

Spotlight: Christian Nawej

Christian Nawej is the Operations Manager at Forest Fruits Zambia, one of EWB's partner organizations. Christian grew up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and has been working in Zambia for seven years. In addition to his position as Operations Manager, Chris completed an MBA in 2008.

In 2009, EWB national conference delegates contributed donations for representatives from EWB's partner organizations to attend the EWB conference in Toronto. Chris was one of the representatives who joined us. Here are some of his reflections on the trip.

Among the things I learned in Canada (other than what it's like to shovel snow, and how expensive everything is), I have never known that telling someone that they're fat is such a problem, or even an insult. In Africa, we are used to people coming and saying "Chris, you have become so fat." Surely being fat is not something I want to do - I want to reduce it. On my trip to Canada, I met Kristy, and she said, "Chris, you shouldn't say that - here we don't say that." It was good to learn about the culture. So something that I've been using for the past 30 years in my vocabulary, now I can't use it. Imagine a world where when I say to someone that

they are fat - it means they are eating well – but now I’ve learned that in Canada, someone getting fat, it’s like they are lazy. Yet they are the same world. It was good to have people around me who understood me and where I was coming from.

My biggest impression from my trip was to find people with so much energy and passion. Passion for things that are not personal, such as clothes, movies, personal careers, etc., but a passion to see another part of the world develop. Why was this impression so big? Because I live in a world where people are self-centered; they think of themselves so much. Even though people claim to work for other people (working in NGOs, government, or business), they are using their resources for their own advantage more so than for the people they say they’re serving.

At the EWB conference, I learned that yes, EWB really is about finding out what the issues are. But I was really impressed and touched. Not so much from the presentations given by big NGOs - these I’ve seen in Zambia through my seven years at Forest Fruits – their language is full of sweet talk. But I was impressed and touched because when I looked around in the room during the conference and listened to the questions people were asking, they really wanted to know about the effect and the results of all the interventions and decisions that are made. That really opened my mind to see that people were interested to see results, people wanted to know: how have the lives of people been changed.

Another thing was the approach of EWB. In the past, the approach was more on technology that could change the lives of people. Throughout the conference, I discovered that EWB is at the level where it wants to invest in the development of people. I could see that it’s more about people rather than just the technology that they are using. I believe in this approach because I believe the good way of helping Africa is to help Africans develop themselves. Africa has all the resources, Africa is rich, but many people in Africa haven’t seen that they can change their lives with what they have.

A story that touched me was the story of untying aid. I didn't expect to hear that story. After being around 600 EWB members, I can say I'm no longer surprised, but when I first heard it I felt it was a big signal. For me, I knew that something needed to be done, because, for example, for the UN, it is said a lot that more than 70% of the [aid] expenditures remains in the Western countries. They believe that when you want to give help to Africa, you need to spend on things to give to Africa, and also to spend on wages of expatriates. This story [of untying aid] showed to me the love that people in Canada have for Africa, that people want to see that Africa is being helped in a good way – not in a way where the help is hiding something. I have to say thank you to EWB [for advocating for the untying of Canada's aid].

I can also say that I have never spent time to think about the work I'm doing and the way I'm changing the lives of people, until I had this trip, and saw the place that Forest Fruits had during this conference. I felt that many people were happy with the work we do. Before I thought, "Yes, we're providing a market to people," but I've never spent time to really think about it. This gave me an opportunity to get feedback from people and it encourages me to continue the work I'm doing, maybe not always with Forest Fruits, but wherever I am: my work has to have a positive impact on other people.

To close, I met really good people. With some people, like my new friends Kristy and Liz, we could interact as if we were knowing each other for a long time. And if that is the spirit in EWB, then I have found the right people to share with. I can say that I would be happy to become a member of EWB and I will even send my \$40 [membership] this month end.