

June 2005 ZAPHA+ elections

Hi everyone,

I just had the privilege of being a part of something very exciting – elections in Zanzibar!!!! No – it wasn't the national election – that will be October 30 – this was the ZAPHA+ elections and it was a fine example of democracy in action. I would like to share my day with you.

First of all, our mwenye kiti (chairman) has been under fire because he has been sexually harassing some women and skimming money from one of the accounts. Now, this may sound horrible but corruption happens everywhere and these are poor and uneducated people. The fabulous thing is that the members have been speaking up about it and they are the ones who called for an election because they wanted new leadership who would be transparent. Yesterday we had a meeting for 3 hours with lots of yelling and speeches and raucous behavior – it was great for everyone to get it out in the open.

So then this morning we all met at a large hall that we had rented for \$28 (that included chairs). Fifty of the members showed up which is pretty incredible seeing that the other 30 are children or adults who are too sick to leave home. Now, last week anyone who wanted to run for an office filled out a form as to what office they wanted to run for and what they felt their qualifications were. We had two people running for most offices except for one, the assistant treasurer, which had four people running. That vote at first did not have a majority so they crossed out the two people with the least number of votes and had everyone vote again for the two who were left. (I think this is the parliamentary system yes?)

We are funded primarily by Africare, which is a subgrantee of USAID, and Deo and Rosa came and facilitated the election and they were wonderful. Deo first had everyone write their name down and then he read off each name and the person would raise their hand and the members would say "sawa" (okay) if they agreed that the person was a member of ZAPHA+. One of the women complained that Mama Ullfat couldn't vote because she was the grandmother of an HIV+ member (Baby Ullfat is 2 years old – I included a photo of her in an earlier email – she was wearing my glasses). Well there was some lively discussion because there were other women who had HIV+ children who were also members and they wanted to know if they could cast two votes. Deo asked everyone to take a vote as to whether or not they would let Mama Ullfat vote and it was agreed that she could but it was a pretty close vote. So then Deo explained to everyone the election procedure and they all agreed – the decision was that the people running would come to the front of the room and give a speech no longer than 2 minutes (most only spoke for less than 1 minute) then slips of paper were handed out and the members wrote down their choice. We had monitors from ZAC (Zanzibar AIDS Commission) and ZACP (Zanzibar AIDS Control Programme) there and they helped people who couldn't read or write and also to count the votes. So the monitors and Rosa would go around to the members and collect their votes into a cardboard box. Then Deo took the box to the table in the front of the room and counted each piece of paper to make sure that there were 50 there – the members watched this and yelled "Sawa" (okay) when he finished. Then he gave the votes to the counters behind the table and went on to the next position repeating the procedure. After the votes were counted and as they were recounting and finalizing everything a number of people got up to make speeches praising the election or saying how they felt about the organization.

These are the results:

Mwenye kiti – Consalata – 38 votes out of 50 (I believe in myself to lead the members and I will stand up for the rights of everyone)

Assistant to mwenye kiti – Amour – 33 votes (I'm trying for the first time to run for a leadership position – so please vote for me)

Katibu (secretary) – Amina – 26 votes (can't remember her speech)

Naibu katibu (ass't secretary) – Tausi – 28 votes (I want to represent people inside and outside of ZAPHA+ and I want lots of votes)

Mshifa fedha (treasurer) – Hussein – 39 votes (I want to be a trusted person and to bring ZAPHA+ forward)

Msaidizi mshika fedha (ass't treasurer) – Asha Said – I don't know how many votes but she said "I want your vote" and sat down

So here are some of my photos:



Here is a shot of the room and in the center is Deo facilitating with the cardboard box that was used to collect the votes. These shots were taken after all of the votes had been cast – the women are waiting anxiously for the results.



These are the speeches given after the votes have been cast and before the results have been announced. Ashura Rashidi spoke up saying that the new leadership needs to work for ZAPHA+ - to focus on development inside the organization – to look after different projects and make sure that the members are helped when they're sick or in need. Khamisi Mtumwa (who was one of the first to get ARVS and has come back from the brink of death) said that members need to advise and respect each other. And then I spoke up and said that I was proud to be there with all of the members who are so courageous and strong and that this was a wonderful example of democracy in action – and there is Deo translating for me (nobody would understand me if I tried to speak in Swahili – not yet).



These four have just been elected to the executive committee – and in the center Consalata has just been elected mwenye kiti – and here she is making her first speech! She is a fabulous woman, cares deeply for the organization and I think that she'll do a great job. In her speech she said that there should be no segregation within ZAPHA+ and said "please give me your heart, I'm

still one of you, I'm no different now that I have power". She is going to be a great mwenye kiti and I'm looking forward to working with her. She is on ARVS (as 28 of our members are) and her husband and her youngest daughter are also HIV+. We were finally given some soda and biscuits and then we left – the entire election took 2-1/2 hours – wow – don't you think certain countries could take note of this????



Here is Khamis after losing finally as mwenye kiti – he has been with ZAPHA+ since it started in 1995 and has been mwenye kiti for too long. It will be good to have some honest leadership and to have a woman – especially in a Muslim country – this a big deal guys!!!! And there are some of the people outside our office – that's Nadine on the left who's a PhD student from Oxford and she's fluent in Swahili and spends lots of time with the women. Consalata was going to run for assistant mwenye kiti and Nadine suggested that she run for mwenye kiti and she did!!! And here are some of the women sitting on the ledge across the street.



Here are two of the guys having an after election discussion – and there is Consalata and her husband – he is a builder but he took the day off to come and support her. And there is our new mwenye kiti talking to the donors – Deo and Rosa – and Consalata has her ever present spoon to eat yogurt. She eats healthy and will also be the coordinator of our nutrition project where we are going to cook two meals a week for all of the members, do nutrition counseling and then write a cookbook at the end of 6 months. This is a momentous day for ZAPHA+.

Okay – that's enough – ZIFF (Zanzibar International Film Festival) starts tomorrow and I'm going to party for the next 10 days – I'll take lots of photos and send another email afterwards. What a great life I lead – I swear I am the most fortunate woman in the entire world.

Kathryn