

# Journey to Africa

## The passion of Kjell Rosengren

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TNT Freight Management employee Kjell Rosengren spent three months as a volunteer in Tanzania. Working for the World Food Programme (WFP) in their School Feeding Projects was a harsh confrontation with extreme poverty and the limitations of a materialistic and frantic world. But finding that humanity is present even when the most basic essentials are not, makes him hopeful that small changes can lead to a better world.



When Rosengren talked to Network News, he had been back in his native Sweden for only 12 days. He admits to being confused by the stark contrast with Tanzania's Mpwapwa district and speaking of his experiences he sounds like a homesick man. "My mind is still in Africa. I would really love to go back and visit my new friends. I want to see how their lives change and maybe do some more work," says Rosengren, a soft-spoken Customer Integration Technology specialist in his early 50s.

A few months earlier, Rosengren did what few people with a cushy corporate job and a young family do: he signed up for TNT's Volunteer Programme. This enables employees to work in Africa, Asia or South America for three months with full pay and benefits. The selection procedure is tough and involves several tests to gauge whether participants can handle the physical and emotional strain of the work.

### Paying respects

Rosengren received five days of intense training at the Rome headquarters of WFP, which works together with TNT on the school feeding programme.

He also received clearance to visit Tanzania's refugee camps after passing a tough security test. "When we came to Tanzania, I met senior WFP managers to learn about their work. I also spent a few days learning Swahili so that I could greet people in their own language and pay my respects," Rosengren recalls.

## "My mind is still in Africa"

Rosengren spent much of his time building fuel-efficient stoves and water-harvesting tanks in Mpwapwa and Singida district. "You don't have to have specific skills; just being there and sharing whatever you know is interesting and motivating enough," he adds, saying he carried bricks and mixed cement with his bare hands. Rosengren also helped to feed school children at each of Mpwapwa's 20 schools. "For a lot of children the school meal, which was cooked in old oil barrels, was the only way to have breakfast and lunch."

### Rolling up his sleeves

Asked what motivated him to sign up for the programme, Rosengren said he felt the need to do more than just send money to poor people in Africa from the comfort of his home. "You can see Africa's disasters on television and send money, but I wanted to be there and do something with my own hands. I wanted to understand better what those people needed and show them that they are neither different nor alone," Rosengren says.

Rosengren felt overwhelmed by the scope and scale of Tanzania's problems. HIV/AIDS is devastating the country and women have to walk for miles carrying 20-litre buckets of water to their village. School children, meanwhile, walk barefoot and wear tattered school uniforms. "It was tough not to be able to help everybody I wanted to help, but you cannot solve their problems on your own. You have to involve more people and raise awareness."

### Sharing experiences

While in Tanzania, Rosengren wrote some 50 stories about his experiences for his TNT colleagues worldwide. Now, he is toying with the idea of writing a book about his experiences and he expresses a desire to go back to Africa. "Most of the schools I visited lacked proper desks and some didn't even have proper floors. There weren't any pencils and the blackboard had been painted on the wall. There is so much to do and I would like to go back to the schools, buy some wood and just build the desks myself."

Rosengren feels that his short stay in Africa has changed him in many ways. He has more appreciation for his health and the fact he has a roof over his head and access to clean water. But the people of Tanzania have also changed his attitude to life. "People in Africa say 'pole pole', which means 'slowly slowly'. They also say that 'only fools rush', which tells me that slowing down the pace of our lives helps us focus on quality rather than quantity."