

# Notes on a Visit to Urambo FDC

Tom Davies

Tom Davies visited Urambo FDC last autumn with the aim of helping them improve furniture design at the FDC. While there, he was able to see some of the things FUM has helped with recently. Here are his comments on what he found.

## Computers:

All the ten computers that were donated are used and in working order. They seem to be pretty functional, although while I was there, the course wasn't running, as it was in between the 3 month short courses. The Internet is used through a USB phone dongle and is painfully slow, slower than an old dial-up modem from when the Internet first started. Mr Jackson Simfukwe, who is the college's secretary and who is also studying domestic electrics, used it with me while I was there, and it is a very lengthy process to try to achieve anything, but emails can eventually be sent. Apparently it only works well at night. There is no printer for the class, so if there needs to be anything printed they have to use the office printer.

## Bees:

The honey from the beehives has been harvested once, before the new principal Mr Nestory arrived. Roughly ten litres were made, which they sold. The whole area is burned, and the boxes are hanging in the wooded area with nothing in. Apparently there was a fire and the bees haven't returned. Mr Nestory has plans to make



Mr Nestory, Principal of Urambo FDC

another twenty hives in the woodwork shop, but there were masses of boxes lying around, so I couldn't work out how more boxes were going to help.

## Vehicle:

Mr Nestory made a point of the fact that they never ever use the vehicle for any kind of teaching in the mechanics class, honouring the agreement with the FUM. It was fully operational and in regular use. The problem they face with the

vehicle is the diesel being very expensive, and the government funding does not cover this. It is 2,300 TZS per litre.

(At present, there are approximately 2750 TZS to £1.)

## Water:

The water situation has not changed. The school has to pay 60,000 TZS per week on water that is delivered to the school and pumped into the tanks, by a truck. After 9 months there is still no water supply from the water department.

## Electricity:

The college spends 400,000 TZS a month on electricity. It is a kind of meter system and staff contribute 20,000 TZS per month. When I was there, it had been off for a week and continued to be off for five days of my visit, as the transformer cooling oil had been stolen. This wasn't just localised to the school, but it affected the surrounding areas too. The generator has a part that needs to be replaced, but I couldn't quite establish what it was. They were making a concerted effort to try and fix it, but I think it is still not resolved. As a general rule,



The Urambo FDC shop - open and doing well

I don't think they had the electricity on during the day, although it was used at night. I'm not sure how this worked for the students doing computer courses, but assumed that the laptops could be charged as and when the electricity was available. As for the woodwork shop, work just happened around the constraints of the availability.

### Shop:

The shop in the canteen area is back open and apparently doing well. The school employs a local girl, who receives 40,000 TZS a month.

**Goats:** (purchased for the FDC by Cranbrook School students)

The goats are doing well. There is a young boy employed to look after the goats and I think he is on a similar wage at around 40,000 TZS. Four kids died as they had a problem with ticks. They bought insecticide for them. It is not too expensive (around 20,000 TZS) and they get sprayed twice a week. There are now 25 goats in total. They are going to be mainly used for meat. They haven't slaughtered one yet, but intend to do so for special occasions.

**Tailoring:** (Workaid gave newly refurbished sewing machines to the FDC two years ago)

The sewing machines function but need regular maintenance. In July and August there was a seminar on how to make bee-

keeping outfits.

**Carpentry:** (Workaid also donated an extensive toolkit to the woodwork shop. Tom's observations illustrate how difficult it is to match what is available in the UK to the real needs in the FDC.) There are many hand tools. Many are broken. Many hand



Students in the sewing room at Urambo

planes have blades that have been used and reground so many times over the years they can't be used any more. There is a fairly comprehensive amount of measuring devices, a handful of tape measures and a few steel rulers.

I don't want to be too critical; I come from a background in which we use high quality tools on a regular basis and understand that this is a privilege/niche area even in



Tom instructing. There are now six woodwork students, but they are still recruiting

the UK. However, in my opinion, some of the tools that were included in the recent tool donation seemed to be DIY rather than industrial quality. I wonder how long they will last.

