

December 30, 2009

Disclaimer: This is a long email – I barely edited it and didn't have anyone check it. Please remember – I can only write about my experiences and I may not have all the facts correct. Things are changing here very fast and I'm sure that there is much more information that I do not have. But here it is and our website is <http://www.participatenowfoundation.org>

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from Zanzibar. I am feeling utterly helpless and frustrated. Our electric cable to the mainland blew a part on December 10 (yes 20 days ago) and we have been without power ever since. They had flown in a new part but then something else happened and then the workmen went home for the holidays. We are told that it can take up to a month to get the part (why?) and I read in the newspaper that maybe we will have power on January 20. Now, this happened here last June and they had no power for 32 days. I thought that a donor or someone was supposed to get a backup generator for the island but I guess I was wrong.

I think that maybe instead of having these huge international conferences about climate change and stuff they should just shut off the electricity to different parts of the world for 20 days at a time. Can you imagine if this happened in America? Would it make a difference if people protested in the streets? Would it make a difference if I wrote an article for the New York Times? Would it make a difference if I shouted from the rooftops? What do I do? How do I help? I have talked with some Embassies and they say that they only do long term not short term aid. I have talked to the emergency relief agencies but they say the crisis isn't disaster proportions yet. What does it take to get someone to notice? And the worst part is that it's the height of our summer – it's very hot and humid and like being in an oven at night when you're trying to sleep.

There is a part of me that says I should just take care of myself. I am so incredibly fortunate. An office downstairs is allowing me to share their generator and so I am able to pump water and use the internet during the day. Another part of me says the problem is too large and I can't fix it – I can't do something that will reach many people so I should just sit still and take care of myself. And, what can I do anyway? I'm just an American woman living in Zanzibar who talks a lot. The government is doing a lot of things and they are helping people, there are donor agencies that are doing things and helping people. But there are many people who are falling through the cracks. It's one thing to sit in our homes or offices with the generator running – then we are able to think "Oh eventually help will come and things will get back to normal". But what about the people who don't have the money or the energy to take care of themselves? I spent the first five days in a panic – trying to figure out how to get enough power for water. Now – I'm fortunate and creative. I have an iPod (which I can charge), and I have a booklight so I can read after sunset. I bought a kerosene stove and I organized people to help me get on a generator and to get water. Not everyone is as resourceful or as fortunate as me.

I know I have talked about this before but I'll say it again. As an American living in Connecticut I felt that I was entitled to electricity and water. I would get so angry when something went wrong and would call the companies and shout and complain until they fixed it (usually within 24 hours). Living in Zanzibar I am learning that electricity and water is a luxury not a right. I am learning how to prioritize my use of water. If I have only a specific amount of water – what do I use it for first? Do I drink it, cook with it, wash myself, wash my hair and what about watering my beautiful plants in my rooftop garden? Oh and I forgot – the toilet – have you ever thought of just how much water is used when you flush a toilet? In many places in the world they use squat toilets with a hole in the floor – I often sneered my nose at that thinking "Oh they need to develop and become more like Westerners". Hah – now I am realizing just how ingenious it is to have a squat toilet that uses very little water. I have so much to learn and again I am one of the fortunate ones who has a large water tank and can afford water if I have to buy it.

20 days without electricity and counting.....



On the left is the main water pumping station where you can get water for free. I went in the middle of the day so it wasn't that busy. Truckloads and ox carts come in filled with empty water cans from various neighborhoods and villages. The neighbors chip in to pay the guys to get the water for them (every single day – sometimes two or three times a day). The next photo was taken a few days later – in the back is a cement wall with hoses coming out of it – much more efficient for many people to fill their containers. The government built that in two days and it was very much appreciated. On the right is a crowd around a water truck that has arrived in their area. The gov't sends out trucks and there are also private ones that sell the water. The biggest problem is whether or not the water is clean enough to drink.

