

September 13, 2009

I arrived in Zanzibar five years ago this week - I came here after graduating from Tufts University and had enough money to live for a year or so. In 1974 I spent a year driving from Cairo to Capetown and my life changed when we stayed with the Samburus in northern Kenya. I asked myself the question "Why aren't I reading in the New York Times what we, as Americans, can learn from Africans rather than what we can teach them?" I have been learning so much in the past five years and continue to learn.

Many people come to Zanzibar and are overwhelmed by the poverty and what they consider the ignorance of the people. What I see is the wonder and awe of the creativity, the generosity and the kindness of the people. We are coming to the end of the holy month of Ramadhan. During this time Muslims fast every day and share their "futari" (the meal that breaks the fast), with family and friends every evening. Zanzibar is a true melting pot of various communities and religions – we have Hindus, Indians, Asians, Africans, Europeans, Americans, and Muslims from different sects – the Bahoras, Ismaelis, Sunnis, Shiites and Obadhis. There's more I'm sure. I have been honored to be a small part of some of these communities – last week my friend Ali Hussein took me to visit an old folks home not too far out of Stonetown.

"Being rich is having enough to share with others"



Ali Hussein is a Bohara Muslim Indian with a kind heart – he humbles me at times with his kindness and generosity. He raised some money from the local community and we went shopping for beans, rice, sugar and oil and delivered it to the old folks home. This home is under the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and managed by Catholic nuns from the Missionary Sisters of Precious Blood. The residents are referred from the Ministry – sometimes these people have no family or their family cannot manage caring for them. We walked through the wards – part of the men's ward is on the left (there are more men than women), the next photo is Ali Hussein, Sister Cicely, Ali's assistant Mponz and Sister Lucy. The next photo is of some of the men from one of the wards and the next photo is the dining room for the patients who are able to walk over there.

The Residents of Waelezo Old Age Home



The home is quite nice but in great need as almost all places are in Africa. The wards were clean and bright – some Germans had renovated two of the wards in 2008. The residents are well taken care of – the staff who clean and cook are hired by the Ministry. Sister Lucy knew every single person's name and greeted all of them – they were very excited to have visitors. They even have a guest house for volunteers, although they don't have any right now. If you know of anyone who may be interested in volunteering please have them contact me – I can put them in contact with Sister Lucy.

Children and lots of walking in Koani



Two weeks ago we visited the farmers in Koani and a big part of our visit is holding the children. We visited Salma who just had a baby girl. Her youngest son was so unhappy that mom couldn't carry him so Senga took over. I'm holding Issa's son who came with us when we walked 3 kilometers to visit his vegetable plot. His son had hurt his leg a few days before and was not very happy. On the right is Issa with his son and his brother who had been working a borrowed plot, saved his money and bought some land. He has "loaned" some of the land to Issa for his vegetable plot. As you can see his brother has water. We found that water is the most important piece of the puzzle for agriculture here in Zanzibar.

We visited our farmers in Koani to see how the bananas and cassava are doing. The bananas are all planted but most of them stunted because we haven't had any rain. The cassava they planted is quite dry. We talked about the "success" of the project – we had hoped they would have a better yield and immediately see results but that hasn't happened. But how do you define success? The farmers worked so hard – they dug the holes, planted the banana, cassava and vegetables and they are doing their best with what is available. They learned so much and have used the information they gathered from the practical trainings, our visits and our study tour to the other farmers in Zanzibar. We are planning on continuing with this group and hope to begin a cooking project. It will take time for us to organize what might be best and of course we must include the farmers in the decision making process.

Participate Now Zanzibar



Participate Now Zanzibar has been officially registered. This is a branch of the Participate Now foundation in Connecticut. We have been working together as a team for a year now. We are doing the Koani farming project, the Kendwa water project and we have been involved with cultural sensitization seminars with students and teachers from other parts of the world. We hold our planning meetings at my house around my dining room table. In the center photo we are holding the map that the villagers in Kendwa drew for the water project and on the right is Suleiman facilitating our participatory planning workshop with the farmers in Koani.

The members in the center photo are Kadir Pande who works in the Ministry of Agriculture in the Irrigation Department, Suleiman Said Mohammed, who is our chairman, Kathryn Sutton – that’s me!!!, Kaesser Said Mohammed, who owns a local nursery and primary school and teaches English and computer to adults among other things. On the right is Senga, a local businessman and who we call “city boy”. Senga grew up in Stonetown and enjoys learning what life is like in rural Zanzibar. At first we thought we would do separate projects with the NGO as the “umbrella” but we’ve learned that we like working as a team on all of the projects. It’s been important to have different opinions and ideas – after every visit we sit and take turns talking about what we learned that day. I am very fortunate to be a part of this hard working group.

I will write more later about Participate Now Zanzibar and all the exciting things that we’re doing. We are looking for an office (that is not in my house), furniture and computers that we can use to help grow our organization. I appreciate that we have started this slowly, with very little money. We talk all the time about our commitment to the NGO and the work that we do – we truly want to listen, learn and advocate for the people in Zanzibar who are in need.

Visit our website [Participate Now!](#) to learn more about our foundation. Our main objective is to do small-scale projects with lasting impact. We are grateful for any support at all that you can give us. Thank you for taking the time to read this email.

Participate Now!
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