

Swahili

Swahili is usually a second language for Tanzanians, who learn their own tribal language first. As there are more than 120 tribes, the common language of Swahili is a great unifying influence, and it is used in all primary schools.

Can you learn some Swahili? Ask Mr Walker if you are not sure how to pronounce the words.

Jambo - Hello

Habari? - How are you?

Nzuri - I am fine/good

Jina lako ni nani? - What's your name?

Jina langu ni... - My name is...

Unatoka wapi? - Where are you from?

Natoka - I'm from...

Good morning - Habari ya asubhi

Good afternoon - Habari ya mchana

Goodbye - Kwaheri

Asante - Thank you

Karibu - Welcome

Nimayfurahi kufika hapa - I am happy to be here

Tanzania Educational Visit - Working With and Learning From

Strong links have been forged between schools in the Leeds Diocese and Tanzanian schools in Mara Diocese. Our school is at the forefront of this and an ambassador for the project given Mr. Walkers recent visit, this is a partnership that will go from strength to strength and is highly valued by the school.

Over time, schools have helped communities in Mara. This support has included the digging of wells, building of classrooms, provision of resources and desks etc. But it is not just about fundraising. Crucially, for the children, it is about learning about other cultures, making friends across the miles and learning key Christian values. From the visit, many opportunities to learn from the Tanzanian schools have been identified including creativity within the curriculum.

As well as the mutual benefits of the international links with our Tanzania friends, a close network has established across local schools who are also engaged and committed to the project.

Opportunities to enhance the curriculum through this partnership are threaded throughout long term curriculum plans.

This link is closely aligned to our vision, particularly in developing the spirit:

Growth in MIND:

- Learners educate, communicate and build enduring relationships with internal and external communities.
- A broad and balanced curriculum is promoted.

Growth in BODY:

- Learners are encouraged to celebrate the wonderful variety of ways to be human.
- Human identity in all its forms is celebrated ensuring dignity and respect.
- Learners understand that we are all created equally in God's image.

Growth SPIRIT:

- Learners show courageous advocacy, driving ethical decisions affirming what is right.
- Learners are supported to be the change they want to see in the world.
- Learners offer radical hospitality and are welcoming to all.
- Learners challenge injustice and are committed to justice.
- Learners become agents of change.
- Character development impacts on wider society enabling people to flourish together.

You can find out more about the Tanzanian visit by visiting the group blog:

www.leeds.anglican.org/tanzania-blog

Our first day in Tanzania



It was amazing to wake up in Tanzania. So much to look forward to and so many experiences yet to come.

The team were woken by a fantastic storm during the night. Leaving Mwanza, the group were overwhelmed by the sights and sounds along the way. Roads populated by bikes, goats, ducks, one pig and scores of people. Sights were seen on the roads such as: bikes carrying families of 4, a horde of pineapples; a precarious stack of chairs on the back of a motorbike and 12 seater mini buses carrying over 26 people.

During the ride, we were kept supplied with water and fresh bananas from the road side market stall-the most fresh, tasty bananas we have ever eaten. Just before reaching our first stop, we were met by a group of baboons on the road. We stopped and fed them banana skins from the minibus. They were pretty bossy so we had to keep the windows firmly shut!

Four hours later, we made our first school visit to the diocese of Mara girls school Bunda. We were greeted by the schools headmistress, Deninsea, who proudly showed us around the school. A highlight of the visit was Rev'd Stephen Rochell, delighting the girls with a performance of amazing grace on his ukulele. We were then surrounded by the beautiful, welcoming girls who hugged us and couldn't wait for their photographs to be taken. The school treated us to a wonderful meal cooked by the school cook on charcoal. All the ingredients were from the school grounds from the vegetable, sukumawiki to beef from the school's cattle.

Sadly, we had to leave and continue our journey to Musoma. After another couple of hours, we arrived at the Afrilux hotel on the shore of Lake Victoria. An overwhelming first day. We couldn't wait for what was to come.

What is our Tanzania link all about?

"Many things" is the answer, but it very much lives in people's experiences and shared conversations.

I am privileged to be in Tanzania with a family of five teachers from the diocese of Leeds visiting Tanzanian schools that are linked with their schools in the UK.

So what are the shared experiences?

For me being met by smiling faces and waving hands as we were greeted by children singing at school after school that we visited.

Being moved to tears by the warmth of the welcome from head teachers, local government officials and Bishop George, the Bishop of Mara. Finally, learning just a few phrases and then hesitantly introducing ourselves in Swahili in front of the whole school.

The shared conversations were many; teachers talking of their experiences sharing their hopes and dreams for the children in their care and maybe just coming to realise that although separated by huge distances geographically and economically they were very close to Tanzanian colleagues in wanting the best for their school and their children. The learning from those conversations was a two way street and I think the journey will have changed our group.

Emotionally, it is hard to watch classes of sixty and over being taught sometimes in buildings that are little more than four crumbling walls with a corrugated iron roof.

