

**Course:** D4 Block Placement

## Block Placement Report in Kenya

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### **Introductory description of the placement**

This report describes my experiences and observations while on block placement in Kenya with Yala Theological Centre (YTC) and Siaya Theological Centre (STC) from January 2010 to February 2010.

b) Yala Theological Centre (YTC) is based in a nearby village.

c) Siaya Theological Centre (STC) is in the district centre of Siaya.

Both YTC and STC offer Bible training to people in villages and local churches using the Swahili and Luo languages. Classes are held weekly in various locations, most of which are reached by bicycle or on foot (Harries, 2007).

My job title with both YTC and STC was student/teacher. This position provided opportunities to have hands on experience in a wider range of roles in different areas of YTC's and STC's varied work. These roles helped me to understand the scope, aims and effects of YTC and STC.

The responsibilities assigned to me were:

- To visit and encourage new, current and former students to continue to participate in the work of YTC and STC. (Encourager)
- To witness to local people by sharing the gospel. (Witness)
- To attend classes and observe the teacher (Student)
- To provide class support to teachers. ( Facilitator)
- To be available, as required, to accompany the coordinator or other members of staff to visit churches and families. (Companion)
- To teach the Bible to five different classes. (See appendix 1).

### **Reasons for choosing the placement**

This is my second year of training at Redcliffe College and I am here as a result of God leading me to serve in Africa through teaching and sharing the gospel. While at college I had an opportunity to meet Jim Harries and heard about the work he is doing in Africa. I found his work impressive and related to what God is leading me to do after my training. As mentioned above, his work is mainly Bible teaching and I had just completed my block placement where I had trained to teach English in a cross-cultural context. I wanted to utilise and develop the teaching skills I had gained during this placement. Redcliffe College also encourages second year students to obtain an overseas work experience. I come from Rwanda and this placement provided an opportunity to work in Kenya with a people group (Luo) that has a different culture to mine.

**Personal aims:**

1. To teach using skills I gained during my previous Block Placement as English teacher and to develop these skills.
2. To learn about Vulnerable Mission by working with its founder Jim Harries.
3. To develop my communication skills
4. To gain an insight of being a theology teacher on the mission field.
5. To use this placement as an opportunity to seek God's direction about my long-term participation in world mission.

**Analysis of the work project and its context**

Historical Overview

Yala Theological Centre (YTC) was founded in 1994 with the aim to train local church leaders and other Christians with biblical teaching. YTC was found by a group of local Kenyan pastors in Yala, coordinated by Jim Harries, a missionary from the UK. In 2004, the Yala board decided to initiate a similar Theological Centre in Siaya (STC). According to Jim Harries, at some point these two centres had nine classes but at the moment there are only four classes, plus a new class that I was appointed to teach. However, at the end of my placement the new class had to close due to the lack of a teacher to continue the work.

Currently both organisations have zero funds in their case. The organisations' staff do not receive any financial or equipment support to do their work from the schools concerned. Every staff member finds their own upkeep by independent means. The only external support the centres have is the opportunity to send one person to Kima International School of Theology (KIST) for training. This was a deal between Jim Harries and (KIST) for working as Dean for (KIST).

### Organisation Structure

Both YTC and STC have the same organisational structure. They have two divisions: The Board of Directive consists of chairman, secretary, director, coordinator, treasurer and dean. The Executive team made of director, clerk, dean and teachers.

The culture of YTC and STC as a whole is over-anxious. Students and staff complained of not seeing any tangible fruit from training with YTC. They found it hard to study without any prospect of receiving any form of qualification. YTC and STC do not have their own buildings. They use local churches or residential homes for class meetings.

I found it hard to believe when I asked Harries about the aims and objectives of YTC and STC. He replied to me that there are no aims or objectives. Local people had not come up with aims and objectives. Students and local staff wanted to know about the future for these centres and their objectives. They told me they had already spoken about this issue to the coordinator, who told

them that such aims and objectives need to come from locals and not from a foreign missionary.

### **Description and reflective analysis of the Placement's context**

#### People

During my placement I was working mainly with people from the Luo tribe in Kenya. The economic activities for Luo people are agriculture and fishing in Lake Victoria. The people I was involved with were largely farmers (Kenya Information Guide). There were times we could not find people in their homes because of their busy schedule in their farms.

Luo people live in a family group. The group is composed of husband, wife or wives and their sons and daughter in-laws (Fletcher et al, 2003). Every married male of over 18 years in this family group will have his own house within one compound. During my visits to these compounds I realised that other family members will respect the individual you have come to visit and they will leave you with that person. However, in some compounds people came together to greet us and we shared with them the Word of God all together.

#### Schools

There are many local primary schools and most of the people I was teaching were able to write and read. Only one old lady could not read nor write. She received help from other students to write down answers during the question and answer time.

## Churches

YTC and STC work mainly with African Independent Churches (AIC) also known as indigenous churches. According to Philip (2004, p79) most of these churches, 'originated as breakaways from the Mission churches for a variety reasons,...'. Due to this breakaway most of the church leaders in these churches did not receive a formal Bible training. In addition to AIC churches I worked with Roho ('Spirit') church. Anderson (2004, p 112) wrote, 'The Roho ('Spirit') movement was one of the Pentecostal movements that commenced in 1912 among the Luo people of western Kenya, at first as a popular Charismatic movement among young people within the Anglican church.' In Roho churches I found that their emphasis is on prayer, interpreting dreams of church members by the leader and they teach the Bible mainly using the Old Testament. The practice and way of life in the Old Testament is relatively similar to African tradition (Mugambi, p105).

