

Report from Visit to Morogoro, Tanzania by Pernilla Pascolutti

In January 2015 when I embarked on my journey to Tanzania (which took 27 hours, two flights and 4 hours on the worst roads I have ever travelled along) I would have said that I was realistic, knowledgeable, culturally astute to deal with whatever happened and fairly difficult to surprise or shock. I have not had a cushioned upbringing – I have lived in a variety of places including Spain under General Franco; through difficult and poverty stricken times; sometimes with very little. I have seen images on the television and talked to people who had lived or travelled in Africa. Nevertheless, it took me the whole time that I was there to really see and understand how people lived; what they really have and what is available; their cultural differences and expectations (which I am still learning); the importance of the church in their lives; and why they are so happy much of the time. To say it was the most humbling experience, which makes you re-evaluate what is really important, sums it up. Despite all the difficulties that they have, as a people they are happy, loving and laughter filled people who fill all the space that they are in with their joy of life and strong community and family ties. If you need something ie you are getting married, families and friends are called to help to pay for this; if your child is going to university, the family and friends will provide lodgings, food, money to facilitate this.

My first impressions were bathed in a cloak of heat (even the local people were complaining), which was only broken by intense downpours (this being the dry season), being surrounded by people everywhere – on the roads, walking, sitting outside their houses, selling anything and everything, 4 people on a bicycle or motorbike, jammed into buses and lorries everywhere (little train infrastructure). The aid improvement work is carried out by the Chinese but badly so, so the road falls away at the sides and lorries turn over, the bridges collapse and the sick are expected to climb up to the other part of the bridge, so supplies and the sick cannot get to the hospitals which then are in financial crisis because they have no patients, and the main road is one of the only tarmaced roads, with the others usually having gigantic potholes which would ruin any suspension. Noise, dust, colour (rich red soil) and lots of laughter.

Most items are bought on the street with some shops which look like very old retail outlets (like a box); even the furniture was shown on the street. This seemed to be very expensive and I was told that if you could not afford the £600 for a bed you slept in a box until you could. Morogoro has approximately 330,000 people and only 3 supermarkets – which were smaller than most Tesco Express Stores. Even legs of meat were sold at the side of the road. Lots of people earned their living by making things and selling these all over the town or on the main road including in the markets.



There was little choice or variety – few sweets, snacks and only unleavened bread that you could cook in a pan. The only other type of bread came from a stall or was made in the kitchens of the hotels. Hotels often were surrounded by high fences and had security – I definitely saw guns. Europeans were few as this part was not a tourist destination. Everyone was keen to try to get you to volunteer and stay in the area.

Lots of people want to build their own home; there are areas of land which can be bought from the government. You then save some more to put in simple foundations (one storey only – lots of space not to go up and stairs/second storeys are expensive) and build with grey engineering bricks and put on a tin roof – then you move in. You may eventually be able to afford a front door, grills on the windows (some houses had glass windows), other doors, indoor toilet, and ceilings. Some houses were painted outside; some were just shacks and a few were sticks and mud – We drove past a



shanty town in Dar Es Saleem. Rarely were there any tiles on roofs of even large administrative buildings (where offices had security guards but little in the way of work paraphernalia. Rarely piped water to the house (lots of collection of water from rainwater to a well), usually a well outside and the water was brought in in buckets. No pipes in the house so no sinks needed – brush your teeth with a cup of water and spit it down the toilet – which does not flush and has raised bricks to stand on while you squat to use it

– at school there was definitely no toilet paper or hand washing facility, and Theodosia did not want me to see them. The shower is not a shower for most people, they do not have shampoo or shower gel because they could not get it off – they use pieces of soap and a bucket of water. Water must be boiled to drink or can be bought from water tankers or in bottles. (10 small bottles of water cost as much as the food for a family of four for one day.) Most kitchens are outside and subject to the elements with cooking on a small charcoal brazier – at school the teachers cook lunch for paying teachers on an open fire.



