



# Heather Johnstone

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**Location:** Tanzania



**What I do:** Helping to empower the most disadvantaged women and children in Mara through the Rehema Project.

Dear friends,

After a busy start to the year, business tailed off and we had very few customers from Easter until the end of June, which was very challenging. However, I'm delighted to report a bumper season over the last six or seven weeks with lots of volunteers visiting Musoma, mainly with the UK Christian charity Go MAD (Go Make a Difference in Tanzania gomakeadifference.co.uk). The Go MAD groups eat at Rehema four times a week, and our onsite craft shop also saw the benefit of having a lot of visitors. Almost all the volunteers (over 120 people) had items of clothing made by our seamstresses, which is part of the volunteers' Tanzanian experience and also a real blessing for our seamstresses.

Our project has been in the doldrums for so long and the positive energy that has been generated because people are working and busy and happy is just wonderful to see. If only it could be like this all year round!

**Praise/Prayer point:** Give thanks for the busy season and the positive energy it has brought. Pray for more visitors during our "down" season.

People often ask me what a typical day looks like for me in Tanzania and, although I do have a routine, it would be fair to say that there is no such thing as a typical or average day. Any day could include extreme challenges, heartfelt moments, unbearable sadness and absolute joy. I've learnt to expect the unexpected and to be extremely flexible in my day-to-day responsibilities and above all to know resolutely that God is with me every step of the way.

So, along with the good news of increased custom and activity, I also have some sad and challenging news to share.

Kibinda, a young man I know, was attacked by four youths as he was walking home from work one evening a few months ago. He was assaulted with knives, a large blade "panga" and an iron bar. He had multiple stab wounds and a huge slash across the back of his head and his shoulder from the panga and the iron bar. They stole his phone and left him for dead, but fortunately someone found him before he lost consciousness. He was in a precarious situation in ICU for some time, but after three emergency operations he survived. He has a wife and two young children but had to move back home to his mother's house until he is completely rehabilitated.



*The reciprocity of joy in the giving and receiving of great customer service.*

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**With Jesus  
With each other  
To the edges**



**Praise/Prayer point:** Please pray for Kibinda and his family. Give thanks that friends from the UK have felt called to assist him financially and prayerfully during this difficult time.

There are currently huge banners lining the main streets of Musoma detailing what the President of Tanzania, Ms Samia Suluhu Hassan, has achieved during the two years she has been in power. One of the big posters says, “Nani kama Mama” which translated means “who is like Mother?” or “who can you depend upon, but Mother?”. Unlike Mama Samia (as she is affectionately known), I don’t shoulder the enormous duty of being mother of the nation but nevertheless in my much smaller context “nani kama Mama” applies as much to me as it does to our esteemed

president. All the women in our project call me Mama Rehema and turn to me as they would turn to their own mothers, in times of celebration, in times of grief and in times of need.

It was therefore no surprise when I got a call from Neema at 8.30pm one Friday evening. She was very sick and needed me accompany her to hospital to get medical treatment, her own mother living many miles away in Mwanza. This followed soon after the attack on Kibinda and friends had warned me not to take unnecessary risks and go out at night, so I was very conflicted when I got the call. I was able to mitigate the risk by ringing my motorbike taxi driver and arranging for him to fetch Neema from her remotely located house and take her to hospital, and then to come and fetch me as the hospital isn’t far from where I live. Thankfully, Neema was processed quickly and diagnosed with malaria and an aggressive UTI that she received meds for, and we were able to return to our respective homes within the hour.

Another day, another trip to the hospital, with Sweet-Beth who was eight months pregnant and experiencing stomach pains. She had an ultrasound and was kept in for observation but was given a clean bill of health and discharged after a couple of days. However, when she went into labour a few weeks later, she went to a local clinic and there were difficulties. Neither the clinic nor the medical staff were equipped to deal with the complications, and tragically she lost the baby. The next day I visited Sweet-Beth at home to commiserate with her and I was shocked to hear friends and neighbours tell her to stop crying and thank God that she is alive. I suspect that is a coping mechanism as the reality is far too many babies and mothers die in childbirth. The infant mortality rate is 34.168 per 1,000 live births in Tanzania. The maternal mortality rate is 500 per 100,000 live births.

**Prayer point:** Please pray for those who are sick or grieving the loss of a child or family member.

Life has no guarantees and is not plain sailing, but I also have so many encounters that warm my heart and in closing I’d like to leave you with one such moment. When I was visiting her grandmother in the village recently a young girl pressed something into my hand and ran off. She had roasted three cashew nuts in the fire for me. I am extremely humbled by this gift from the heart from someone who has so little.

Mungu awabariki.

Heather



**Photos from top to bottom:** A traditional meal of rice and beans and “nyama choma” (barbecued meat) at our outdoor café; Mama Samia, the President of Tanzania; Three cashews – a gift from the heart.



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