

Nairobi, March 2026

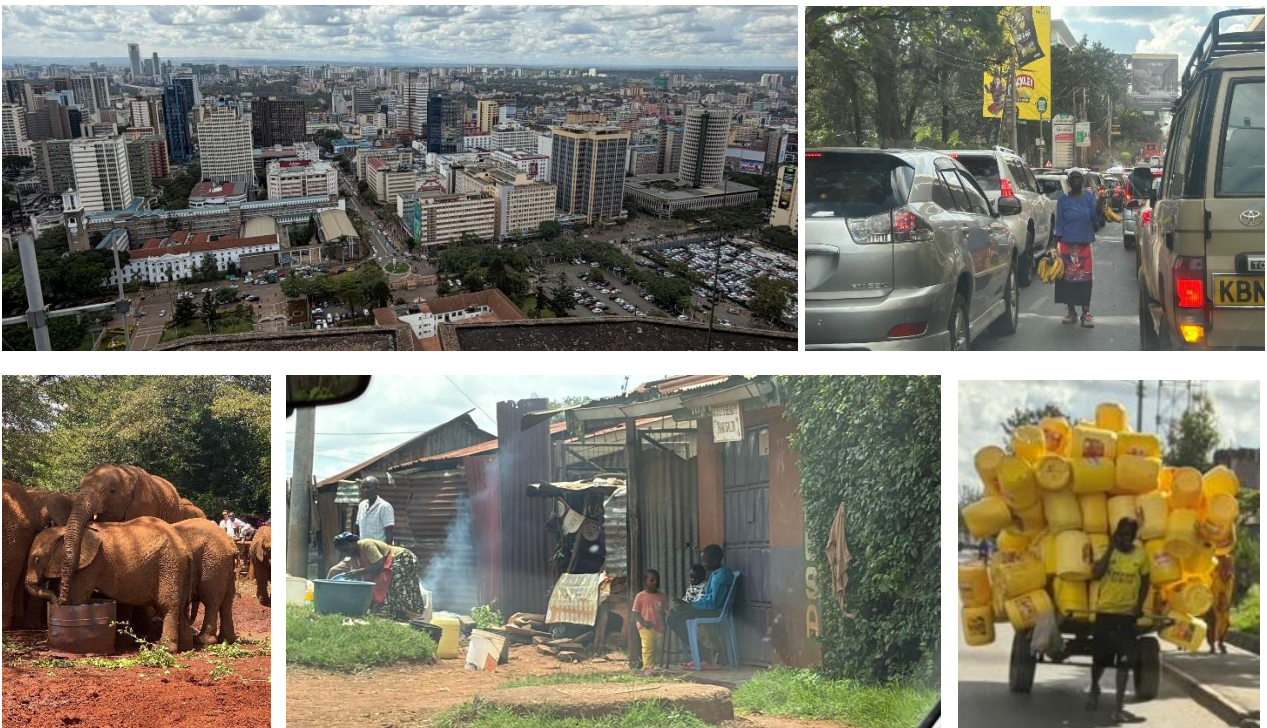


Left: Tumaini School closing for the holidays. Right: Some of our alumni at Brackenhurst retreat centre

Impressions...

Something that strikes me each time I visit Nairobi is its rapidly developing infrastructure. The old streets still wind through the city centre, albeit with slightly fewer potholes, but they are overshadowed by huge viaducts and tortuous slip roads giving access to the new highways. The latter have certainly made travelling easier, so long as you know where you are going: there are often no road markings or signposts. Some Kenyans liked them so much the government felt compelled to add some hefty speed bumps, almost invisible until you hit them. At least that is better than hitting one of the many motorbikes which swerve in and out of the traffic at nightmare speeds. 'is this supposed to be the fast lane?' I ask our driver. He laughs.

Along with the improved highways, a big change is the number of private cars, reflecting the improving economic fortunes of the middle classes. So the city streets that were once jammed with minibuses (the infamous 'matatus') are now equally jammed with cars and motorbikes, weaving their way through the smallest cracks in the queues of traffic, making it no less hazardous for bicycles, handcarts and pedestrians!