The landscape can be beautiful – with tropical flowers, the mountain, the lush undergrowth in places and the red soil – it can also be littered with blown tyres, water bottles and items just left lying around. Most people grow some of their own food – out of necessity – in the growing season crops grow quickly and easily if they are watered. People eat lots of carbohydrates – rice, potatoes, plantains, thick porridge (which they roll in their fingers and dip into sauces), vegetables, some meat peanuts) were unusual – most people could not afford to eat these – ice cream was available but few takers; I did see pupils with a version of ice poles. Hospitality is very important, and it is considered an insult to refuse this even when you turn up uninvited and they enjoy offering cold fizzy drinks and water which is bought in local shops. Obviously dairy produce is not common (no electricity = no fridge), so tea without



milk, bread without butter, cheese unlikely etc. Some places do have electricity but this is not the norm, or you may not be able to afford to turn it on this month. Most of the food I ate (except when you tried to eat European food) was really tasty and fresh, but you always had to wary as stomach problems were the most likely cause of illness and all medical help must be paid for.

Religion plays a huge part in peoples' lives – it is their extended family and social system. You need to sign up

to the church/mosque/temple that you attend (in Morogoro most people are Christians); then they will support and help you. The church provides your spiritual guidance; your groups to join; your social help; your entertainment through the choirs and bands that play; your study groups; churches originally set up and ran all the schools; provide support and aid from linked groups abroad ie Morogoro Diocese is linked to Worcester Diocese; and your friends to name but a few. They may even teach you skills so that you can earn a living such as the three month sewing course with Mothers' Union. We have a wide system and many distractions to estrange us from the church – think about the importance of the church 150 years ago and you have some idea of its importance in Morogoro. Church services are several times on a Sunday (we attended a youth service at the Anglican Cathedral in Morogoro for 3 hours at which we had to introduce ourselves and say why we were there) and during the week, with attached groups such as Mothers' Union.

Education is free – well sort of. No fees to pay (unless it is a fee paying school) but the government only provides the buildings (which originally were built by the Churches and have not been maintained, updated or painted since), sends textbooks (approximately 1 between 3 – not able to purchase these anywhere), and pays the teachers. That is all – everything else must be funded by families - bags, exercise books (1 for each subject), pencils (no pencil no work), rulers, pens, rubber (pencils sharpened even by teachers with a plain razor blade); or by the teachers (the



only phone used is the head teachers' mobile if children have been absent for a long time or she has to speak to the local education office). The chalks for the boards (which desperately need painting) are paid for by the School Committee (made up solely of parents, a little like Friends). Anything needs to be funded by the School Committee; in a place where many people struggle to get enough to eat, how can you put on a fair to raise

money? No equipment is provided (one teacher was using a shoulder pad to wipe the board, others used bits of sponge) – displays are only informational and very old – only in the staff room; there is no storage apart from a locked cupboard with the chalk in. There was no glass in the windows, no electricity, no teaching aids in the classrooms, broken unusable desks (3 to a 2 seater desk in my school was considered a luxury – 5 in the school next door), and holes in the floors that, much to the amusement of the pupils, I kept tripping up on. The only staff are teachers – no office staff, no



caretakers, no cleaners, no teaching assistants and no kitchen (or staff). The children have to be in at 7.30 bringing brushes to sweep the school inside and out, and using water to wash down desks and floors including in the staff room. Then they sing the National Song (part of a shared identity which unifies over 120 tribes into quite a stable African nation) and maybe the school song – their accompaniment is the only instruments in school –

expertly played by the older boys – drums. Lessons start at 8am, pupils in Standard 1 (aged 5 or 6 seems to be flexible) up to Standard 7. Morning break and lunchtime see no adult on duty – pupils can be inside (lots finishing work) or outside. The children play like all pupils particularly enjoying skipping, singing/dancing games, football (with a plastic bag ball), gymnastics (no equipment, no coaching) or standing around and chatting. If there are any problems, the victim is expected to complain to the adults, which did not seem to happen but despite the lack of supervision most were well behaved. Corporal punishment is frowned upon by the government but this has not filtered all the ways to daily practice although there were only two minor incidences which I saw (unlike some of the more sustained incidences my English colleagues have spoken about). On the whole the staff and children had very positive relationships – the teaching was very chalk and talk, repeating and rote learning and the children were afraid to give unknowns a go; but once they felt that they were allowed to join in, and brave ones had, they were very keen to take part with the whiteboards and number cards I had bought. Education is seen as one of the few ways to improve your life and the curriculum is very geared to survival and earning a living – lots of keeping clean, health, eating, basic skills, learning to read and write.

