

Kodeni School Project Expedition Journal

John Fudge - February 2015

Background

In 2010 Mark Lamb and I together ran an Urban Saints Rebuild trip and were introduced to working with Amor Ministries in San Diego/Tijuana Mexico. We were both impacted by the biblical social justice values demonstrated by Amor, and became aware of possibilities for appropriate direct social action as a result of taking a team to Mexico.

Mark had long had a degree of vision for building a primary school as a response to his understanding of the need for good quality education, accessible by children born into poverty.

Gareth Webber began working with John, delivering children's work training in Burkina Faso in 2012. On that training trip it became clear that there existed the compelling combination of available land, a community in extreme need of a school, a highly effective church leader and leadership team capable of carrying a project on the scale of a school build and development project.

Mark, Gareth and John returned to Burkina Faso to discuss the possibility of partnership with Moise Oubda, leader of Laffiabougou Assemblies of God Church in February 2013. The three met with a Burkinabe architect and a Burkinabe builder both of whom had already designed and built more than one school successfully. It became clear that it would be possible to use local skills and materials for the construction. The task became much more about financing. Plans and estimates were drawn up and e-mailed to the UK to enable focus and clarity regarding the exact task on their return.

Soon after that time the Kodeni schools team was formed in Folkestone, comprising John Bird (Head Teacher, St Mary's Primary Academy), Jon Wilson (Folkestone rainbow Centre), Mark Lamb (Teacher), Gareth Webber, John Fudge, Dawn Kellers (Administrator), Harry Taylor (Asst Administrator).

The team developed a Christian Ethos for the school:

"Recognising its Christian foundation, the school will preserve and develop its religious character in accordance with the principles of the Assemblies de Dieu du Burkina Faso and in partnership with the local Church.

The school aims to serve its community by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. It encourages an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith and promotes Christian values through the experience it offers to all its pupils."

The project team, with its wide range of skills and perspectives developed Mark's original outline of building a school into the following vision.

1. *Raise a team from the Shepway area that will together raise the necessary funds to build and equip the school in Kodení. Estimates in 2012 were in the region of £139,000.00 but the fall in the value of the euro has trimmed this to nearer £110,000.00. The school build would include an assembly hall that would serve as a church building (a multipurpose room) – a unique concept in the area.*
2. *Recruit a team of 20-40 people from Shepway to start the build. The monetary value of their work (which would deny tradesmen local to Kodení this work) is roughly \$1.00 per person per day, so negligible. The mobilisation value of their going is likely to be highly significant.*
3. *Recruit one primary school in the Shepway area to commit to long term relationship with each new cohort that joins the school. Thus each reception class will have a sponsoring UK school, committed to making their education affordable for the six years of their primary schooling from year R to year 6.*
4. *Develop a long term link to the Kodení school, involving exchange teacher visits for excellent teacher training not just for Kodení, but also of the other schools in the area.*
5. *As part of the school, construct a multi-purpose assembly hall that could also double as a church building. The school and the church would work hand in hand developing flourishing human life in the village and surrounding area – physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially.*

The Kodení Expedition in February 2015 triggered the construction of the first half of the school. After 1 year of amazing fund raising, the team had raised around £56,000.00 which was enough to fund construction and fit-out a 3 classroom block, a set of latrines and an administration building. Significant fund raising events included a three peaks challenge, several school sponsored bounces, a wedding in which the bride and groom requested cash gifts to the school instead of wedding presents, some individuals moved to give big one-off donations and several generous donors responding to the appeal in the book 'Touching Smyrna.' A golf day, a cream tea, swimathon, quiz night, auction of promises, BBQ, clothes swap, and many more events packed out a year of action. The team would reflect that it has been fun and encouraging if quite tiring!

Moise's team plans to open the school in October 2015.

The Folkestone team has begun plans to return to Kodení with a second expedition in 2017 to commence construction of the second half of the school (the remaining three classrooms, the second latrine block and the multipurpose hall).