How to get clean water during a blackout



Many people live in large apartment complexes in town like the one on the left (horrible photo sorry). I've heard that the government moves generators around to different areas so that people can at least pump water into the main water tanks once a week or so. Then they only have to fetch water in the neighborhood rather than kilometers away at the main water station. The girls were near a building that I visited – everywhere you go there are people walking with buckets trying to find water. My biggest concern is this – because of “development” many villages have been upgraded to water taps rather than wells. Without electricity the taps can't work and so there are people trying to go back to using the wells (of which many are dry) or they have to walk very far to fetch water or they go to a small pond like the one in the photo that does not have clean water. On the right are water purification tablets that the Ministry of Health are giving out. I'm told that they are informing people through the radio but not everyone listens to the radio and still don't know where to get them. Cholera has broken out but so far as I know as of today no one has died. What is my responsibility? Is anyone responsible? What can I do? I don't even know that much about cholera – I don't know what to do to prevent it, what the symptoms are or how to treat it. Should I just assume that many of the villagers and other Zanzibaris know about this because they're Africans? I talked to a health official who said that they have systems in place to treat the cholera. So – I guess I shouldn't worry – or should I? I did contact a friend of mine with Medecin sans Frontiers and she sent me cholera guidelines. I'll have to try to read it before the generator gets turned off.

Generators and noise - what a headache!!!!



Generators – there is so much noise and diesel in the air that I can't think straight at all anymore. The two left photos are from my building. The fundis (workmen) are standing around our largest generator trying to get it to work. We have about 8 to 10 generators of all different sizes (and noise level) around our building. Again – my photos aren't great but on the right is a generator repair "shop" that I passed by the other day. There are about 10 to 14 generators that the fundis are trying to repair. I have a friend who is working on generators and he is utterly exhausted. My ex-husband was a plumbing and heating contractor and I remember what it was like during some ice storms in Connecticut. He and his team would work around the clock for days. The men delivering water and the ones repairing generators here have been doing this for 20 days and there is no end in sight for the moment. Everyone is exhausted and short tempered by the noise and everything else.

Kathryn trying to be mindful of water



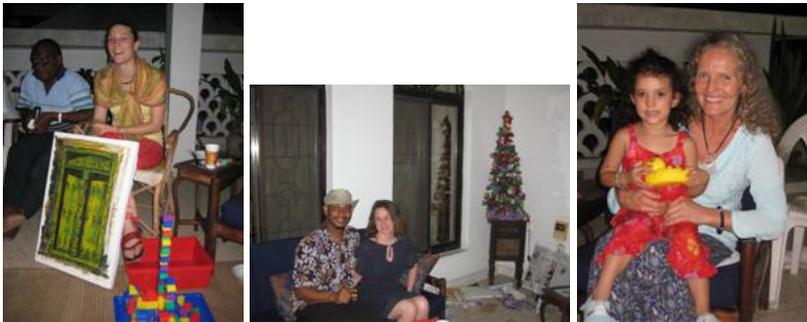
And here is my house – I tried harvesting rainwater (in the blue and orange washtubs). Suleiman laughed at me and he said he'll hook up a proper rainwater harvesting system with a tank for me. I went 4 days without water and it was horrifying. In the center is my kitchen sink. I would fill up one sink and do the dishes then put the dirty water into bottles. I have a beautiful garden on my roof and I feel guilty wasting precious water on plants. On the right is my electric stove (that I cannot use) and my kerosene cooker (that I'm not very good with). I sure do miss having an oven to cook with. A neighbor of mine installed solar so that she can have a light, fan, her computer and even watch TV a bit. I'm hoping to get something installed by next week. Is there a solar company out there who would be able to help the people in Zanzibar who can't afford the high prices of solar?

Christmas gathering at Kathryn's



And yes I had a pot luck dinner party and a Yankee Grab on Christmas night. There were 13 of us and we had a great time. The two hot gifts going back and forth was a flashlight (useful) and a bottle of champagne. Again – I am very fortunate – I paid to have the generator on during the party which was great. I think what touched me the most on Christmas night was when the generator fundi came upstairs to tell us that he was going to shut off the generator. Suleiman immediately put together a plate of food and a large bottle of water for the guy to take downstairs to share with the others. Kindness and generosity like that takes my breath away. I have so much to learn from people here in Zanzibar.

Annual Yankee Grab on Christmas Night



The painting of a Zanzibar door went back and forth but Meg will be taking it home to Vermont. In the center is my cute little Christmas tree with Valerie, who came in from Paris and Farid, who is a good friend of ours. Esme and her grandma Annie enjoyed the party!!!! It was wonderful for me to see Annie and Esme together – my son Keith and his wife Alanna are expecting a daughter in mid-January – I'm going to be a grandmother for the first time!!!! I can't wait until my grandchildren will be old enough to visit me in Zanzibar – oh they will be spoiled by everyone.

