



The more you win, the more you play

YOU WILL NOT SEE TANZANIA'S FOOTBALL TEAM in the World Cup. You will not find our school's name on a silver trophy. Still, we cheer our school's football players as if they were champions. After school, one form (grade level) challenges another on a nearby field. It has no lines marked on it, so "out of bounds" is a matter of opinion. The best players get picked for the school team. They wear their yellow and green uniforms when they compete against other villages.

Girls play netball, a team game based on running, jumping, throwing, and catching. The rules say only fourteen players may take the court at one time, but we allow as many as want to play. The aim is to score as many goals as possible from within an area called the goal circle. On our court, the goal circle markings are imaginary.

Two board games are popular in our village. *Bao* involves distributing, capturing, and redistributing sixty-four seeds on a game board with four rows of eight holes. It belongs to the *mancala* game family. *Mancala* is one of the oldest board games in the world, although no one knows how old. It may have begun as a game played in holes scooped in the sand or earth. Many people say *bao* tests the limits of the human mind.



Drafti, or draughts, is also an old game, left behind by the British. It is checkers, with a little chess. Men play it in the village center, using bottle caps for pieces. You win the game if you take all of your opponent's pieces, if they cannot make any more moves, or if they give up.

Emanuel Bayo has played *drafti* for just one year. He already claims the village title, and no one argues with that.

I play after I finish my work, as often as I can. I study my mistakes and do not make them again. That is my champion's secret. The people I play, most have been playing for eight or nine years.

In *drafti* you keep playing until you lose, one opponent after another. The more you win, the more you play. I get to play a lot.

Good friends

THEY SAY TANZANIANS ARE THE FRIENDLIEST people on earth. We would not know. We can tell you this, though: When two people pass each other on our footpaths, they say hello. We greet and shake hands all the time, eager to



exchange news. We care about unity. We treat strangers as friends. We show respect and good behavior in the language we use. When someone enters a room or we want their attention, we say *karibu sana* (most welcome) several times. When we need something, we say not only *tafadhali* (please) but also *naomba* (I beg of you).

And we smile.

Since few people leave our village, friendships last a lifetime. We make friends at the places you would expect: church, school, special events, and celebrations. Our nearest neighbor may live a ten-minute walk away, but we call on each other for company and help. Disputes are rare and they never last long. We do not snatch from one another. We share. Only once in ten years has a case of stealing in our village needed to go to the court in Karatu. We do not have a court here.

When you are our age, what makes someone a good friend?

A good friend is someone you can exchange ideas with. – TRIPHONIA

A good friend helps you with your subjects. – HEAVENLIGHT

A friend is someone who values you. – SYLVESTER

Heavenlight is my best friend. She has good behavior. She keeps secrets.

We talk about science studies together, and we laugh, too. – SHANGWE

The walk from one point to another in our village can be long. It strengthens friendships along with muscles, one of our teachers says. We share stories that go on for kilometers.



Village government

JIANDAE KUHESABIWA.” (“Prepare to be counted.”) The fliers say that, announcing each year’s village census. Perhaps because we have so few hard assets, we count all the ones we have. The village government compiles the record. In 2004, the inventory—maybe 30 items long—included 2,583 males and 2,347 females, 54 ox-carts, 225 dogs, and 6 grinding machines.



Village government also handles official decisions and rules. Sometimes the matter is strictly local, and we talk it out until we agree. Other times, the decisions come from far away. The village government oversees social services, too—education, water, animal husbandry, and the medical dispensary. It administers the warehouse where farmers store crops, seeds and fertilizer, and machinery needing repair. It even tames our bees. In the one-room government office, you will see a beekeeper’s suit in a corner.

We elect an executive director and 25 councilors every five years. Anyone eighteen and older can vote, and by law, ten percent of the councilors must be women. Laurenti



Crescenti, our village executive director, is also a farmer. Few of his duties require him to sit behind a desk, so the doors to his office are often closed. He explains his job:

I monitor the village decisions and execute orders from the district and beyond. I secure the peace. When there is a dispute, perhaps over property held in common, people turn to me.

Three times a year, the village councilors and I hold a village assembly where people ask questions and speak complaints. We talk of our needs, too. If we are to bring more teachers to our primary school, we must build them houses. To bring more tractors to our fields, we must petition the district government. We discuss and make plans, many plans.

To questions like “Why is the dispensary always low on supplies?” or “Why do we not have better access to improved seed varieties?” there are often few answers, or really, just one: We lack money.

Writing down every word

WE ARE HUNGRY FOR EDUCATION HERE, as much as we can get. In our village, we have a nursery, two primary schools, and a secondary school. A half-hour’s walk separates each from the other. The secondary school is new, but thirty years of chalk-dust whiten the primary school blackboards. The primary school has over 850 students in eight grades, and 60 to 75 pupils to a class. Three hundred and fifty students attend secondary, which has four forms and 40 to 50 pupils per class.