Thursday 12 February 2015

Bleary expedition team members gathered for Norman Burnett's Harbour Bus coach departure at 5.30 a.m. A Duke's of Hazard style dash to the rendezvous for 5.33 a.m. in the case of the Fudge/Taylor axis of evil – the inevitable walk of shame down the coach aisle followed, as those who'd made it on time found it necessary to check their watches.

Smooth transition at Gatwick saw us all in Istanbul with very few hitches, except for a few disputes over allowable Scrabble words. Getting 24 people, all sporting distinctive blue tops, onto the right plane was a breeze for the Rebuild team. They sometimes have to cope with six times as many! Mark Lamb (expedition leader), with typical aforesight noticed in-flight that we were only due to be on the ground in Istanbul for about an hour and issued instructions to the team. 'Alright look lively everyone!'

The transit in Istanbul was a breeze. We arrived at gate 202 and our Ouagadougou flight departed from gate 202! Welcome to Mark Lamb's world of falling on one's feet everyone.

Andy Lyde from the USA rendezvoused with us easily at the gate, completing our group to a full complement of 25. Gareth and Steve were already in Laffiabougou, being our advance party, so our final team would number 27.



In Ouagadougou, we had to make our way past the Yellow Fever verification booth – presumably complete with hypodermic intervention capabilities for those unwise enough to have left their certificates at home.

We were processed quickly and were soon following beaming friends from Moise's church out to their coach, then checking into a decent guest house for some sleep. Most people got a bed, everyone had a shower and there was a refrigerator full of water; decent start.

Friday 13 February 2015

Breakfast of omelette, coffee and tea, bananas, bread and jam was ready and waiting, and after a little bit of luggage stowing, we were away again. Our early

start was to avoid the worst of the heat, as the coach had no aircon so the only cooling option available was to drive along with the doors open. Here we ran into a problem. Our driver, not overburdened with flexibility, refused to open them.

Francoise, already seeing plenty of action as team translator, was unable to cajole any cooperation from him - something to do with it being illegal. We managed to wedge the door halfway along open a little with a few water bottles but sweltered like those chickens in Morrison's rotisseries, all the way to Bobo. People pay for saunas. I have no idea why.

Team members gazed out through the windows as we swept past mile after mile of horrible unimaginative cuboid mud brick houses. The road itself was fantastically smooth and remarkably empty. The settlements and towns we passed through gave us a glimpse of life in one of the world's poorest economies, grim.

Six hours on a coach is too much for 25 bladders, and it became necessary to take a comfort break. Toilet facilities were nonexistent so travellers were split into two groups along gender lines. Ladies headed into the bushes on the near side, gents crossed the road. Most people seemed to understand this simple system, except Harry Taylor who visited the 'ladies.' Blissfully (literally) unaware of the effect of his presence, he wrung out his kidneys and returned to the bus. The girls were all too aware of his proximity (if not his prostate) and headed deeper into the bushes to avoid the indelicacy of his voyeurism. Thus it was that Joey and Harriet chanced upon a snake, happily before making any unguarded flesh available to its fangs. Screams, rapid redeployments ... you get the picture.

We arrived without further incident, though with one further (snake free) stop, in Bobo Dioulasso, where the advance party and Moise's team had been very busy. In both the women's and the men's quarters (separate compounds) mattresses adorned with sheets were arranged neatly into rows. Each had its own four post frame, from which was suspended a new mosquito net. The four post frames had been welded by the street boys' project set up by Moise. Portable fans blew air around noisily. We were not expecting such comfort.

A large modular boardroom-like table seating 27 people had been assembled under a newly erected roof, giving shade to the men's compound. We took our meals here, all week. This table was soon groaning under the weight of curried goat and rice, bananas and cold bottled water.

