spirits.

I never would have thought that more than a year down the line we would still be so affected by the pandemic.

Rwanda is the most densely populated country in Africa with a population of roughly 13.2 million and a land mass about the size of Wales (which has a population of just over 3 million). The government has exercised tight control of the Covid crisis, and to date 275 people are



known to have died of the disease. The vaccine is now being rolled out. However, as in other countries, the school pupils have missed months and months of their education.

In Tanzania there are no Covid statistics as the country has had difficulty in coming to terms with the existence of the pandemic. On top of that President Magufuli died in mid-March after many rumours about his absence from the public eye. Whether the new President will allow any form of vaccination programme remains to be seen. However, there has been relatively little disruption to education, and the 2021 school year is progressing as usual.

In Rwanda, schools opened across the country on Wednesday 24th February. For those in Primary 1, 2 and 3, they were last in school in March 2020. In the rural areas many had no access to television to watch lessons broadcast by the government, but some, but by no means all, had access to a radio to listen to lessons broadcast on radio.



Our popular radio programmes, 'English with Teacher Katy', were aired again during December. The programmes for P2 and P3 were broadcast twice a week on Radio Rwanda. We got very good feedback from the radio station.

"People are very interested in the lessons. The lessons are very well done with super methodology, and we got a call asking if we can run at least a daily programme."

On return to school every pupil has a temperature check at the school gate each day. Both teachers and pupils are wearing masks, following government advice. That may hinder learning, as a lot depends in language learning on watching the teacher's facial expressions and the movement of the mouth.



The teachers have a huge task after a year of school closure, but using our NOEC books helps them enormously.

The beauty of our NOEC books is that learning is based on the build-up of sentence patterns and structures, and so each sentence pattern is constantly revised and re-used as new ones are introduced. This means that the teachers can easily go back to earlier parts of the book and quickly revise until they are comfortable that most of the pupils are ready to pick up where they left off nearly a year ago.

In the government textbooks, the teaching of English is based on topics such as Greetings, Health, Traditional Tools etc. Each topic is riddled with different sentence patterns, and many of those are never met again once that topic is 'done' and the pupils move on to new topics. I have written to government education officials many times about this approach.



**New Original English Course
for Rwandan Primary Schools**



I mentioned in my last report that the return to school this year has seen the introduction of the government's new policy that all subjects and lessons are to be taught in English from Primary 1. In previous years, from 2011, Primary 1 to Primary 3 had all their lessons taught in the mother-tongue of Kinyarwanda with English taught as a foreign language for seven periods a week, and in Primary 4 the medium of education changed to English. The teaching now using English for all subjects from Primary 1 will be a challenge as many teachers of Primary 1 to Primary 3, especially in rural primary schools, do not have sufficient command of English in order to be able to teach in it.

Dr Timothy Williams (Adjunct Professor in Global Social Work at Boston College and Researcher for Effective States and Inclusive Development) has overseen the evaluation of our work in Rwanda, and his latest article about the change of language in Rwandan schools for World Politics Review is excellent and most interesting. He has given me permission to share his work. 'Research suggests that children learn best if they spend the first few years of their schooling grasping foundational and complex concepts using the language that is also spoken in their homes. The government's most recent decision appears to reject this evidence – the same evidence it had previously embraced – potentially disadvantaging hundreds of thousands of students during the foundational years of their education.' The whole article is well worth reading and can be found using this link to World Politics Review: <https://tinyurl.com/3u43a9bk>

Why Did Rwanda Abruptly Change the Language in Schools—Again?

Timothy P. Williams · Monday, Feb. 22, 2021

Children in Rwanda finally started heading back to school last fall, after months of learning from home. It was a bit of bright news for the country, given that schools had been closed since March due to the coronavirus pandemic. But now, many students are facing a brand-new challenge: Having to learn in an unfamiliar language.

Rwanda's government has begun implementing a controversial language change that requires all primary schools to instruct their students in English, rather than in Kinyarwanda, the national language spoken by nearly everyone in the country. However, only 88 percent of the primary school teachers who are affected by the change know English, while even fewer of their pupils do. A 2018 evaluation of the English abilities of third graders found only 16 percent of them to be proficient. These figures are likely much worse outside the capital, Kigali, in rural areas where most families live...