*Faces of Nairobi: Top left: the view from the CICC tower; right: gridlock in the city
Bottom left: The elephant orphanage, a dwelling in the suburbs (not a slum), and making best use of a handcart*

The city has grown some skyscrapers over the years. From the rooftop of the 32-storey CICC tower we had impressive views, with some of the newest buildings standing tall and proud. Our excellent guide pointed out the Ngong hills to the East, and which way to mount Kenya and the coast. ‘Where is Kibera?’ I asked. He pointed ‘Over there, in a depression, but you can’t see it because of this tall building in the way. I think they planned it there deliberately. The government doesn’t like to admit we have slums.’

What hasn’t changed is the mass of human poverty. As we leave the main business district, the roads become lined with rough corrugated iron structures, and crowds of people are going about their business. Step across the open drain (mind the stones and rubble sticking through the mud walkways), and everything is available to buy from tomatoes to mobile phones, shoes to sofas, and the prices are cheap. A side of pig hangs in the butcher’s window, beautiful hand-sewn dresses blow in the wind, and a man lovingly polishes a wooden table he has made. The colourful fruit and vegetable stalls are very inviting, and music blares from a loudspeaker system – also for sale. This is the city’s microeconomy, where the talented and enterprising find ways to make ends meet. Here you can shop, have your hair braided, snack on a tasty samosa in a ‘hotel’, charge your mobile phone, and have keys cut. The service is not shabby – once we had suits tailored there, and the keys I had cut by a man with a small hand file fit perfectly.



Above: Kibera slum. Note the new blocks of flats in the foreground; a government development project. Left: In Kibera market you can buy almost anything

Visits to the Primary Schools

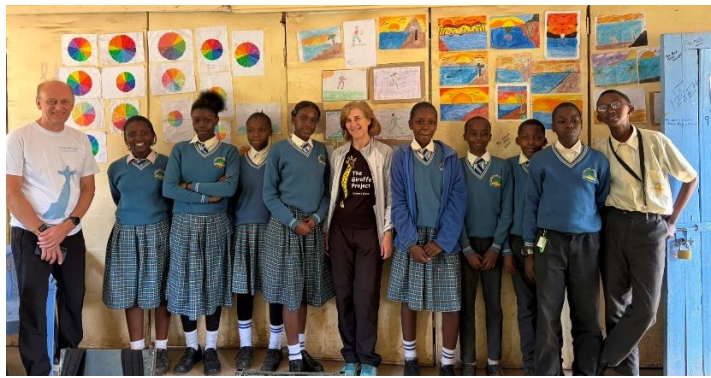
The days we spent in ‘our’ two primary schools, Green Pastures in Kibera slum and Tumaini in Mathare slum, were, as always, a highlight of our trip. It is mandatory to visit every classroom, introduce ourselves and then be entertained by the pupils. This time many of the classes impressed us by singing in French, a subject that was introduced with the new curriculum, and is being taught in both schools by Wycliffe, a Giraffe Project alumnus.

A key concern to us in Giraffe has for some time been the issue of sustainability for these schools. Green Pastures has gained a reputation for good teaching and high grades in the national exams, and for some years has been able to attract families able to afford the fees. Now its modern, well-constructed classrooms, computers and science lab are making its Junior Secondary section attractive also. Director Japheth was recently approached by local community leaders and encouraged to take on the lease of an abandoned school property a short walk from the main site. It has a field suitable for games, and a small forested area.

It was amazing to see this in the heart of the slum, and so good for the children to have a truly *green pasture* to play and work in.



Above: Green Pastures main school with its new 4-storey Robert O’Connell Building (aka ‘Japheth’s Tower’); a school bus in the new site, and the Junior Secondary science lab.
 Below left: Visitors are always fun for a primary class; Right: Some of the Grade 9 sponsored students



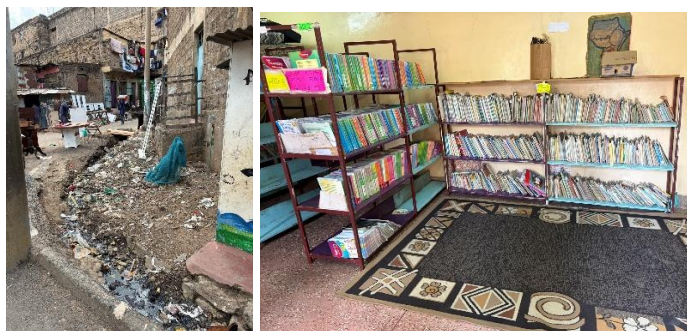
Whilst at Green Pastures we also visited the clinic run by Nurse Elizabeth, with whom we have partnered for over 15 years. Her team still carry out annual medical checks for the students we sponsor. Her clinic was extended and equipped with some significant donations through supporters in Bonn, Germany, but more recently the government bulldozed part of it to make way for a widening of the railway which runs alongside it. As is typical of buildings in the slum, the iron sheet roof is rusting and leaks in places. Elizabeth has opened a new facility north of the city, but her team soldier on in Kibera, providing vital services to the population of the slum.