After the meal we used the new toilet and shower block for the first time (amazingly good facilities - in November these had not existed) and introductions were made to Philip and Alison Ledune (Aid to Burkina founders) - our project was being run under the Aid to Burkina Charity which partners with Moise and Elizabeth Oubda's many humanitarian community projects.

All subsistence arrangements were very much in hand, we were beginning to see how effective Moise and Elizabeth's leadership was. The largest group they had ever hosted before was less than 10, and we numbered 27 (+ Philip and Alison so 29).

Saturday 14 February, 2015

I love you, I love you my love is almighty
I wish my pyjamas were next to your nightie
don't think I'm too forward or soft in the head
I mean on the washing line, not in the bed

Thus ended Steve Ridgwell's advice to our glorious leader Mark Lamb, as the latter struggled to compose some thoughtful verse for fiancée Bernie's Valentine's Day card.

We were up at 5.25 a.m., breakfasted at 6.00 a.m. and at work by 7.00 a.m. That was pretty nasty, especially as some of the banter in the men's dorm had run fairly late.

Breakfast was bread, butter, jams (these varied in colour but not in flavour) and bananas, washed down with water and or tea/coffee.

The team spent its first hour or so relocating thousands of 5kg cinder blocks from one part of the church compound to another. Then we split into two smaller teams, one for each minibus. Team 1 headed for the work site, team two loaded 900 of the blocks onto a lorry to be taken out to the work site. Brick moving was done by forming two chain gangs. Each person touched half the bricks (450 X 5kg = 2 ¼ tonnes) per load onto the lorry, and the same taking them off (4 ½ tonnes per run by hand, by everybody.)

When team 2 and their lorry reached the site, they found a scene of dusty hard labour. Pickaxes were being wielded like something from a Gladiator scene, shovels were shoveling, and people were wilting in the heat. There were some issues over tools and space – 'hey, get out of my trench! Give me your shovel!' Spoken in rich deep, sombre African tones (by men and women). We handed them over, until we realised these were church volunteers some of whom felt a sense of shame that we were digging in their dirt. We soon learned to respond with 'oi hand that shovel over mate!' in strongly



accented Kentish (or Californian) English. Banter began. By the end of a harsh morning of heat, sweat and manual handling, we were pretty punctured. I glanced across the work site at 11.30 a.m. and saw only one white face able to wield a tool. We called it a day, and returned to showers and food. The temperature was over 100 degrees and we could not cope. 10 swings of a pick axe and we had to swap out of the trenches.

However by the end of that first harsh morning, we had dug all of the foundations



for the three classroom block. One important factor was that we were digging into iron ore, thus digging was incredibly tough but the ground was rock, so the foundation depth was reduced to 28cm from 40cm. We returned to base elated at the amazing pace of progress, and were delighted to find a wonderful cooked meal – chicken and chips, awaiting us. That was the point at which we realised how hungry we were.

We met the governor of the South west of Burkina Faso this afternoon (equivalent UK rank: Cabinet Minister). He greeted us, pledged his support for our project and formally welcomed us to his Region. Mark Lamb sat awkwardly just along from the great man in a row of dignitaries, whilst the team subtly pulled faces at him from the audience, trying to make him laugh.

Mark Lamb, from very early in the trip, became known as 'Our Glorious Leader' and was already beginning to revel in his new status as the all-powerful potentate of our compound (except when Moise was around). This went well until he passed wind at the dinner table and was sent to the naughty chair by his mum. Dignity restored, Mark made a few arrangements for various outings which would keep the longsuffering, ever accommodating Moise busy in the coming days.

Sunday 15 February, 2015

All of our team (including some non-church-goers) attended Moise's church this morning. Around 700 worshipers packed the place out. The choirs sang multi-part harmonies with great gusto. My personal favourite was the Dorcas Girls' Project choir.

