

September 30, 2011

Dear All,

This email is going to focus on two events. Once again it ended up being much longer than I expected so please read it at your leisure. I went to visit our farmers in Koani who we had done a project with in 2009. Heather Cereda is an American student from Oregon who is interning at my friend Kaesser's school – she is teaching Math and English to the young children and English to an adult class. She was interested to learn more about the work of Participate Now so we went on a visit to some of our farmers with Suleiman Moh'd and Senga Thani from Participate Now Zanzibar.. As usual I learned many things that I had not expected. Development is not a linear process – I was considering making up a questionnaire for my farmers so that I could identify their progress and decide whether or not the project was a success. I'm glad that I did not do that and I will tell you more of what I learned.

I am also writing about the horrific ferry tragedy that occurred in the early morning hours of September 10, 2011. Zanzibar is made up of two islands, Unguja and Pemba with approximately (please don't quote me as this is only my very rough guess) 700,000 population in Unguja and 300,000 in Pemba. Again, anything that I write in my emails are only based on my experience. I am not an expert and I was not at the site of the tragedy or at the hospital or Maisara, the grounds where the bodies were brought. I can only talk about what I have heard from friends and read in the newspapers. I did not personally know anyone who was on the ferry but I know people who lost friends and relatives. This shocking tragedy has affected every single person living in Zanzibar. There are many stories about the events of this tragedy online – much more than I could ever tell.

Koani farmer and land rights



Ali lives with his wife and their three daughters on a new road on the way to Machui. The road is quite beautiful and Ali's wife can now sell their fruit and vegetables on the road in front of her house – she doesn't even have to go into town to the main market. Ali was very ill during our 2009 training and he was not able to participate fully but we did visit him and some people helped him to plant his bananas and fertilize them. Ali is much healthier now and has been working quite hard on his farm. His one challenge is that he is trying to sort out the land rights concerning his farm. Once again – I am not an expert – I'm just Mama Kathryn listening and learning about the plight of the people in Zanzibar. In 1964 Zanzibar had a Revolution and the lands were nationalized and distributed to the poor under socialism. Many of the landowners who were Arabs were driven away from the country and many of them went to England, America, Canada, Oman and other Middle Eastern countries. Some of them are now returning to Zanzibar and have been going to court to have their lands returned to them and many of them are succeeding. The farmers, especially, are struggling to become their own advocates and learn about their land rights and what they can do to retain the land that they have lived on for more than 40 years. Sadly, in the end it often comes down to money which is the same worldwide. I do not completely understand what happened during the Revolution, or the laws that were enacted afterwards, or the new laws that are being enacted now. All I can do is try to tell the story from my point of view as I know it with as little information as I possess.

Koani farmers and success



How do you define success? Fatma's house on the left is a 2009 photo then next to it we have one I took the other day – she has built up her compound and has chickens and a small vegetable garden and is quite happy. To the right (I don't have the photo) Issa and his family live. Both Fatma and Issa have 7 children each in their families. Some of them were very happy to have their photo taken with Heather. It was raining and Issa's plot is quite far away so we didn't visit it – we talked. First his plots are in various locations because this is “borrowed land” (one more confusion as to land rights). Issa was our shining star during our initial project – he strategizes, plans well and works hard. He told us that he did benefit from our project as he received healthy

banana plants, cassava, vegetable seeds and good fertilizer and he was trained as to how to utilize all of them to the greatest benefit. He estimates that financially he earns about 200,000 TSH (approximately \$150.00) a year more because of our project. I asked Issa what he feels is the next step and he quickly replied, "I need irrigation for the dry season. I would like to have a well and a foot pump that would irrigate my crops.". Suleiman is going to meet with Issa and come up with a very small proposal and budget for this ongoing project. I like that we at Participate Now (particularly Suleiman) decided to take this project one step at a time rather than try to do a large scale, long term project.

The children go to school – Issa does not allow his young children to work in the fields. The school they attend is close to 5 kilometres away and they must walk every day. This proves to me once again that small scale development can be more successful and sustainable. Wouldn't it be great to have just 2 or 3 Peace Corps workers or missionaries living in the village and teaching classes under a tree? I wonder if big donor projects of building a school and getting desks etc is the answer – maybe a teacher who will spark someone's curiosity and potential is enough. I truly believe that the best we can do is to find the child with a hunger for learning and help them as much as possible. Issa's son, Ali, (in the blue shirt next to Heather) is 11 and shows a natural intelligence and curiosity. I asked Heather what she thought the best way to help him would be. Would it be to take him out of his environment and send him to a boarding school? I don't think so – I think there has to be another option for children who are hungry to learn.

Koani women farmers



Four of our seven farmers in Koani are women. Salma was pregnant during our 2009 training and she is pregnant again (sorry I didn't ask how many children she has right now). She is the third wife of a Muslim man (they can have 4 wives) and she is quite happy. He is a very good man and provides for all of his wives and their families. Salma is growing cassava in a nearby plot that she has "borrowed" (yes again the land rights issue) from a neighbor who is living in

Pemba but owns this land. She is fortunate to have the plot nearby her house as many borrowed plots can be quite a distance from the home. I grow tomatoes in my garden and I have to water them twice a day during the dry season – I couldn't imagine if I had to walk a long way to do that every day after tending to my husband, children, home and other plots.

Zanzibar ferry tragedy



Note: I found the majority of these photos on the internet – none of them were taken by me. The travel prices I have quoted are also approximates – I haven't traveled to Pemba in the past year myself.

