

A cluster gathers around me of small dirty children with runny noses and dusty skin. Small eager faces smile up to me with happy shining eyes. Their ripped and out sized clothes hanging on them. Bare filthy feet or maybe a pair of broken shoes, which often are shared between more than one family member, is all they have.

Pushing between themselves, they stretch out their hands towards me, eagerly awaiting another go of “round around the garden” circled on their palms. Squeaking with laughter as I chase after them trying to tickle anyone I can catch. The sun has set, and life takes a calm friendly atmosphere. Mothers carry and play with their small children enjoying the cooler evening air. In most cases they have been apart all day, as the women leave early for their jobs. They’re mainly hand washing, cleaning and cooking for the middle class homes. Their children are left in the care of a family member, or unfortunately often abandoned to wander around alone. Other women start lighting their little stoves with small amount of wood they’d found along the road side.



Goats and cattle graze on the tufts of dry grass and the rubbish which lays all around. Chickens scratch in the dust. Groups of men sit around talking, older boys play football as younger children play and chase each other about.

In their tiny tin homes and around the narrow alleys it is already getting dark. The open space fills with all ages enjoying the last light of the day, for in these houses there’s no electricity, and only a few can afford the oil for their lamps.

As the night approaches we make our way out of the slum. Driving down the long bumpy road we pass alongside women carrying large plastic containers on their heads filled with water. This is the only supply of water for the slum, and this is the only way to get it. It’s fetched from the local airport two km away.



This same water which is not only needed for washing clothes, kitchen utensils and People, is also their only supply of drinking water.

And where does it come from? This is the waste water that runs off the aeroplanes after being washed.

When it rains a lot the sewerage pipes often overflows into this supply. So many suffer from sicknesses caused by drinking this, and the most affected are the children, the weak and the old. When one family member gets diarrhoea, as a consequence of the dirty living conditions it quickly spreads, and they have no way of curing it.

Starting the morning walking around with Violet is something I enjoy. We visit different homes of the children who attend her school, she is trying to encourage the families to improve their situation. She repeatedly explains the importance and benefits of keeping their homes clean, this, though not easy with the difficulty they face in the collecting of the water, could certainly improve the health of them, and maybe save the lives of some.

On several occasions Shadrack has managed to acquire the help of a doctor called Charles. He has held meetings which have been organized for the families living in the slum; they cover different subjects and solutions which could be changed and improve their living and health conditions.

People here confide in Violet. For many she's like a mother, who gives them time and listens to the daily problems, that occur in the in their homes and the slum area around them. Home violence and sexual abuse is a regular problem, especially when one or both parents drink or take drugs. Older children are often left to bring themselves up, and this easily leads them into bad company. Sexually active teens encourage others to follow. Pregnancy among young girls and also the spread of Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases is a common danger.

One sixteen year girl I met fell pregnant last year. The father of the child refuses to accept any responsibility. She is being looked after by her mother, who has already another nine in her small house to provide for.

After falling pregnant she stopped going to school, and let her self completely go. Being a single mother almost finishes her chances of marriage, and definitely her education or further training, that could have got her another life out of the poverty of the slum. Feeling devastated, now all hope had been taken from her, she let boys sleep with her for as little as thirty cents.

When I first saw this girl she was sitting in the corner of her mothers tiny shack, the baby crying in her arms. She sat quietly trying to get the fretting child to feed, as the two older ladies watched, talking about the pitiful situation she had got herself into.

The tiny square I sat in was filthy, the girl didn't seem to care about the fact waste food was left on the floor, or that she and the baby were dirty. Her eyes had a blank glaze, she seemed to have lost all want for anything around her. I felt so desperately sorry for her.

She has since started mixing with a company of girls who prostitute, even for all the wise words of her mother and Violet. But friendship is all she has now, and this group provide a sense of companionship, as other girls her age are in school or leaving for further educational training. This cruel life offers her little else.

On one such morning walk, we passed a house where a couple of women stood around the door, of yet another badly pieced together galvanized structure. Violet entered in ahead of me calling for me to follow. The small space within was filled with three women and a couple of children.



A tiny baby cried in a dark corner on the make shift bed. Not understanding the Kiswahili speaking women, I squeeze-passed taking the baby in my arms. As I quietly hushed the child, Violet explained the situation to me. The mother had died during the night leaving this one month baby and a four year old daughter. She had been only seventeen. Since giving birth she had suffered strong pains and had got steadily weaker. Even though she had been so obviously ill, the family couldn't afford, not only the expensive hospital fees, they didn't even have enough money for the Taxi to take her across the city. Her home birth, like all births in the slum, had been assisted by the local women of the area. They run a dangerous risk if any complications occur, not only for the baby but also for the life of the mother. In these filthy conditions with no running water or electric, death in child birth is common. But these women have no other choice. As I rocked back and forth cradling the little girl in my arms, the thought passed repeatedly though my head, "What can I do, what can I do ?".

