

Heshima Newsletter

December 2021



At last, a new edition of the Heshima newsletter! For obvious reasons, I have not been able to go out to Tanzania for 2 years, but at the end of November I made it, and have just returned. Before an update on Heshima, some background information about Tanzania, which I hope you will find interesting.

For Tanzania, like elsewhere, the past 20 months have been very difficult. Fortunately, although official figures are hard to come by, Tanzanian population does not seem to have been as badly affected as many experts feared. This could be due to a relatively young age profile, the fact that much of life is conducted outside or in well-ventilated rooms, or the intense UV sunlight destroying the virus. In fact, Covid hardly featured in conversations with ordinary people: the only masks worn were in an English, mainly white, church. Social distancing on the main means of transport—dala-dalas (minibuses)—was impossible when 25 people are crowded onto a vehicle seating 15, and you find that your face is 3 inches from somebody else's! The main concern of ordinary Tanzanians is day-to-day survival, especially as many people-- those employed in the tourist industry, for example-- lost their jobs due to the ban on travel from the West: and in Tanzania no work means no income, means.....you can work out for yourselves the indirect impact Covid has had on the lives of so many in Tanzania where there is no Social Security system or furlough scheme. In addition, malaria still affects thousands of people, and obtaining clean drinking water and earning enough money to buy food are the priorities of so many.



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Ironically, the Covid-denying President John Magufuli almost certainly died of a Covid-related illness so his

Deputy, Samia Saluhu Hassan (photo), now occupies his seat. Mama Samia is, I think, only the third female President in the whole of Africa. Like any leader, she has her critics, but she is already having a positive impact on the lives of so many Tanzanians. Unlike her predecessor, she is encouraging people to be vaccinated against Covid, but is fighting an uphill battle to reverse the vaccine hesitancy and suspicion promoted by President Magufuli. Mama Samia is also in the process of lifting restrictions on the media and, in addition, she has reversed a decision of a predecessor which prevented pregnant schoolgirls continuing with their education. She also made a speech at COP26 highlighting the effects of climate change on Tanzania, and arguing that if a poor country like can do so much to counter the effects of climate change, why can't those responsible--the rich West-- do more? Incidentally, Tanzania (and Kenya) have also taken the lead in banning ALL plastic bags! —why can't here in the UK do that?.



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When I left Tanzania on Dec 5th, the country had been experiencing a heatwave (daytime temperatures averaging 5 degrees C above the normal) and a prolonged period without rain: in much of the country, nothing is growing, and nothing can be planted, and grazing for livestock is becoming increasingly difficult to find. Obtaining supplies of clean drinking water is also a serious issue, for humans as well as their animals.

However, despite all the problems created by Covid and climate change, I experienced once again the resilience, hospitality, generosity, optimism and “joie de vivre” of so many ordinary Tanzanians.



But what of Heshima? Inevitably Covid put the brakes on further development of the project, but it is alive and well: the textile ladies and the nursery group continued to meet throughout the pandemic, thanks to

the wonderful Mwamvita and textile trainer Adelfina; and the grounds are kept immaculate by Kasioki, the young man employed by Heshima to act as caretaker/groundsman/assistant to Mwamvita. We are very fortunate is being able to employ such a wonderful team of local people. And a big thank you to Steve and Alison, the founders of Heshima, who in addition to all their responsibilities as, respectively, Head of Boarding (and other jobs!) and Head of

School at the nearby Braeburn International School, continue to provide the vision and time to Heshima.



So, in addition to supervising the textile project, Mwamvita (with the help of Kasioki) continues to run the nursery class. At present 14 children attend, some of whom are children of the textile ladies.