Moise honoured Andy Lyde, our American



team mate, explaining that it was a mission team from the USA that planted AOG Burkina Faso (a movement of 3-4000 churches rapidly growing and expanding across the whole nation). Flags of the UK, USA and Burkina Faso were raised, welcomes extended collaboration for the Gospel recognised and Jesus honoured and worshipped. Philip Ledune preached boldly and many people responded for healing. I heard a German lad admitting his ear was healed. It was funny hearing a doctor using phrases like 'I am a doctor, but we are not talking about doctoring. This is about welcoming the power of God to heal.' I found it refreshing (and rare) to listen to someone who is comfortable going for either.

The afternoon saw Coach Russell work alongside team Doctor Russell to put out an England Football team against the Laffiabougou Street Boys' team. It was a bit of a preview of the Doha World Cup – with Europeans, and one N American lurching around in concrete socks, struggling with 37 degrees of heat, whilst black Africans skipped around them demonstrating dazzling skills.

I fell over spectacularly, legs in the air etc., was smashed in the family jewels by a raking shot, and having got fed up with a lightning fast street boy going round me yet again, kicked him up in the air, all to howls of abuse from the stands. The crowd was huge and veered between hilarious derision and dangerous rumbling. My hearts and minds campaign felt like it had taken too much advice from our American cousin.

Mark Lamb missed a penalty but scored with a lucky header. We held on for a 2-2 draw with our penalty area like the Alamo and Andy Lyde playing a blinder in goal. The German coach of the African team summed up our lucky draw:

'Typical England, can't take penalties against the Germans, opted for the long ball down the middle, and saved by an American.' It's easy to understand how we've ended up at war with them a few times.

The coach and medic kept us all alive and thriving in the heat with touchline diagnoses and rolling substitutions, balancing survival and tactical nous – no sunstroke, no dehydration and an honourable draw – wonderful stuff.

After the evening meal we interviewed Philip and Alison Ledune, founders of Aid to Burkina www.aidtoburkina.org.uk. Philip is a GP, Alison a secondary school teacher. Here are a couple of powerful quotes:

'Every family you see here has experienced infant mortality. It is much more common here than in the UK but the pain is the same.'

'The top healthcare intervention I make as a professional doctor is to build wells. There is no point in treating preventable diseases if you have it within your power to prevent them.'

The project team decided pretty much there and then to install a well at Koden School. Our kids will not die of preventable water-borne diseases, it's worth raising an extra £7000.00 – though heaven only knows we have challenge enough as it is!

Monday 16 February, 2015

Gareth Webber from Harbour Church led our building efforts, alongside the Burkinabe builder, with whom some difficulties were emerging. The job was progressing far too fast for him and he was worried that he was losing work as a result of the army of volunteers coming from the church, the village, and of course England/USA.

Moise carefully pointed out that all the low-skill work was being done by volunteers, but for the builder's expert part of the job, we were having little impact. He would be paid (by the Europeans he was working alongside and starting to resent.) As usual, Moise patient careful working through of an issue was effective.

Brick lorry duties for team 1 were complicated by the lorry stopping off to pick up a load of steel reinforcing in comedy lengths which snaked around all over the place when we carried them across the site.

By the end of the day we had managed to fill the foundations with concrete and boulders. There were some enormous blocks that would need laying on top of the foundations tomorrow. These were carried across the site

one at a time (I reckon they weighed 25 kilos each and were awkward to lift because of their size and shape. Brick carrying made a very tough end to the day, as the heat had held off until the last half hour, but then cut in with a vengeance.



After showering, lunch of curried goat and couscous, and a table tennis competition, we headed into the village of Kodenii to look around and meet the people.

Walking down the dirt road hill to the river, we saw beautifully worked land. Excellent market gardening surrounded by thick thorny hedges to keep out the goats was prepared by magnificently built men toting hoes and watering cans. The sights gave some perspective to the vegetables on sale in the markets, often for paltry sums.