Above: Mercylin Clinic with its founder, Nurse Elizabeth (far right)

Tumaini school, on the edge of Mathare slum, has found it difficult to attract fee-payers in the past, but this is now changing. The main road into the slum has at last been tarmacked, and a medical charity from the US has begun a new building for the Junior Secondary School on a corner with easy access from the

surrounding neighbourhoods. The new Headteacher is proactive in researching local sources of funding, and has secured a grant from Safaricom, the local mobile network provider, to turn an old building bought by Giraffe in 2007 into modern kitchens for the school. It was very encouraging to see both Tumaini and Green Pastures becoming well established with local support.



Above: left to right: Tumaini school nursery, primary and junior secondary classrooms
Left: Open drains outside, library inside
Below: Richard's job was to give out uniforms to the Grade 7 (Junior Secondary) cohort. Then they dressed up for us...



The evolving picture

Over the past decade, the government has made efforts to extend education, now officially compulsory and free. Where we once saw many children roaming the streets of the slums or sitting aimlessly by the roadside on a school day, now there are far fewer. But building programmes have not kept up with the numbers. One primary school in Kibera is reported to have 7000 students, and classes of 150 are typical.

As government primary schooling has become more accessible, our focus is gradually shifting to the older students. On the new programme, primary education finishes after 6 years, at age 12, but most primary schools now host the new 'Junior Secondary' section for years 7-9. After that, young people apply and are 'called' to a Senior Secondary school, often a boarding school far from home. These schools are not allowed to charge for tuition, but the bill for admission, boarding, food, games, transport, uniform, books and other supplies, which include everything from their mattress to their cutlery, far exceeds the means of a slum dweller. There are also day schools, but they too find ways to charge the families, and uniforms, books and all equipment are still the responsibility of the student. So some of the brightest, most motivated 15 year olds, who have survived hunger and depravation and have graduated from classrooms of 150 with top grades, are then consigned to finding casual work in the slum.

Dandora, and Senior Secondary sponsorships

Dandora, on the edge of Nairobi, is another vast slum area which countless Kenyans call home. There you will find the main city rubbish dump, several stories high and extending over 12 hectares (30 acres). Every day some 2000 lorries bring unsorted rubbish from homes, businesses, schools and hospitals, and thousands of locals sort through it for plastics, metal, electronics and other items which they sell to dealers for tiny sums of money. It is a dangerous place. Disease, gang rule and hunger are part of normal life, and violence and rape are daily occurrences.

NGO's and many private initiatives try to help young people in the area. One of these, Dadreg, <https://dadreg.org/> runs an education centre and works with children in local government primary schools such as Wangu School.



*Left: Wangu primary school, Dandora.
Below: The dumpsite, photo taken from the school field. Note the marabou storks, which are present in their thousands.*



In late January when schools have already started, we invite Dadreg's Director to recommend to us students of high potential who have not secured funding from any other source, and are therefore still at home. Liz then collects their details and interviews them. This year we took 33 new students from the Dandora area onto the sponsorship programme, and sent them to boarding schools. We do not normally send them to day schools, as this means continuing to live in the slum, which makes studying difficult and puts at risk their nutrition, health and physical safety, especially that of the girls.

New Grade 10 students' meeting

As the Easter holidays were beginning, we were able to host a meeting and lunch at our hotel for the students who had started Senior Secondary School in January. 51 students came; 10 were former Tumaini School pupils, 6 from Green Pastures and the other 35 were completely new, most of them from Dandora and the surrounding areas. We introduced ourselves, and they told us some of their stories and their hopes and dreams. They were all so excited and thankful to have been chosen to be part of Giraffe Project.