Children sitting on the mud floor and not at desks. Children who may have walked 5 km to get to school for a 6 am start and who will be expected to clean the school compound and buildings before school starts.

Yet time and time again we experienced just small steps that the church and community working together were making.

Life enhancing, life giving chances set against the reality that some of those smiling happy faces will not survive into adulthood because of diseases that with appropriate treatment and medication can be treated but in Tanzania often aren't.

The link then is about life about common humanity and about a faith that refuses to look the other way but stands shoulder to shoulder with our Tanzanian brothers and sisters.

Bega kwa Bega.

Rev'd Stephen Rochell

Assistant Priest

Benefice of Roberttown, Hartshead with Hightown and Scholes.



Siku Unzuri (A good day)



On our fourth day in Tanzania it was a privilege to visit two schools whose English counterparts were members of the group.

The first visit was to Mshikamano, the school of Michael Walker, Headteacher of Ackworth Howard School.

Upon arrival, as has become a custom of our visits, the school was extremely welcoming. Inspirational hospitality is a common thread and something to be commended.

The staff met with the team who introduced themselves in Swahili with the school being presented with gifts by Michael which were greatly received.

Following this, the children showcased their singing and dancing talents thanking Ackworth Howard for their gifts.

This school is extremely large and has 3500 children and 32 teachers. As a result of this, the school has had to split into two as they do not have enough classrooms. The great number of children was demonstrated by the boy in the picture, one of a hundred and ten in one class learning mathematics.

Our second visit was to Mugango Primary School. This is an established link and the second time Windmill C of E have sent a school representative to visit. The school has 669 children and 14 teachers and we were greeted warmly with singing from everyone even before we stepped off the bus.

When meeting with the staff, a teacher confidently read a school report to the group. He shared the successes of Mugango; demonstrating his pride in five days of food provision for every child and its positive impact on attendance. The village chairman asked the group what more they wanted from the link. Kate explained that Mugango had already done so much for Windmill; the link has broadened their horizons and developed the children's global view in an incredibly personal way.

We were taken outside where the children performed a song to welcome and declare their friendship with their link schools of Windmill and Battyeford. This was incredibly moving for Kate and the rest of the group. To see Arthur brought to tears was a joyous occasion. His pride proves that the link is working. Gifts were exchanged by both schools to roars of joy and warm embraces between teachers.

The visit ended with fun, laughter and friendship as the children and teachers (including our group) took part in sack races.

Today epitomises the importance of strong links and sparks excitement for the potential of new ones.

Asante kwa kutukaribisha - Day 5

This morning, the group headed off on a longer journey to one of our more rural link schools, Kinyariri. Kinyariri is the most deprived of the schools we have seen so far and the link school to Ruth from Southdale CE Junior School.

It was a very bumpy ride there along what can only be described as a bmx track. Due to the condition of the road, we couldn't drive up to the school, but instead we were astounded to see the whole of the school running down to meet us. When we stepped down from the coach, we were surrounded by little faces and hands desperate to say, 'Jambo.' The children had made flags to welcome us which said, 'Welcome friends!' The children sang as we walked and when we reached the school we return the greeting singing a song created by Stephen, 'Asante kwa kutukaribisha (thank you for your greeting),' which delighted the children and staff alike. In the classroom, we had the opportunity to introduce ourselves in Swahili to the children and teachers. Ruth then exchanged gifts with the headteacher of the school both leaving and taking a little of our school's love with us. The group then moved outside to the sound of the beat of drums. Ahead, the children were racing towards the sound under the shade of a tree. A spontaneous dance began which engulfed Ruth and Michael who danced with the children until they were all completely covered in red dust. The rest of the team had been visiting the school buildings which are in desperate need of renovation and completion. An example of this is a classroom which has no floor, no roof and houses a class of 160 nursery children in the baking African heat. The visit was both a privilege and a huge reminder of the importance of strengthening the link between Tanzania and schools from the Diocese of Leeds.

Later that afternoon, we started with a visit to Buhemba Primary School. The welcome was again overwhelming with children running to keep up with the bus, shouting "jambol!" with amazing, welcoming smiles on their faces. As soon as we stepped off the bus we were greeted with many "hamjambos" and children desperate to touch and hold our hands.

Kate was overwhelmed when one little girl with a beautiful smile on her face ran up to her and without giving it a second thought threw her arms around Kate, showing the overwhelming happiness we can bring to these children through our visits. A special moment which will last a lifetime.

Once we had made our way through the crowds of children who have so much love to give we visited the Headteachers office and took some time to look at the work displayed from their link schools Darrington and Normanton All Saints in England. They had clearly hung the banners and bunting up with pride to show their strong link.

Next we got the opportunity to explore the classrooms - again the gifts from the link schools in England were instantly visible on the walls and the numberline and alphabet were used as a resource to support the children's learning.

It has been a particularly hot day today, so Arthur suggested the children's performances took place in the classroom. Arthur's concern for the children standing in the heat shows his big heart and the care he has for the children in his diocese.

