

Kenny Mackenzie's Trip To Ituri Forest.

By Pastor Upoki Bitum



Kenny Mackenzie is at the entrance of a Pygmy's camp in the forest of Congo

It was unbelievable to see that the one coming to see us was Kenny Mackenzie, a Scottish missionary to Africans in Uganda, who has demonstrated servant leadership by actions at ABU. His actions have defined him not just a servant leader but also a pro-active servant leader. His presence in Africa can inspire many of us to become better servant leaders; it can also convert those who claim to be servant leaders into real servant leadership in order to change the mentality of this continent if they accept to be followers for some time.

On Wednesday, he arrived at the airport of Bunia at 2Pm. He was warmly welcomed by Upoki Bithum and Dr. Muamba. After having some serious discussion with government officials who insisted that Kenny should submit his certificate of yellow fever, otherwise, he would not be admitted and sent back to Uganda. God intervened, and Kenny was eventually admitted. It was a new experience that Kenny went through at Bunia airport.

In that same day and since he did not get tired, he spent his time on touring the town of Bunia. He went walking around, seeing old and new buildings standing in the thick dust. He walked through the dust of the town. The main road leading to Mahagi was being built from the entrance of Bunia to the exit. Trailers, big trucks, motorbikes and UN vehicles all were splashing dust on the people walking along the main road. From a bit a distance, you could see people of different social class walking through the dust as if they would fall sick the following day. As we were walking along the main road, a big trailer was coming and splashing dust. Kenny, since he was not used to walking on the road full of dust, which could be held responsible for causing anomalies in human body, wise as he was, alerted me to move away from the main road to avoid being soaked in the dust. We slopped to the big market.

Here, different people were doing different things. Some were doing welding, building metal doors and windows. Some were selling clothes and food, and some were busy dealing in gold, and there were bodabodas. Businesses hinged on foreign currency. Dollar was the main currency instead of Congo money. “ is everything sold in dollar”?, Kenny asked. As we were going back home from the market, the national flag was descending down. Without realizing it, a soldier, who was standing without shaking his body and who was fixing 90% of his attention to the flag, saw us walking instead of honoring the national flag, and he shouted at us to stop walking immediately. This was a strange event to Kenny to see everybody stopped when the national flag was coming down from the post.

Friday was dedicated to visiting Pygmies in the forest. “ I want to see the Pygmies and this is the main thing”, said Kenny. At midday, we set off on motorbikes. We were four: Dr. Muamba, Upoki Bitum, Leng’cwiny Mugisa, and Mackenzie Kenny. Kenny was carried by Dr. Muamba on the big motorbike, and Upoki carried Mugisa on the small bike. About 45 minutes of riding, Kenny complained of his leg which was getting tired, and he asked if we could stop to pose a bit. Immediately, we stopped for posing. Since the love of Jesus was burning him to keep on moving until he could accomplish the task put before him, enthusiastically, he said we should move because his leg was no longer feeling pain. We rode hundred Kilometers to a sub county, called Komanda. Here, we went to a restaurant where Kenny had only soft drinks because the food he ate at Bunia was still in him. But the rest of us went ahead to eat again though we had just eaten.

It was the entrance of the big forest (equatorial forest). Komanda is situated at the entrance of the forest, and the forest is full of Pygmies. As we were about to finish drinking and eating, a man came in and asked if we would come to his village to visit a band of Pygmies, because he said he was told that we came to visit Pygmies. He did not know we never came to see the Pygmies, living in his village.

At 3:00, we began to ride, taking the road leading to Mambasa. 10 minutes of riding, Kenny began to realize he was already in the forest. The road leading to Mambasa passes through the big forest. Seeing big trees which fit for timbers, the beautiful red Ituri River which contains gold and the long bridge which allows people of every social class to carry their businesses freely from east to west, Kenny asked where he was. The answer was he was about to reach Tipemuche, a small village which connects Mambasa and Irumu Zone. Some women who were carrying babies at their back and charcoal on their heads and some who were pulling little children along the road, children and men who were seated along the road at their dilapidated houses built with leaves and small trees harvested from the forest without replanting, were waving to Kenny as we were riding. Kenny without being distracted and as he was fixing his attention carefully on the rider who was riding on the slightly bumpy road, would wave back to them, telling them “ bonjours”.