Melting mud brick huts were everywhere. The rains melt them. These huts, in tiny compounds contained a few cooking pots. Some of the better organised compounds had ovens for cooking things

commercially, and one had a set-up for brewing dolo – the local beer. Some of the team got quite excited about helping with the brewing process.

The women were washing both clothes and pots in the slow-moving, filthy water of the river – more of a brook at this stage of the dry season.



We strolled casually through the village, engaging smilingly with the people, playing hokey-cokey with swarms of children. The children were not well dressed. Some had barely any clothes; some had nothing on the bottom half of their little bodies. They were adorable, cheeky and in great need. The visit was both sobering and delightful. We had met our kids – the school is for these – the desperately

poor, especially those whose parents cannot afford them a top or pair of knickers.

We are working, hoping and praying that the next generation of children will be fully clothed, because despite their poverty, they will get a decent education and the opportunity for faith in the living God. We hope to be a small part of God's plan, delivered through the local church to get them up out of their hopeless state.

The girls in the team handed over 14 wedding dresses to Elizabeth – she is setting up a wedding dress hire company to help fund work among widows and orphans. Francoise in particular had put in a tremendous amount of effort for this and it was



good to see her beaming with satisfaction and full of worship, recognising God's leading and provision in her own mini-story behind this generous gift. Fittingly Manda Wilson's gorgeous dress was among those donated. Manda and Jon, married in October, had given up all their wedding presents to fund the school build.

Tuesday 17 February, 2015

Two lorry loads of blocks (1800 blocks in total) were moved to the site today. That's 9 tonnes of manual handling for each member of team 1. The team took to riding in the brick lorry on top of the load. Great fun, much singing and waving and the occasional smack in the face from the tree tops for the unwary (Barney). No hats were lost in the making of these journeys.

There was a huge amount of barrowing today, and two types of barrowing to be done.

First we had to load several barrows of sand, to one of cement in a volcano mix for the foundations. These volcanoes were mixed all around the building so the materials were barrowed to them. Nigel Lewis was first to present a barrow that he felt confident to push to the builder for mixing and to hear the words 'Yoo harve nort fullled eet.' He was sent back.

Then there was moving mountains of red sand used to fill in the foundations and create the level floor of the building. The barrow-filling teams slogged away with their spades, keeping sweating barrowers moving. A hierarchy of barrow payloads emerged among the shovelling teams: -

The continental	Derisory payload, likely to be sent back for re-filling.
The full English	Acceptably filled from the builders' perspective but some improvements needed to avoid scorn.
The African	Full and hard to push.
The Holy	A good measure, pressed down and overflowing
The double African	The African, with an enormous boulder on top.

Only Africans could push a 'double African' – we watched in admiration.



Speaking of watching in admiration, Our Glorious Leader demonstrated his 'I can handle an African barrow' technique and charged up the planks laid across the site only to fail horribly and publicly.

After lunch we dropped by to visit the Dorcas Girls' centre, shown round by its founder Elizabeth. Elizabeth started

working with the girls about 8 years ago. She began to explore what might be done for the female children of polygamous marriages. Such girls are extremely poor,

with no education. For many, without Elizabeth, their future is to be married to an older man, produce children for him in abject poverty and to die young.



She arranged simple lessons, basket weaving and some tailoring. Beginning with just the meagre resources of an underpaid struggling church family, she soon attracted the attention of overseas sponsors. Once they took an interest, a residential training college for 180 girls has become reality. Each girl graduates with accredited language and math's qualifications, and with tailoring and business schools. On graduation the girls receive their own sewing machine. Most team

members had their measurements taken for a garment. All agreed to pay the girl who made it 5 euros – a generous amount, but not ridiculously generous.

We interviewed Moise tonight, a tremendous privilege. His background of poverty was a little difficult for us to grasp, as his status as a highly dignified and respected leader makes it hard to understand where he came from.