We sit at wooden desks lined up in rows. The breeze blows through our classrooms. The walls are bare. We wear uniforms and when called on we always stand, prefacing our remarks with “Sir” and “Madam.” In secondary school, we take ten subjects, and speak only English. Our teachers are young and, we believe, wise.

In Tanzania, only one in ten primary students achieve secondary school. Primary school is free, but secondary carries a tuition. In our village it costs 20,000 shillings (\$20 USD) a year, and parents must also donate, per term, 36 kilograms of maize and 13



kilograms of beans for day students, or 95 kilograms of maize and 34 kilograms of beans for hostel dwellers. We advance from form to form depending on how we score on national exams. If you are weak in a subject, help is scarce. One-quarter of our country's population cannot read and write.

Herieli Malle, the headmaster of Awet Secondary School, believes education holds the key to our village's future:

In the past, many did not see the validity of a thorough education. In a village of agro-pastoralists, a primary education seemed plenty. Now we know our children need the most education we can give, including our girls.

Families sacrifice all they can to pay the school fees. We lack textbooks and so much more. Our teachers fill their blackboards with knowledge, and our students write down every word.

Our students care about the affairs of the world. Some topics, they are abstractions. Others, like global warming, affect them directly. They wonder if the drought in our village may become permanent. They wonder why the industrialized world does not do more to control dangerous emissions. The global community, our students want to be contributing members. They are fierce in their studies and in their will to belong.

God's blessings

CHURCH BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER in our village, and we have three: a Catholic, a Lutheran, and a Pentecostal church. Some of us attend churches in nearby villages, like the Roman Catholic Church in Upper Kitete, 12 kilometers away.



In Tanzania, there are equal numbers of Christians, Muslims, and followers of native religions, and we value religious tolerance. In Kambi ya Simba, we are mostly Christians, yet we welcome all faiths.

We go to church on Sundays to support each other—and to pray. Praying together is always more effective than praying alone, we believe, and we pray a lot: for rain, recovery from sickness, a good harvest, a safe journey, stronger cattle. We seek God's blessing for special occasions, too, from weddings, births and deaths to a football competition with a nearby village.

In a village with few books, the Bible is the first text we hold in our hands. Reading the verses helps us relate to the transformations in our own lives.



But it is the music that often lures us most to church. Every church has a *kwaya* (choir), and singing, dancing, drumming, and folk tales spill out the door. Audio cassettes (*kandas*) of church music have become a big business across Tanzania.

Robert Masong, the minister at our village's Lutheran church, reports:

The church was built in 1994, at which time its members were using a classroom for their prayers. The new church enabled nearly 300 members of the community to attend. Five people regularly work for the church—a caretaker, an evangelist, and several others part-time.

Each Sunday, the caretaker and evangelist commence the service. The service has a choir as a way of attracting anyone at all to pray with us. In addition to worship, the church is blessed with a one and a half acre farm to support itself. The church we built ten years ago is already worn out and unsatisfactory. We have put in place a plan to build a new one.

As for providing charity, our churches step in when they can. They may help one family with school fees and another with medicine for a sick child.

Children and sacrifice

CHILDREN FILL OUR VILLAGE. Forty-four percent of the population in Tanzania is under fourteen. We are a young country, though this may be changing.

Fifteen years ago, the average mother in Kambi ya Simba gave birth to six live babies. Now our average birth rate has dropped to 3.8.

Once it was good to have a lot of children. They fetched water and firewood; they herded cattle and goats; they gathered vegetables; they went to the store. They did whatever their parents needed. They stood in for wealth. Now, having too many children can extend poverty. Children need development; they need education. And this *takes* wealth.

Angela Marco Malle, a mother of four, says:



When I was a child, work, not school, made my life. That is the way it was, especially if you were a girl. Parents saw their children as fruit for the labor they provided, and they picked them early. Now, children are our fruit for the future they bring, not the water they carry. And rather than pick them early, we must let them ripen.



In my household, I am the father and the mother. I do the work of two. I want my three sons and daughter to have the education that I never had. Yes, I want my children to help me when I am old. Yes, I want them to have good manners. But I also want them to find what they are good at, to acquire the education that makes them strong. I tell them they must do real work and control their lives.

As young people, we are grateful for the sacrifices of our families. We want to give back.

I want to help street children by giving them food, clothes, and shelter. – LUCY JOSEPH

I want to ensure that the women in my country get the education they deserve and the right to inherit land. – LUCY JOSEPH

I want to deliver my country from poverty and disease. – JULIUS

I would like to balance the budget of the country. – PIUS

I want to teach people about good agricultural and industrial practices that will help our country develop. – WAYDAELI

I want to help protect the environment, especially the ozone layer, so that we preserve our planet. – PILI

I would like to use knowledge effectively in order to fight oppression of any kind.
– PASCHALINA