



Heshima Newsletter October 2022

Welcome to the latest from Heshima! I returned a couple of weeks ago from my annual visit to Tanzania, and it's good to report that all is well with Heshima, and that the project continues to develop.

Firstly, though, an update on the country itself. As mentioned in the previous newsletter, Tanzania's new president, Mama Samia Hassan, continues to make a generally favourable impression both in Tanzania and abroad. Here's part of a recent speech:



"In building a better country I aspire to create a society that lives in harmony and understanding. I wish to foster unity regardless of our political, religious, or ethnic differences. This will only be possible by creating a society in which everyone enjoys equal rights before the law, where there is no discrimination and where there are equal economic opportunities for all. I believe reconciliation cannot be attained where there is discrimination and where some people are denied economic and civil rights".

It is difficult to assess the impact of Covid on the country. The Previous President, John Magufuli, who many suspect died of a covid-related illness, was vilified by many in the international community for refusing to accept the seriousness of Covid. However, he did not have the luxury of Western countries of shutting down the country, which would have had disastrous consequences for millions. Instead, it is said that he "removed the fear of Covid", in contrast to the situation here in the UK where some people still fear the disease, and are reluctant to mix with others, despite multiple vaccinations

Unfortunately, the war in Ukraine has impacted on fuel and food prices in Tanzania, and some blame the new President for the rise in the cost of living. In addition, the land in much of the country, away from the coast and mountains, is parched, so the planting of crops is not possible at present. The situation is not as bad as in the Horn of Africa, where millions are at risk of starvation. However, if the big rains do not come soon, Tanzanians may well start to suffer food shortages or further increases in the price of food. As always, though, Tanzanians are resilient and hospitable, and laughter is never very far away!

Sadly, the end of each year marks the beginning of the "cutting season" in Tanzania when, although illegal, many girls are subjected to the horrors of FGM. The director of a project which provides safe houses for girls wanting to escape FGM (which I visited 3 years ago) reports that in

August alone 65 girls were rescued, and that they now house 165 girls. However, she still expects that in the Mara district alone 200 girls will be cut during the next couple of months. On a positive note, 60 girls have this year been reconciled with their families, with the promise (enforced by the local police) that they will not be subjected to FGM or forced into early marriage. You can find out more details of the project at <https://hopeforgirlsandwomen.org/>



But what about Heshima? Heshima now has both solar and mains electricity providing light, and power for lap-tops in the main building, which houses the textile project. The textile project continues to provide training for around 10 local Maasai ladies, and also a work-place for those already trained and who have not set up their own businesses. The ladies produce a variety of items: bags, aprons, clothes, but also curtains, cushion covers and other household furnishings, under the supervision of Mwamvita and Adelfina. Finding outlets for sales is always a problem, especially post-covid, and the challenge is always to produce items which are unique and saleable (although the aprons and bags are always popular back here in the UK). Safari vehicles pass close to Heshima en route to the Serengeti and Ngorogoro national parks, and it is hoped that a few of the safari companies' drivers can be persuaded to call in with their tourists.

The Nursery group run by Mwamvita attracts around 10 local children, some of whom belong to the textile ladies. The Trustees have decided to drop fees for the nursery class, as this is clearly a disincentive for parents to send their children to the nursery. Time will tell how successful this decision will be, and the loss of income clearly has financial implications for Heshima.

So what's new? Heshima has been trying for a year or more to provide a homework club for local secondary schoolchildren, where they would have access to books, lap-tops and a teacher. It was hoped that Dennis, an employee at Braeburn International School, would be able to organise and lead this. For various reasons, this has not been possible. Instead, it was decided to start a Saturday afternoon club for Class VI primary schoolchildren. These are children in their penultimate year at primary school. The problem is that lessons in government primary schools are taught through the medium of Swahili, whereas in secondary schools lessons are taught in



English. If children do not have a good grasp of English when they transfer to secondary school, they inevitably struggle! So I visited one of the local primary schools, explaining what would be on offer...and waited until the following Saturday. Would anyone turn up? If so how many? We need not have worried: in the end around 60 children arrived, and they spent the next 2 hours learning English through games and more formal teaching, led by Heshima caretaker Kasioki, and Justo from Braeburn School. There have now been 3 Saturday sessions with 50+ children attending each time, so Kasioki and Justo must be doing something right!



I think the Heshima logo at the top of this newsletter is very appropriate: children learning in the shade of the tree!



Some of the children being taught in the classroom

So what of the future? It is hoped to set up a woodwork/carpentry training centre during the next 12 months or so. This will enable young men to gain necessary skills to enable them to find employment as joiners etc. It will require the building of an open-sided workshop, and secure lock-up for the tools. It is hoped that a Welsh charity (which collects unwanted tools from people in the UK, renovates them and sends them out to project in Mwanza)), will provide us with much of the equipment needed: so watch this space!

Of course, to maintain current activities, and to build the new workshop requires a constant inflow of donations: so a big thank you to the many of you that have contributed over the years, and continue to do so. If you have any fundraising ideas, then please tell me, or just go ahead and do it!! I have also put in a couple of grant applications to charitable organisations and am waiting to hear the outcome.



Just in case you think I go out to Tanzania for 2 weeks in the sun (true), I did spend 3 days helping Kasioki paint the inside walls of all the buildings

Finally, a big thank you especially to Steve Ngugi who oversees the project, and his wife Alison, whose brainchild Heshima is, and without whom the project would have failed years ago. Thanks also to Patrick (a former teacher at Braeburn) and his friend Ian who have made some updates to the website: more to follow. www.heshima.org.uk

If anyone is able to visit Heshima at any time, you would be most welcome, or if you know of any (young) people who would like to volunteer at Heshima, please let me know. Also, if you want further information, or would like some of the textile products, please get in touch.

Note: None of the Trustees are paid or claim expenses: my visits are self-financed (although this year my air fare was generously paid for by a Scottish charity, "Realising Dreams", because I spend a lot of time during each visit checking on children who are sponsored by them). Heshima pays the salaries of Adelfina, Mwamvita, and Kasioki.

Thank you again, and best wishes,

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