

Study Programme of Berlin Teachers in Tanzania

(Sept. 29 to Oct. 21, 2006)

When we, four Berlin teachers, met our tour guide for a preparation seminar, it became clear: This will not be an ordinary study trip, but we will be involved in Uli Sonn's long running projects, which he has led in connection with the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (Tanzania-Germany exchange). Through his intensive contacts with different institutions and his personal friendships with Tanzanian project leaders we were able to visit schools, self-help groups and other organisations, and moreover we got to know some families and their everyday life.

On the Flight Dubai-Daressalaam

By coincidence we met with the press attaché of Tanzanian government who happened to sit next to us on the plane. On the same flight there was the team of recently elected President Kikwete. The press attaché outlined the main government policies in three words: WATER-HEALTH-EDUCATION.

Study Programme in Tanzania

The main interests of our study programme were the school system and health care provision. In all we visited seven schools in different regions of Tanzania, one AIDS self-help group, the anti female circumcision programme NAFGEM, one hospital and one orphanage. In addition we had private invitations from leaders of several projects. Thus we had the opportunity to discuss important issues in depth.

General Information of Tanzanian School System

The Tanzanian school system is based on the British system. Since 1978 school attendance is compulsory, but there are only about 60 % children at school, because of parental poverty, child labour, long distance to school and AIDS. Sometimes several villages club together to found a school. Official school attendance begins with two years pre school and continues until the seventh grade. State primary schools are free, but secondary education (boarding schools) must be paid for. In these schools students can study for their O-level in four years and for their A-level in a further two years.

State school teachers work in very difficult conditions with upwards of fifty pupils in a class, little teaching materials, low and irregular pay. Most of them have to do a second job to make their living.

Msafiri English Medium Pre & Primary School

Our first contact to a school was in our "base camp" near Mwanja town south of Kilimanjaro region. The founder of this private primary school, Grace Mngara, has built her school without any state funding. The school buildings include classrooms, dormitories, a dining room and several guest houses. During last year she successfully completed three classes. Three young teachers teach 41 pupils and moreover they take care of the children day and night living on the school grounds. Grace is planning to build a separate teacher's house.

This boarding school offers five meals a day for the children, what is unusual compared to other schools.

As we spent our longest period of time here, we were able to observe school life and we even could teach some English lessons. The school day begins with an outdoor assembly which includes English songs, singing the national anthem, line up and go to class ("Education for discipline").

During this time we were guests in Grace's household, which consists of a number of people (10 to 20) working and living there. Grace looks after her old parents and people who work in her compound. She takes foreign guests and finds room for friends and relatives who are in

need. Thus Grace is a good example for a strong African woman: teacher, school founder, business woman and head of a large extended family.

In the following text we discuss two other school visits and the different standards we found.

Mwanga Mixed Primary School

This school is a state primary school with a special group of 48 deaf pupils. The school buildings and dormitories are situated in a dry area without running water. The children have to collect water from a nearby well for cooking and cleaning.

In the main school there are about 50 children in one class. In spite of these difficult conditions the headmaster, Laurent Hhado, makes a confident and engaging impression. He has organised a school partnership with a Frankfurt school, which provides material support for the school and a friendly cooperation. This year some German teachers of the partner school came to Mwanga to visit his school.

Mwanga School for the Deaf

The first impression of this school was a pleasant surprise: a nice school compound with garden areas, good school buildings and not more than 13 children in the class. The school exists since 26 years and has been supported by sponsors from Sweden and Finland.

We witnessed intensive and effective teaching with modern methods. The children were very motivated and they obviously felt at home in their school.

Although all the state teachers were absent for a regional conference the children remained very disciplined and worked independently in their classes.

The headmaster pastor Longio told us about the new school project to found a class for deaf-blind children. Opening schools for handicapped children is a new development in Tanzania.

Mwanga Secondary School

Visiting this school was a further positive example. We saw a large schoolground with solid school buildings, dormitories, a garden area and an own well. There are additional buildings which we could not see in other schools: a large assembly hall, science labs, a dispensary, a computer room and an internet café, which is also open for the villagers.

The school has this good equipment thanks to the commitment and organisation of the headmaster Mr Senkoro, who has arranged a partnership with a German partner school in Bad Homburg and the Rotary Club of this town, from where the school gets materials and pedagogical support.

School partnerships in general have advantages for both sides, because there is support for the African schools and moreover an exchange and intercultural learning between two countries and cultures (letters, internet contact, teachers' exchange).

Struggle against HIV/AIDS

During our journey through Tanzania the theme of AIDS was ever present. When we arrived at our "base camp" in Grace's compound, we found that she has taken in a child of her friend, whose parents had recently died of AIDS. When we returned 10 days later there was a young woman with her baby in the compound, who has lost her husband to AIDS.

We visited a self-help group in Mwanga, made up of HIV-infected women, who had organised the group in this little town. The large notice board outside their small office reads "Tanzania Network of women living with HIV/AIDS".

The women, whose husbands had already died from AIDS, had formed the group to help cope with their medical problems and the discrimination by the villagers. We were impressed and moved to see how calmly and humorously they dealt with their difficult situation.

The women's group is supported by Evaline Senkoro, who has a small pharmacy in Mwanga. She can give medical and emotional advice and provide a little financial support, possible by sponsorship from Germany.

We also met the leader of an AIDS prevention project, Mrs Nahato, who works in the mountains around Mwanza. One main point of her work is the support of a group of young single mothers, who have been thrown out of their family homes because of their HIV-status. Although all extended families have been affected by this illness, HIV positive people are still stigmatised by society.

For a long time Tanzanian government didn't take this problem seriously, but in 2000 official AIDS-prevention projects started in schools and in other state institutions. The estimated HIV infection rate in Tanzania is about 20 %, but a further growth of the epidemic is to be expected.

Anti Female Genital Mutilation Project (NAFGEM)

Especially impressive for us was a visit to NAFGEM project in Moshi. The project leader Mrs Urasa reported the results of her work in the Massai region, where about 80 % of the girls and women used to be circumcised. Through the intensive work of NAFGEM Mrs Urasa was invited to an extraordinary meeting of Massai tribal chiefs. At this meeting the tribal elders spoke against the practise of female genital mutilation, and in the presence of the minister of education they promised to stop this practice in the Massai region. If the circumcisers are willing to give up their traditional work, they will receive a short midwifery training. Thus they retain their former respected social position.

Significance of School Education in Tanzania

Although there are still shortcomings in the Tanzanian school system, society has recognised the importance of a good school education. Thus we could see for example. in the print of a school T-shirts "Education is our right." or in the school motto of a secondary school "Education is the key to a successful life". For many families the ability to send their children to private schools indicates their social status. Poorer families can't afford that, so they have to send their children to state schools, where the standard of school education is often very low.

If we look back at all schools we visited in Tanzania, we remember the government press atache's words of government programme (EDUCATION-HEALTH-WATER). We discussed the obvious problem, that the former government has not done enough for education. We hope that the current government of President Kikwete can better realise the development of school education.

On the other hand we have met so many strong and engaging people, who are a good personal example for society. They can raise awareness of their countrymen and contribute to the further development of Tanzania.