

MY WORKING TOUR OF THE NETHERLANDS

In November 2016, I did not have a slight dream of ever visiting Europe, let alone the Netherlands. But come December 2016; courtesy of Petra Munneke and Samen Succes Foundation; I started finally having dreams of eventually being in a plane bound for The Netherlands.

In the early hours of 21/1/2017, I was in an Egyptair headed to the Netherlands (most of us call it Holland). I touched down at Schiphol in Amsterdam at 14.00hrs. I cleared with the immigration and came out of the Airport and was greeted by extreme cold. I had not experience that cold before in my life. Petra was also waiting for me.

We went to her Fiat and went through Amsterdam seeing the sea and the big ships passing through the harbor, we also saw the greet steel factory spewing white smoke into the air.

Who knew that a Pokot man from the mountains of Nothern Kenya, with very little infrastructure will one day be in the ancient and very developed Amsterdam, it was very absorbing and amazing. The sight of development and sophistication unfolding before my own eyes.

The first thing that amazed me were the roads. In the whole of Netherlands the roads were made very expertly, the highways were broad and not close to each other. In contrast to the roads that we have in Kenya, were most of the roads are poorly made, the highways are small and close to each other, and potholes are common everywhere. I felt very safe while travelling in the roads of Amsterdam. In Kenya, while travelling on the roads, people normally are quite in the vehicle because they do not know whether they will arrive safe because of the bad roads and reckless drivers.

I also found out that services in Amsterdam and indeed the whole of Netherlands were superb. I never experienced an electricity outage even a single moment the all time I was there. In Kenya, power outages are common. A day does not pass before electricity is interrupted for some hours. Water was always flowing in the tap, safe for some few days when we lacked water at the boat house but it was rectified immediately it was reported.

In the mountains of Pokot and most parts of Kenya, water is a scarce commodity. Water is normally found by digging on dry riverbeds and it is common to share with domestic and wild animals. It is always dirty and unfit for human consumption. In the towns, things are not better as the taps lack water most of the time and water is also dirty.

It was amazing to me how the railway is working, all the towns are connected to the railway system. Travelling across the Netherlands from Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Den Haag, Blerik, Leiden, Breda, Nijmegen and other cities, the train is always a reliable means of transport. It comes on time and fast enough for comfort. In Kenya, the train which was constructed by the British in 1890 has been ran down and is no longer profitable to operate. This is a typical problem affecting most African countries.

I also learnt that most of the Netherlands is below the sea level. I was amazed as to how they could manage to hold the sea by building big dykes to contain the sea and continue to maintain it in good condition for many years. If it was an African country, then surely the land could have submerged long time because of lack of maintenance and corruption.

In Kenya, we are not able to control floods during the rainy season, when houses are swept away and people drown. We are not also able to store the flood water for use in the dry season when there is acute shortage of water and pasture. Animals and people die due to lack of water and food during this time.

I think we as Africans should sit down and embrace technology which is readily available in order to solve our problems.

The Dutch people are one of the most wonderful people in the world. Wherever I travelled in the country people were always welcoming and ready to listen to me. I once travelled to China and in that country people were always staring at me in a strange way, probably because I was the only black person in the street. But in the Netherlands I was always at home in any place I went.

I was also fascinated by the way of greetings, which was to peck the cheek three times rather than hand shake that we are used to. Of course we went to some place where the person was not interested at all in the greetings and I felt he was very rude. But I was told that it was very normal for many people not to greet people. In my part of the world, handshake is the way of life. You also shake the hand of your enemy.

It was also amazed to see that the big man's mentality is nowhere in the Netherlands. People are treated equally despite their social standing in society. It is quite opposite here where a big man is always treated like a god and followed around. I hope this should change as everybody is equal in the country.

When it comes to cuisine; for the two weeks I was in Netherlands, there was no single day that I ate the same type of food. The food is so diverse and comes from around the world. Not like here where most of the foods is centred around Ugali (Maize flour porridge), beans and sukuma wiki (kales). It makes someone full but has very little nutritional value. Petra used to tell me that it is like cement in the stomach. I bet she was right.

When it comes to work, the Dutch are always motivated and work hard. They are committed to the work they do. It was a challenge to me as in my work place there is very little motivation. People spend most of the day doing very little while there is a lot to be done. I Hope to find a formula to change this.

The systems in the Netherlands are made such that everybody is guaranteed of the future. That is the health is available to everybody and equal to every one, jobs are also available to the citizens but depends on your education, housing is also available depending on your pocket. When one retires, he or she is guaranteed of a good retirement with the care that they deserve.

In my country, it is very difficult to get all that I have mentioned above. Health services are very poor. Health facilities are poorly equipped and most of the time no drugs. If it is available it is for the rich as you have to pay from your pocket. There is no insurance to pay.

There are no jobs available in this country. If jobs are found then a bribe has to be paid so that it could be secured. So most youth live a hopeless life.

Housing for the majority are the shanty type. Made of mud grass and, for the lucky ones they use iron sheets. They are poorly ventilated. Those in town are worse of as there is no drainage and no

toilets. When one retires then you can expect him to die within months if he did not acquire enough during his working life.

It was a big experience to have come to the Netherlands. There was a lot that I learnt and it is a big opportunity to bring the lesson to Kenya so that we can change our perception. Of course we cannot reach the Netherlands but we can improve things so that the lives of our citizens can improve significantly.

Donato Shaw