Primary-school students in a classroom in Eastern Province, Rwanda, 2002 (photo by Tim Williams).

In this new context, the use of our NOEC books could provide real help. Teacher Vestine at Gasabo primary school teaches social science, which she now has to teach in English when she was used to teaching it in the mother tongue of Kinyarwanda. Vestine now uses the NOEC Teacher's Books to familiarize herself with the language and particularly how to ask questions and how to help her pupils to answer her questions. So, already the NOEC books have proved their worth to Vestine now that she has to use English as the medium of instruction for social science. The books could benefit so many others.



Of course, the continued use of the NOEC books by teachers who teach English as a subject has already proved to be successful.

After Emmy Nyirigira, the Chair of our trustees in Rwanda (where we operate as Support to Primary Education Rwanda – SPER), met the Minister of State for Primary and Secondary Education, Mr Gaspard Twagirayezu, in November, my colleagues Damian and Ivan had a meeting with the Minister in December. In attendance were the Minister's adviser, and a representative from the Rwanda Education Board (REB). The meeting was summarized by the adviser in an email circulated to all who were present:

Dear all,

On behalf of Hon. Minister of State in charge of Primary and Secondary Education, I am pleased to share the following key action points of the meeting for your consideration and action:

1. The meeting recommended that REB looks through Katy's feedback documents and respond on them and consequently conduct a technical debate between REB and SPER on the feedback in a week's time. To include the 'New Original English Course (NOEC) books to deliver the teaching of English language in schools and the teaching methodology among others.

2. It was emphasized that the Ministry of Education is open to discussions to learn from available expertise.

3. To arrange visit to schools in which SPER operates to see SPER's progress.

The meeting was concluded by re-emphasizing that SPER's support, like any other partners in Education, is necessary towards how things can be improved in CBC (competence based curriculum) as a learning method.

Regards,

Since then, there began major restructuring within REB, and the schools remained closed. We are now chasing for progress.

The good news is that the primary schools are now open and education can get back on track, and our teachers and pupils are well supported by the NOEC books and by the regular visits of Damian and Ivan. A recent visit to Claude's Primary 4 class at Gasabo Primary School is in the photograph below with everyone nearly unrecognizable in their masks!



In Tanzania, Her Excellency President Samia Suluhu Hassan took office in March following the death of President Magufuli. In her first main speech she delighted everyone by requesting a review of the education curricula, as she is aware that many students are not reaching their potential. Not only that but Dr.

Leonard Akwilapo was appointed to be Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Science & Technology.

This is all very good news for Education East Africa. We worked with Dr. Akwilapo when he was a director of the Tanzania Institute of Education and he liked our work and especially our action research and recommendations for change. I am now writing to both Her Excellency the President and to Dr. Akwilapo in the hope that my expertise in primary education in Tanzania and particularly in the teaching and learning of English will be drawn upon.



The Bright pre-primary and primary school under the direction of Loveland Makundi at Njia Panda is thriving. The new school year started in January and there are now 214 pupils. The school is an English-medium school but Swahili is also used.



The classrooms on the middle floor of the school building have been completed, and the classrooms on the top floor of the school building are now very nearly completed, needing just glass in the windows and some paint. Loveland will soon be using the whole building.

One new addition to the school which has caused much excitement is a set of drums. Morning assembly for years and years always included marching to drums. This tradition has waned, but Loveland was keen to restore it for his school. The pupils will be taught various marches by teachers who were trained in them during national service; drumming is something that seems to come naturally to many pupils complete with syncopated rhythms! There are many adults who reminisce that they were never late for school because they didn't want to miss the morning marching.

This has been a difficult year for everyone, but I am grateful beyond words for the donations that have continued to come in to enable our work to keep going. Thank you so very much indeed for your extremely generous support.

With very best wishes,

Katy Allen Mtui MBE

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Self-Sustaining Life**

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