Once the children had showcased their amazing talents of singing, dancing and drama we had the opportunity to hear from the Head Boy and Head Girl.

The 18 year old Head Boy gave a very moving speech about his life and the struggles he has faced but the adversity and courage he continues to show to reach his goals. He told us how he

only started Primary school when he was 14 because before this he was living on the streets and didn't enjoy education. It was only when the Tanzanian government introduced the law of all children going to school that he realised the importance of education and the way this could change his life and support him on his journey to become a soldier and protect his country.

This visit again proves how vital these links are, not only in supporting the education of children in Tanzania but also in educating our children and communities back in England.

We have so much to learn from these schools, the dedicated staff and the community spirit which surrounds them.

Those who have so little, have so much to give us.

Punctures, ditches and laughter (Part 1)

At St James Primary School, Friday's in Tim's class is known as "Funday Friday". Who'd have thought this name would have followed us to Tanzania!

A very early start ready for a long days travel to Ragata Primary School and a visit to Nyamisisi on the way. The group all said that today would be an adventure. How right we were!

On arrival at Nyamisisi children stared on and ran out of their classrooms to greet us. It was difficult to absorb as the older children were herding them back into the classroom with some force.

Smiling faces and waves greeted us through the windows and as we exited the bus there was a line figure of a child no older than 3. He stood motionless for a while. We wondered what he was thinking. Stephen knelt down and his warmth was felt by the child and they embraced. Stephen sung him some songs and the personality and confidence of the child was beginning to break through.

Arthur escorted us to the teachers office, where we were greeted by staff with mountains of books on their desks marking away. A hundred books each. Piled up. A nightmare for all teachers and a very familiar sight for us.

Whilst we were asking and answering questions with the teachers. The little boy took centre stage in the middle of the room, giggling, smiling, keeping himself entertained with a very small piece of chalk and his flip flops. Emotions were building up throughout and seeing a child so happy and content brought smiles to our faces.

Song and dance erupted again. Thanking the link project schools (Thornhill Lees and St Mary's Wakefield) for the help developing their school and they shared the pride they have for their school.

Onto the bus and Stephen had to touch a few more hearts. Breaking out into song passionately to a class who clapped and laughed along.

What an amazing start to the day!



Punctures, ditches and laughter (Part 2)

Our journey (Swahili- safari) to Ragata took an unforeseen turn when the bus came to a halt due to a flat tyre.

Now normally, two and a half hours stuck on the verge of a rural road in the African heat would be challenging to endure. However, it led us to some very unexpected and humbling experiences. As we sat in the bus, children were returning home from school. The vast majority of these children will have never seen white people before. They watched inquisitively but with hesitation. Curiosity took over, and they bravely returned our waves with widening smiles. We were obviously of great intrigue as they sat at the opposite side of the road watching and intermittently smiling and waving.

Having inspected the wheel (with the help of some passersby), realising it was beyond repair and sending Alisha William-the bus driver-to hitch a ride back to Bunda for tools, Arthur vanished into the vegetation at the roadside. It transpired he had gone to speak to a family in a nearby homestead. One of the many things we are learning about our friend Arthur, is his innate skill to greet and give his time to speak to anyone he passes. He called Ruth over and they both disappeared back in the direction in which Arthur had come. Once there, a clearing appeared and a homestead was visible. Ruth was introduced to the baba (father) who was standing under a tree in the shade and the mama (mother) who was cooking by the fire. Their warmth was instantly felt. We exchanged greetings. The couple had 5 children. The eldest was 19 and the youngest was 5. We talked about how the family lived. Jeremiah explained how he traded fish at the market and sold produce he grew. Arthur showed Ruth the hoe and explained how the land was cleared to grow with Ruth jumping at the chance to have a go. The rest of the group then joined and Rev'd Stephen gave the mama a blanket which had been knitted by one of his church parishioners. The gift was graciously received and we said our farewells.

Returning to the road, we followed Arthur to the next homestead where we were again warmly welcomed. This time we met the family of a retired teacher along with his grandchildren. They brought out chairs and we sat and talked. The mama went to her cooking area as she wanted to prepare us food. We politely declined as it would have meant her family going without a meal. These welcomes are the norm in Tanzania. The Tanzanian people view visitors as angels. It was a privilege to have met them and easy to work out who the real angels were.

Soon after, the bus was fixed and we were on the road again to Ragata school.



Punctures, ditches and laughter (Part 3)

Along a bumpy road we went. Seeing a collapsed bridge. It brought it home how hard it is to access Ragata. Black clouds were forming and Arthur filled us with confidence "if it rains we must go. The rain will wash the roads away". Thanks Arthur.

As we pulled up to a school children were sat at their desks outside in the shade. Teachers walking to greet and welcome us. The community and the church members all sat awaiting to see us ... 3 hours later than expected.

