

BG-LEG – Amani Visit Report for Website

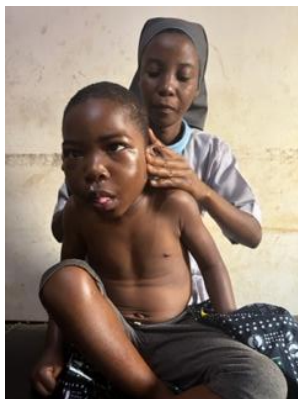
29 August to 7 September 2022

This was Bridget & Leslie's first visit to Amani in three years and the first visit by anyone from FOAT since Cathy Swanson's brief visit in April 2021. The welcome by Amani was as warm as ever but I think the most striking thing was the many new faces in the core CBR team at Amani and in the teaching staff at Amani Mvomero Special School.

The timetable for our 12-day visit was heavily biased towards meetings and events which meant less time to spend with the children and staff. We hope, however, that these meetings have paved the way for more and sustainable local support for Amani; the initiation of a plan to introduce, promote and keep alive safeguarding in all contexts in the Anglican Church of Tanzania (see <https://amanitzuk.org/shinyanga>) and, in the case of the Mpapa Dispensary; to a recommitment of villagers and government officials to getting this much needed facility open soon.

Amani Chamwino

It was good to see Amani physiotherapy and day care functioning much as ever despite the many challenges and staff changes over the past couple of years.



The care given to the children by the young nuns is unstinting but much of the equipment is old, 'held together with string' and the physiotherapy room would benefit from investment in replacement of the linoleum floor.

Two stories of love and hope which touched our hearts

- 1) Yona** is a little Masai boy who was identified when the Ecumenical Team were conducting outreach at his village in 2021. His father, 'Baba Yona' considered his son to be worthless, he could not walk, speak or show much emotion. He told Fr Beatus he might as well kill him! Fr Beatus persuaded Baba Yona to allow the boy to come to the Amani Centre and to visit him in three months. He guaranteed Amani would get him walking in that time. Baba Yona was amazed to see the transformation of his son in such a short time and gave Amani one of his cows by way of a thank you. Look now how Yona can walk, dance and enjoy music [*insert video*]



Baba Yona is now a true 'Friend of Amani'. He pays for fuel for the water pump at Mikese in exchange for Amani allowing his cattle to drink there once a day and purchases lambs from Amani to augment his herd of goats and sheep. Baba Yona also gave a calf to contribute to the feast following the celebrations for the opening of the new Masistas' house.



2) Neema is about eight years old. She had been abandoned and was found by the police roaming the streets of Morogoro about six months ago and brought to Amani. Nothing is known about her parents, name or date of birth. The staff at Amani named her and she was baptised by the Bishop. From being a very withdrawn child who did not speak, Neema is now very outgoing, craving attention and always has a smile on her face. It is hoped that in due course, Neema can benefit from medical treatment for her hydrocephalus and with appropriate therapy, begin to speak.

Many of the children at Amani are orphans. Others come from very poor families who cannot afford to contribute to their care. Amani receives no government funding. It is reliant on donations to carry out its work. If you would like to find out more and sponsor a child, do get in touch:

amanicentre.sponsorship@gmail.com



Mikese Farm

The overwhelming impression we came away with was one of gratitude and hope despite the challenge of drought. The borehole, funded by FOAT from a grant from the Rotary Club, has made it possible for the staff and young people with disabilities to live here through the drought and to continue with animal husbandry. The new-found friendship and business relationship Amani has with the Masai, Baba Yona has brought unforeseen advantages, but despite this the challenge of water still remains.



Fr Beatus & Baraka show us the new borehole and pump



Cattle, goats and sheep gather by the water trough



New life



The Challenge

The new borehole cannot produce sufficient water to irrigate crops. This year's excessive heat and drought has led to a total failure of the maize crop. Normally Mikese produces 50 per cent of Amani's food needs. Amani has identified where a second borehole could be sited. The cost of the borehole plus pump and overhead irrigation is in the order of £8,000. FOAT will work closely with Amani to seek funding for this, once the dormitory for the secondary boys at Amani Mvomero School has been funded (see below)

Surveying site for second borehole



Ravaged by drought, Amani hopes to salvage a few legumes from the land



Mvomero

Amani is addressing three large challenges here: 1) the Government reneging on its promise made five years ago to pay the salaries of the teachers at the Special School, meaning that five left in July for salaried positions elsewhere 2) the theft by a former teacher of books and equipment from the School, and 3) the lack of maize harvest due to the drought.

