

HOW DID WE END UP IN TANZANIA?

Developing New Locations for McMaster Fellows and Scholars

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Conducting an exploratory trip to a location never visited before can be challenging but it can also be rewarding. Defiance College's Carolyn M. Small Honors trip in May, 2013 was just that. Defiance College President Mark Gordon and I quickly agreed to include students as we evaluated Tanzania as a potential location for future McMaster Fellow and Scholar community-based research initiatives. Dr. Jeremy Taylor was added to the team as faculty interested in moving community partnership development forward in Tanzania if it was determined to be viable as a result of this initial visit.

President Gordon was able to request information from those currently working in Tanzania or with connections in Tanzania through a listserv. Filtering through these initial contacts allowed me to make connections via email and phone prior

to arrival. Planning a two week initiative to a location you have never been to before demands that you make viable connections at each location. This is accomplished through local people who are willing to speak on your behalf to set up meetings. This approach is critical because the local people are the ones that have the best understanding of the dynamics of communities and community partner organizations on site. Lillian Mkony became our direct connection in Tanzania and her ability to disseminate our letter of intent to various communities and organizations in south central Tanzania in and around Morogoro proved invaluable. In addition to Morogoro, it was decided that the team would also travel to the Arusha/Kilimanjaro area in northern Tanzania. Defiance College through a mutual donor Dwight Smith, founder of the Thanks Be to God Foundation, collaborated with World Reader and took part in what was the largest launch of e-readers in Tanzania to date. The entire trip rested on these partnerships and the connections they unfolded for us while on site.

The Honors/McMaster team which included the following students – Brock Bell, Michelle Bulriss, Kirsten Frissora, Phoenix Golnick, Katelyn Haydett, Catherine Savage, and Cord Speelman – flew into Kilimanjaro and traveled to Arusha to meet with the Vice Chancellor and faculty of the Nelson Mandela African Institution of Science and Technology (NM-AIST). Teachers were trained in two schools at Nambala and Nganana that lie in the shadow of the NM-AIST and over three hundred Kindle e-readers were distributed. In the process of our collaboration with World Reader, NM-AIST, and the schools, we met the honorable Mizengo Pinda, Prime Minister of Tanzania. We made some very close contacts, and we learned a good bit of Swahili.

The group flew into Dar Es Salaam and did a day of sightseeing in Zanzibar, which has to be one of the most exotic and beautiful places on earth – the Indian Ocean was the backdrop for the winding streets of Stone Town, spice and fish markets, and sultan palaces. The dark side of Zanzibar evidenced the hub of the eastern African slave trade, one not often considered in western history books. We then met up with Lillian Mkony and traveled west to the Morogoro region; comprised of large grassy savannas and the Uluguru Mountain range. We spent multiple days in Mvomero village, about 1.5 hours from Morogoro, meeting with people at the schools, the health clinic, a women's community micro-lending organization, agricultural co-ops, and an elderly group. The Honors/McMaster team brainstormed at night about the challenges these community groups faced and how McMaster initiatives might collaborate with these partners to effect change. It was through these sessions that we reaped the benefits of having a team composed

of students from multiple disciplines, some former McMaster Scholars, a McMaster Fellow, and people completely new to the experience. It was through this diversity that ideas emerged regarding the complex challenges the local people struggled to overcome. Lillian Mkony proved to be a trusted friend and we will certainly rely on her and her expertise as we engage in future initiatives in Tanzania.

Finally the group headed to Mikumi National Park and the Vuma Hills Camp where we would make our home for several more days – on safari. I don't think any of us realized the number of animals that roamed the savannas in what is one of Tanzania's smaller wildlife preservation areas. Elephants, giraffe, impalas, marabou storks, zebras, and warthogs in numbers that we couldn't have imagined. We slept in tents on platforms and engaged in two four-hour game drives each day. All of us agreed that being on a savanna in an open jeep and seeing animals watch you from just a few feet away is an experience of a lifetime.

As the McMaster School for Advancing Humanity has evolved there is an emerging framework to developing sustainable partnerships for this type of international community-based research. I recently wrote about this framework in an article published by the Association of American Colleges and Universities titled *Steps to Developing Effective Sustainable Partnerships for International Community-Based Research* (Studer 2013). Our partnership development in Tanzania as well as the sustainability of all McMaster sites is dependent on the components listed below.

EXPLORATION PHASE

- Assess the potential of the site (organizations, communities, issues)
- Survey of the logistical feasibility of working in the region, culture, and conditions

INVESTMENT PHASE

- Building a foundation of trust
- Moving forward with effective incremental outcomes toward a collective goal
- Assuring repeatability through a commitment of time, effort, and resources

FOCUS PHASE

- Evaluation of the potential to effect change
- Evaluation of the match between needs/issues and resources /expertise
- Evaluation of the potential for mutual benefit – student learning, community impact

SUSTAINABILITY PHASE

- Reevaluation of overall goals
- Assessment of outcomes via feedback from all stakeholders
- Repositioning the project to evolve dynamically

Tanzania, through our connections on site, has moved forward and will continue to develop new partnerships through McMaster initiatives. In addition the schema will continue to allow us to evaluate the next McMaster exploratory trip to the Central American countries of Nicaragua and Panama in the spring, 2015.

The McMaster School for Advancing Humanity is anything but static. Its dynamic evolution over the past 12 years has resulted not only in positive change for communities around the globe and effective student learning through research and application; the McMaster School has contributed to foundational knowledge relative to the development of international community-based research initiatives by other tertiary institutions both in the U.S. and abroad. This schema devised through experience and reflection facilitates the evaluation of new sites and partnerships as well as our progress as we sustain current initiatives over time.

REFERENCE

Studer, Mary Ann. 2013. "Developing Sustainable Partnerships for International Community-Based Research." *Diversity & Democracy: Civic Learning for Shared Futures* (Association of American Colleges and Universities) 16 (1): 17-19.