

My Visit to Tengeru in North Tanzania – February 2015

What a privilege it was to be able to visit Tanzania through the British Council Connecting Classrooms Project. The six teachers from north Herefordshire, representing Stoke Prior, Bodenham, Kimbolton, Shobdon, Leintwardine and Luston Primary Schools were invited to stay at the Liti Agriculture College, which is situated in a small village called Tengeru. What a warm welcome we received from everyone who met us, all of whom knew of the Leominster/ Tengeru friendship. Everyone is so proud that the link has flourished for 25 years with ideas being exchanged and shared.

The village of Tengeru is located on the busy metallic main road from Arusha to Moshi. The view is dominated by Mount Meru, the second highest mountain in Tanzania, therefore it is very green and fertile with many crops being grown and water present. However, one only needs to drive a short distance and the lush green foliage becomes a dry and dusty plain.



Manyata Primary School is located about a 40 minute drive away from the Liti Agriculture College at Tengeru. To reach the school one has to journey along bumpy mud tracks, skirt boulders and ford streams. Apparently, during the rainy season, the



village of Manyata is isolated as vehicles cannot access the roads. On leaving Tengeru the mud track passes through areas of paddy fields, where both men and women labour for hours in the hot sunshine tending the rice plants. The landscape gradually changes to become more arid and open. The community of Manyata is small, comprising a

collection of houses and a few small shops. The school building and the two protestant churches are the largest buildings in the village.

The school buildings are arranged in an L shape and the school boundary is demarcated by aloe vera plants and piles of thorny acacia prunings. In places there is no definitive boundary and the children



wander throughout the village during their break times. The soil is golden orange in colour. A big concrete water harvester dominates the front of the school. The buildings are in a good state of repair with new corrugated roofs and metal guttering that leads to the water harvester. All the classrooms have stout metal doors and the windows have metal grills. Some are glazed.



Several years ago the school began a programme of environmental awareness. Various trees have been planted near to the school buildings in order to provide shade. The



trees gifted last year and planted by Miss Turner are at the edge of the children's playing area and provide a natural border with the area used for growing crops. The crop area has been greatly enhanced by the provision of the water pump that everyone at Luston School worked so hard to fund last summer. The school fields can now be irrigated and crops grown with greater

harvest yields. This is so important as the harvested crops provide the ingredients for the daily school meal of either makandi (beans and maize stew) or nguli (porridge made from maize flour).

I was made so welcome at the school by Mr Julius Mbwambo, the Head Teacher and all the staff and pupils. The younger children were a little wary of me and took a while to smile when I spent time with them, in their classroom under the shade of an acacia tree. It was later explained to me that the pupils aged 4 and 5 may never have seen a white person before, hence their concern.





In all the classrooms and outside at playtime the children smiled, laughed, spoke simple English phrases and regularly broke into song in both Swahili and English. They asked me many questions, translated by a member of staff, about life in England, Luston Primary School, football and the Queen. One child asked if I beat children if they are naughty at school! There was evidence of sticks in all the classrooms and children prefects.

The staff were all so happy and welcoming. Their ability to speak English varied, however, we were able to communicate using actions and translation of key words. Several members of staff live in houses on the school site and therefore provide security. They regard themselves as a “small family”.



The other members of staff walk many kilometres each day to school in all weathers. I was aware of the gender divide and that the male members of staff were invited to have “breakfast” with me and showed me around the site and village. The

women staff were dressed in a range of styles from western with knee length skirts and T shirts to typical Tanzanian costume being bright, full length and colourful. It appeared that all staff worked very hard. They had a lesson each day just to mark books in their staffroom. Marking and planning was scrutinised by Mr Mwambo each week.



On talking to Julius he said that his pressing problems were:

1. Attendance – in the rainy season up to 50% of his pupils cannot attend the school due to impassable streams/rivers therefore they fall behind in their learning and do not pass their national exams.



2. Lack of electricity – electricity cables are found to the north of the village supplying power to the Nelson Mandela University and the town of Arusha, however there are no local supplies. Julius is keen to establish a solar power project for the school community but has no funding for this. The government has also decreed that by the summer of 2015 all schools should teach technology. As Julius remarked, how is this possible to achieve if there is no electricity or any computing devices in the school? Julius has asked if the Luston community would be interested in assisting the school in this project.



3. Nutritional needs of his pupils – the school make the most of growing crops in the fields and are keen to expand their flock of hens. They currently have two hens and 10 chicks. The plan is that every child, especially the orphans in the village, will receive two eggs a week to supplement their diet. Any additional eggs will be sold in

the nearby town of USA River, at the market. Julius has asked if the Luston community would be interested in assisting the school in this project? For this I need to talk to the pupils of the School Council at Luston.

4. Shortage of two classrooms – due to the rising birth rate there are two school grades, the equivalent of our Reception Year and Year One – that do not have a classroom. The Year One class is accommodated in the back of one of the village churches with all their books being locked inside a large stout wooden box. The Reception Year class are taught outside, sitting on the ground in the shade of an acacia tree. The teacher writes on a large chalk board which is stored in the other church building. In the event of poor weather the children move into the church building but they have little space due to the bulkiness of the church pews.



So... what has been the impact of my visit? The friendship between Luston and Manyata has been strengthened. It was a privilege to spend two days at Manyata Primary and meet Mr Julius Mwamambo, his staff and children. I look forward to welcoming Mr Amanuel Moshi to Luston Primary in June. He is very keen to learn about our teaching styles and wants to spend time in the classroom, working with Luston pupils. He also wants to develop his knowledge of English history. I have been totally overwhelmed by the happiness of the children and their ability to laugh, sing and giggle. I was given the impression by the staff that



children value the ability to attend school as it is a passport for their future, and that the majority are determined to succeed. I was also not prepared for the genuine warmth and hospitality from total strangers, who had a connection with the college at Tengeru and would invite the 6 of us to their house for an evening meal and would prepare such fine cuisine after a day at work.

The time spent in Tanzania was truly special and I will always have magical memories of my time there. The tree that I planted to mark my time spent with the community at Manyata will hopefully grow well, and flourish like that of our friendship for many years to come.

Mary Freeman
Head Teacher