We took our seats. Tim's heart started to pump more and more. Amazement, nerves, thanks. The welcoming began. The head teacher introduced himself and his teachers. The members of the church welcomed us and gave us their blessings. The school committee (the first committee we had seen of men and women) then introduced themselves.

The group then introduced ourselves. Confidence at its highest speaking in Swahili. Tim was last to say thanks and share information about St James. A very humbling experience knowing the community and children stayed to greet us.

In true fashion. Arthur called us up to sing to Ragata. The ukulele was out. Stephen led us out and off we went. Asante Kwa Kutukarabisha. Laughter, cheers, clapping erupted.

A group of girls turned up to greet us and share the celebrations. Arthur called them forward to speak to us. These girls were from a local secondary school and had walked 3km to greet us. They shared their dreams for the future. To become teachers, doctors, journalists, nurses and pilots. To come from such a remote area and to have such dreams touched our hearts and brought tears to our eyes.

A drum beat built up. The singing and dancing began. The confidence of the children was great to see. They took great pride in their performance. Kate was invited up to do her thing. She did this expertly and could've fitted into the Tanzania dancing.

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We then experienced something new from our visit. A poem with dancing. The children had a verse each about the story of guests visiting and their excitement. After each verse the child danced and laughter started. The end of the poem said thanks to St James for their support and partnership and that we are welcome in their community. Heart strings plucked. Emotions building up again.

Now it was challenge time. Can we walk with a container full of water on our heads with no hands? Diane and Tim stepped forward to take on the challenge. Wow! How can these ladies walk kilometre after kilometre with this on their heads. We struggled to walk 10 metres, but at least neither of us dropped it! Another experience in the bag.

It now came to the gift exchange. Ragata presented Tim with baskets with St James and Ragata painted on and some material. One of the teachers wrapped Tim in the material and spoke in Swahili. When translated she said "thank you for your link. Thank you for visiting. You are now part of Ragata. When you visit we care for you". Tim held back the tears for such an emotional and amazing gift.

Tim presented Ragata with gifts from St James and RWE. The school and children were grateful for the gifts. The smiles shone again! The cheering grew louder. A partnership was growing already.

The school invited us for food. The priest, the community members, the school committee and teachers joined us. A real sense of togetherness and support was apparent. These people want the best for their children and want to work as a partnership to achieve these dreams.

During the meal Tim asked Arthur about the laughter during the children's dance. He replied that it is a sign of encouragement. The more they laugh the more the children will dance. What a shock! Comparing that to England. If this happened embarrassment and a drop in confidence. Such a difference in culture!

Tim went for a walk around the school with one of the teachers Robert. Eyes wide open. We walked into a classroom of 15 standard 7 children staying after school to continue their work. Once they saw guests enter. They stopped and stood up to show their respects. Very shy children. Tim said hello and taught them his classroom celebration. They were reluctant to do it. But as we left the classroom. The "wheyyyyy" cheer was heard and the children were jumping around joining in. A smile was brought to Tim's face.

Across the courtyard we went into a very derelict, run down classroom. Bricks missing, part of the roof destroyed, a huge crack down the back wall. Robert told Tim they can't use this classroom because of the safety condition. But still had to be used for the nursery children. Robert then told Tim another one of the classrooms is in such a bad way it isn't safe to be used.

Ragata has 8 classrooms and 640 children. 2 classrooms are out of use most for the time. But was there a sad face? Were the children moaning? No. They smiled. Played and laughed.

Tim shared with the group that St James Academy, the Parish of Chaplethorpe and Durkar FC would be working in partnership to work with Ragata to help with the development of the school and the local area. Applause and thanks echoed around the room.

The Ragata community shared how they will keep the partnership alive with us! They will pray for us. They will continue to love us. They will work together to help develop their school and community. The partnership between ourselves instantly felt like it was getting stronger.

It was time to leave. The whole school still there. One last time for Tim to say thank you and goodbye. The school stood together. Tim joined in. Surrounded by the children all cheering "wheyyyyy" and doing Tim's favourite celebration. The children, the staff, the community representatives continued to laugh.

All the adults came to say goodbye. The local priest said he would pray for Tim and all the partners who are supporting Ragata.

Walking to the bus. The children continued to swarm to say goodbye! The children joined in with the St James and Ragata chants! Onto the bus. Pause. Children stood by the door waiting ... Tim jumps off for one more celebration and cheer with the children.

An amazing visit. An amazing experience. A school and community which matched the personality and energy of Tim. A link school which will grow stronger and stronger!



Punctures, ditches and laughter (Part 4)

Sad to leave, we were glad to be heading back to the hotel as it was late and the clouds were gathering. Arthur's fear was that if the rains came, the bus would not make it through the mud. Having already had the drama of the flat tyre, some of us were a little apprehensive about the journey back. This was to prove justifiable.

Having dozed off, Diane awoke suddenly to the sensation of sitting sideways, the bus listing precariously to starboard and lots of concerned voices.

We were well and truly stuck.

In the middle of nowhere.

It began to rain.

Stephen's reaction, 'Well, this day just keeps giving,' just about said it all.