At 5 PM, we landed at Tipemuche. The arrival of the white man was so significant in the village of Tipemuche. As the chief of the village was enthusiastically embracing us, an influx of children in decrepit clothes, who believed that walking a long distance to reach the school was a crime, illiterate women, who encouraged their daughters to get married at young age instead of thinking about how to send them to school, and young Bantu men, who spent their time on boozing instead spending time on making charcoal which would generate incomes to develop their village, came running to see Kenny. “ Upoki has brought a Muzungu”, happily they would say. Without the intention of Kenny, the Chief,

Bartus, a Bantu, who leads the Bantus with some justice and who oppresses mercilessly the Pygmies, gave up his chiefly throne for Kenny Mackenzie.

That day, it was a day Kenny was listening carefully to the vulnerable people of Tipemuche. Kenny was seated on the chair of the Chief, Burtus, and was surrounded by 7 elders of the village, 15 children, 4 old women and 6 young men. All of them sent their problems to Kenny. They talked about diseases such as diarrhea, conjunctivitis, river blindness and lack of accessing clean water. They said they had no health centers to cure their diseases and no school to educate their children. The community asked if they would be given clean water as a replacement of dirty water which was the source of medical problems in the village.



Makenzi listens to Bantu elders at Baraza, office of elders in Tipemuche.

After 30 minutes of listening to the Bantus, I took Kenny to visit the Pygmies. We rode inside the forest for about 10 minutes. Suddenly, Kenny found himself already in the first camp of Pygmies. We entered the camp. 62 human beings were in that camp in which children were the majority. Some of them were in a group, and they were roasting immature plantains for supper. The chief family had a sick child who was waiting for death, but the child was given treatment when we came there. The wife of the assistant chief was suffering from ulcers, and her health was deteriorating. There was a child who was naked and was isolated from other children; for, he had a terrible eye disease. There were about 9 young women who were nurturing their babies, and some young men were standing behind their huts shaping their arrows, probably to be ready for hunting monkeys the next day. Hearing the noise of our motorbikes, they all came together to greet and talk to us.

Kenny was the most important Personal before them. “Upoki has brought a Muzungu”, they said. The chief of the camp greeted Kenny. Kenny was chocked to see all those children had no schools to go to, their families sleep in a terrible conditions, and no sanitation in the camp. Those Pygmies realized that It was a sign of love to see a white man coming to see them in their camp in the evening. They said their

problems to Kenny, requesting for iron sheets or tarpaulins, water, and school for their children.



The woman seated in middle is the wife of the assistant chief, and she has been suffering from ulcers.

It was getting dark, yet the Pygmies wanted Kenny to spend the night in the camp. But we could not allow that to happen; for, about 10 Pygmies of the same family sleep in one small hut. If it was not too late evening, they would take probably 30 minutes to build a hut for Kenny to spend the night.

About 6:00, we left for Lolwa where we spent the night. 6km of riding, we reached Lolwa. We were accommodated by an American Missionary, who had been living there with his wife and a daughter for 12 years, and they had immersed themselves in the culture of the indigenous. We were surprised to hear them speak the language of the indigenous. They gave us food and drinks. Saturday morning, they gave us break fast, and we set off for Tipemuche to visit another camp.

At 9 AM, we went dip into the forest to the second camp. They were about 26 Pygmies both small and big. Kenny greeted them, and he had a talk with the Chief the camp. He was also shocked to see the kind of life they lived. The camp was surrounded by big trees for timbers, but no one was equipped to cut

them for timbers in order to lift up Pygmy community from their long night of suffering.



