

The Capital City (?)

In high school, I had attempted to memorize the national capital of every country in the world. I never managed to learn them all, and even fewer of them stuck with me over the years. But even in high school, eastern Africa was particularly interesting to me, so when my mom read the Amani Center's brochure to me, I knew that she was wrong.

"Trust me, mom: Dar es Salaam is the capital. When was the last time *you* tried to memorize national capitals?"

"I'm just reading what this says," my mom defended herself. "Dodoma, the capital city."

"Well, it must be the district capital, like Helena. Tanzania's capital is Dar es Salaam."

Driving through the city, I could even see some similarities between Dar and Washington, D.C. Both of them were crowded and seemed to have a proportionately large number of people who were in a *big* hurry. Both had opposite ends of the wealth spectrum. While the wealthy didn't live in the same luxury as wealthy Americans would, the poor people were much, much poorer. All of this fit my assumption of Dar being a capital city. But, last night when Rev. John had pointed to a television broadcast of Tanzania's Parliament, he noted that it was taking place in Dodoma. Even then, I was reluctant to admit that the information I had studied so hard could possibly be wrong. It wasn't until we drove through Dodoma and they pointed out the capital building that I was finally willing to concede. (I've never liked being wrong.)



But while it wasn't the capital city, Dar es Salaam provided a pivotal first look at Africa. Twelve-story apartment buildings stuck into the sky, looking like a palace amid the squalor of the rest of the city. Not two blocks further down the road, shops made of a piecemeal collection of used materials sat on a dirt sidewalk. There were plenty of cars in the city, but lanes of traffic were also occupied by men wheeling enormous carts *by hand*. Far more common were the bicycles, many of which looked like they were straight out of the 1800s. In fact, as we left the city, the scenery around me looked more and

more antiquated: mud houses, people carrying firewood and baskets on their heads, babies in fabric slings on their mothers' backs,...cell phones.

That was one modern technology that Tanzania was not lacking in the least. Cell phone use was just as widespread as it is here in the U.S. The models are a little older, and many people have trouble finding a place to recharge the battery, but they are everywhere. The other reminder that I was in the 21st century was the clothing. While many of the Tanzanians wore the traditional tribal dress, an equal number wore regular-Western style clothing, all of which was imported from other countries. Old clothing from sports teams, Tommy Hilfiger, Billabong, and countless other American companies were prevalent – it was like the whole country shopped at our American thrift stores. I even saw a Hartford Whalers jersey (a defunct NHL team) that I almost bought from the kid wearing it because I was sure I couldn't find one in the U.S.



My eyes remained wide and glued to the scenery out the Landcruiser's window. I was trying to take in Africa. It didn't seem strange to me, not in the sense of it being out-of-place or counterintuitive, but it was so different from anything I had seen before. I took in the plants, the people, the buildings, the shops along the sides of the roads, the mountains, the sky, the roads, the bikes, more people...this was Africa!

But even with so many exciting things to see, the long plane trip caught up with me. Eventually, the plants became just plants, the people became just people, and I drifted off to sleep.



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Amani Center



“I’m at the center,” my journal for July 4th read. I laughed. My next sentence was, “The center of what?”

Amani Development Center is (straight from the pamphlet) “a community-related and Christ-centered ministry in central Tanzania.” But leaving the description at that would be like saying Butte has “some history.” After only two years of operation, the Amani Center is shaping the communities around it and the people within those communities. In fact, when I first heard of the Center, I was under the impression that it had been under operation since it was first registered with the Tanzanian government in 2002. Half-way through the trip, I found out the Center had only been operating for two years, and I could hardly believe it! It seemed like what had been done at the Center in two years was more than I could have accomplished in my entire life. One word stuck in my mind every time I thought about the Center: *vision*.

The Center is located on the east end of the village of Makang’wa (muh-kaw’-ngwuh). Two other villages are within the Center’s area of ministry: Makulu and Mvumi Misheni. No one I talked to knew what the populations of any of these villages were. I know that the Makang’wa schools had about 70 children in every grade, and I believe that is the smallest of the three villages.

The first ministry the Amani Center provided to the people of Makang’wa was clean water. During the wet season, villagers had been getting their water from muddy ponds and rivers shared with the village livestock. In the dry season, they dug into empty river beds to get water of the same quality. The Amani Center invested \$30,000 to drill a

well that would provide cleaner water to the village. Recently, another well has been drilled in Makulu, and the pump is being powered entirely by wind power.

