

June 2006 Zanzibar Blackout

June 16, 2008

I decided to delay my return to Zanzibar until July 9 because an underwater power cable broke and the entire country has been without electricity since May 21. The Norwegian expert has been quoted as saying that it could possibly be as long as 3 months before it's repaired. If you are interested in reading the very few articles that have been written about it please go to www.google.com – type in Zanzibar and click on News. I do not have any answers, pronouncements or judgments that I can make except to say that I am devastated and saddened beyond belief. There are one million people living in Zanzibar – it is my home and this is my community that is affected. Can you imagine the state of Connecticut being without electricity for over 27 days? I have been on the phone with my friends in Zanzibar and the situation is becoming dire. Generators are the only way that the island is operating and the fuel is expensive. Businesses have slowed down and may soon be closing completely. Many of the larger hotels are spending thousands of dollars a day for their generators but some have just closed down. This is going to cripple the Zanzibar economy for a very long time even if they get the cable repaired in the next week or so.



My friend Peter Bennett took these photos of Zanzibar a few weeks ago. The people are resourceful, kind and generous. Generators are being used to charge cell phones (.50 for ½ hour), rented to pump water and shared with some who cannot afford to buy one. I heard that a large resort bought a generator for a local village and that another village pooled their money to buy a generator. Some people who do have wells are giving away water for free rather than charging high prices for it. UNICEF has donated 12 generators but even that isn't enough. I cannot tell you exactly what is going on because I am not there to experience it. I will be visiting friends all over Zanzibar and taking many photos after my return on July 9.



The photo on the left is of the well that ZEDO (Zanzibar Enterprise Development Organization) built in 2005 in a rural village. On the right is a photo that I took two months ago in a village outside of town. Wells are still used in the very rural villages but many villages have piped in water as a result of government and donor projects which was to help the island develop. But if there is no electricity then what are their options? Will they be drinking the water from the pond on the right rather than just washing their dishes? How will they get water? I have been in touch with the director of Save the Children in Zanzibar. They are prepared for a cholera outbreak although they are hoping that won't happen. The Ministry of Health has chlorinated the bore holes and many wells so that is good. Some people have suggested that I contact Americares or other large agencies but the Zanzibar government has brought in the United Nations to make an assessment. There are many in the government and the international community who are trying to assist Zanzibar. I am just one woman who lives on this wonderful and beautiful island and I want to help as only I know how to do and that is to work directly with the people.

I'm sure that there is much being done that I am not aware of and I am obviously not able to provide clean water or generators but I am planning on contacting some companies that sell hand crank flashlight/radio/cell phone chargers and I'm also looking at hand crank lanterns. Does anyone have any contacts in companies that sell these? It would be wonderful to get some donated but of course the biggest obstacle is shipping. It costs me \$100.00 to ship 20 lbs from the US to Zanzibar. Hey – I don't have the answers - I only ask the questions. If you have any advice or suggestions please let me know. Just remember I am only one woman and there are only so many hours in a day and I am leaving the US on July 9. This will not be the last time that this will happen – the underwater cable is 40 years old and will need to be replaced at some point but until then I'm afraid there will be a need for more repairs in the future.

Please please help us to rebuild the local economy. It is now vital for Participate Now! to have funds available for projects to be implemented immediately. I will be returning to Zanzibar on July 9 whether the power has been restored or not. I am hoping to raise at least \$50,000.00 before then so that Participate Now! and ZEDO can make a difference right away.

We will be:

- Listening to the people to find out what their needs are
- Learning how best to get those needs met
- Collaborating with participants, village elders, community leaders, local advisors and donors
- Implementing the projects immediately
- Documenting and visiting the projects weekly to observe the progress
- Remaining flexible to make any necessary changes to ensure the greatest success

- Sharing results and findings with the participants and all collaborators

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Participate Now!
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