Gerda Kuiper

Impressions from Lindi, Tanzania

Whereas other parts of the world were already in turmoil because of the new corona-virus, Lindi in Tanzania was until a few days ago as tranquil as ever and Tanzanians were minding their everyday business. There were occasional jokes and discussions about the virus. When looking at the stern measures taken elsewhere, some did already start to get a bit worried: “if the illness is already so dangerous in Europe, we here will all die”. But people did not yet change their behaviour.

Indeed, there is not yet much fear or panic here. The common symptoms of course do not sound so threatening, especially not in the light of the range of other health risks people here have to live with every day. There is a short clip circulating on social media of a man who scolded the corona-virus for being pretentious. “We have AIDS here, we have ebola, we have syphilis. And we survived.” In a similar vein, I heard a few people say they thought corona is a white man’s disease and that Africans are too sturdy for it to affect them severely.



Sign at the door of a clinic warning for corona in Swahili: “Protect yourself against the corona-virus!“. Source: Gerda Kuiper

Nevertheless, attitudes have changed quickly over the past two or three days, and are likely to continue to change. Corona is also omnipresent here now, even though there have only been a handful of confirmed imported cases within the country. The government – as in other African countries – has started to take measures such as closing the schools for a month and cancelling sports events. It has also become more active in raising awareness. I have noticed the effects: travellers are for instance here and there provided with water and soap to wash their hands before getting on their bus or boat.



Water and soap for travellers. Source: Gerda Kuiper

I also saw some motorcycle drivers – who apparently usually do not worry about all the dust they inhale but now worry about the virus – driving around with mouth caps. Indeed, it was reported on news websites that also here in Tanzania mouth caps have started to increase in price and become scarce. When I walked through town today, the word “corona” was on everybody’s lips and children were even already singing songs about it, praying to God the virus would not spread in their country. Corona fever thus clearly has arrived in Tanzania by now; we can only hope the virus itself does not follow.

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