

Glockwise from above: The Noble Mobility group say hello to some of the Orange Babies' children. From left to right: Sigurd Jolles, Maarten van Zutphen, Paul Duijndam, Naud Wirtz and Desiree Mulder; Girls at the Five Rand Primary School in Okahandja, Namibia; Desiree Mulder with some of the children at Hope Village, Johannesburg (left) and Tonateni

By **DESIREE MULDER**, Noble
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Desiree Mulder, special ambassador for Orange Babies at Noble Mobility, joined the team who went cycling on a nine-day tour, together with 17 other people.

Although she had travelled through Namibia seven years back, she had little idea what her journey touring the charities and orphanages supported by the Orange Babies charity would be like.

She shares her diary of unforgettable experiences...

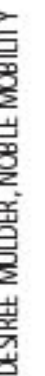
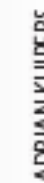
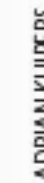
I'm arriving in Namibia early in the morning and, after checking in at the hotel, I'm soon on my way to Hope Village for a short visit. There, a Dutch couple has been managing four houses (for girls, boys, babies and our toddlers' home) with 87 children.

All the houses had their own day and night mother, while there was one father for the boys' home. Many children – including the toddlers – are living with HIV, but they all receive medication. Following a strict routine, the kids had to take their medication at 04.30 hours and 16.30 hours. It was sad to know

I met with my colleagues who had visited some Orange Babies projects. The heat and the unpaved roads – laden with stones and gravel – had made the cycling trip a lot harder and my colleagues had to give it maximum effort.

We all visited the Hope Village together this time. The kids sang and danced for us. They proudly showed us their rooms, which they share.

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Clockwise from top: One of the boys from the Hope Village babies' home; At Hope Village, one of the mothers and Baba Sylla, the founder of Orange Babies, cut a cake. The other adults on the picture include Noble Mobility staff and another cyclist; Noble Mobility's Naud Wirtz (left) and Maarten van Zutphen join in a game of rugby

It was very special for the five of us from Noble Mobility (Sigurd Jolles, Paul Duijndam, Naud Wirtz, Maarten van Zutphen and myself) to see the toddlers and the house they live in. Although we know that the kids are getting food, medicines and a safe place to stay, we all felt we need to do more...

Together with Baba Sylla, the founder of Orange Babies, and Elanza, the woman in charge of Orange Babies Namibia, we visited several projects. The first project is Ehalelo Koo Meme, helping HIV infected women and their babies. The women receive medicines so that they can breastfeed safely and the babies stay HIV negative. The babies are weighed and measured, and the women receive counselling.

We also visited a church involved in charity initiatives, but which wasn't a part of Orange Babies project. At the church, the children were singing and, when they saw my camera, they started to pose for pictures. The church also provides the elders with a meal, twice a week. The oupa and ouma, as they call them in Afrikaans, are taking care of their grandchildren as their own sons or daughters have died of Aids.

We then drove to Okahandja to visit the child development programme. Here, at the Five Rand Primary school, 300 of the 500 children get a meal after school five days a week. The 300 children are connected with one of the volunteer community mothers who

know their details. The pictures that I took show all happy faces. I help with the dishes at the school and it just felt unnatural to me to not be able to do more. My time in Namibia and at the Orange Babies project is just too short.

Today, I'm taken along with two Dutch nurses who had been volunteering at the Hope Village to visit the Orange Babies project at Rehoboth. When we arrived, the children and their mothers were sitting under a big tent. The women were provided with certificates

The nurses offered to stay at the hostel for a week to help. This offer was appreciated and arrangements were made for their next visit. We decided that they would buy toys and games for children and bring them on their next visit. On the drive back to Windhoek, I felt tired; the images from today and the previous day keep going through my mind.

After lunch, the kids from the babies' house are put to bed and it is time for me to leave. I'm thankful for this once-in-a-lifetime experience; these memories will last forever. FF