The children of Musoma

Keval Ashok Shah goes on a life-changing journey to help make a difference in Musoma, Tanzania

A
fter months of anticipa-
tion, Tanzania came into view. What better way to define this than with the snow peak of Kilimanjaro, glistening in the moonlight. It was enough to wake us up after the exhaust-
ing 14-hour journey from Lon-
don Heathrow, as we drove along a pitch-black road to an inn in Moshi, where we were go-
ing to spend the first night. Nothing prepares you for its beauty, and one can only gawk in wonder at its immense size.

The team staring out of the win-
dows were Dr Manny Vasant, Mrs Meena Vasant, Dr Kishor Vasant, Dr Auriel Gibson, Hud-
son Cook (a builder by trade), Fleur (a dental practice man-
ager) and myself.

On the road

The next day, we visited the town of Moshi, which is situ-
at ed 70km east of Arusha. What struck me immediately, was the pace... how laidback every-
thing was, compared to Lon-
don. No one seemed to be in a hurry, and I put it down to the blazing midday sun.

After buying much-needed bananas, chocolates and water, we vis-
ite d Marangu Falls, in the foothills of Kilimanjaro. We
stood for a while and took in the sight of the 60-foot cascade
dropping into a plunge pool, which led away as a rivulet
through a dense jungle that seemed to stretch for miles.

On the right as we touched its western tip. As darkness fell,
the clouds gathered over the heart of the Serengeti, and
gave birth to lightning. I could just imagine the horror in the
eyes of a wildebeest, as the bolt
illuminated a crouching li-
oness with only one thing on its
mind.

The next we made our way back to the airport to fly to
Mwanza, the southern port of Lake Victoria. Looking out of the plane, it was easy to see the
devastating impact of human activity on the environment.
Hundreds of hectares of forests
had been cleared to make way for grazing and farming, evi-
dent by myriads of white lanes in the barren land. But that was what it was — barren. I don’t
know if it was due to lack of rainfall, or overuse... it just
seemed like a huge waste, land that could no longer be used by people or animals.

Upon landing, we visited the Hindu Union Hospital, where I
witnessed a small portion of the enormous contribution Manny
had made to the healthcare in Tanzania. The dental clinic he
donated was well up and run-
ning, except for a handpiece, that he quickly made a note to
fix.

A few more bottles of water, and we began on the three-
hour journey to Musoma, with
the Serengeti rushing past us.

Arriving at Musoma

Arriving at

Dreams aside, we reached
Musoma, to be warmly wel-
comed by Denis Mahina, Andy
Vanzandt, Lizzie Cameron and
her parents. Denis, a small man
with a big heart, started the Lake
Victoria Disability Centre (LVDC), with nothing more than
his savings and determination, to improve access to social, eco-
nomic and educational opportu-
nities for disabled youths in the Mara region of Tanzania. Many
articles are constructed by the trainees and assistants (for ex-
ample, desks, bicycles for the dis-
abled) and sold to help fund the project. The project is otherwise
funded by donation and has char-
table status. The absence of reg-
ular funding is a continual prob-
lem.

Andy Vanzandt, a 22-year-old
qualified carpenter/joiner from
Suffolk, is spending three months in Musoma to teach his
skills at the LVDC, and help with its renovation.

Lizzie, a 26-year old graphic
designer from Edinburgh, Scot-
land, found out about the project,
and joined him, to work with the
disabled children and

Teenagers. She has been living in
Musoma for four days, and Lizzie or-
organised our schedule to see and
treat the children from the
Mwembeni Deaf and Intellectu-
ally-impaired School, and the
youth from the LVDC.
One in ten people in Tanzania are disabled — 3.5 million people suffer from a physical, mental, hearing or vi-
sual impairment. This statistic is high because of causes such as
catching malaria or meningitis as a baby, unprofessional admin-
istration of herbal medicine, mis-

what louder for the
place and its people. Sadly, ever
since the 1970s, the town has suf-
fered economic decline. The iso-
lated rural majority across Mara
continue to suffer from abject
poverty due to an absence of em-
ployment opportunities, ill
health caused by malnutrition,
and shortage of schools and af-
fordable health centres.

