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The Kernel



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Looking Ahead: 2012

by Jenny Koeth

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! Hope you had a wonderful holiday season and are ready for another eventful year. It's been a good time to reflect on the accomplishments this past year and we are truly thankful for the growth at Profugo. On the India side, we are making strides in relating to the community in Prasanthgiri, Wayanad. Our Center of Development consists of 40 families at this time and we are employing 2 program coordinators



and 1 tailoring trainer. In 2012 we are hoping to add to the number of families, hire a social worker to oversee our programs, and officially start a tailoring business for the successful graduates of the tailoring workshop. We will also be sending several interns and fellows from the US to Wayanad, at various times during the year. As we continue to build on the already existing programs (tailoring workshop and English Language School), we are also looking to implement several new projects this year—water works project, community supported agriculture, and poultry farming. We are continually investigating new possibilities for community development—please share your ideas with us!

On the US side, a new academic semester has begun, and a new group of interns have joined us. It's been exciting to see the incredible interest that university students have in international development and it's our privilege to be in a mutually beneficial relationship with our interns and volunteers. Profugo as an organization gets to benefit from fresh perspectives, energies, and contacts, while our team gets to be involved in every aspect of building sustainable tools toward a better quality of life for our global neighbors. I wish I was 25 again so I can be involved in such ventures and realize that I, though I'm in my upper 30s, am involved! This to say that *all are welcome to join our team* and help Profugo's efforts in building a global neighborhood.

~Hearty greetings from one profugo to another!

Ps. Please join us at Café Profugo on January 28th as board member LeeAnn Peterson shares about her experiences working on income generation projects in Mozambique.

Family Highlight: the Vadakkancherri

By Joshua Keeney

Abraham Vadakkancherri is a father, son, and a leading member of the community in Wayanad. Abraham's family lives in the area around him giving him a strong family base. It is common for his wife Sheila and his daughters to be at his parents' house or for his niece to spend the day with Sheila and his daughters Aleena and Asin. Abraham, his brothers, and parents have their own separate land, but farm it all together. They will spend a day on each plot of land so that each family receives help while making sure their land is not neglected. Lunch is commonly held at Abraham's father's house, where both the groups of men and woman come together in-between work to share in food and conversation. Children are as likely to run to aunts or uncles as parents during dinner and will often go home with them rather than to their own home. The family is very close knit.

Abraham tries to teach himself English if he has some downtime and is not working the field. He tries to keep up with his daughters; Aleena and Asin attend the English school that the social worker, Jessy, teaches. He says those in his community must learn English, because many of the legal and financial papers are in English now. He speaks of times when he was forced to ask someone to explain the documents he was using, just to understand and properly fill out the forms. He says good jobs for his daughters in the future are dependent on their grasp of English. More and more, business interaction and daily work requires individuals to be able to communicate in this foreign tongue.

Abraham is serving as the president of the executive board of Profugo's Center of Development. This is a community-organized group of forty families who pursue various activities to better the community and to help each other out. As the president, he oversees the executive committee and must make the final decision on any action the community takes. Once a month he meets with the rest of the executive members, often meeting by candlelight, to run a normal meeting: updating everyone on progress of projects, debate new opportunities, and discuss the internationally dreaded 'old business' that not formal meeting is complete without.

Much like Jessy, the social worker, Abraham can commonly be found visiting neighbors in need. He knows them all and tries to help out where he can. When he speaks of the future he hopes for, it often involves the whole community rather than just his family.

Sheila, Abraham's wife, is an active and intelligent woman. Sometimes working alongside her husband and sometimes doing other jobs, she is just as busy as he is. She cleans clothes on a stone beside the house, helps the kids with homework, cooks meals, does yard work, and anything else that needs to be done. She has a bachelor's degree in history, but does not see much of a future based on the degree. She explains how the history degree is one of the cheapest to get, and since her family was poor, that is all they could afford. She says many people get a history degree; there are few jobs for those who have one. However, she wishes she could go back and learn a different profession. Her eyes sparkle as she speaks of the chance to teach children, though the certification is too expensive for her family to fund. She is quick to smile and to ask about the well being of visitors and will almost always meet you before you can even reach the house. Along with her husband and daughters, she is readily accepting and concerned about any facet that may be troubling her guests and friends. Though they have little to offer, she does her best to honor her guests with fancy meals and will shower them with snacks (which, though they are served as snacks, would be a meal for the family when guests are not around).

The Vadakkancherri family is the example of hope for the community in Wayanad. They are loving, caring, hard working, intelligent, and community minded. They have connections in the community and with their family, and do what they can to help whenever they can. However, years of hard times and little options, and little capital have left the family in hard places. They get by financially, as long as no major events happen. However, illness comes, and this stresses the finances. They are thin- not hard working thin, but not enough food thin.