Thankfully, up the road, the workman hadn't finished for the day and a truck arrived which was able to give the bus a helpful push as we all watched from a healthy distance. If he had have finished, who knows how long we would have been stranded there.

When the bus had to stop again in Bunda for air in that replaced front tyre, some of us feared the worst...but we need not have.

So it was a weary, dusty but very thankful band of travellers who returned late back to the hotel.

A roller coaster of a day to finish a roller coaster of a week!



Sunsets and Sunday Celebrations

With us succumbing to the effects of wobbly tums and general exhaustion from all the travelling, it has been a welcome rest this weekend. It was, however, punctuated by two notable events: seeing the sunset on the shores of Lake Victoria and the wonderfully colourful service at Musoma Cathedral yesterday.

Watching the sun go down, the team could scarcely believe this was Africa. A world away from our normal routine. Conversation was rich with reflection on the events of the week and with ideas to strengthen our links.

We were truly rewarded with the most beautiful African sunset.

What if church services were four hours long in Leeds diocese? Sunday lunch would be spoilt, that's for sure!

But that was what the team experienced yesterday. All dressed in new African outfits, we added to the rainbow of colourful clothes worn by everyone. Seven choirs sang and danced, including the Mother's Union. Nine collections were taken. We were asked to introduce ourselves, which we did in our now well practiced Swahili. This was followed by a rendition of our signature song written by The Rev Stephen Rochell - 'Asante kwa kutukaribisha'. The response was overwhelming as the congregation showed appreciation for our efforts.

Our very own Canon Maggie McLean shared an excellent message about God meeting us where we are and using what we have to offer, from the Parable of the Sower. With an introduction in fluent Swahili, and the remainder translated everyone was blessed and impressed with Maggie's preaching. A retired Tanzanian bishop made a point of thanking us for making the effort to learn some of his language and for making the trip to visit his country. It was very moving.

As is Arthur's way, he asked Diane to 'say a few words about why you are here.' Although unplanned and impromptu, it was an opportunity to talk again about our long standing partnership with Tanzania and about the schools' links. Diane explained that what we have learned will be taken back to share with our schools and churches in Leeds Diocese.

There was even a birthday celebration for all born in February...Diane enjoyed the cake and narrowly avoided setting her hair on fire with the Roman candle on top of it as it was passed around those celebrating/commiserating a birthday this month.

A wonderful morning which set us up for our adventures ahead this week.



Our final days in Musoma

Bunda Girls School

Following yet another fantastic Tanzanian welcome from Deninsia, the Headmistress, three girls from Bunda girls' school were delighted when they received gifts sent from their sponsors at Halifax Trinity Academy.

Their school is a boarding school run by Mara diocese with the aim of improving life chances for Tanzanian girls. On site there is a dispensary with a Dr and nurses to treat any girls who fall sick. Opened in 2014, the results are some of the best in the region and the girls are very happy to study. Currently the focus for Deninsia is to get the water connected to a more reliable supply, as well as building a chapel for the girls and houses for the teachers.

The faces of the girls lit up when they saw the letters to them from the students at Trinity. When they saw the stationary to help with their studies, their smiles grew wider.

At ACT Mara, the head teacher familiarised us more with the Tanzanian education system. The children take exams at the end of standard 7 (yr 7). If they fail there is no second chance and students cannot go to secondary school. Sadly, 40 per cent fail of students fail.

Secondary school is for 4 years (form 1-4). They have to pass exams before can do forms 5&6. 50 percent of students fail at this stage. To get into university, they have to do forms 5&6.

All secondary education is now free and is taught in English...after just having a period a day studying English in primary school, many students struggle.

Glen explained how pupils have to follow the government syllabus, even in fee- paying schools like ACT Mara (primary), Bunda girls and Issenye secondary schools (all run by Mara Diocese). The exams taken are very different in style to ours and comprise 50 questions which are multiple choice.

They now some comprehension questions at the end too.

Mara ACT were connected to the internet and WiFi but now do not have the money to do so.

In terms of focus for the direction of the school, Glen explained that they are tackling behaviour management. Since the government has now outlawed corporal punishment, teachers no longer use the stick to ensure discipline. This new development may be popular with the children, but Glen has had resistance from parents who believe that standards will fall if children are not beaten.

Whilst not having the same challenges of over a 100 pupils in each class (numbers are more like 45 in a class), ACT Mara still has some. Salaries are higher in government schools, so teacher retention is an issue. Glen is working on teacher motivation and introduced a teacher retreat, which was well received and which helped build a team .

Pupil rolls have fallen in recent times as parents find school fees difficult to meet. This has meant that planned development of the school is on hold. Whilst classrooms are better than in government schools, floors and ceilings need work, more text books are needed and resources are in short supply.

The children were clearly happy to learn and since classes are smaller, results are very good and all children pass their standard 7 exams to go onto secondary education.

Once again it was a warm welcome by both students and staff.

