

Teaching materials for two primary schools in Makanya, Tanzania

Makanya is a small town in Northeastern Tanzania located close to the Pare Mountains and home to about 6000 inhabitants. The town is the infrastructural centre for the Southern part of the Pare Mountains as well as for a larger catchment of the Masai plains to the West. Close to the town is a gypsum-mine and a Masai (Tanzanian nomads) livestock fare, where cattle and goats are traded. The gypsum mine generates the main income for the people in Makanya, but several hundred children and teenager mine the gypsum in hard work using only a rake and an iron lever. The salaries are minimal at 60,000 Tanzanian Schilling (~35 Euro) for a whole truck load of 30 tons gypsum. Besides this limited source of income Makanya is pretty much cut off from other opportunities to earn money. The by far greatest portion of the population is subsistence farmers growing maize, beans and labda (type of lentil). The cultivation is without irrigation opportunities, meaning entirely dependent on the scarce rainfalls. No need to say that agricultural tools or animals are unaffordable for most farmers and the work is done in hard handwork. Often children have to help out on the fields instead of going to school. A successful harvest can be expected every third year when there is enough rainfall for the maize to grow. Food security is a permanent problem in the minds of people and causes a lot of frustration among them. The pork barrels for the people in Northern Tanzania concentrate around the touristic hotspots Kilimanjaro, Serengeti or Ngorongoro Crater. The growing tourism creates good job opportunities, but access to those depends on the ability to speak at least Basic English.



In Makanya there are two public primary schools and one public secondary school. All schools are boarding schools, but students need to wander up to four hours every day to reach the school from the remote villages. School buses are not existent. The schools host usually 750 and more students in a few one-story buildings and class sizes are accordingly of a different dimension compared to schools in industrialized countries. Forms are only available for the earliest students. In the best case four children are sharing one form.



The quality of education varies a lot, but is generally dependent on the economical opportunities of the parents. Despite the widespread poverty of the people the obligatory tuition fees determine the teaching standards. The lower the rate is the more students are in one class. The differences between schools are tremendous. As I visited a school in Makanya to attend some classes, one of the teachers asked me whether or not I could fund his child to go to a better school. The school, where he was a teacher himself was so bad that he wanted his child to visit another school. Unfortunately, his salary as a teacher was not enough to pay the higher tuition fees.



In Tanzania it is common practice to educate the good students as practitioners, lawyers and engineers. Only the less well performing students become teachers. This is a fatal mistake when trying to improve the education system. In many cases teachers have little motivation, no proper education and receive an unacceptable salary of around 65 Euros per month. They have to teach English without even speaking the language themselves from the first level (Shule ya Msingi) until the highest primary school level, which ends after seventh grade.

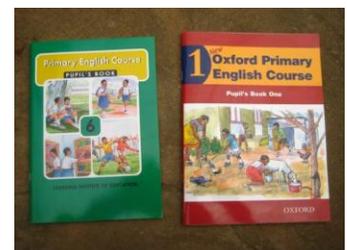
The entry into English classes varies from school to school, but no later than fourth grade. In the Makanya schools and probably in many more the English lessons pose the biggest problem for teacher



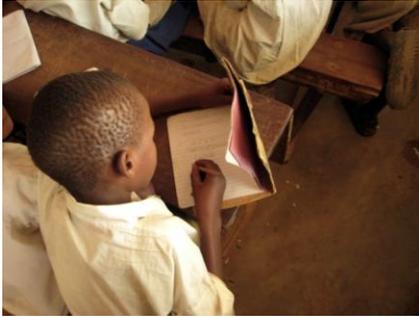
and students. The teachers have insufficient English skills and the students no adequate text books and learning materials. Three to five students have to share one book, copy machines are not available. Homework and individual exercises become impossible. The available books have been used for too many years and cannot be substituted because of lack of funds for the school. Money from the ministry of education arrives irregularly and is often already used to supply the major schools in the bigger cities. Schools in the remote areas do not receive any funds and are

put off till the coming year. In case there is money available, new teaching materials are often the last thing the money is used for. It is the teachers themselves who are responsible for the purchase of new teaching materials for the schools.

There is a one central book store in Dar Es Salaam where English school books are for sale. The Oxford press published a series of small English books, designed for the level and requirements at Tanzanian primary schools. The books are available for all grades from one to seven and they are the common textbooks also at the higher ranked private schools in Tanzania. I had a look at the books myself and I think that it is possible to learn Basic



English with these materials. One book costs 4000 TSh which is approximately 2.30 Euro. With only a few hundred Euros it would be possible to purchase a large number of books and thus, improve the chances and perspectives of many students in the remote areas around Makanya. Good English skills are the key to a better life in Tanzania and this skill will even gain importance in the future.



The teachers of Makanya and me are seeking for financial funds for new English books for the children in Makanya and the Pare Mountains. I will buy the books in Dar Es Salaam myself and deliver them to the schools. All costs including transport, packaging, etc will be covered by funds other than the contributions. Each and every Euro will be fully invested in school books. I am convinced that a limited

amount of funds will improve the situation in the English classes remarkably. In exchange the teachers promised me to try their best to improve their own skills and to enhance the teaching in the future. With our financial opportunities we can possibly contribute to a sustainable change in an area where support is so much needed and appreciated.



The students, the teachers, the people of Makanya and me will be grateful for every book that we can contribute to an improved English learning.

Asante sana.

Timo/