His struggles came alive as he recounted being told at age 11 that his father could not pay the school fees and Moise's education was over. He worked in a factory from the age of 17 – buying his first pair of shoes with his first pay packet. He put his brother through university by sharing his (modest) pay. His brother (then an aeronautical engineer) returned the favour by funding Moise's bible college training some years later.

Moise described the years of incredible ministry, dividing his thriving church into 4, then planting other churches, investing in young leaders, developing people. What emerged was an initially uneducated, highly talented man somehow finding a way to develop himself then others. Not only has he gained a high education, he has educated hundreds of others. At every stage his key choices have been guided by his absolute determination to hear and obey God.

'We care about the poor because we were poor. You cannot just look away when you understand.'

Wednesday 18 February, 2015

Having first pick-axed and shovelled out the foundation trenches on Saturday, we had on Monday filled in those trenches with poured concrete and iron ore boulders. On Tuesday, strong, heavy foundation blocks had been laid. Today was all about the concrete ring beam. Those massive long floppy steel reinforcement rods were dropped into wooden shuttering (boxing). Concrete was then mixed and

poured into the shuttering with great care taken over straightness and level. The walls would be built on this beam.

Many of the team had been to Screwfix and obtained rather natty steel toe-capped Velcro-fastened trainers (£9.99 – white leather uppers, steel nail-resistant soles) that were pretty much the envy of all who didn't get a pair. You may detect, gentle reader, that I was numbered among those fortunate enough to wear their first Velcro-fastening shoes since qualifying for long trousers.

All this wooden boxing meant there was plenty of opportunity to step on a nail, and Chris Chandler duly obliged. Now if he'd been wearing his budget Screwfix nail-proof romper shoes he'd have been OK – but he wasn't so he learned to hop for a bit.

Mark organised with Moise to invite some decent market traders to come and sell us their wares, and our compound turned into a local market. Much haggling ensued, and everyone seemed pleased. Moise reviewed the prices paid by everyone and arranged a refund for Bernie who had not haggled hard enough!

In the evening we met and interviewed Idrissa, the Fulani evangelist with whom Urban Saints has been working. Idrissa described being educated in an Islamic college, working in Senegal and being introduced there to Jesus by a Senegalese Fulani, he returned with the Good News to his own people. Things did not go well initially as his family threw him out (his dad still does not speak to him) and he came under tremendous pressure. However his message - coming as it does from a former Moslem scholar, the tenacity of his character, and the power of God have combined to see him working in more than 40 Fulani communities in a 100km radius.

Every day we have been served by a team of 25 church members, all women. Moise explained that they had volunteered to serve us, clean our toilets, wash our dishes and cook. They were not being rewarded, except by God. Their contribution was as voluntary as ours. 'You have come to dig and to shovel, and you expect only to please God. For them it is the same' – Moise.



Thursday 19 February, 2015

Build day 5 was all about the sand. Massive heaps of red sand and of course the obligatory two lorry loads of cinder blocks needed moving. We were by now pretty adept at shifting stuff.

Amazingly, despite most of us shifting 9 tonnes of bricks, and enough sand barrowing to reposition a small beach each day, we didn't ache too badly and

our feet seemed to be OK too - despite budget Screwfix romper shoes.



At least some of our physical fortitude should be attributed to Kayleigh, a dance teacher and team member. She had us warming up and warming down every day, flexing joints that had lain undisturbed for many a long year. Despite groans of protest and the occasional sharp crack from a rusty ligament, we were much blessed by her efforts, and pretty impressed.

Dark red sand gets everywhere and stains the skin to a delicate shade of rust. We all looked pretty tanned, even our grey hair went brown. This can take several washes to remove, unless you were Mark Lamb of course, as your hands tended not to get too dirty.

Supervision was more Mark's line, particularly from shady spots. We didn't begrudge this at all, and most were very impressed with his excellent programming skills and ability to stay one jump ahead of disaster; a combination of catlike organisational reflexes and the grace of God. He was surrounded by an almost incredibly



disparate range of skills (from dance, through video editing, to building logistics and medicine) allowing him to delegate almost everything – a role at which he was most adept. He was a popular and sensitive leader, much appreciated by all, including those baling him out; a gift!