Issenye

Many of us were nervous of the journey again following our previous adventures. We did wonder if the bus would hold together under the strain of the rocky road...not the chocolate version...It was so bumpy that the vibrations repeatedly closed the windows or shook open the door. However, we were granted travelling mercies and finally arrived thankful, shaken, but not stirred at Issenye Secondary School, which is on the edge of the Serengeti.

The views from the football pitch are beautiful, down over the plains



Safe House Visit

Despite being moved in all of the schools we have visited, this was by far the most harrowing visit. Nyumba Salaama is a safe house presently giving refuge to 52 girls. Eight workers (matron, secretary, social worker, computer teacher, sewing teacher, driver, temporary manager, Melina Galibona and a chaplain) all share the vision of protecting the girls from harm.

The girls come to the safe house for different reasons but mainly they are escaping abuse. In each evenly numbered year between September to December, the girls are most at risk.

2016 two women were jailed, so it appears that the government does take its eradication seriously. FGM is now illegal.

Sadly, for the girls in the villages, the threat continues to be very real and is kept secret. The abuse is seen as a rite of passage that purifies a girl for her future marital life. It happens at any age. There were girls at the safe house still in primary school. After their 'purification', girls can be married at whatever age.

The rite brings prestige to the family. They believe it will bring many good things and that they will bear many children. The truth is that more women and girls die as a result of this abuse in Tanzania than from anything else.

The Safe House provides what they hope will be temporary accommodation. With the help of the local police, the social worker, Melina and local clergy try to reconcile girls back to their families after the danger period. Much work is being done by the parish vicars to re-educate the villagers and where the message of the Gospel is accepted, usually their ideas change too. The problem, Melina explained, is that some families are now doing cutting any time not just on an even number year and not just in those months. So some girls will now stay long term. Others do return safely and are treated as being very brave by their peers because they ran away and resisted the practice.

If they can't be rehabilitated and do need to stay at Nyumba Salaama, they are provided with uniform and sent to school. In other words, given a normal routine as far as possible in order to help them move on. Melina explained that they want to concentrate on education to help them achieve their dreams. They also seek to give them skills so that they don't need to rely on the men.

The full horror of the reality for the girls was communicated to us through the stories of some of the girls.

One daughter ran to her aunt to ask for help, who told her about the safe house. She fled alone on a journey which would take two and a half hours by car but on foot!

When the father first realised she had run away, he tried to find out who had helped her and vowed to kill whoever it was. When Mum knew her daughter had arrived safely, she was worried that the father would kill the aunt and asked the safe house not to say that it was the aunt that had brought her.

Dad came to the safe house and demanded her back. Melina spoke to him for two hours, but he wouldn't listen. He finally went away.

He returned in January and tried to take her saying he would take her back to school, so they kept her at the safe house.

When they tried later to take her home again, the father said that she was not his daughter. She is still at the safe house.

Ruth's thoughts

We listened to a girl (Lucia) who told us about her story. Her father wanted to hurt her but her mother supported her to run away. She walked the equivalent of a 2hr car journey to get to the safe house. She is safe and is in her 3rd year at secondary school.

Maria's parents wanted to hurt her. Her uncle rescued her by giving her money to escape. She caught the bus and asked a lady walking on the street where the safe house was. She arrived at night and was taken in by the matron. They tried to return her to her village but she was not safe to stay as her mother said her father would cut her when they left. She is now permanently safe as part of the safe house.

The visit to the safe house was both harrowing and inspiring in equal measures. We were welcomed, as we have now realised is just the Tanzanian way, with warm smiles and open arms. The safe house is exactly what it says, a safe place to protect vulnerable young girls escaping threat from people who should be loving and caring for them. They arrive in an environment which envelops them in love. They are provided with a safe place to sleep, food, clothes, guidance and support. One thing which struck me was the strong sense of ensuring these young women were given the self-belief to be confident and independent. Education is key and the girls all attend school with the support of the safe house. They are also taught additional skills to provide them with the best future possible. Melina spoke so passionately about the safe house and despite the challenges she continues to strive forward to ensure the best for the girls. NO girl is EVER returned to their village if they are still under threat of harm. This is so important and is a real reality within the stories we were told.

I found the experience extremely difficult. I am the mother of a girl and the thought of any deliberate harm coming to her is something I can't comprehend. As a mother, I protect her but in equal partnership with her father. To think of the mothers' of some of these girls having to help them flee is just heartbreaking.

Leaving was difficult and I did it with a heavy heart but with the knowledge that I was leaving a place which stands out as being a shining example of love and protection.

The biggest challenge is money. Everything is expensive. To feed and clothe the girls is proving a challenge as they are completely reliant on charity.

As the centre is open to the local community, the girls are not completely safe. Melina would like to build a fence around the premises to make it secure, so that it truly becomes a safe house. This would cost £16000.

Rev Stephen Rochell's thoughts

Visiting the safe house in Mugumu was emotionally challenging and yet inspirational.

