



Dear All,

This month has brought the beginnings of dam construction along with some new challenges. The photograph below shows the site being cleared for the dam wall. As I write, a team of workers are moving large quantities of soil across to this site using wheelbarrows. The wall will be earthen.

Donald, my engineer had contacted a dam construction specialist called Jones and after some discussions, we hired him. Prior to employing him, Donald had warned me that Jones could be very difficult to work with. He had a history of causing conflicts within teams and then getting himself fired. But he was also the best man available for dam construction.

In view of this, I made a plan to put Jones in charge of operations but another worker, Brian, in charge of personnel. Everyone would be accommodated on site. I suggested that Jones and Brian work collaboratively since Brian had demonstrated good leadership skills whilst working here last year. Brian was not available immediately however, so we started the first week without him.

I negotiated a good salary package with Jones where he would be paid on completion of the job. The rest of the workers were to be paid a weekly wage. The first hint that there might be a problem occurred when I returned from town one day last week to see one of the workers walking down the road during work hours. On enquiry, I discovered that Jones had told the workers that they could finish early. I tried to explain to Jones that the salary structure was based on full days but he proved to be stubborn about his decision.



On hearing about this, Donald told me that Jones had often changed work hours without notice in previous projects and that this had proven to be very disruptive. A second incident followed two days later. The building contractor renovating the babies home told the dam workers that they would all have to sleep in one room of this house whilst newly laid concrete flooring dried in the other rooms. In response to this and without any discussion, Jones announced that he was leaving immediately to go back to his township and that we could expect to see him the next day. The problem with this is that it takes hours to travel back and forth to the township and he might not arrive back punctually (or even at all for a day or two!). All the other workers were fine with the accommodation changes. I quickly negotiated with the contractor for a separate sleeping space for Jones and Jones agreed to stay.

The third incident happened another two days later. At 8.00 pm after dinner, Jones again announced that he was leaving immediately to go back to his township. Another worker advised him to defer his decision until the next day. The next morning, Jones said he wasn't working with the rest of the team anymore because he was the only one who was hard working. He was using a couple of the english-speaking workers to tell me this and each interpreter took issue with what he was saying before reluctantly translating it for me. Jones was refusing to work with the team.

Since I had an appointment to go to that morning, I told Jones that I wasn't paying him any money until the end of the day when everybody was due to be paid. I suggested that he continue working. But when I returned at lunchtime, I found that Jones had refused to work. I sent him away with some pay and we will be meeting with the engineer in a few days to determine his future with the Children of Destiny Project.





In the two preceding photographs you can see Donald the engineer in a light blue shirt. Donald had a fairly privileged upbringing that included having adequate food. Therefore, he was able to reach his full physical potential (which is big!). In contrast to this, many of the labourers here have grown up knowing poverty and malnutrition and are often physically depleted when they begin employment with the project. Since they are now adults, I doubt that they will ever reach their potential height. Whilst they work, these labourers love staying over on the property because they receive three good meals a day. They begin to put on weight and feel good about themselves. They each have their own blanket at night, can wash with soap in clean, readily available water and even have access to electricity here (including an electric light). Donald's physical size gives him immediate status and authority with all the workers as it represents success, health and prosperity.

The Soccer World Cup is in full swing at the moment in South Africa and it seems that the whole African continent has tuned in. It's huge here. The engineer thought that I might struggle to keep workers focused at this time but so far they've been fine.

Last month, I wrote about John and Maggy and their return to school. Through a subsequent donation from Australia, Joseph, another child in the family has also been enrolled back into school. I can happily report that all of the five school-aged children in this family are now attending school.

That's all from me until next month.
Until then, stay well,

Mike



15-year-old Joseph (pictured above) has everything he needs to go back to school again. We ended up having to pay two years of school fees because the fees for a previous year were also outstanding and needed to be paid in order for us to re-enroll him. Although Joseph was shy and nervous being with a mzungu (me), David (also pictured) said that Joseph was beaming and raving when he got home to his parents after the enrolment.



Edward is seen here preparing to cook dinner for his fellow labourers. The firewood is collected from around the property and the big pot pictured is used in the afternoons to heat water for the evening wash. It's the cold season at the moment.