

December 2008

Dear All,

This is a very frightening time in America with the uncertainty and the economic crisis. I hope that everyone will have the strength to get through this very difficult period and that you will turn to each other and rely on your neighbors and allow them to rely on you. This is not a time to be alone with fears and worry – it is a time to realize that community is most important in this life. Lately, I have been reminded of the quote that I have posted on the [Participate Now!](#) foundation website:

“Being rich is having enough to share with others”

My focus is not to become just another large foundation with millions of dollars. Simply stated, it is to have enough money to accomplish our small-scale projects. Any small donation makes a very large impact with the work that we are doing. I would like to ask you to please share this email with others, especially someone like a “venture philanthropist” or someone influential in international development to Africa who may be interested in supporting our work here in Zanzibar - there is so much that we can contribute to each other. Change does not happen by itself – it takes contacts, collaboration and lots of discussion between people who are doing the actual work, on all levels.

I love living in Zanzibar and I am working hard to be a “cog in the wheel” helping to change int’l development so that the people will benefit more. Self respect, dignity and an opportunity for a better quality of life are the goals of [Participate Now!](#) I have lived in Zanzibar for over 4 years now and the work that we are doing is more and more effective as we utilize the lessons that we are learning. I am having my emails and project reports translated into Swahili and sharing them with the participants so that they will know exactly what I am writing about them. This is an important part of the process of listening and learning very clearly what the needs of the people are.

I have been learning a lot myself – I designed my personal website <http://www.kathrynsutton.com>. I am trying to learn how to be able to have someone google my name and find my website – does anyone know how to do that? I am documenting all that I can as timely as possible but there are new lessons to be learned every single day. Now that I am becoming an amateur website designer I will be updating the foundation website. In January I will be posting the project reports that are written by the managers themselves. We have been working hard trying to design a template that can be consistent for the basis of each project so that the managers can focus their energies on what they do best. As the director I am also responsible for the financials and let me tell you – it’s not easy keeping tracking of cash in a foreign currency!!! Monitoring, evaluation and transparency are a process – we are doing our best to learn all that we can about managing donor money in the most efficient and effective way.

[Participate Now!](#) has just concluded the first year of operations – we are making a difference. We have achieved non profit status so that all donations are tax deductible. I raised \$25,000.00 last year and hope to meet or surpass that goal this year. This past year we did the entrepreneur project with 9 women from ZAPHA+ (Zanzibar Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS), learning about small business in the local economy here in Zanzibar. We began implementing the Koani Farmers Project that includes 7 farmers from a rural village and many other participants from the local government authorities to civil servants with experience in farming. The Kendwa Village Project is just beginning – we are meeting with elders and villagers to find out just what the needs of the village are and how to get them met. [Participate Now!](#) documents and shares everything and academics and students have been interested in utilizing the information to learn more.

Entrepreneur Project



Our Entrepreneur Project objective was to give 10 women from ZAPHA+ (Zanzibar Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS) small business training and micro loans. Mzee Mohammed as the project manager worked very hard with the women and we learned a lot. We will be writing our final report and posting it on the [Participate Now!](#) website in January 2009.

This was our first project and we learned so many important lessons. I think that we learned to be flexible concerning our overall objectives and to adapt as the project progresses. I somehow thought that if we trained women about small business that some of them may go on to utilize a small loan and become a successful entrepreneur. Now – that is very Western thinking and does not always apply to other cultures. But we did learn a lot. Most fundamentally, people who are HIV+ get sick often and sometimes cannot keep up with a demanding day to day business. Production and delivery of goods is often interrupted which might lead to customers going elsewhere. We learned that it is important, even with very small projects, for the manager to have the time to devote to the participants. It is necessary to meet with them and be available to mentor and help them along the way. This takes time that is often not available unless the manager is able to get enough money to focus solely on the project. What is difficult with many projects is that they look good on paper – you choose the participants, have a few trainings, give a few micro loans and voila! – the women become *successful entrepreneurs!* The reality is much more complex than that. We did give many of our women small loans but not all of them repaid them. ZAPHA+ did not have the capacity to manage the loans and so Mzee and I tried to do it ourselves. Some of the women were wonderful and repaid the loans on time but many of them did not and expressed frustration when they couldn't get more money.

Please know that it is important for me to tell “my” truth – I can only speak about my experiences. I can not always be positive and have you believe that every thing that we do at [Participate Now!](#) is highly successful. That does not mean that we or our participants are failures – that only means that we are doing our best to listen and learn and try something different for the next project. This was our first project and we are having our final meeting next week with the women. Mzee and I are going to talk honestly with them and learn more as to what the challenges were and how maybe someone else can help them in the future.

Koani Farming Project



Our Koani farming project is working quite well and shows the progress that we are making in designing and implementing projects. We learned a lot from the Entrepreneur Project and Suleiman Said has been working very hard to include all of the participants in the planning process. We surveyed 20 farmers, chose 7 for the project and had a 3 day participatory planning workshop to design the training specifically for their needs. Our participants know that the objective of this project is to truly help them learn better ways to grow their daily crops. They said that they wanted less days of training but to have it more focused. On the right is the photo of our one day training about growing bananas and cassava. The participants are now in the process of preparing their plots to plant 30 banana plants each and they will plant cassava in January and then we will focus on vegetables. Our goal is to attain the maximum benefit for each of the farmers and to learn more about what their true needs are.