DENTAL TRIBUNE United Kingdom Edition · August 7–13, 2009

Back to school

We planned to work in Mu-
sona for four days, and Lizzie or-

organised our schedule to see and
treat the children from the
Mwembeni Deaf and Intellectu-
ally-impaired School, the
Mwisenge Blind School, and
the youth from the LVDC. One in ten
people in Tanzania are disabled —
3.5 million people suffer from a
physical, mental, hearing or vi-
sual impairment. This statistic is high because of causes such as
catching malaria or meningitis as a baby, unprofessional admin-
istration of herbal medicine, mis-

What struck me immediately,
was the pace... how laidback
everything was, compared to Lon-
don. No one seemed to be in a hurry, and I put it down to the blazing midday sun’
Inside the clinic

The surgery itself needed a lot of organisation. This was probably the first time that the challenges of health care in the developing world, hit home. Everything that I took for granted working in my cosy clinic in Northampton, had to be arranged—the different types of equipment, nursing staff, the administration, ensuring infection control, and making sure we did not get in each other's way working in a small room. But Auriel's determination and Manny's cool exterior drove me on. At the end of the day, we were exhausted, but very happy that we could slightly improve the lives of these children.

While the first day's challenge was verbally communicating reassurance to the kids who could not see, the next day's hurdle was to successfully gesture to those who could not hear. The teachers at the Visweswara Deaf School taught us basic sign language, but I realised that if you looked into the child's eyes with an honest willingness to help him/her, that child put all their trust in you. A gentle reassuring hand on the shoulder was enough to put them at ease. The most challenging were the mentally and physically impaired kids, but the headmaster's kind words and reassurance enabled their compliance. Children that had a systemic illness or condition, were referred onto Dr Kishor Vasant's team to facilitate further treatment.

Whatever school we went to, we were welcomed wholeheartedly.

Prevention better than the cure

The unseen killers in this part of Africa are malaria and HIV. The population of mosquitoes grows, the nearer you get to the lake. A number of Dennis's family members, including himself and little Rodney, have tasted the wrath of this disease, and he is now in the process of raising capital to build a house away from the shores. But it has been challenging for him, as most of the time, he is working voluntarily.

Prevention is key to the reduction of the prevalence of these diseases. Education and awareness are the weapons of choice. Just at the entrance of one of the schools, we discovered a massive collection of stagnant water—a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Measures such as the provision of mosquito nets, and the provision of mosquito sprays, would go a long way indeed. Over the years, Manny has spent significant time and energy, in dental equipment, including units and dental chairs, and medical necessities like oxygen cylinders, defibrillators and beds.

We spent the remaining days in Tanzania, admiring nature in the Serengeti and Ngorongoro. Words cannot describe the feeling of being among some of the most beautiful animals on Earth as they migrate for their livelihoods. Elephants, hippos, lions, cheetahs and leopards to name a few. But for every wonder, there is a beauty. At the end of the day, it couldn't keep a straight face!

Survival of the fittest can be allowed in the Serengeti... not in London, where I come from! We have evolved beyond searching for food and shelter in the wild. We now have the luxury of making choices, of being able to choose rather than have to fight for it. The same goes for food and water, a phenomenon already facing the millions living in poverty.

We must change the environment will have to pay the price. The environment will have to pay the price.

Events

The view over the Serengeti

Andy Vanzandt plans to continue his involvement in projects aimed at reducing world poverty.

A better place

This has been a true example of the power of the individual to make the world a better place; an illustration of a deeper approach to the reduction of poverty through improved provision of health care; a case of not following like sheep, doing your own thinking, and taking a risk in your own hands; a shift from the 'me me me' psychology to caring more about others who need help.

This trip has strengthened my purpose in life—reduce poverty and conserve what is left of nature. The two cannot be separated; if one worsens, so does the other, and vice versa. It has never been easy to put in hard work and wait for governments and organisations to make a move. Mahatma Gandhi said: 'We must become the change we want to see in the world.'

Overpopulation is a basic issue that needs to come first on the agenda of every charity in existence. It cannot be ignored. All our efforts are cancelled out if we cannot control the growth of the human population. No one likes a crowded train or having to fight for jobs...at the rate at which we are going, we will soon have to fight for food and water, a phenomenon already facing millions living in poverty.

It will take all of us to make a real and significant change in this world. And how we live here, affects everything and everyone around us. The fundamental problem is the 'me, me, me' psychology and the 'I want more' lifestyle.

Survival of the fittest can be allowed in the Serengeti... not in London, where I come from! We have evolved beyond searching for food and shelter in the wild. We now have the luxury of making choices, of being able to choose rather than have to fight for it. The same goes for food and water, a phenomenon already facing the millions living in poverty.