The bandsaw that was provided is a Black and Decker, again aimed at the western DIY home user, and in my opinion not suitable for a workshop dealing with super tough timber. The bandsaw is used for theory, so they can see how one works, but they do not use it to cut timber for projects.

The jigsaws work and cut, but are pretty fragile and I'm not sure how long they will last for.

There has been a sander provided, aimed again at western DIY enthusiasts, which takes specific branded sanding pads, and when these run out they will not be easily replaced. It would make a lot more sense to get a sander that uses rolls of sandpaper, and this would not cost any more than the one they have.

There is an electric drill, and it works well.

Bearing all this in mind, they are incredibly grateful, but there were many tools in their boxes in the storeroom, not really serving any purpose. The power tools that I have mentioned are all used, apart from the bandsaw.

There is a lack of dust masks and safety goggles. A regular cheaper wood

that is used makes you sneeze and cough and splutter, and you could tell the students were really put off by this. Mr Moses, the carpentry teacher, independently mentioned that they need masks. Also, with the introduction of power tools, there is an introduction of speed into the process, which means bits of wood can fire off in the direction of the face, so a handful of safety glasses would be a very good idea.

There is a lack of money for materials. Wood is even a problem; apparently they are struggling to get enough timber into the workshop. Twelve feet of timber varies from 7,000 to 10,000 TZS. For finishing they use a varnish, which seemed pretty toxic, with no gloves.

As with safety equipment in the UK, many people often don't bother, but it is important to have the option, and when Mr Moses talks of things like dust masks independently, I think there is a real need. It's not just the health and safety bureaucracy of the west influencing my judgment.

The course is really struggling. It only has three students this year and there is a general lack of interest. Numerous people speculated that this was to do with the lack of interest in hand tools. Children can join a carpenter on the street, as there are carpenters on every corner in Urambo town. There is a general thought that if

there was more emphasis on power tools on the course, then there might be more interest.

Mr Moses is a really skilled maker. He was really sharp-minded and when we were working together was often one step ahead and picked up on little techniques/ideas that we shared really really quickly.



We worked out a slightly modified design based on a stool, that he saw in some photos of projects I have worked on. It was very lightweight, and an idea that he was clearly familiar with, based on the fact that this was his reason for wanting to make the stool from the image. We set about changing the design slightly, so that we could make it with the college's facilities, and over the

duration of the week, exchanged techniques and drawings, working out the various stages along the way, while the students watched, and then helped make the other parts of the project.

After making a stool with Mr Moses and the class, the students were then given the task of making a smaller one each. It was the same style, but with the seat height of an average chair. Mr Moses explained how he would find images of other furniture designs really useful, and this is a great point. They have books on the technicalities of making furniture, but none on 'designs'. He expressed a great interest in this, and has requested images of furniture from the 'west' to try to recreate and to inspire the class. This brings up quite a few moral issues on globalisation etc, but I think that if the images were presented in a kind of anthology of other furniture from all around the world, as a more historical and contextual reference, then this might be a bit more ethical.

#### Other things of note:

Mr Jackson Simfukwe was introduced to me as the principal's secretary. To me he had probably the best understanding of English, along with Mr Nestory. When communicating with Urambo, you are often actually talking to Mr Jackson, as he deals with a lot of the office emails.



I had an English to Swahili phrase book, and EVERYONE I came across was obsessed with it. It was very simple, but they made it apparent that there is a strong desire to learn English. Students were coming to Devon House and copying it page for page late at night. I reckon a shipment of Swahili-English phrasebook / dictionaries would be very much appreciated. I am con-

tacting the School of African and Oriental Studies in London to see if they have any old books they might be able to donate.

There is a strong desire for a football kit. This would be a great treat for the college football team as they take their football very seriously.

The Principal, Mr Nestory has been a teacher for 30 years, and before that he was in the Army. He has taught at another FDC before this one. He is very interested in history and this is one of the subjects he used to teach. He is a very, very friendly man, and seems to be greatly liked by staff and students alike.