Brackenhurst Retreat

It was one of our biggest challenges a retreat for 93 teenagers for 3 days and 2 nights at Brackenhurst Conference Centre in Limuru, an hour or so north of the city. <https://www.brackenhurst.com/> These were our sponsored students in their final 2 years of Secondary School or just graduated and waiting to apply to college or university. They were housed in dormitories with 'real' beds and hot showers, and presented with 3 meals a day, buffet style, plus snacks. All of this was completely new, from learning how to control the temperature of the shower to dealing with choice when faced with more food than they had seen in their lives, and moderating how much to stack onto one plate. For some it was simply overwhelming!

As well as a retreat centre, Brackenhurst focuses on environmental conservation and research, and one of its projects is the restoration of the indigenous forest that once covered the region. As a small part in that, we bought from them 100 saplings, and each student planted one, under the guidance of the Brackenhurst team. We were then taken on a guided walk through the forest, and observed the flora and fauna, including a small chameleon and monkeys in the trees!

In our meetings we encouraged the students to see themselves as individually unique and special, not as 'slum' kids but as fine young people growing up with a future to build. On the second day, 10 Giraffe alumni visited, and each shared the story of their journey from poverty, through education to employment, or working as entrepreneurs. They encouraged the teenagers to seize every opportunity in school and in further education or training, to expand their skills and learn to network. Their stories were truly an inspiration.



In between the serious stuff, we hired monitors from a company specialising in teambuilding. Their games and activities reinforced the message, and created a lot of laughs and some unique experiences. Some of the shy students were seen to be joining in, trying new things and making new friends. The biggest hit for most was climbing rope ladders into the trees and then having to make their way across ropes or wooden boards to the other side....



**Brackenhurst
Retreat:**
Previous page: In a meeting
Above: Tree planting and lunch
Left: Teambuilding fun
Below: Celebrating!



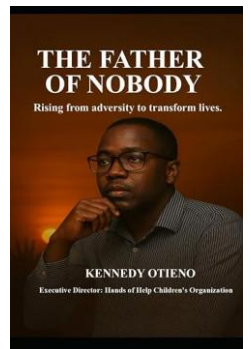
It is safe to say that a good time was had by all, and one these students will never forget.

The Alumni Reunion



The absolute highlight of the whole trip for me was the Alumni Reunion. Over the past 10 years the Alumni Association has slowly taken shape, and gained structure and purpose. It has some 200 members, 73 of whom gathered for a day at our hotel. Some had been sponsored from primary school; all had graduated from secondary with Giraffe, and all had either graduated from, or were still in, higher education. Some of our very first group of students from Enna Girls school were there, now in their 30's, most married with children. Students from across the years inspired us with their stories. One is a nurse, another a waitress, others are employed in human resources, public health, banking, finance, or as statisticians, engineers or economists. Several are teachers. One calls himself an agronomist. Others are running their own businesses in photography, catering, counselling or journalism. Many are parents. Some have been through hard times, or are still trying to make it as entrepreneurs. But though they spanned a range of ages, interests and backgrounds, there was something almost tangible about their sense of belonging to Giraffe, and the bond of the shared experiences that had brought them.

There were 3 stories that I found particularly inspiring. Pauline founded an NGO for women and girls rescued from traffickers. About 20 live in a shelter and 200 come to train in leatherwork and other crafts. She has secured funding from Mastercard, and her energy and passion are extraordinary. Kennedy Otieno is also running his own NGO, providing equipment and personal needs for children and teenagers in the slum where he grew up, so that they can go to school. He has published his story in a book called 'Father of Nobody', which is available from Amazon, and will tear your heart out. Then there is Ashford, who runs his own safari company, Tafsiri Tours. If you go to Kenya, do please contact him at tafsiriadventures@gmail.com for an offer. He will tailor a safari to your wishes and budget. From the profits, he has established the Tafsiri Foundation, and on Saturdays he visits the slum he grew up in to serve meals to hungry schoolchildren.



Coming of age...

During the Brackenhurst retreat, Ashford, Kennedy and James, the President of the Alumni Association, came to share their stories with the students, but they also had a message for us, the Directors of Giraffe Project. They had seen how challenging it was for us to organise these events from 6000 km distant, and they wanted us to know that next time they will do the organising. Together with our employees, Fridah and Liz, they claimed to possess the knowledge, contacts and IT skills to manage all the logistics, communications, bookings and activities. We could see that they certainly do! All we would need to do, they assured us, would be pay to the bills and come and join in

As I sat listening to these passionate young men and women, already making their own mark on society and now stepping up to support us, it dawned on me that in a very real sense Giraffe has come of age.