In spite of Covid, therefore, Heshima has moved on since I was last there: there is now mains electricity which supplements solar generation installed 3 years ago. And now, there is wi-fi! This will be a great asset for the

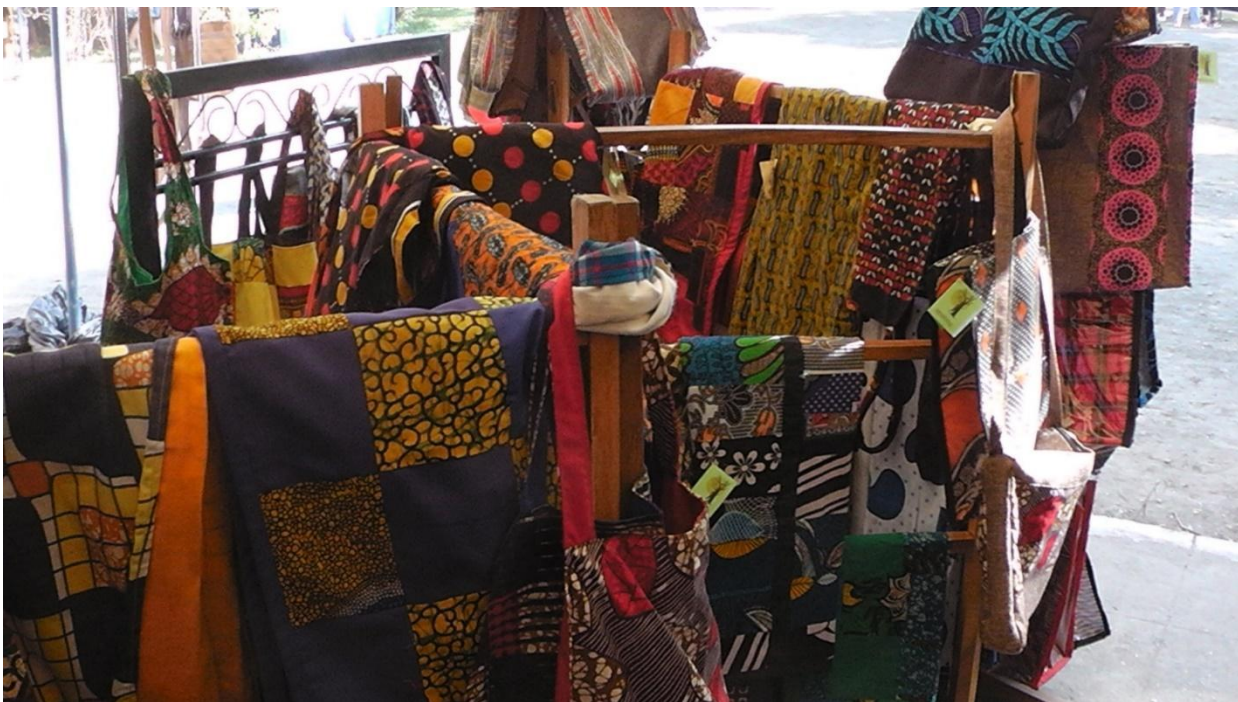
soon-to-be-implemented next stage of the project: on Saturday mornings, a supervised homework club will commence, possibly before Christmas, enabling local school children to access resources, including books and the internet, to facilitate their educational progress. Support teacher from Braeburn, Dennis, will run the club, assisted by Kasioki. Word will rapidly get around, and it is likely that the club will be overwhelmed, so some sort of rota system may have to be implemented. It is then hoped to supplement the Saturday club with evening homework sessions. Great care will be taken to ensure that girls are not inhibited from attending any of the sessions, nor pushed aside by the boys. We are in the process of sourcing more lap-tops.



Whilst in Tanzania, I attended the huge Charity Christmas Fair conveniently held just a few miles from Heshima, which attracts hundreds (thousands?) of (mainly white) residents who

have money to spend! Heshima had a stall there (Mwamvita on the right), displaying and selling the latest textiles made by the ladies. Although few items were sold, it provides an opportunity for Heshima to show off its products and raise awareness of the project. The

Fair has also presented the challenge of how to make the products more marketable and eye-catching-- by improving the packaging perhaps? Any suggestions gratefully received!



A big thank you to all who have supported/are still supporting Heshima in any way. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like further information about any aspect of Heshima, or if you would like to order any products. I'm sure we can find a way of getting them to you. I have some items, various bags, and aprons at home here in the UK.

Alan Cram on behalf of the Trustees.