Our down-time this afternoon was taken in a beautiful forest. The team found itself swinging on cable bridges and chilling beneath majestic trees. It was here that Steve first produced from his pocket a realistic rubber snake (known from this point on as Steve's trouser snake). A blood-curdling scream drew the medics over, and convinced Melissa the doctor for about 2 micro-seconds that he was victim of a vicious attack. He had more success with the Africans at the work site on subsequent days.

We interviewed Elizabeth about her life tonight. The team learned of her hard childhood and the struggles of early marriage when she and Moise had virtually nothing to live on (she became emotional when pressed about this). Instead of

going to school, she was selling fruit and vegetables from baskets on the top of her head – we had seen many little girls doing that. The money-making and handicraft skills she teaches the Dorcas girls had been gained here. It was an obvious tragedy that such a talented girl missed her primary education because of where she was born. A tragedy redeemed by the incredible power of God. She cannot go back and fix her past but she has grown out of it.

Elizabeth, when pressed by Gareth told of a prayer event in which a young girl was raised from the dead whilst she was helping lead the church during Moise's absence. There was something simple and uncomplicated about the story, and subsequent demands for her to raise others (she explained that out of moral duty to the bereaved she had tried but has concluded that this is something very rare.) It would be fair to say that the English team would agree it was something very rare in their experience too.

Friday 20 February, 2015

Almost unbelievably, our last day. The street boys from Moise's project turned up in numbers. These lads have run away from their polygamous families where inter-wife



strife, hunger and poor treatment make lives intolerable. Even the risk of dying on the streets seems attractive. Their usual life of hanging around the market in gangs, getting into crime, has been interrupted by Moise's expression of God's love for them. They have been given overalls to wear (more like grey lab coats), taught literacy and numeracy, carpentry, welding, tailoring and basic electrical skills. They are becoming employable, and frankly you could barely tell the difference between their behaviour and that of the church youth group (also volunteering beside us).

We just about finished the sand barrowing today, and the block laying for the walls reached shoulder height on all but the front (and most

complicated) wall by the time we left. The Africans had completed this wall by the end of the day.

The arrival of the last lorry load of bricks was celebrated with considerable enthusiasm. No more sweating away in chain gangs! Then, horrifyingly, Mark had us all back in chains again moving bricks from the stacks to the brick-layers! We didn't mind – this was something we could do well and it was quite fun, if exhausting.



Just before leaving site we performed two necessary ceremonial duties.

- Each team member laid one brick, and was given the opportunity to pray as they did so.
- Jeremy led us all in 'Climb, Climb up Sunshine Mountain' managing to draw in many of the African volunteers and builders.

A few team members became quite emotional on this last day. We had started with a piece of Burkina Faso scrubland and in six brutal days had seen it transformed into a substantial building. Now we could stand inside a classroom and imagine the children who would sit there in just a few months. The materials had been bought with our own money, and with that of our friends. The whole experience amplified by the pace of the build was quite overwhelming.

The garments from the Dorcas girls arrived during the afternoon – exotic colours and beautiful designs drew appreciative murmurs from the clients. One particularly vibrant shirt was sported by Nigel – who had picked it out himself. No prizes for guessing which team member was colour blind then! He looked as though he'd been wrapped in a Marvel comic.

We played football against the church team this afternoon. Many of our opponents had poor footwear, and this may have gone some way to evening up the contest. Somehow, despite being under considerable pressure in extreme heat, we got to half time 1-0 up from a sweeping classy move. The first half lasted 8 minutes, and the team all in decent shape during the break. The second half was all about missed chances as the locals pounded our goal from all angles. It was a bit 'to absent friends' at the back - Andy Lyde performing wonders in goal, assisted by post and bar. When it became apparent that they would not blow for full time until they had equalised, I chose dishonour over death by heat exhaustion, and let my opposite number through for an easy finish. Local honour upheld, the ref immediately blew for full time. The second half lasted 33 minutes.

