

Pre-Dissertation Travel and Studies in Tanzania, 2019

I was in Tanzania from June 20th until August 17th for my pre-dissertation travel and field work. I want to do research on the dynamics of women's organizations in the coastal villages just outside the city, and so I chose to be based in Bunju this summer, which is on the outskirts of the city of Dar es Salaam and towards the road to Bagamoyo district.

I had made contacts with a local NGO working in the Bunju and Bagamoyo villages over the past few years, and I worked with their staff members this summer as a volunteer worker. In this way, I could access the villages around Bagamoyo and Bunju easily. My volunteer responsibilities were to document the NGO's activities in six of these villages, and in the process, I could also conduct interviews with the village members – including various women's organizations, the village leaders, and schoolteachers. I learnt about the forms of microcredit and savings associations in the villages, and was surprised to hear that most of the income generation and development-related associations in these villages were managed and attended by the women. When I asked about household dynamics, most interviewees replied that men and women in these villages have more or less equal power when it comes to household decision-making processes. However, it seemed that men were much more active when it came to decision-making for village activities. I asked the men about why this is the case, and some replied that women simply did not like to participate in village meetings. Many replied that this has been the predominant culture, and some just smiled.

I learnt more about the villages – their income structures, health facilities, schools, parents' worries regarding children's access to quality education, transport issues, and other aspects of village life. I proceeded to meet with some of the larger NGOs based in Dar es Salaam, and interviewed leaders and staff from TAMWA (Tanzania Media Women's

Association), WLAC (Women's Legal Aid Centre), and the Women Fund Tanzania. These are large and established NGOs working in Dar es Salaam for women's rights protection, and they receive funding from both national and international donors for their operations. I learnt about their work, and also the challenges they face when working on women's rights issues. Many of the NGO workers expressed frustration because of particular stereotypes, culture and environment that constrain women's daily interactions. I felt frustrated too because I had thought of culture as important, but as something that can change – sometimes very quickly, and especially with systemic changes in the community. I realised as well that I had grown up as a child primarily in very quickly shifting and overlapping cultures – in a Korea that was newly-democratizing, and in a Brunei that was emerging from the British protectorate system, and I wanted to learn more about how changes in systems and environments affect women's lives in Tanzanian communities as well.

I've started reading and learning afresh about how to approach studies on perceptions of women's rights in Tanzania. I would like to have a stronger grasp of the various reasons and explanations for particular social patterns in Tanzania's coastal villages, especially those concerning women's rights. Hopefully, my Swahili language skills will improve over the next few months so that I can tackle a wider range of sources and knowledge for understanding Tanzanian societies. I had a truly in-depth and fortunate experience this year in Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo, and I am very much looking forward for future research in Tanzania again.