To see strong Christian women working as, teacher, defender, advocate and friend to girls who had been abused, was inspirational.

Listening to the girls tell their stories was hard and I along with others in the party listened with tears in our eyes.

The Tanzanian government has made "cutting" illegal and yet it still is common in some tribes.

The Anglican Church in Mara is working within these communities and through education hopes change will come.

Tim's thoughts

Visiting the safehouse in Muguma was an emotional rollercoaster.

We met a group of girls who have fled from abuse being brought upon them and also listened to some of the girl's stories. To stand up and talk about the experiences they've had showed a lot of courage, bravery and determination that they want to live safer life.

The safehouse and Melina provide a loving and supportive infrastructure for the girls to learn new skills (sewing) and create pathways for their future.

The safehouse doesn't just protect the girls. They reach out to communities to teach them about FGM in hope they can reintegrate the girls back into the communities.

Michael's Thoughts

Visiting the safe house and seeing Melina and her team in action was inspirational. The care, guidance and support offered to the children along with an aspirational and resolute attitude towards this care was truly remarkable and the importance of the work shone through. The visit was extremely emotive, the stories were so hard to hear but at the same time were important to hear so that we can speak of the work and support in any way that we can. A number of girls shared their stories with the group, their bravery and trying to understand what they had been through was difficult to process. Personally I found one story particularly difficult. As a father of an 8 year old girl, listening to a story about how another father was treating his daughter and trying to comprehend the detail was harrowing and it was impossible for me to remain composed. My little girl is my world and it really upset me that other fathers could treat the daughters in the way described. I will be supporting the safe house in the future in any way that I can. Truly remarkable!

Kate W's thoughts

Our visit to the safe house made me realise how strong a woman Melina truly is. On a regular basis, she is faced with the challenge of trying to reunite girls with their families after they have fled in fear of abuse. This usually involves visiting fathers, who can be threatening and aggressive, accompanied by police officers. If there is any doubt that leaving a girl with her family would not be safe, the staff take her back to the safe house. The danger involved for all parties is high and demonstrates Melina's passion and love for the girls she protects.

As a group made up of men, women, mothers, fathers and teachers, this of course led us to think about the young girls we know and care about. We were all moved to tears listening to the girls' stories; their recounts were completely beyond anything we could comprehend. Melina and her team and working incredibly hard to educate the girls at the safe house in order to give them hope for a bright future.

Kate M's Thoughts

The visit to the safe house was an unforgettable experience for many reasons. The first been the time we spent with Melina discussing the awful realities.

Speaking with Melina really highlighted the love and care she has for these girls. She is their protector and will not let any harm come to them. She has provided them with a better future and consistently promotes the girls achieving their dreams.

"We are stars of the future".

The second unforgettable experience was listening to the girls tell their stories.

As a girl, I could not imagine facing a time when my father, who should be a caring, loving protector decides that it's time to put his daughter through a soul destroying experience, effectively endangering the life of his own little girl.

Thanks to Melina, she has empowered these girls, showing them their value as women and inspiring them and their communities to be the change for a better future.



You can take a group of teachers and vicars out of Tanzania, but you can't take Tanzania out...

Having returned to our day jobs, and thinking that this time last week we were in the Serengeti seeing some of God's wonderful creation in their natural habitat; it feels somewhat surreal. Here are some of our final reflections on the visit:

Rev Maggie:

It was a real pleasure to travel with such a great group of teachers from our diocese. Their capacity to embrace, and to try and process, some very difficult and overwhelming experiences was marked by an openness to learn and a depth of compassion. They were extremely good ambassadors for their schools and the diocese and I am confident that they will share their experiences with sensitivity and insight.

Michael's thoughts

It has been such a privilege and honour to represent Ackworth Howard as Headteacher during my time in Tanzania alongside a group of remarkable people. I have been moved and encouraged by the things that I have seen. It has been inspiring to see the impact of the work from the collaboration between schools, the diocese of Leeds and the diocese of Mara.

A particularly special day for our school was meeting the wonderful children and staff of Mshikamano (meaning solidarity) Primary School, our partner school. Seeing the children's gifts in Africa brought a tear to my eye. They were so appreciated and the children even sang songs thanking us for coming and for the gifts.

I have now begun to process what has been experienced and will carry those that I have encountered in my heart forever. I will find ways to articulate and communicate these treasures the best way that I can. We had a lovely assembly on my first morning back where we discussed our partner school, learnt some Swahili and sang a song. The Howard children were fantastic!

Kate W's thoughts

It seems an impossible task to sum up my thoughts about our trip. It was unforgettable, inspirational and has without a doubt changed me as a person. My lasting memory is smiling faces. Children who were beaming and full of excitement just to see us will be etched in my memory forever. When thinking about Mara, I can hear joyful music and see lively, spirited dancing. Arthur said it best when explaining, "Asking a Tanzanian child to sing without dancing is impossible. They would be dancing in their hearts."

