

SIGBI Programme Director's Blog May 2018

Where did April go?

It hardly seems five minutes since I was writing about going to Kenya to see the Meru project and now I have been, spent two days at home then off to Marrakesh for the African Conference.

It has been a wonderful month. The time spent in Meru illustrated how we, together, can make a difference to the lives of women and girls.

The garden project, led by Margaret (a Soroptimist of Meru) from CIFFORD, is proving to be a resounding success. We visited the women's gardens and saw first hand how much the project is, improving their lives and the lives of their families.

Working together they operate table banking, implement sharing, advice and support one another. It was wonderful to see the smiles on the faces of the women who walked miles, in torrential rain. To receive their certificates on graduation day.



The rain poured down, but to those women it was a blessing, it gave them food, and as one woman from the project said, growing food helps us to grow young.

Most of the men go out daily to look for work, it is a bit like the old hiring fairs we had in the UK and Ireland, but this is permanent. No work, no income. Many of the husbands of the women on the project will help their wives if they are not hired – it must improve the morale of all to be able to feed the family, earn a little from excess and educate the children, all from a project we support.

In addition a series of workshops on alternative rites of passage have been implemented and we were privileged to be entertained by and speak to many of the girls. Although FGM is illegal in Kenya it still happens in rural areas and this province is rural! It was great to hear that these girls were not ostracised because they had not undergone "the cut" and were being listened to by many of their elders – long may it continue.

We also saw the water tanks our project had provided, allowing harvesting of rainwater.

When asked what more the women wanted they replied-" more water".



Throughout the whole visit it was smiles and dancing and a welcome you would not believe. The living conditions are poor, but their spirit is rich, I urge you all to continue your efforts to support this project.

After a beleaguered flight home on the Saturday through Sunday it was on with the washing machine and out with the iron to repack for a trip to Morocco on the Wednesday to attend the SIFAF Conference in Marrakesh.

The enthusiasm of the delegates for their own Federation is tangible, but they still have a way

to go.



One of their main problems is communication, systems vary so much. In Kenya it was very difficult to get on line, Marrakesh was a little better, but many countries are limited with power and connectivity.

There is also the funding issue as some countries cannot move currency freely. If any of you have friendship links with African countries can you help them out with fees? They can work within their countries but have difficulty outside.

The project work in Africa is amazing, we were invited to attend the Soroptimist School in

Marrakesh, where young girls are given every opportunity to reach their full potential, their showed their skills with goods they had made to sell and by their delightful singing at the opening ceremony.

Education, Health ,Economic Empowerment, Water, Disaster Relief, FGM and Violence against women were all represented in the work done by our African sisters- it was so humbling to see what they have achieved.

I returned home last week-end, tired in body but energised in spirit.

I have truly seen what we are about- helping women and girls achieve their fullest potential.

We have to concentrate our efforts to make this happen.

Barbara Dixon
Programme Director