The homes of Mitumba slum



The problems are so overwhelming. Everywhere I look, something needs changing or someone needs helping. People here, and so many children, surviving on so little and in such conditions. These small tin houses ranging from around, three by three or two by two, are homes to thirty thousand people in the slum of Mitumba. In these small houses crammed with clothes, blankets, pots and other needed objects, are where they sleep, cook, give birth and bring up a family. As many as eleven at times manage in the space. Parents, children and grandchildren all have to live under that one tiny roof, for any roof is better than none.

Those who are unfortunate enough to live without a home, risk rape, child selling, abuse and violent acts from drunken and drugged up men. Not that a roof stops the rain or the cold. When it rains everything gets flooded out, and beds made of pieces of flattened cardboard laid on the floor, get wet and soggy.

Another occurring danger are the snakes and rats, which pass easily under the galvanized sheets. Their bites if not treated can become quickly infected, if not fatal.

Small children already malnourished regularly get very sick, from the dirty conditions, especially when it rains, washing filthy, contaminated water into their homes.

Rubbish lays around everywhere, bring flies and attracting rodents; and not to mention the smell.

If a man is lucky enough to find a job, which is normally heavy manual labour, he could earn around one to two dollars a day.

Some may wonder, as I often did, that the cost of living must be very cheap if a family can survive on so little. Well, sadly it's not.

Petrol is just around a euro a litre. Milk (the cheapest I saw in the shops), was also a euro a litre. Rice, bread, cooking oil and other essential products, cost almost like in Europe.

So many families have only enough to buy their poorly nutritious food, and are left in a state of poverty until they earn money after another day's work. Forced to live this way, they will never be able to step up out of this desperate life.

They fill their stomachs on ground maize mixed and cooked up with water. It stops them from starving, but little else.

Glue sniffing is a common and sadly addictive and brain damaging way to not feel the strong hunger pains, and leave the person disconnected from the reality of a life, they cannot endure.

Also different drugs and alcohol are an equally effective, though maybe more expensive, way out of an impossible existence.

Home made alcohol, produced mainly in the slums, often leaves people dangerously sick as the ingredients are sometimes toxic.

Girls of Mitumba

Being born a girl in many cultures, can often foresee a life of difficulties.



Being born a girl in a Kenyan slum, is all too frequently nothing more than a curse.

Abuse and rape, not only to small girls but also women.

The dangers are sadly all too often, in the family it's self.

Father and brothers forcing themselves on younger sisters and small daughters.

Often girls as young as fifth grade, have been found pregnant. This can be as young as twelve.

Who when your home is hell, do you turn to?

Many young girls confide in their friends. Some turn to their teachers, as they often have no other trusting adult in their lives.

One teacher I talked to, expressed the deep pain she feels inside, each time she hears these girls desperate stories. She added sadly, that it's so terribly hard for them.

Pregnancy can often mean the end of all their (and already so few), chances in life. School is one of the only opportunities any child in the slum can get for improving their futures. Getting pregnant means leaving school, dashing any hopes of an education, which would have held the promise of a good job, and in doing, the only way of leaving the pitiful conditions of the slum; not only for the girl, but also her future children.

In not attending school, which provided for their (in nearly all cases) one meal a day; and unable to leave the baby to find a little work. Many girls are forced to sell their bodies, for even as little as thirty pence, in order not to starve. Leaving themselves open to the risk of aids, and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Some try to end the pregnancy using dangerous and illegal home abortions performed by local women; which run the risk of complications, infection and sometimes death.

Another violation is that of young toddlers. Being left to roam around, abandoned for the day (as their mothers have gone looking for work), have been taken and abused by drunken, drugged or simply twisted men. These children are even as young as two. I am sure, they not only will be left mentally scared but certainly physically.

Their mothers, who have gone looking for work in the richer middle class estates, are often raped by the men of the house. One said, that even if a woman screams no one comes to help them.

From very early in the morning, these women sit in groups by the large locked gates of the guard controlled housing estates. The owners come, or in passing on their way out, pick one for their house work. A women doing these kind of jobs earn around one dollar for a full days work.

Sometimes they refuse to pay the woman after the whole days work unless she goes to bed with them.

For these women knowing their children are waiting at home hungry; and not only, they never know if they will find work the next day, or even the ones after. The choice, though a cruel and hard one has to be a total denial one self, in order to survive. These men knowing the position of these women, take advantage of them. Forced to continue this work of washing cooking or cleaning, as they know no other skills, they run the daily risk of underpayment, violence and rape.

A sad and all too familiar story for those of the slum, is that of Jen. One of nine children, her parents drunk who cared nothing for her, she was forced to find her own way of surviving. She frequented the R.E.M primary school, where not only a happy girl but also a bright pupil; and like all the other pupils, she had plans for her future.

