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Newsletter March 2017

Dear friends,

Already three months have passed since our last newsletter. Much has happened!

Moving

We have been busy with the move to Maroamboka, In our last newsletter we wrote about the visit which Jurgen and Issa used to bring some of our furniture. In January Jurgen travelled down to Maroamboka again, this time together with Vanya. The car was fully loaded with other belongings We are so happy with this car! The weight of the of all the stuff was enormous and still the car is strong enough to bring us where we need to be. A friend, who owns a minivan, offered to bring all our belongings in ones. However, when Jurgen drove into the area one thing became clear... the minivan would not even be able to cross the first obstacle.

We have moved, as a family, to Maroamboka in the second week of February. We took it slowly because driving on the roads of Madagascar is almost asking for motion sickness, especially with five children in the car. Again, fully loaded, we left Antananarivo to arrive next afternoon. Along the way we met one of the kings of a village. He just came back from his rice field and was happy to see us. He even remembered the names of the children!

It took us a long time to pack everything in and on the car. Unloading, however, went much faster. Two man on the roof and four carriers and with Katja in the new house telling everybody where to put the boxes. She could start clearing away right away.

Tired but satisfied we went to sleep. A new day tomorrow.

Food

There was so much to do. Katja foremost concentrated on everything in the kitchen. We brought all kinds of food. The variation in the area is limited to rice, beans, green leafy vegetables, rice and not to forget: rice! To keep a varied diet we brought as many different vegetables as possible as well as food with a long storage life. The trick is to store everything save from mice and rats and other creepy crawlers. Still, we will have to get out of the area so now and then to get new supplies. It is a challenge to have enough for the whole family.

Odd Jobs

Just like in every new house one will always find thing that need to be changed. This was no different in our house. We have a ditch around the house to make sure the rainwater will flow away. Nevertheless, the ditch was not deep enough and did not flow down. We soon discovered this when the water happily started to flow into the house. We had to dig out the ditch. One of the young boys of the village offered his help and with good intentions he started behind the house. He dumped all the ground against the wooden wall of the house and he was done in a jiffy. Proud of his work he came to tell us that he was already finished.

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We shook hands and thanked him for his help. We told the boy that we would finish the rest ourselves. It took us the rest of the day to remove all the ground.

The second time the rain fell it came into the house again. This time through the wall upstairs. The gutter turned out to flow to the middle instead of to the left and right (where the reservoir ought to collect the rainwater). The wood soon got saturated and started to leak to the inside. This was the next job. Disconnect the gutters and attach them again with the right angle. It was a difficult job because at the rear of the house the gutter was not reachable with two hands, the home made ladder was way too short. To overcome this, Jurgen attached a rope to the house in which he could hang and have two hands free to work. After two days work the gutters are hopefully flowing in the right direction. We still have to test it as we did not receive a proper shower yet.

Then, finally we could start to work on the electric wires in the house. In Tana we bought a solar panel system which still needed to be installed. In the meantime we can sit in the evening and drink our tea together while the laptop and phones are recharging for the next day.

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The Children

Everything is very exciting! The children had to say goodbye to friends (again). A week before departure we organised a party and many children came to play, it was fun. Then, the few days before leaving the kids took every opportunity to play with friends. It was a busy period, but finally the day came to leave.

On Vanya's birthday (1 September 2016) she received a coupon. The coupon promised her a cat as soon as we moved to Maroamboka. During one of the breaks we found a nest with kittens and while the children were unaware playing on a field we picked one out. Seldom have we seen Vanya so happy and quite, sitting in the back of the car. Her own little kitten named 'Poekie' (do not ask the meaning, we have no idea). But oh dear, Poekie got sick. A swollen belly, vomiting and diarrhoea, in short a big worm infection. We did not have any medicine for cats so we broke a human pill in little pieces which worked wonderfully. Poekie is not a happy young cat who is chasing everything that crawls around.

It was a special time for Dani as well. He was already counting the days for months: his sixth birthday! And we celebrated it big time. In the morning we eat a Dutch treat: Poffertjes. In the afternoon chocolate cake and in the evening we have made French fries. Besides all the lovely food we gave him his presents: Playmobil, a home made wooden knife, candy, drawings, booklets, home written stories, etcetera. Vanya, Issa, Abbey and Simeon worked really hard to give big brother Dani a special birthday.

Overall, the children have been busy exploring the area in which they discovered new playgrounds in the forest behind the house and the mountains on the other side of the rice fields. Filthy and full of scratches, but satisfied they return home with many exciting stories.



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Friends

A little further up the road lives a family of which the son, Menza, is the local teacher. Menza already knew Jurgen as he always came by for a little chat if Jurgen visited the area. Now his sister, a mother of two children, visited us to bring a welcome gift. A living chicken! The lady comes by regularly to ask how we are doing. She also invited the children to come along for net fishing in the river. It is clear that this family is trying to become friends and are willing to help us where they can. It is such a blessing to meet people like this in an area where everything is strange and new.