In the evening Moise held a formal dinner in honour of all the volunteers, involved in the build, including us. Despite the language difficulties (usually solved for us by Françoise) our English/American/French team split up and ranged itself among the Africans – a wonderful experience.

Saturday 21 February, 2015

Our coach transport was downgraded to a small bus, which contained exactly the same number of seats as we had people. The entire luggage was therefore stowed on the roof, which took ages.

The journey was hot, bisected by an amazing picnic, including fizzy drinks, put together by Elizabeth and stowed in a massive cold box.



The road was pretty clear and our progress was swift. The seats were a bit dodgy but after numbness had set in we were comfortable enough.

On arrival at the guest house in Ouagadougou, there was a wonderful meal, showers and a lot of lazing about and card playing, waiting to go to the airport.

Gareth and I met with Moise and Francois, our two friends involved in Urban Saints training. I have been disappointed in the strategic engagement of key players in owning the training in Burkina Faso. Our friends fed back that the president of AOG had recently contacted Francois following very clear prophetic input on the subject of the next generation. Francois is a highly capable church leader, and also a brilliant youth worker. It seems that the problem has been linked to the expectation of international cash (not by these two – by those engaged by the church to advance young people's work). We explained that Urban Saints would ONLY get involved in skills transfer, and in giving materials and coaching to those who owned for themselves the task and the vision for the next generation.

We agreed that I would return in October to be there when Moise opens the school (will probably do a quick Part 3 training course with Idrissa whilst in Bobo), then in the capital gather strategic people to receive 'training trainers training' in order for them to take the training back to three regions of the country.

Moise and Elizabeth saw us off. Whatever you may have been told about Africa - think again! These two arranged beds, frames, and mosquito nets for 27. All coaches, buses, meals, building supplies, tools, market traders, guest speakers, and drinks came on time. All appointments were kept. These people delivered to a standard beyond any expectation, doing so with loving gentle tenacity. We consider the new school to be in good hands.

At the airport we were treated to a study in how to make getting a few people on planes as complicated and time wasting as possible. My passport was checked 10 times. Despite this, someone was let onto our plane that should have been on another one! There came a scream over by the x-ray machine so I assumed Steve's trouser snake had made a last appearance. Happily not, a lizard had run up Harriet and was being executed by stamping. Much mess, traumas, hilarity – depending on your perspective.

Sunday 22 February, 2013

In Istanbul I was privileged to sit with Andy Lyde - CEO of Amor Ministries. He volunteered to join us having exchanged many conversations with me about the place. Andy had helped us all to debrief back in Bobo, but I offered to debrief him more fully. His reflections can be found at <http://amorblog.org/leaps-of-faith-in-burkina-faso> and they follow along the lines of what was discussed at debrief. I encourage you to read his very perceptive writing. It was wonderful to be able to.

Turbulence most of the way home apparently caused a considerable number of team members to suffer from air sickness, keeping our team long-suffering medic Melissa very busy. I slept.

Touchdown at Gatwick was the second worst of all the landings I have endured (and there have been a few!)

The temperature on arrival was approx. 30 degrees below that in Ouaga, and we had a couple of pairs of sandals (no socks) in action - nippy! Happily Norman and his bus got us home in time miss Tim Bloomfield's welcoming party in Hythe.

It was good that most of the hardest moments of the trip occurred on the flight home - such a blessing that way round.

Mark (Leader) and Gareth (Building), Melissa (Medic) Françoise (language), Barney (video) Neil (Photos) and Kayleigh (warm-ups) I salute what God did through them. There was not a team member who under-performed, but these folk made exceptional contributions on top of hard work in the trenches. Gloire a Dieu we didn't so much take our dad with us, it felt like we met him there.