There are three different types of places for class meetings. In one class we met in a residential home, one class outside under a tree due to the hot weather and two other classes meet in church buildings. The location of the class does not affect the teaching as it is like a Bible study not a formal class.

## Working Hours

On this placement I did not have exact working hours. The duration of one class lesson is two hours and I taught one class each day Monday to Friday. I found it frustrating to see some students coming sometimes one hour before

the end of the class. Apart, from these two hours of lesson, I spent my time preparing lessons or visiting families to encourage them to come to our lessons.

### **Effectiveness of YTC and STC**

Students are important members of YTC and STC with the role of attending classes. Without students both YTC and STC would not exist. These organisations have managed to maintain four classes. However, the number of classes is diminishing due to a lack of teachers.

Due to the weakness of the leadership in both YTC and STC, there is less effectiveness of the organisation.

The outcomes of lack of clear goals by the organisations have been a negative fact of poor performance. Some students told me that they just come to classes to learn the Bible but that they would be more committed if there were well-planned program to follow and an idea of what kind of qualification they would get at the end of the program.

YTC and STC are effective in building relationships with local churches.

Churches that we visited appreciated our visits and our encouragement from the Bible.

## **Accomplishment of my aims**

### **1. Teaching and developing teaching skills**

Working as student-teacher for both YTC and STC gave me opportunity to offer my teaching skills. This position helped me to develop teaching skills. For example, classroom management skills due to the varied backgrounds of students. Some students were more outspoken, while others more reserved and I had to make sure they all participated in class activities.

### **2. Learning about Vulnerable Mission**

One of my aims was to investigate and find out the practicality of Vulnerable Mission by working with the founder Jim Harries. Its mission statement is as follows, 'That there should be some missionaries from the West whose ministries are conducted in the language of the people being reached, without use of outside financial subsidy'. (Vulnerable Mission website). My findings were that using local language of people being reached was not a new thing in the mission field. However, it a good reminder to missionaries to put a great emphasis in learning the local languages of the people they are serving. This placement helped me to learn that its position of missionaries not using outside financial subsidy was difficult and could give the missionary a bad reputation among the people he/she is working with.

### **3. Developing my communication skills**



Visiting people in their homes, teaching in classes and also working in teams during this placement helped me to develop my communication skills. I learned to listen to people and to process my thoughts before speaking.

4. Gaining an insight of being a theology teacher on the mission field

I did not fully fulfil this aim as I hoped, because I did not have enough time to build strong relationships with the students. In addition, my placement supervisor (in fulfilment of vulnerable mission principles) had asked me to use Swahili only, while there were students who found it more comfortable to express themselves in English than in Swahili.

5. Seeking God's direction about my future ministry

During this placement God allowed me to see there is a need for trained missionaries to teach the Bible to local churches, especially the indigenous church. For example, one church that I worked with believes that there was a second Black African Christ who came to save black people (Poewe, 1994, p 142). God increased my desire to serve Him in the area of teaching and to take biblical truth to people in Africa.

**Interaction with others and effectiveness**

Jim Harries (2010) wrote on his website Mid February News, 'Having an intern from a missionary training college here has given many opportunities to discuss the nature and difficulties involved in the theological education work that I am involved in both in Yala and Siaya'. We talked about my progress

on placement. He appreciated my work and I thanked him for the opportunity to work with him.

Jim encouraged me to take interest in the local language (Luo) and I knew I could not do it due to time and the work I was doing. Due to the seminar I attended at college about assertiveness. I was able, with respect, to explain to him that it was not possible for me to learn a new language, but that I was going to try.

#### Interaction with staff

My interaction with staff members was excellent. They gave recognition to the work I was doing and I congratulated them for their work and desire to share the Gospel. I was considerate of their feelings and the way they did their work. For example, we visited different local families and some of these families gave out to the team money and household materials. I waited for the right time for them to explain to me about the donation. They explained to me that some of these families would not have been happy if we had rejected their donation because they believe that we deserved a reward for our work.

#### **Reflection on Redcliffe courses**

The Bible Study Methods/Leadership module helped me to know how to prepare lessons whilst having in mind the target audience. Principles and methods learned in the Evangelism and Discipleship course helped me to build good relationships with the students. For example, I learned that a good relationship takes time so I gave time to my students so they could get to

know me. The experience and theories gained from the Public Communication module helped to present teaching material with confidence.

Practical work, self-awareness, and cultural awareness learned in Teams allowed me to work and perform well with staff members of YTC and STC. I listen to members of the team and respected their personality. Living and Working Cross-Culturally exposed me to the skill of asking questions and I learned that local people like to answer questions. This knowledge helped me to know how to ask and to be at ease when asking questions.

This is my second year at Redcliffe College and I believe that all the courses that I have so far done has helped me to perform well on this placement.

### **Development of specific skills and gifts**

During my placement I was able to appreciate the gift of teaching and developed my teaching skills. For example, the ability to stand in front of students and teach them using good communication skills. I worked with different types of classes, men only, women majority and individual class. I developed my planning and organisation skills in planning for different types of classes.

I developed social skills because of living in a multi-cultural house. The family I stayed with during my placement had orphans from different back-grounds, a house lady and a Western missionary. I learned to respect how they conducted their daily activities.

## **Future direction**

This placement has reinforced my desire to work in the field of teaching the Bible. In the future I hope to contact mission agencies that are involved with teaching the Bible in Africa. Paul in Colossians 1:28 says, 'Him (Christ) we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.' It is my hope to teach the Gospel in order to see people transformed by God.

## **Conclusion**

This placement helped me to develop the teaching skills I need for my future work as a teacher. Certainly the experience and discoveries made by working with YTC and STC put me in a better position for my future work.

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