We must change the environment will have to pay the price. The environment will have to pay the price.

Events

The view over the Serengeti

Andy Vanzandt plans to continue his involvement in projects aimed at reducing world poverty.

A better place

This has been a true example of the power of the individual to make the world a better place; an illustration of a deeper approach to the reduction of poverty through improved provision of health care; a case of not following like sheep, doing your own thinking, and taking a risk in your own hands; a shift from the 'me me me' psychology to caring more about others who need help.

This trip has strengthened my purpose in life—reduce poverty and conserve what is left of nature. The two cannot be separated; if one worsens, so does the other, and vice versa. It has never been easy to put in hard work and wait for governments and organisations to make a move. Mahatma Gandhi said: 'We must become the change we want to see in the world.'

Overpopulation is a basic issue that needs to come first on the agenda of every charity in existence. It cannot be ignored. All our efforts are cancelled out if we cannot control the growth of the human population. No one likes a crowded train or having to fight for jobs...at the rate at which we are going, we will soon have to fight for food and water, a phenomenon already facing millions living in poverty.

It will take all of us to make a real and significant change in this world. And how we live here, affects everything and everyone around us. The fundamental problem is the 'me, me, me' psychology and the 'I want more' lifestyle.

Survival of the fittest can be allowed in the Serengeti... not in London, where I come from! We have evolved beyond searching for food and shelter in the wild. We now have the luxury of making choices, of being able to choose rather than have to fight for it. The same goes for food and water, a phenomenon already facing millions living in poverty.

We must change the environment will have to pay the price. The environment will have to pay the price.

Events

The view over the Serengeti

Andy Vanzandt plans to continue his involvement in projects aimed at reducing world poverty.

A better place

This has been a true example of the power of the individual to make the world a better place; an illustration of a deeper approach to the reduction of poverty through improved provision of health care; a case of not following like sheep, doing your own thinking, and taking a risk in your own hands; a shift from the 'me me me' psychology to caring more about others who need help.

This trip has strengthened my purpose in life—reduce poverty and conserve what is left of nature. The two cannot be separated; if one worsens, so does the other, and vice versa. It has never been easy to put in hard work and wait for governments and organisations to make a move. Mahatma Gandhi said: 'We must become the change we want to see in the world.'

Overpopulation is a basic issue that needs to come first on the agenda of every charity in existence. It cannot be ignored. All our efforts are cancelled out if we cannot control the growth of the human population. No one likes a crowded train or having to fight for jobs...at the rate at which we are going, we will soon have to fight for food and water, a phenomenon already facing millions living in poverty.

It will take all of us to make a real and significant change in this world. And how we live here, affects everything and everyone around us. The fundamental problem is the 'me, me, me' psychology and the 'I want more' lifestyle.

Survival of the fittest can be allowed in the Serengeti... not in London, where I come from! We have evolved beyond searching for food and shelter in the wild. We now have the luxury of making choices, of being able to choose rather than have to fight for it. The same goes for food and water, a phenomenon already facing millions living in poverty.

We must change the environment will have to pay the price. The environment will have to pay the price.

Events

The view over the Serengeti

Andy Vanzandt plans to continue his involvement in projects aimed at reducing world poverty.

A better place

This has been a true example of the power of the individual to make the world a better place; an illustration of a deeper approach to the reduction of poverty through improved provision of health care; a case of not following like sheep, doing your own thinking, and taking a risk in your own hands; a shift from the 'me me me' psychology to caring more about others who need help.

This trip has strengthened my purpose in life—reduce poverty and conserve what is left of nature. The two cannot be separated; if one worsens, so does the other, and vice versa. It has never been easy to put in hard work and wait for governments and organisations to make a move. Mahatma Gandhi said: 'We must become the change we want to see in the world.'

Overpopulation is a basic issue that needs to come first on the agenda of every charity in existence. It cannot be ignored. All our efforts are cancelled out if we cannot control the growth of the human population. No one likes a crowded train or having to fight for jobs...at the rate at which we are going, we will soon have to fight for food and water, a phenomenon already facing millions living in poverty.

It will take all of us to make a real and significant change in this world. And how we live here, affects everything and everyone around us. The fundamental problem is the 'me, me, me' psychology and the 'I want more' lifestyle.