



Saturday 18th – 20th March WFP Isaka & Burundian Refugee Camps

Saturday

At last we leave Singida. We have been counting the days since we arrived in this place. It has been the most challenging part of the trip so far. There is nothing worth of note in the town save a few strange rock formations, the internet café is often visited by people looking at sex sites, and I have eaten the same thing for lunch and dinner for a week. I am up early, in the car early and waiting to leave this boring town. As you all know I was hit by Typhoid last week. Not a nice disease and certainly not a pleasant experience. In a funny kind of way it added excitement to the trip.



The memorable Scene Lodge



The Bartender, Kjell, Witness (receptionist) and Elly (our driver)



Singida on the rocks...

WFP Isaka

We travel for 5 hours non stop before having a quick break for lunch and reach another god forsaken town called Isaka. We stop at the WFP food storage depot and find we are staying in staff accommodation which is basically a converted container, and they call it "container house". It is really quite nice and the site has clean water, electricity and a satellite dish. The sole occupant of this site is a young and bright American who has opted to stay in this hardship post for three years and is about to move on to Banda Aceh in Indonesia to get some long overdue social company. It is quite amazing; he has lived alone on compound for three years and is still sane. The upside is it very peaceful, has all mod cons and as it is classified as a hardship (out)post and is really only for singles which not are a party-animal. It qualifies for a week of r & r every six weeks (which is needed to re-charge the batteries). So essentially he can go wherever he wants for up to a week fully paid. Reading between the lines it is a good job but three years is enough. We have a fantastic take away supper and we go to bed early (purely through over eating). Overnight there is a spectacular thunder storm but not much rain, but instead heavy winds and Kevin said the day after that this was the worst thunderstorm he has had during his stay at Isaka.



Kevin & Janet in the compound



The storage tents



On the way to our "Container House"

Sunday

The whole of Sunday is traveling to the refugee camps. The only excitement is when we arrive and realize all three of us have no idea where we are staying? Everyone thought everyone else knew (dorks...). We call the WFP Office and we get asked if we have had a police escort? We have no idea what anyone is talking about. Apparently this is an area of slightly higher risk and a police escort is required for the last leg of the journey. Anyway we are arriving safe and sound and get sent to our accommodation which is quite nice. Nice little houses in a field.

We are peckish having only had a piece of pineapple all day so we eat and go to bed.



Monday, UNHCR & WFP Kasulu

We are up early and go to the office at Kasulu to meet the refugee team (Patricia, Rose, Charles) and other agencies such as UNHCR (Mrs. Bik Lum). We have several small meetings and discuss the latest government directive to stop chopping the trees down for firewood. How the refugees are going to cook is not clear as there are no alternative means of fuel. We make some suggestions like asking the government to install biogas stoves and leave her to her challenges for the day.



UNHCR | Kasulu

Camp Information

The influx of Burundian Refugees, predominantly the Hutus into Kasulu District, started in October 1993 after an attempted military coup in Burundi. The majority of refugees settled in the villages of Katanga, Kilelema and Migongo near the Burundian border. The number of refugees at that time was estimated at 44,500. They were regrouped on 3 sites in January and February 1994. During the exercise more than 28,000 refugees went back to Burundi claiming the situation was safe for them to return. In April 1994 the Mtabila camp, about 40km to Burundian border was opened with 7,000 refugees. Following a further military coup in July 1996 the new influx of Burundians into Kasulu led to the opening of Muyovozi Camp. The Banyamulenge rebellion in Zaire in October 1996 saw the arrival of the Congolese and Burundian refugees in Kigoma and consequently the opening of Nyarugusu (Congolese) and Mtabila Extension (Burundian) camps in November 1997 and February 1997 respectively. Although Burundian and Congolese refugees continue to enter the country, their registration in the Kasulu camps has been closed since late 1999. There are reportedly around 16,000 Burundians living in Kasulu district registered with the immigration office. The official figures released by UNHCR as of August 05 are as follows:-

Mtabila 1 (Burundians)	16,778
Mtabila 2 (Burundians)	36,309
Muyovozi (Burundians)	27, 717
Nyarugusu (Congolese)	61, 181

WFP provide food supplies to the camps and supplementary food to vulnerable people, hospitals and malnourished children, pregnant and lactating mothers.

The food distribution is managed by World Vision and happens bi-weekly. It takes two days as the new food distribution database (progress) is not yet fully accurate and they are still making corrections to the mortification of the families who have been receiving too much food in the past. Food is distributed to appointed group leaders who present ration cards based on family size. It is then re-distributed by them to up to 200 people within their designated group. In theory every refugee has a ration card but there is a big black market of buying and selling cards as people repatriate. Many families have acquired more than one card and the re-registration process is trying to correct discrepancies

Camp Visit

We head off to Mtabila 1 camp and meet the camp manager who enquires about our security permits which we have not got. We keep talking and finally he lets us continue the tour.

