

VISIT TO IMPREZZA ACADEMY, BUSIA, W. KENYA BY POSY STOCKMAN,
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My visit to Imprezza Academy immediately followed that of Chris Hulme, Chairman of Operation Imprezza Trust, which supports the Academy from the UK. The Director and Founder of Imprezza Academy, Catherine Omany, who was recently married to Daron from the USA, kindly hosted me in their new house which is still under construction within the grounds of the Academy – definitely an upgrade on the camp in a very leaky thatched mud hut with minimal facilities, that Richard and I enjoyed for 3 weeks on a previous visit! The climate in the Lake Victoria region was exceptionally challenging this year being very hot and humid after an unusual and unseasonal amount of rain, which washed away many huts in local villages before last Christmas.

I met for the first time the two young men, Edwin and Joshua, who were recruited by Chris and Catherine a couple of years ago and are leading the Agricultural Programme, following the training they were given in Conservation Agriculture. I could see they were very committed and hard-working and have been successfully growing crops using Conservation Agriculture principles for school meals at the Academy, thereby making considerable savings on the cost of food and improving the nutrition of the pupils.

Some of the ground previously used for growing vegetables has recently been requisitioned for new buildings, including a dormitory and a kitchen/dining hall. Because of this, a fertile piece of ground, which is off-site and is watered by a river, is being rented and used to grow crops for school meals. Half has been cultivated adopting Conservation Agriculture principles and half using conventional methods to compare crop yields (it will be several seasons before the Conservation Agriculture methods can be properly compared.) Operation Imprezza has recently purchased a plot of several acres adjoining the Academy, which needs to be fenced to keep neighbours' livestock out before it can be put into production. It is steep and rocky in places with little topsoil but still has the potential to grow drought-resistant crops.

During the week I spent at the Academy, we visited a local farmer who had been impressed by one of the Conservation Agriculture Open Days that the Project Managers held at the Academy. Her farm is a wonderful example of best practice and the family is now reaping the benefits with remarkable crop yields – they are delighted and are excellent ambassadors for Conservation Agriculture within the community. It is our intention that Edwin and Joshua will run more workshops on Conservation Agriculture in the future when they have the time.

A visit to a local agricultural training institute, which has a well-run and established poultry unit, was helpful and informative and they have offered to give on-going support to the Imprezza Agricultural Programme. It is of paramount importance that Edwin and Joshua get some income generating enterprises up and running as soon as possible since the proceeds must eventually fund their wages. With that in mind, we have decided to concentrate on poultry and rabbit production, which necessitates the building of suitable housing. We identified where the agricultural building should be sited – sufficiently far away from the dining hall and dormitories for them not to be affected by offensive smells. We agreed that for optimum security all the livestock should be housed under one roof as there is no risk of

cross-contamination. However, it was impressed upon the whole team the importance of constant attention to hygiene and adequate ventilation to ensure the success of these enterprises. The building will also house an animal feed and tool store and a small office to keep the agricultural department as a compact unit on the campus. Building works will have started soon after my departure and photographs will be sent to monitor progress. I impressed upon Edwin and Joshua the importance of keeping us informed in the UK of their activities with regular reports and photographs. Unfortunately, communication is still difficult at the Academy – there is no electricity yet or wifi – so for them to send emails necessitates a trip of 20 miles to the nearest town. I therefore told them a brief report every two months would be sufficient.

Because of the costs incurred when pupils fall sick, Catherine is very keen to establish a medicinal herb garden to treat common ailments. We had a visit from an old friend, Pastor George from Kisumu, who works for REAP (Rural Extension for Africa's Poor) to advise on where to site this garden – which fortunately can be on the poorest ground - and what herbs should be grown. He has offered to give a day's workshop on how to use the herbs, if there is sufficient interest (which apparently there is) in the local community. Catherine will appoint a couple of the Academy's teachers to attend and be responsible for administering herbal medicine to sick pupils.

I mentioned to Catherine that the school buildings still had no guttering to capture rainwater with tanks for storage, when water is so precious. She explained it was only because of pressures incurred by the rapid expansion of the Academy giving rise to other priorities for the Academy's limited funding, that this job had not yet been undertaken.

This was a productive and useful visit, which enabled me to meet properly Edwin and Joshua and reconnect with the Academy's Agricultural Programme, having been unable to go to Kenya for the last two years.