The pupils are beautifully turned out – clean (there are inspections for hair and hands/nails). The uniform jumper may have no sleeves and some holes but it is not dirty. All the pupils had the same white socks (if they were worn) and polished shoes. They took real pride in their work and their education – the teacher would chalk and talk, they would chant, repeat, then an exercise from their textbook. This was then marked by the teacher 12/30 and that lesson was done. If too few pupils got a reasonable score the teacher would have to repeat the lesson (all part of a national curriculum and state given textbooks). Schools make different choices re the timetabling, but after lunch all except Standard 4 and 7 could go home. These pupils received extra lessons to be ready for the national tests because they could not go up a class if they did not pass. In primary schools they taught in Swahili (but had a lesson in English); in secondary school teaching was in English. The pupils loved the i-pad in particular and loved to see themselves in photos and videos – often howling with laughter. They were engaging and usually very cheerful although even in the heat some would not take off their jumpers!

The pupils were taught to stand up when you came into the classroom and would have a set routine in English – Good morning Madame (Good morning class, how are you?) (I am very well thank you Madame and how are you too?). A number of classes also sang songs to show what they could do. The little ones have no toys or equipment in class, they copy from the board – interestingly they also do the same handwriting patterns that we do! I have to say that all pupils wrote beautifully and neatly within a few years – they had had so much practice! There was lots of praise from class members in set routines (which we have started to use here in the same way).

There was little in the way of organised activities for pupils outside of school (no PE in school) – apart from Cubs/Scouts and, if you could afford it, swimming in the hotel swimming pools. So girls mainly helped at home, sang and danced traditional dances and boys played football or gymnastics – lots of skipping mainly from the girls. I asked Theodosia and Cecilia (the deputy head) what they liked doing in their free time and they both said watching TV. I thought this was rather limiting, as I like going to the theatre, the cinema, historical houses, concerts, reading books, doing puzzles, taking up a hobby, going for walks/gym class/swimming when I am not with my family. But I did get it in the end – there is a public library (but I did not go in or find out how it works), there is no

cinema, theatre, no gym, no leisure time activities or extras really in Morogoro – although there is a golf course for those who can afford it and a renowned Rock Garden. To go on safari you need to be able to get there and to afford the entrance (cheaper for Tanzanians - the same as the 10 bottles of water) but most people and children will never get the chance.

No food or water is provided by the school. The only food was cooked and paid for by the teachers for themselves so that they shared a late breakfast and lunch together – using their hands to eat – this was cooked by 2 teachers for the others (on my last day they kindly bought some forks from a travelling salesman so that I could eat with one when I returned!) 3 to 10 mothers turned up at break and lunch to sell hand food and ice poles to the children. It was too hot to bring a packed lunch – so if you had no money, you had nothing to eat. There is no safe water to drink at the school and the school cannot afford the charcoal to boil it to make it safe. I saw very few water bottles in school – so most children did not drink.

The abiding memories for me are of the beauty and closeness of the people – their smiling faces, selfless laughter and endurance during whatever life throws at them. The children at school in Overbury are often told about our friends in Morogoro and I know that our continuing link will support our children to see wider than their own lives, have a better understanding of their own lives and help them to touch the lives of others around the world.



We look forward to having Theodosia with us from Saturday 13 March 2015. Thank you to Mrs Hutt for inviting Theodosia to lunch and to Mrs Hallett for hosting Theodosia for one evening in Overbury.