

Cultural Notes

Don't:

- ✓ Appear in a hurry all the time
- ✓ Display marital affection in public
- ✓ Use extremes in make-up or wear short skirts (only loose women do that)
- ✓ Keep visitors outside your door while talking to them
- ✓ Bid your visitors farewell from the inside of your house - go outside with them
- ✓ Regularly refuse hospitality from others, or friendly gifts
- ✓ Turn down an offer to help carry your load
- ✓ Get in the habit of paying for every service that's offered - although generosity is always appreciated too
- ✓ Be goal-oriented at the expense of your relationships with people
- ✓ Hide your feelings of irritation or anger all the time (people want to know that you have shortcomings just like they)
- ✓ Regard all new or strange behavior as primitive
- ✓ Use abusive words like "stupid," "idiot," or "foolish."

Do:

- ✓ Greet people willingly and regularly
- ✓ Have your home open to visitors
- ✓ Offer hospitality at meal times
- ✓ Shake hands with people
- ✓ Make the acquaintance of the important people in the village, even if they are not Christians
- ✓ Learn the local language
- ✓ Get the local leadership involved in treating such problems as petty theft and family concerns

SOCIAL ETIQUETTE:

Etiquette is the acceptable behavior in a given society. As development workers expected to work with nationals mainly at a grassroots level, it is important to abide by the norms of the area we work in. To go against them is to alienate ourselves, which in turn renders work efforts ineffective. So in order to be accepted, we not only are expected to try to learn people's language, but also to value and observe some of the most outstanding and indispensable behaviors. So let us live by the saying, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

African hospitality is famous. Tanzanians are proud of being known as 'a polite people'. In traditional Tanzania societies, life was lived communally with mutual care, concern, sharing, and support. An individual existed for others and the community took care of the individual in the community. The good of the individuals and that of the community was a concern for everyone. This traditional upbringing is still reflected through Tanzanians' friendliness.

Greetings:

Women and children bend their knees to some degree when greeting men and elders. You do not have to do this as a foreigner. When conversant with Kiswahili, use the respected form of greeting the elders or senior Church leaders like the Bishop. Kiswahili uses the old slave-master greetings of "shikamoo" – literary meaning "I clasp your feet" and anyone older than you expect to be greeted this way. Greeting is an art form in Tanzania. Greeting a person before saying any news or information breaks the ice between strangers. In Tanzania, it is proper to greet all persons whether known or unknown to us upon meeting. Not responding to a greeting just because you are in a hurry or emotionally low, may not be understood by Tanzanians. This may result in your being treated in a "cool" manner. Greetings

are of two kinds - formal and informal. Have the patience to go through the formal greetings. The whole process shows the concern they have for your well-being. Greetings can also be a means of telling what is happening around you. Greetings are not complete without shaking hands when you meet people. Just remember to wash your hands as often as possible.

Hugging, and holding hands:

Hugging is limited to members of friendly groups – mostly women. If they hug you (they never hug men), accept the hug. Often friends of same sex hold hands, brothers or sisters or colleagues who are just friends.

Hospitality:

In Tanzania, all guests/visitors whether invited or uninvited should be well received. One does not make an appointment to visit and whether the visitor is invited or not, s/he should be given hospitality. But the kind of relationship between the visitor and host determines the kind of hospitality. Give every visitor something to eat or drink - it could be a glass of water, a cup of tea, or juice etc. But don't ask if they would like something! It's OK to ask what they may want to drink, but not if they want something to drink. The implication of asking is understood that you don't really have anything to give, so you hope they'll politely refuse. Courtesy is one of the most-valued practices among Tanzanians. If you invite somebody for a drink or meal in a restaurant, they expect that you will pay for their bills.

For security reasons, it is recommended that one lets in only well known guests in their homes. It is also recommended that visitors/guests be allowed into the compound when there is more than one person around e.g. guard or spouse.

Eating Manners:

Most Tanzanians have breakfast and two main meals (lunch and supper). Lunch is always eaten between 12:30 - 2:00pm and always a heavy meal. Supper is also heavy and is taken between 7:00- 9:00pm. During the hungry time of year (December through February) these meals may be cut back or eliminated altogether depending upon the availability of food.

Food is often eaten inside the house or outside under the shade of a tree when it is hot. Men use the table if it is available and women and children use mats. It is unbecoming for one to stand or walk while eating or to eat while others around you are not eating. Usually, whether cutlery is available or not, if water is provided, wash your hands. If you are using your fingers to eat, observe others and try to imitate them. When you are invited for a meal, do not refuse. Likewise, do not refuse to invite one to eat with you just because you have very little left. Lasting friendships may begin over the meal. It is polite and one of the norms to compliment the cook and those who present the food on the table.

Giving Presents:

Giving presents is something that is done in Tanzania. The gifts/presents are given in the form of foodstuffs, poultry, especially during harvesting season. This is done so that others can share in God's blessing of their sweat and share their happiness through this type of giving. When a gift is presented in a container - basket, bag, sack, etc. - the container never returns to the owner empty.

Display of Emotions:

Stress affects everyone at one point or another and so may contribute to the emotions that we display which later those around us may misconstrue. Each one of us is different and the way we react to situations also differs.

Some foreigners, when they lose their tempers, may find themselves shouting or screaming at people to let out their frustrations. In Tanzania, this is not acceptable and may precipitate a fight or something unpleasant. If you are a person who displays your frustration by shouting, find another outlet or means to vent it.

Displaying the kind of affection wives and husbands or lovers display (that is, kissing, embracing, caressing, and fondling) in public is not a socially acceptable behavior and is considered a private matter. Avoid doing so in public places.

Crying is a good thing since it helps one to relax from tension, but in Tanzania, men are not expected to cry. They are expected to be brave and to comfort and encourage the women. So, men who are very emotional and cry easily should when they feel the urge, find a private place to cry. Seeing a grown man cry just because he feels emotional confuses Tanzanians and leaves them with negative thoughts about such a man. In fact, he may quickly become a laughing stock.

Tanzanians, as courteous people, may not openly display their emotions, especially frustrations, boredom, etc. With all those emotions, they may only display an attentive face so a foreigner may not know whether the ideas s/he has brought forward are well perceived or not. For a Tanzanian to display his/her emotions may depend largely on whether you have bothered to get to know him/her/them. So, it is important that you use your observation skills to note communication amongst them, particularly the subtle non-verbal communication. When people do not want to be accountable or to take responsibility, they will deny what you have verbally agreed. Tip is to document any serious discussions, especially anything needing follow-up.

Dressing:

Tanzanians like to dress well and look smart. It is vitally important to them when they go out in public to be in their best clothes. In general, it is wise to observe and learn from the Tanzanians so as not to overdress and feel out of place or under-dress and snub the host.

Privacy:

In Tanzania, personal space does not exist. When you sit quietly alone, it is assumed that you are bored or troubled, so a Tanzanian will invade that "privacy" in order to alleviate the boredom or worries. If you are overly friendly and outgoing, you will have problems keeping visitors away.