Though she had a large plate of food at school, no one knew that before and after she went hungry.

Not able to cope with the hunger, she fell into an easy trap. She was offered by a man, who saw her begging, a cup of milk and one small chapati, he in return wanted sex. This pitiful exchange went on daily. A bit of food in the morning, and then after school, she was his to use.

She tried to hide her pregnancy telling no one. When the teachers realized her condition she was already six months pregnant. There was nothing anybody could do. So leaving school, and all chances of a brighter future, she's now at home struggling to provide for herself and her baby. (I also wrote of this girl on page 1) The only hope she has now, is that someone from abroad will sponsor her, so she's able to attend training school.

These courses teach tailoring, hairdressing and other subjects which would give her the possibility of a future job, providing for her and her baby.

Tailoring and hair dressing a woman can do from home, which means the child has the constant care of the mother, who in turn does not have to risk being abused in the place of work.

A day in the kitchen

The already small area of the R.E.M primary school kitchen is almost all taken up by an enormous pan, more than a metre in radius.



This is where all the food is cooked for more than three hundred children, seven days a week.

In the morning large sacks of cabbages, rice or maize flour are brought by Shadrack in his car.

This food is dependant on the different donations of money. One steady and sure amount is that of the sponsored children. They are each given ten euro a month. Though this does not cover, in reality the cost of feeding one child per month, it is a welcomed help, and without this regular incoming of money the food program could not exist.

Also shops, farmers, private families and thankfully from many other different avenues, food is provided.

Though for Shadrack it's a day to day affair;

phoning, asking, and collecting. He drives up and down the city picking up what ever has been offered. Some days he told me there is nothing for the next morning, but he adds smiling, "something always turns up, God always provides". It is their faith that keeps him and his wife going.

So thanks to all those unknown kind people, who piece by piece provide food and money, all those children don't go hungry. For they would simply have no one feeding them.

When Violet and Shadrack first arrived they were met wit a scene of utter despair. Naked staving children, severally malnourished, with skin problems, thinning hair and small bony bodies. Children were often seen eating mud in order to take the hunger pains away, to feel something in their stomachs.

On starting the project the Pastor and his wife brought their own food from home to give the children. Also anything else the deemed needful.

They frequented the slum three day a week to being with. Until they learnt that the children went without food the other four days.

This is when they took the decisions together with their church to begin a continuous project feeding and teaching the children.

Trough the time they have added to this a small clinic (which not only provides for the children, but also for their families); and a children's home, for some of the many orphans. They are able to houses and sustain for thirty children, providing for all their many needs.

A lovely couple, Francis and his wife, have taken on the caring and watching over of the home. They live together with the children. Cooking, washing clothes and being with the children all the hours they are not in school.

It has taken twelve hard, yet rewarding years to get to where they are now.

Children with Aids when they first arrived, were in pitiful conditions, and always ill.

Though now with the medicines provided by Shadrack and care and information given by the Doctor; who comes once a week, accepting almost nothing for his days work. They are as healthy as any other child.

The work in the kitchen, is a full days work. With carrying water making the porridge for the mid morning brake time. Preparing dinner for three-four hundred and not to mention the masses of washing.

Who are then the hard workers? Three non stop, happy people.

Anthony is a young man who came begging one day for food, as he had no job and a wife to provide. Shadrack's offer to give food in exchange for work, He accepted and is still there.

Another couple was also taken on, in the aim to help them; as they had many children who were all going hungry. They not only eat at the school but also take enough food home for their evening meal. And their children (the ones that have not run away to the streets, begging and living out ruff), attend the school.



The children in the dark

For families already struggling in a society which offer, in no form at all, social services; a disabled child is an incredible weight in any Kenyan home. In the slum, it's a disaster (and almost a death sentence for the child).

In most cases they are kept locked away in those tiny dark shacks. One child Violet saw, was even tied up with cords, it was their way of keeping him still.

The families don't know how to deal with them, and their difficulties are misunderstood, and go untreated.

Society, culture and communities don't except, or want to know of them. So they are hidden away, or sent into mental institutes.

Those beautiful children, so terribly vulnerable, totally dependant on those around them, are abandoned, are mistreated and unwanted.

No one what ever their mental state should never be forced to live this way.

We complain continually (I as much as anyone), about our lives, what we don't have, or the way the world around us, treats us. I hope after this letter, you may see your life, in a different light. Maybe we should be happy for all those (and it's a long list) things we have, and take for granted.

For so many go without, and they suffer. Suffer to see their children hungry, ill, cold at night asleep on a wet floor, their bare feet caked in dirt, their clothes ripped and filthy, knowing the next day there will be no food to give those pleading

starving little faces who trust in you. And in return they also suffer, for themselves, abused, abandoned by all and unable to turn to no one.

From Lael



A small child
Wondering alone.

The older daughter of the
lady who died. She's four.

Ing with, when Hannah phoned