The question that I would like to have answered is this: in the last photo on the right is what Suleiman called a “very good” plot – the cassava is growing well. Now – these plots are one of many and I’m curious as to why this farmer’s plot is doing so well and yet the ones around him are not. Does he have more money? More tools? More people helping him to do the work? Is he more dedicated? Does he have more knowledge and experience? Why don’t the farmers with plots around his learn from him? Does he share his knowledge and experience? What I always learn first is that I have many assumptions that seem to have simple answers but that is never the case – there are always more complexities and more to learn. The changes needed in international development will come from the continuation of our method at [Participate Now!](#): listening, learning, collaborating, documenting and sharing.



Bimboga, Mwajuma, Salma and Fatuma are 4 of the women participants in the Koani farmers project. They are very poor and work so very hard – they rise early in the morning to feed their family, then sort out the house and walk kilometers to their plot to weed and water – often in the broiling sun. I went to a one day workshop and sat with the women who are very kind and generous. It is my hope that these women will gain self respect and dignity and be able to have more food to eat every day.



Here are Ali Jafar, Mtalii, Issa and Suleiman, the project manager. These men always have a smile and they want to learn – that is the most important criteria for any of our projects – the participants must want to do the hard work necessary to achieve success – however it is that they define success. I always focus on self respect and dignity – these are the benefits that are reaped when you have knowledge. During our 3 day planning workshop the farmers with the help of our facilitators put together a “problem tree” and a “goal tree” . At the bottom of the goal tree was “adequate knowledge” which flowed up to the top of “higher income”. There was only one square that mentioned access to credit and it was standing alone and connected to availability of good seeds. I found that fascinating and will be posting the report on the foundation website soon.

Suleiman is eager to learn and make a difference – the benefit which helps his family and others around him. He truly believes that it’s not just about the money – that is about sharing knowledge and hope. Suleiman learns as much as he teaches and is enthusiastic in utilizing all that he learns. He has gained respect amongst villagers and his colleagues in the agricultural sector. He enjoys speaking to any students, researchers and visitors who come to Zanzibar about our projects.

We will be posting our first phase report and also our budget vs actual report. We are working so hard to try to keep things as simple as possible so that it can be understood by everyone. This project will continue until August 2009 but we are excited and bubbling with ideas to build on the lessons we have learned and to start a new project. Please let us know if you would like to support the Agricultural Projects.

Kendwa Village Project



This is the beginning of our Kendwa Village project that I wrote about in my last email. Water is the main priority and we will be visiting the village to learn more about the needs of the villagers and then help them to create a plan to get those needs met. Zanzibar is a tourist island yet the villages themselves often benefit by donors giving them something physical – such as a building or a well which can be very important. But there is much more needed so that the buildings don’t stand empty and the wells don’t go dry. If you are interested in supporting this project – please let us know. We are finding that a single project can be accomplished with \$10,000.00 or less quite effectively.

Education Project



RUS Centre is a small local private school – they teach primary school students the basics and also focus on learning English. Every parent would like their children to have more opportunities to have a better life. Education is certainly one way to accomplish that. [Participate Now!](#) will be exploring various options to help students with potential to further their studies. We are also learning how best to help enhance the current curriculum with livelier participation through debates, drama and art projects. Linking foreign volunteers with local schools benefits all involved but takes a lot of work to manage the programs. If you are interested in donating to a specific project please let us know.

Tufts University Grads and other students



I was very fortunate to attend [Tufts University](#) as an older student and graduated with a Political Science degree in 2004 at the age of 52. I have kept in touch with some of the students and the faculty at Tufts and they are making a big difference here in Zanzibar. On the left, Samantha Diamond, who I became good friends with in junior year, visited Zanzibar and some of my projects. Jon Rosen in the middle graduated Tufts in '04 but we had never met. He responded to a request for writers and became the editor of Swahili Coast this past year and spent a number of months here in Zanzibar. Anne Andrews in the middle had visited here a few years ago and we were pleasantly surprised to learn that we are both Tufts grads – what a small world. Anne came back this past summer to do some work and we spent lots of time talking!! There are also groups of students that come through Zanzibar and I am fortunate to be able to give talks to some of them – these students were from Princeton and it was very exciting. Some of the various students that I have met have kept in touch with me and are learning from the work that [Participate Now!](#) is doing. On the right is a photo of Katelin Wilton who helped create a youth group at ZAPHA+ last year and returned this year to do follow up consulting for the UNICEF funded project. Katelin has made a very dramatic impact on Zanzibar and the youth living with HIV. I was so very proud to be able to link her with ZAPHA+ and UNICEF. Sharing what we learn with each other is how we change the world.

Maulidi ya Homu



And lastly there is Maulidi ya Homu. They are a group of men and boys who sing praises to the Prophet Mohammed. I am privileged to be able to watch them practice and to invite along some of my visitors to Zanzibar. I am fortunate to be able to share these experiences with people who may not have prior knowledge about Islam, just as I didn't before moving to Zanzibar, a predominantly Muslim country. Sarah Heddon, a Fulbright student, worked with Maulidi ya Homu and put together a brochure and their history for them. We are now translating that into Swahili to be used here in Zanzibar.. Maulidi ya Homu is a group that carries on a very unique cultural tradition with Zanzibar. If you're interested in learning more, Frederica Boswell, the BBC correspondent in Zanzibar wrote a beautiful article about them last month called [Poems for the Prophet in Zanzibar](#).

Wow – I am really enjoying this hyperlink option – I hope that it works okay. I have tried to include many photos and very little text. If you would like to read some of my past emails (and especially look at the photos) please visit www.kathrynsutton.com.

Please 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!
424 Riverside Drive
Fairfield, CT 06824