Holiday gifts for Welezo Old Age Home



A friend had given me a donation for Welezo Old Age Home. It was about \$50.00. I called Ali Hussein who asked Sr Lucy what they needed. She said they needed food more than medicine at the moment so Ali got more donations of \$150.00. With our \$200.00 (approx in currency exchange) we bought 105 kg of beans, 75 kg of sembe (I think it's a flour) and 50 kg of sugar. We drove it up there with Michael (Esme's dad) who is an American pre-med student and who attended my Christmas party. Sister Lucy gave Michael a tour and showed him the volunteer house – what a beautiful garden!!!! I asked sister if they have volunteers pay for their stay and she was surprised and said “No – we are so grateful if people come here to help us – we are happy to house them and feed them simple meals”. It was a good day and I am so fortunate to be surrounded by such kind people. Sister is having a tough time with the blackout – they have about 43 elderly people and many employees to take care of and they depend on the gov't (who is overwhelmed) and others to bring them water. She just called me – it seems that now Zanzibar has run out of kerosene (last week it was diesel) and so they don't have any lamps for the night. I just called Ali Hussein and he's going to try to find some for them. He'll somehow pay for it – one of the things I appreciate about him is that he doesn't say “Oh I can't do that because I don't have the money or I need a donor”. What a nightmare – I feel so helpless and frustrated. Who do I try to help first and how do I do that? Do I just say it's too much and stay home? I'm the crazy passionate, obsessed American woman living in Zanzibar who wants to change things – the only way to change anything is to just do it!!!

Mamas visiting the women in Kendwa



Yesterday we went to Kendwa with visitors and met with the men about the water project. Ingo is the blond German in the light green shirt on the left. I met him last year at Sauti za Busara, the music festival. He volunteers at an orphanage on the mainland and emailed me a few weeks

back saying he was bringing some of the mamas on holiday to Zanzibar (for some their first time out of their village) and could they visit one of my projects. I don't usually bring people to Kendwa because I don't want to put the villagers on show as though they are animals in the zoo but this was different. In the center is a beautiful little boy standing in a doorway of a Kendwa house – I adore all these children. On the right the women are comparing notes of their villages and their lives. Neither of the villages have electricity, much water or good medical care but they shared how they cope and work with what they have.

Gathering water in Kendwa



These are the well photos – Kendwa has three wells for 1,300 people. The wells are incredibly deep and going dry. Suleiman, Kaesser, Kadir and I had a meeting with the men about the water project. The committee has gone house to house and each villager has donated money or sold what they have to get money towards the new bore hole. They have raised about \$3,000.00 and Participate Now! has about \$3,000.00 that we can match. It will at least get them a bore hole but that won't give them water yet. We still need to get a pump, pipes, taps and another water tank. And we will have to find a generator because a bore hole can only be pumped by using electricity. I would really love to be put in touch with a solar company that might be interested in donating a solar pump or something. It would benefit the people and would be a great advertisement for their product.

Making new friends and staying strong



And, of course, making new friends. That's what life is all about isn't it? Having people to share our good times and hard times with. How important it is to find out that we are not alone. And lastly – the shopping on the ride home. Kaesser is at a pineapple market in Dunge which is the area that produces the best in Zanzibar. He got a great price on some beautiful pineapples!!!!

I do believe that I am one of the most fortunate women in the world. Life is hard – at the moment life is pretty unbearable for many people. But we go on and do what we can to help each other. Yes, I do feel helpless and frustrated. I can only do what I can do – which is to go talk to someone who knows more than I do about this situation in Zanzibar and see how I can help. I'm going to keep on putting myself out there whether I have money or not. Someday – someone will pay attention to us and help us. Until then we need to keep on helping each other.

Please – in this new year be kind to each other. Be gentle and pay attention to this single moment – it will never come around again.

I asked a government official “If I can get some money what do we need first?” And his reply was “Diesel for the generators”. Usually people are supposed to have a plan and a budget before they ask for money. Well, I don’t have one but I can tell you that if anyone donates money to Participate Now! it will be used immediately to help someone in need.

“Being rich is having enough to share with others”

Please send a check to either the CT address or if you live in Zanzibar you can contact me directly – we have a bank account in Zanzibar and can accept USD or TSH. Or visit our website [Participate Now!](#) to make a donation through PayPal.

Participate Now!
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Thank you for taking the time to read this email.

Kathryn

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