With the well, Amani Center began a large farming operation, hiring local villagers to do the work. It has been a blessing for people in Makang'wa to find work at all, and for some, their weekly wages are what allowed them to feed their families. For others, it is a source of financial relief that frees them to look for other jobs or do missionary work. Rev. John also focuses on the spiritual needs of the Center's employees, holding services every morning at the giant cross constructed inside the Amani front gates.

The money that the farm earns returns to the community in many ways, largely in the form of education. There is a local parish that had a special ministry for orphaned children, called the Ingadola Children's Project. Rev. John donated money to provide this project with a school building and higher teachers' wages. The nursery school, as it is called in Tanzania, serves children from three years old until they are ready for primary school at age six.

During my stay, another leap toward education was made: ground was broken to begin building a new primary school in Makulu. This school will eventually teach children from grades 1 – 7. After that, students apply to enter secondary school, but it is not the free and accessible education we have in America. There are various school fees, and if a student is unable to finish secondary school, they cannot return to it or continue their education. Rev. John sponsors many students to ensure they make it through secondary school, and continues to sponsor many of the students who move on to the universities as well. He uses as much of the Amani funds as the Center can spare, but he also relies on donations from Australia and the U.S.

The word "amani" is the Swahili word for "peace." The Center could have just as aptly been named "baraka" or "tumaini," which mean "blessing" and "hope." Or the word that struck me so clearly while I was there: *maono*.



St. Andrew's Church

Rev. John planned a church circuit for us to travel during my visit that would allow me to see a different church on each of the four Sundays I was there. Having never seen an African church service before and looking forward to it immensely, I didn't much care when John told us on Saturday afternoon that there was a change of plans. He had decided to take us to the St. John's parish in Makang'wa because they were having a farewell service for one of their pastors. I didn't even care much when we showed up at the church, and there had been more of a change of plans than we realized: nobody was there. Somehow, there had been a miscommunication and the service at St. John's had been moved to a different church, changed to a different time, or maybe just canceled (I was never sure which). I figured for people who couldn't speak Swahili, just ending up in the right city on the right day was a pretty good start.

We drove across the village to St. Andrew's church. Like St. John's, it was an Anglican parish. And like many of the churches we visited during our month in Africa, it was a congregation that met in a small, run-down church while they constructed a larger church nearby. We had brought what would be our usual Sunday crew to church: Rev. John drove with Gordon in the front seat. Gordon got the front seat because, approaching seven feet tall, he needed it more than the rest of us. Gordon and his wife Rae were a retired Australian couple that was visiting the Center for a year. They had been in Makang'wa for three months when I arrived and were already well-known in the village. Many of the local people called them Babu and Bibi, the Swahili words for Grandpa and Grandma.

Wedge into the back seats were Bibi, Gideon, Albert, and I. Albert is a secondary school that Rev. John sponsors. He comes from a very poor family in Makulu, so Rev. John also offered him housing at the Center, which frees up some of his parents' income to help feed his three younger siblings. Young John was in the back of the Landcruiser. I'm not sure how Gideon, Albert, and John decided which of them would get the back seat, but I think it must have involved losing some kind of competition. The back seat wasn't terribly uncomfortable, but it had to be opened from the outside. And it was common for the rest of us to pile out of the Landcruiser and forget completely about whoever was in the back.

The people at St. Andrew's were extremely friendly. The deacon invited me over to his house before the service to try some groundnuts. He knew very little English but was able to ask me where I was from. From the time I told him until I ran into him again in the village later in the trip, I would hear him repeating, "Oh, Mon-TAN-ah! Ha, ha, ha." He enjoyed the word.

The service at St. Andrew's was magnificent in its simplicity. There were no microphones, no comfortable pews (the church had rows of crude, ankle-height wooden benches), no elaborate decorations, not even a finished roof over our head. Yet, the people of the church worshipped with grateful hearts, knowing God had provided for them everything they needed. Two choirs sat in front, performing several songs each during the service. The only instruments they had were animal hide drums and a few cheap whistles, but they all sang beautifully.

The only thing about the service that made me feel uncomfortable was how well we were treated because we were white. I didn't want to be in the front on the only set of comfortable, full-sized wooden chairs. It seemed to explicitly conflict with the message of James 2:1-13. But I didn't know their language or their culture well enough to protest. The one good thing about my seat was that I had a front-row view of the choir. I didn't realize at the time how much that would mean to me by the end of the trip.

