

COLUMN/FEATURE

Peter Jessen: A man dedicated to the destiny of Tanzania's children

By Alpha Nuhu

He may not be popular to you, but 80-year-old Peter Jessen has become a household name among education authorities and eminent religious leaders in Coast, Dar es Salaam, Morogoro and Tanga regions.

His popularity is derived from his kindness and readiness to help push the educational development in various primary schools in four regions by improving infrastructure to create a healthy learning climate to hundreds of thousands of Tanzania's children privileged to have the chance of sitting inside the four walls of a classroom.

Like in many other African countries, Tanzania has a myriad of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) engaged in the development of its ailing education sector. However, the contribution of individual persons towards this goal has over the years been disregarded or underestimated. It is in this light that Peter Jessen has

emerged as a hero playing the role of a non-governmental individual (NGI) in supporting the country achieve the Millennium Development Goal Two of increased primary school enrolment aimed to avail every school-age child an opportunity to get education.

Jessen's organization, Tanzania Hilfe Braunschweig, was established 29 years ago by two German women, Liserole Karbath and Gesine Utz. Since then this German firm has funded many projects in the country such as building classrooms in primary schools, providing equipment and medicines to hospitals and orphanage centres and nursery schools.

Jessen's interest in Tanzania's educational development was aroused 37 years ago when he first arrived in the country as technical manager at the Faculty of Engineering of the University of Dar es Salaam.

"I want to see Tanzania's children get better school buildings, facilities and a conducive learning environment to become future responsible leaders and

workers of the country," he says.

"This task cannot be left in the hands of the government alone. We need individuals and NGOs to supplement government efforts in its endeavour to ensure that children have access to quality education," he explains.

Last week, precisely October 14, Jessen donated 88 new desks, 137 repaired desks and 25 benches to Pius Msekwa Primary School located in Dar es Salaam's suburb of Tegeta. The cost of these items was 16,404,400/-.

In the last four months, the donor and his team of co-workers provided foodstuffs and wheel chairs to the Mother Theresa Children's Home in Dar es Salaam, donated two climbing racks to the St Bakita Nursery School in Tegeta, contributed benches and other items to the Kambangwa Dispensary in Kinondoni district and repaired impassable walking ways for students in wheel chairs at the Yombo Rehabilitation Centre in Temeke district.

"For all this work, we have

spent more than 25m/- in the last four months," he says emphatically.

"I don't want to talk about the poor, sometimes very, very poor state of primary schools in Tanzania with up to 200 and more pupils in one classroom – without furniture, without books, taught by very poor paid and very often very poor trained teachers," he says with a highly strain of melancholy.

He adds: "You have to keep in mind formal learning starts in nursery and primary schools. And girls and boys who cannot succeed will most properly stay poor their whole life. I think the situation will not change unless the lawmakers are forced to send their own children in such schools."

Jessen has won praise from education authorities and prominent religious leaders in the project area for his immense contribution towards revamping Tanzania's education sector.

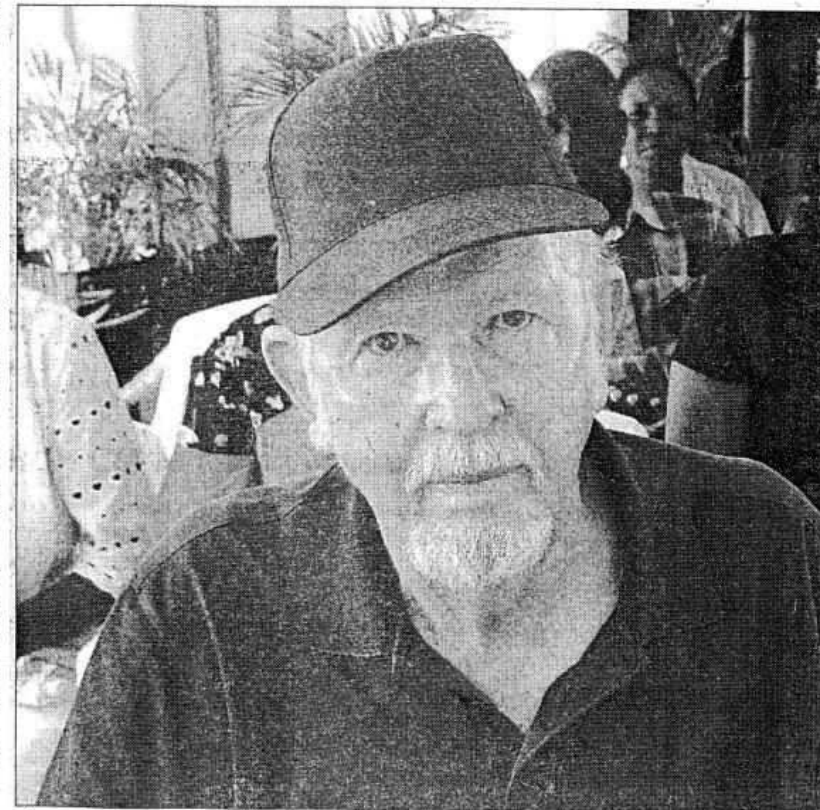
"Peter Jessen is among the few people who use the limited resources they have to think of the development of children in our country," says

a letter of commendation from the Bagamoyo District Executive Director.

On his part, Mkuranga District Education Officer Stephen Apolinary says Jessen's support "not only poses some challenges to our side as your partners, but also instills the spirit of sympathy to other donors in supporting Mkuranga residents."

In acknowledging Jessen's contribution to the education sector in Tanzania, the Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Polycarp Cardinal Pengo, says "I am deeply edified to hear that you have decided to spend the rest of your life dedicating yourself towards the elevation of the education system in Tanzania. Thank you very much for the noble thought."

With more people of Jessen's warm heart and vision fighting for the destiny of children in tomorrow's Tanzania, this great East African country can make a giant leap towards quality education in a world where the illiterate would be condemned to perpetual poverty.



Peter Jessen