At first camp, Kenny stands near the chief of Pygmies, and Dr Muamba gives a smile of pain.

It was time for us to go back to Bunia. Riding so fast, we reached Bunia at 4:PM in that very Saturday. Kenny took a nap. He was very tired from a long tiring trip.

On Sunday morning, we went to Kasenyi to visit Upoki's family. Kasenyi is 55 KM away from Bunia, and is situated at the Lake Albert, bordering Uganda. It is a coastal area full of fishermen, and it is hot. Slopping the big mountain of Bogoro, where some of UN troops are based for the maintenance of peace and where some of Congolese barracks are located for the same purpose, was a challenge that the trip to Kasenyi presented to Kenny. Because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Kenny accepted to go through the challenge. Using a small motorbike, we rode to Kasenyi, and at 8:30 we reached. Without wasting time, and without bathing, we went first to the church. It was French service. Upoki interpreted for Kenny every that the Pastor, Isaac, said. What surprised Kenny in the church was to see all females covered their heads with veils. It reminded him of his church back home in Scotland where women cover their heads with veils. At 12:30, the service ended, and we came home. That was the day Christ was born. My wife cooked food for Kenny, and I ate with him. At 3 PM, we went to see the Chief of kasenyi. He welcomed us, and he was very happy to see me bringing a white man into his house. His son was asked to bring soft drinks to us. As we were chatting with the chief, two Bangladesh commanders came in and had a chat with the chief. The chief introduced us to them and them to us. The two commanders invited Kenny to have tea with them at their garrison. We all went with the chief to have evening tea with Bangladeshi UN commanders.

It was a beautiful day. It was about to get dark. The chief Deo, requested me to ask Kenny to sleep in his lodge for free. Kenny slept in the house of the chief of Kasenyi, and in the morning after having breakfast made by my wife, the Chief called us on phone to come for another heavy breakfast in his

palace. It was fish, chapatis, strong coffee, and milk. Kenny ate the food of the chief. After praying for the chief and his family, we said farewell to Kasenyi, but my small daughter was crying that I was leaving her. We reached Bunia at 12:PM

Tuesday, at 8 AM, we went to see to time of departure at the airport. The manager of MAF said Kenny would be told on phone the exact time of flying back to Uganda, but we had to pay 125\$ for tax. That was an abrupt challenge which emerged. MAF Uganda did not tell Kenny about this. We all lamented. We came back home lamenting. At 13PM, we came to the internet. At 5PM I took Kenny to see a land in a suburb area at Bunia where I plan to have a school built for Pygmies children and other vulnerable kids, including derelicts living on the streets of Bunia. We rode on the bike passing through different suburb areas of Bunia. We reached the house of the chief of Tembo, and he and his assistant showed us a land 150 meters squares. "It is a beautiful land", said Kenny, " I wish I had money I would buy it to have a school built for the Pygmies", he added.

On Wednesday, very early the morning, we accompanied Kenny Mackenzie to the airport. We took last photos. After one hour, Kenny entered the flight and took off.

It was a blessing to have Kenny Mackenzie spent his time in the Congo, DR during the period of celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was intrinsically motivated to visit Congolese, especially the Pygmies, the outcast social group, in the forest of Ituri. Having been touched, he made a wise decision to descend into the field where he interacted with the vulnerable Pygmies, having no education to get them out of ignorance, no health centers yet their bodies are sick, having no clean water yet they are thirsty, having no adequate food yet their bodies need to survive the pressure of hunger, having few clothes, yet they need clothing and housing. Those Pygmies were in complex situations which required God in His faithfulness and righteousness to come to their relief.

I wish Kenny would come to Congo again and would serve the same God Jesus he serves in Scotland. We wish God would allow him to minister to the vulnerable Congolese in Bunia. We wish you would support Kenny to support this ministry that focuses on Pygmies. And, for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we request if you could release some your money, which is precious to you and which you work so hard to earn it, to allow Kenny to build a boarding school for Pygmy children.