The MV Spice Islander (official capacity of 500 persons) is on the left and I have sat having tea at Tembo Hotel (where this photo was taken although not by me) watching them loading this ship many times. There are three ways to get to Pemba from Unguja – a 45 minute plane ride (\$100), a 3 to 4 hour fast morning ferry (\$25) or the overnight ferry (\$10) that arrives in Wete, Pemba in the morning. I have never personally taken the overnight ferry because I had heard horror stories of the overcrowding – people practically sitting on top of each other on the floors with no space to even lie down. A friend of mine who was with the US Embassy took the overnight ferry in 2009 to experience it herself and she sat next to a window with a life jacket grasped tightly in her hands and was frightened that they wouldn't reach Pemba. Most of the poor Zanzibaris who live or have family in Pemba (which are many) have no choice but to take the overnight ferry as it's the cheapest.

There are so many stories – a friend of mine has two women in his neighborhood who chose not to take the ferry that evening because it was already listing in the port before it even left. Others I

have been told tried to get off the ferry but were beaten back. The ferry started sinking at 1:30am and the rescue ships did not reach them until almost 5:00am or later. Most women and children in Zanzibar do not know how to swim and I cannot possibly imagine the horror that developed as people were drowning while trying to find their family members. And what about the village children who spent 3 days on the beach watching the bodies being brought ashore? A number of people phoned their relatives to say goodbye and I heard that one person had wrapped his phone in plastic as was his habit when he took the overnight ferry. His family called the phone number which rang and rang for 4 days before it ran out of charge but it was never answered.

Zanzibar ferry tragedy



President Shein has appointed a special Investigative Committee to look into this disaster. Their findings and recommendations are to be publicized within a month. The official numbers are that there were 204 bodies recovered and 619 people rescued, of these 205 children; 106 boys and 99 girls. This will make the total passengers a total of 822 but those who were registered missing were unknown as there is no record and even if it is there, children were not included in the manifest. I have not yet read any official report as to the missing.

First of all, the water rushed into the first class and no one there was able to get out – I have no idea how many hundreds were in there and still are as divers have not been able to reach the sunken ferry. The majority of the passengers were women and children returning to Pemba after celebrating Eid after the end of Ramadhan. I have heard that people have gone out to the villages and the list of the missing totals 1,600!!!! I have spoken to people who think that needs to be verified but they all agree that the number of the missing is well over 1,000. A friend of mine lost a 13 year old and his grandmother but they never found the bodies. Now, in Islam, you bury the body within 24 hours and you know that they have gone to be with Allah. I asked how they cope if they don't have a body and he said "They will always wonder every day if they may still be alive somewhere". My heart goes out to everyone who has been affected by this horrific catastrophe.

Identifying and praying for the dead at Maisara grounds



The accident happened in the north of the island and the bodies and rescued had to be brought to Mnazi Moja Hospital and the Maisara grounds which are near my home. All day there were sirens of ambulances and official vehicles driving up and down the island. I am in awe of the Zanzibar people – they organized themselves and dragged the bodies and people out of the water – they labeled the bodies with numbers and the local TV station showed the faces of the dead for identification. At first I was horrified watching but a friend told me it was actually very smart as people could identify a relative and then go to Maisara to claim the body and bury them. ZOP (Zanzibar Outreach Program) a local NGO of doctors helped along with people from Save the Children and so many other agencies that are based here in Zanzibar. Many of the speedboats that were used were from foreign owned diving centers. Everyone that could pitched in to help as quickly as possible.

A friend of mine was looking for the sister of one of her family members – she went to the hospital and Maisara and told me there must have been more than 5,000 people milling around looking for loved ones. She noted that not one person shed a tear – this is the culture here in Zanzibar – the tears are shed in private. Another friend of mine went immediately to Maisara where the bodies were being brought to help out. I texted him in the afternoon and asked him how many of them did he know (as he's from Pemba and takes the overnight ferry often) – he said “Ten and counting”. A part of me felt like I was very removed from all of this – as if I was watching it on TV because I did not go to the site – I felt that I would have been intruding.

Yesterday I was choosing photos to include in this email and I saw the one of the babies and I started sobbing – please weep with me for all of those lost. I talked to a local friend of mine and

he asked me what was wrong and I told him I was weeping after seeing the children. His response was “Kathryn stop crying and cheer up”. That was actually a very kind response – he did not want me to feel pain. It is the culture here – you do not grieve in public. Many Zanzibaris do not have the coping skills to deal with trauma and tragedy – psychological counseling is not common here. What will these people do? How will they assimilate their grief and go on with their lives? There have been some suicides, heart attacks and many people are physically ill – one way of dealing with difficult emotions. Save the Children is designing a project with UNICEF and the local ministries to train counselors but how long will all that take? A UN donor project never happens quickly. Please weep with me for all of the people who are living alone with their grief.

I will be visiting our well project in Kendwa soon and write about that and an end of the year report in the next few months. Thank you all for reading this and please send positive thoughts and prayers to all of the grieving in Zanzibar and abroad.

Participate Now is dedicated to continue working for the welfare of the people of Zanzibar. We strive to make the biggest impact possible with very little resources. We do have a wealth of love and caring to share with others who are interested in raising the quality of their lives.

“Being rich is having enough to share with others”

Please send a check to the CT address below. Or visit our website [Participate Now!](#) to make a donation through PayPal.

Participate Now!
424 Riverside Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824