First we visit the repatriation department which takes care of voluntary repatriation. People are screened for identity and asked why they want to return home. They are then interviewed to ensure there is nothing odd about their departure and it is purely voluntary. The process then takes them to a medical check up and then the departure is approved. They pack their belongings and are allowed roughly 50kgs per person (there is flexibility in this). They can repatriate with their animals and they also have a further medical check before departure. The night before leaving they stay in the departure compound and are given dinner courtesy of WFP and counted and counseled again for the final time to ensure their departure is voluntary. The convoy is then escorted by police, UNCHR officials and a doctor. If they are receiving medication they get a 3 month supply of their medication before they leave. They are then transferred to reception camps in their country awaiting distribution to their former villages.

Once again there is a lot of opportunity to 'beat the system' in operation such as false identities, leaving family members behind so they can exist under one name but perhaps return under another name having sold one set of ration cards etc.

On a good week as many as 500 people elect to be repatriated, on the week we were at the camps only 45 were



being repatriated. The feeling is that now the food supplies per person have been reduced by the government and there is the threat 'in the air' of no fire wood then people may be more interested in going back to their home country. This is purely our subjective opinion, of course.

We move to the registration programme where an exercise is underway to photograph every person in all 3 camps and issue them with new cards to stop the fiddling and create food distribution lists which are accurate. It is hot, smelly and noisy as entire families move around the registration process somewhat unwillingly. Many of their records are incorrect and again the opportunity for inputting further incorrect data is high. People borrow children to increase their family sizes and it is hard to spot babies being used more than once. Gradually these anomalies are being reduced but the challenge is still there.

The Dispensary

We move on to the dispensary which is situated in Muyovozi and is available for use by the local Tanzanians (which helps keep the local tension between locals and refugees in check). The dispensary has a maternity ward, vulnerable feeding unit, general male and female wards and a ward for children. They day we are visiting the hospital it is fairly empty and but the same old diseases are prevalent, mainly malaria, worms, respiratory infections, luckily HIV and aids is still quite small.



The Red Cross team



Baby in tantrum in the supplementary feeding



Feeding time all the time...



Mama, look Mzungo!



First time seeing Mzungo



Janet is anxious to leave the delivery before the next baby arrives

Walking around

The camp has clean water supplies (to the envy of the local villagers), a local police force, work and vocational courses are run, in fact this is a regular town with a full support programme run by aid agencies. The Burundians are natural farmers so every plot of land has something growing on it. There is a market to sell the fresh produce and people from outside the camp come in to purchase fresh pineapples at Tsh150 when we were purchasing for Tsh 800 in Singida. This is almost unbelievable.

We get to lunch time and go to a fantastic restaurant in the camp (Hotel Source Du Wil) serving some of the best food we have eaten.

After lunch we go and check out some of the micro projects that WFP has financed, the first is handicrafts sold by the women and we all purchase something. There are fantastic mats, trays made from the threads of the WFP food bags and grasses. Then we move on to a carpentry workshop where every piece of machinery is turned by hand even the lathe. The big trees are cut with band saws with one man standing in a pit and the other on the ground to get the length correct. Obviously there is no electricity to the camps.



This couple have lived in the refugee camps for many years and their children have now their own houses within the camp. The couple earns money by making mats.



We were told to look for order in the chaos. This nation are comfortably way more untidy than me...



Harvested maize drying in the sun. We boiled some it is disgusting and like eating cardboard only worse.

We are just amazed by the place. Why would anyone want to leave? Why are the locals not rioting over the unfairness? These political and social issues are burning issues for discussion over a glass of South African red in the evening. I can assure you there is no simple answer but the debate is interesting.

For the refugees there must be some uncertainties about the future. One is the government issuing instructions regarding tree cutting and the reduction in food rations. The overarching feeling is 'it won't last forever' so what is best. Go home now whilst there is a choice or wait until the choices are reduced. What would you do? Whilst on the other hand the government is pressuring the aid agencies to pay them compensation for the refugees cutting down the trees? Unbelievable! Where is the logic? This debate needs a further glass of red for more intriguing discussions.



The service at Kasulu motel is unimpressive but the young girls are quite funny and cute



Dreadful facts

More people die from hunger than in wars



Do not forget this important event; the walk this year is taking place in May 21st in your city or a city nearby. You can register your attendance by visiting <http://www.fighthunger.org/signup06>.

Positive facts

WFP acts quickly in emergencies, like war and drought, to prevent people from slipping into starvation



Salama
"Baba Kjell" Rosengren



"Mama Janet" Dutton