In addressing these issues: 1) Bishop Lazarus plans to meet the Regional Director to lobby him regarding the School contract agreement, and Amani has recruited new teaching staff; 2) Amani is seeking assistance from a local donor to help with replacement of books, and 3) FOAT and Amani are working together to a) seek funds for the immediate food needs and b) opportunities for developing sustainable agriculture.

Despite these considerable challenges, Bridget and Leslie were delighted to see the new secondary classroom in use and the happy faces of the children starting the new term with 'fidget toy' gifts donated by a friend in the UK.

New Secondary School Classroom



Children at Amani Mvomero Special School enjoy the fidget toy gifts donated by a friend in the UK

Magubike

Details about the Amani Magubike project can be found on the 'Projects' Page <https://amanitzuk.org/projects>. Bridget and Leslie were pleased to note that the Hall/Classroom was now almost complete.



While the site cannot be occupied until the hostel and toilets have been constructed, Amani has used the surrounding land to grow maize and now legumes. Sadly, as with Amani's other sites, the maize failed this year due to the drought but it is hoped that the more hardy legumes will provide at least a small harvest.

Mpapa-Msufini Dispensary

A project to construct a community dispensary for the families living in Mpapa-Msufini villages was initiated some seven years ago, supported by FOAT in conjunction with Amani and in partnership with local government. Unfortunately due to changes in legislation and multiple changes of local government officials, the facility is still not open. It was important for all concerned that we should meet together with village representatives and local government officials to negotiate a way out of this impasse. We hope now that with the co-operation of all, the facility will open within a few months.



Dispensary Buildings

Gathering outside the dispensary

The Ecumenical Group

Bridget and Leslie were delighted to meet once again with the Ecumenical Steering Group after a gap of three years. It was especially pleasing that the group reaffirmed its desire to continue to work ecumenically and agreed to invite the Lutheran Bishop to join the Ecumenical Steering Group, to open a bank account for all ecumenical work with a pledge by Bishop Lazarus to deposit 500,000 Tsh into the new account and for him to lobby the Regional Commissioner to honour the Government's promise to support people with disabilities in the community.



Fr Patrick, Fr Beatus, Bridget, Bp Lazaurus (RC),
Rev Enock, Lugendo Isaac Mseegu (representing
Bp Sehaba), Leslie

Economic Social Empowerment Projects – Microbanks

Bridget and Leslie were surprised and pleased to learn of the success of two economic social empowerment projects funded by FOAT. Groups of families of the disabled have been trained to run their own micro banks to generate funds for them to use to support their families and initiate other projects and thereby grow the wealth of the family.



The eight group leaders made the five hour journey from ***Tunguli Village*** to tell us about the success of their microbanks. It was especially encouraging to learn that despite the failure of chicken projects started by the groups in 2018, they were keen to continue to work together and grateful to be given a second chance by FOAT. After training at the end of 2021, FOAT gave each of the eight groups 100,000Tsh (£30) start up funds. After seven months of operation, there is now over £17,000 in circulation; an average of over £2,000 per group.

The Sangasanga Helena Memorial Group was established in 2018, one of eight social empowerment groups for families with children with disabilities established in the wards around Amani Chamwino following the death of Bridget & Leslie's daughter, Helena. Projects chosen by the groups ranged from market gardening, to chicken and goat rearing, cake baking and beaded handbags. Seven of the groups are still going, generating income for the families. It was unfortunate that the agricultural project at Sangasanga failed. However, following training in January, the eight members of the group initiated a micro bank. Already they have nearly £600 in circulation. When we visited them they were extremely grateful to have been given a second chance and can now already afford to care for their children and some have started small businesses from the monies they have borrowed from their microbank.



Economic social empowerment of families of the disabled is core to Amani's mission. It is heartening therefore to have heard from the villagers themselves of the impact of two such projects. Working with the ecumenical team, it is hoped the success of these projects can be replicated in other villages in the Morogoro Region.

Final thoughts

It was hard to leave our Amani family at the end of our whistle stop 10-day visit. We are always conscious that Amani faces substantial challenges, none more so than this year with the failure of the grain harvest, the on-going failure of the government to pay teaching staff at Mvomero Special School and hence high staff turnover, and the difficulties of retaining professional staff – physiotherapists, social workers and special needs teachers - for the CBR team.

Despite these and other challenges, Amani continues to provide excellent support to children and families of the disabled. It is laudable that it is seeking every opportunity it can to raise awareness in the community, both of the services it offers and its need for financial and gift in kind support. It is hoped that initiatives to improve marketing and the [expected] expansion of the ecumenical group to include the Lutheran church, will help to reinforce these messages.