The Language

Pretty often we receive the question of how many people we have told about Jesus and whether we are already preaching. We do know these questions are serious, still they make us laugh. We do speak the official language well enough to have little chats about the weather, our children, and where we come from. This is nice, but at the place where we live now the people speak a dialect. The Tanala dialect is different than the official Malagasy. A cat is 'saka' in official and 'piso' in Tanala. Furthermore, if the words are the same the pronunciation is totally different. This makes it hard for the people to understand us and for us to understand them.

It does not need much explanation that preaching did not happen yet. To teach one needs to have much more understanding of the language than that we have. This does not mean that the people do not understand why we are there. They keep a close eye on us. They notice how we treat each other and the animals around us. For example, the animals are quite often used in times of boredom. People throw stones at the chicken or try to hit the dogs with a spate. Our vocabulary is good enough to explain that this is not the way we should treat God's creation.

In time we will arrive at the point that we can give proper education but that takes a lot of effort and practising. Just try it for yourself. Many of the English people have encountered the French language often enough to understand it and maybe to communicate a little. So, now try to have a good conversation in that language just as detailed as in your mother tongue. How much more difficult will it be to do that in a language you just start to learn, a language you have not heard before? It does not matter anyway as learning somebody's language creates a bond with the locals. The people feel they have to help which in turn helps to gain trust and establishing good relations.

Different Challenges

While writing this newsletter, Jurgen is back in Tana for a week. The car papers are still not official. We have started the process in December and received temporary papers every time. We are not the only one with this problem. The government decided that all car owners need to change their papers in biometric ones. This means that people from all over the country need to travel to the capital only to hear that they are on a very long waiting list. Of course there is a way around this list. One only needs to pay €120,- (under the table) and the papers will be ready in one or two days. For many this is tempting because travelling up and down including the hotel costs are expensive. We have chosen to stay on the official route, even if this is going to take much longer.

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Another challenge is closer to home. The water provision in Maroamboka is very bad at the moment. There are five pumps in the village but only one, which is located at the other side of the village, works (very slowly). The pump next to our house is not working at all and thus we have to fetch water from the other side of the village which is quite a long and hard walk. We discovered that one needs a lot of water for a family of seven. Katja asked a boy, Zilio, to fetch our water. We pay him the same wage as water fetchers receive in Tana, 200 Ariary per jerry-can. This way the boy can make some good money because a days salary (in our region) is typically around 2500 Ariary.

Then, there is the longing to contact our family in Holland so now and then. In Tana we could phone a land-line by Skype. This belongs to the past in Maroamboka. Recently Katja could talk with her friend in Holland on Whatsapp (with a five second delay), but this was probably a lucky moment. The connection is, especially during daytimes, very bad. Sometimes we cannot send or receive messages. We need to learn to be creative. However, all is not bad as we can place phone calls to other mobiles on the island. So we are not totally cut off from everybody.

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Finally

This newsletter turns out to be much longer than you are used of us. We had a lot to tell and wanted to make the most out of Jurgen's stay in Tana. Long messages are very hard to send from Maroamboka.

We still hope to keep you informed regularly. We already had some success on Facebook. If you want to be up to date we advise you to go to our Facebook and send us a friendship request: <https://www.facebook.com/jurgenenkatja>

Your letters and parcels can still be sent to the same address in Tana as before. Our post will be collected by one of the AIM workers in Tana. However, this means that it will take even longer for us to receive it so do not send products that expire (cheese, meat or live geese).

This was it for now. We are happy and feel blessed that, after a long time, we finally live among the people we like to serve. On the next page you can read how you can pray for us.

Many Blessings

Jurgen & Katja Hofmann
Vanya, Issa, Abbey, Dani en Simeon

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Things to pray for:

We are thankful because:

- 1) we finally live in Maroamboka;
- 2) the people welcomed us;
- 3) the family of Menza wants to be our friends;
- 4) the children enjoy themselves;
- 5) we are blessed with a nice house;
- 6) we have each other and we are happy together;
- 7) God went before us and prepared the people for our arrival;
- 8) we have so many people behind us who pray for us and encourage us with letters and parcels and in many other ways.

Pray for/that:

- 1) the car papers;
- 2) the water situation will be solved quickly;
- 3) we will learn the Tanala language quickly;
- 4) Katja, that she will have enough time to teach the children;
- 5) rain! The rain is not sufficient enough for the rice fields;
- 6) we learn to adjust to the new situations which are hard and difficult so now and then;
- 7) extra financial support. Our budget is not enough yet, overall we have a gap of about 300/600 Euro monthly;
- 8) the Tanala will hunger for God's Word;
- 9) we will find good ways, besides teaching God's word, to serve the people.