Although it was clear that the schools were facing immense challenges, I was overcome by the dedication of staff and students alike. What moved us to tears had only made the staff work harder and the children become more ambitious. The visit to my link school will stay with me forever. I experienced a range of emotions; watching the reaction on the children's faces when gifts were exchanged, being dragged into a crowd of children and staff dancing and singing and taking part in sack races while laughing and crying. This experience has renewed my enthusiasm to strengthen the link even further and has made me determined to convey the importance of the link to the rest of my team.

I feel incredibly privileged to have been given the opportunity to visit the Diocese of Mara and must also thank the rest of the group for their support, care and encouragement on the trip. I know I have made friends for life and could not have asked for a better group of people to share my journey with. I have every confidence that our combined enthusiasm will raise the profile of our link with Mara and maintain the superb relationship we are developing with our Tanzanian friends.

Tim

To be given the opportunity to visit St James link school Ragata has been a privilege. It has been great to represent the school and begin to develop the relationship between the two schools. To be welcomed not only into a school, but a community will stay with me forever. This has touched my heart and is something which I'll share with my school and the parish.

I have worked alongside an inspiring group of adults who made the experience even more memorable. There has been a lot of hard work with the Diocese of Leeds and the Diocese of Mara to make these links possible and there is excitement to build a legacy to share with others.

Now that I'm back to school, everything I have learnt is beginning to sink in. I've already started sharing the experience with my Year 1 class, lots of questions, lots of discussions and a realisation of how two different communities are so different yet so alike. I will be holding a whole school assembly next week alongside Reverend Stephen Rochelle (and the infamous ukulele) to share our experience, our friendships and our songs. Asante kwa kutukarabisha.

Diane's thoughts...a sort of poem

Flat green land stretching to the mountain in the distance.

Rice fields

Maize fields

Lake Victoria glimmering

Women bent in the heat of the African sun

Men and boys driving cattle to pasture

Small compounds, homesteads

Dwellings made from mud bricks thatched with straw

Corrugated metal roofs reflecting sunlight

Round grain stores and charcoal oven houses

The smell of wood burning everywhere

African women walking carrying an assortment of pots, plastic containers, bundles of sticks, or sacks of beans on their head

No hands needed

Unmade roads; bumpy, bumpy tracks

Children...smiling faces

Delighted by our visit running out to meet the bus

Excited shouts

Singing and dancing for special visitors

Songs of joy to commemorate our visit

'We are so happy that you have come'

You have come a long way and we thank God for your safe journey here'

You have helped us'

'Come to school. Education is very important.'

'We don't want you to leave'

'Karibu'

Not used to seeing white people, the children want to touch us, hug us and dance with us

'Karibu sana'

Treated like royalty

'Karibu'

Having to overcome the usual British reserve to fully immerse ourselves in these precious moments

Very different lives touching fleetingly yet profoundly

Teachers sharing vision to see children realise their dreams

Doctor, Pilot, Teacher, Lawyer, Engineer

Why not?

Children want to learn

Children see the value of education

The way out of poverty

Teaching in challenging circumstances

Over 100 pupils in a class

One adult

One text book for the teacher

Children sitting on a mud floor

Some are lucky

They can sit on a sack

Others are luckier

They can sit three or four to a desk

What are Working Walls?

What are teaching assistants?

Maybe one day the classroom will be finished

Maybe the walls will be plastered

Maybe there will be a proper floor

Maybe there will be teaching resources

Maybe there will be other classrooms

Maybe the children can eat lunch and drink clean water

Maybe then results will improve

Maybe more than 40% of children will go on to secondary school

Safe house

52 girls escaping FGM and domestic violence

Great need

Mouths to feed

Educating stubborn traditions into the 21st Century

Brave, strong women

Brave strong girls

They have dreams too

And yet, 'Karibu' is the chorus everywhere

Radical hospitality the norm

Guests eat and drink

Hosts would go without

Visitors are angels

Karibu sana!

Even complete strangers are welcome

A challenge to typical British mistrust of the 'other'

Sad to return, yet longing to see loved ones

Beginning to process what we have experienced is our next challenge

How to articulate what we have seen and learned?

May we carry those children and schools with us forever

May we find ways to articulate and communicate the treasure we've been given

So that others may catch the vision

And seek to help those children realise their dreams.

Rev Stephen: Sacrificial Hospitality

So often we excuse ourselves by being too busy or not having enough time or simply by saying charity begins at home.

We become isolated and deeply suspicious of strangers.

This is simply the opposite of what we encountered in Tanzania. As we travelled around Mara we were constantly shown sacrificial hospitality. People who had next to nothing offered to share the little that they had with eight strangers. In any exchange, on the road, at schools, around our hotel or in Musoma we were shown courtesy, smiles, warmly greeted and always offered food and drink.

Visitors are seen as a blessing and are themselves blessed.

I think we have all been blessed by our time together in Tanzania and return committed to be a blessing to others, family, friends, strangers and our brothers and sisters in Tanzania.

Mungu Akubariki God bless