Abraham's family is the case and point for the kind of global neighbors that Profugo is trying to reach out to. They do not lack the work ethic, just the chance to break out of cyclical poverty. They simply need a little boost. Their intelligence and hard work will carry them to a better life.



Travel with Purpose: Ecotourism as Community Development

By Melissa Yates

Currently tourism is the leading growth sector of the global economy. The World Travel and Tourism Council reports that tourism employs “some 220 million people and generates over 10 per cent of the world’s GDP.” This is an industry with enormous economic power. The School of Leadership and Development at Eastern University is researching the ways in which this economic power can be directed toward communities in developing countries.

Tourism has many subsectors, including cultural tourism, cruise tourism, adventure tourism, gaming tourism and sustainable tourism. The Eastern University Ecotourism Research project studies faith-based and community-based ecotourism projects around the world.

Ecotourism, as defined by the International Ecotourism Society is, “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of the local people.” Community-based ecotourism then is ecotourism that is implemented, promoted by and directly beneficial to the community.

Tourism can be a form of community development if implemented thoughtfully and with intention. Babu Varghese, a former board member of The International Ecotourism Society and an ecotourism pioneer in Wayanad, India describes the relationship between tourism and development this way:

Tourism is one way of transferring money from the rich to the poor and needy. The high expendable amount of money once used is the best possible way without damaging nature but at the same time conserving. It should be promoted especially in a developing nation like India. It is wrong to think that more problems like poverty eradication, inequality can be solved with massive projects. Poverty eradication can be achieved by community development programmes with responsible tourism practices. Small-scale tourism projects involving the local community are always the building blocks of tourism. (From Ecoclub interview-Issue 97-May 2008)

The Eastern University project focuses on community-based ecotourism as a bridge to holistic development in a community. The project gathers information on existing projects and methods and the success they have achieved at income-generation for communities in developing countries. The goal is to encourage tourists to support villages with their travel dollars.

The benefit of the community-based method of ecotourism to a community is the ownership by the community of the tourism industry, rather than multi-national corporations implementing projects without community support.

For tourists, community-based ecotourism is an opportunity to visit beautiful parts of the world, experience new cultures and financially contribute to these cultures. Community-based ecotourism provides the traveler with leisure activities in a sensitive and ethical framework that provides unique solutions to three key areas: poverty alleviation through sustainable economic development, environmental preservation, and support of local culture and heritage.



The Eastern Ecotourism project has studied sixteen Christian, community-based ecotourism projects across several regions around the world. Here are a few brief examples:

ASSETS, Kenya- located in East Africa, this region supports some of Africa’s rarest wildlife and plants. Flamingos, pelicans and the Sokoke scops owl, Africa’s smallest owl all find their home in this area. ASSETS encourages community involvement in nature conservation and supports the local community by providing scholarships for secondary school children. All proceeds from tourist fees go directly into the ASSETS scholarship fund.

Savannaland, Ghana- has been recognized in The Ethical Travel Guide, 2009 for its inclusion of the local community in its ecotourism and its commitment to use ecotourism as a form of economic development. Visitors experience local culture and wildlife and enjoy activities such as safari tours, historical tours and cultural tours.

Rio Platano, Honduras- is an experience in the traditional lifestyle of indigenous people of Honduras. Food and lodging are rustic, so this amazing experience is not for the faint of heart. Rio Platano is reached by a series of propeller planes, dugout canoe rides and trekking. The remote area offers beautiful scenery, hiking through the rainforest, swimming in the Caribbean and guided tours of ancient petroglyphs. Moskitia Pawisa Apiska (MOPAWI), an indigenous development organization, is responsible for this ecotourism site. They help to protect 815,000 hectare of the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve. MOPAWI’s goal is to integrate sustainable, human development and nature conservation with an emphasis on local ownership and community-based development.

For more information on these and other community-based ecotourism options visit our facebook page Ecotourism Network and our full directory at <http://issuu.com/ecotourism/docs/directory>.

Melissa Yates is a graduate student at Eastern University's School for Leadership and Development. Melissa's background is in the fashion industry. In addition to her work as a graduate assistant for Eastern's Ecotourism Research Project, her research focuses on faith-based global fair trade initiatives.

Toward Resilient and Sustainable Communities

By Andrés Umaña

Imagine a spider web that contains a hard working and very committed spider, Ana. Ana maintains her web everyday, keeping it clean of leaves and debris, and making sure that it is strong - yet flexible enough to catch her next meal. Now imagine that a big rock pierces through the web and Ana rushes in to repair it. Through arduous spinning, she manages to rebuild the web in record time and almost to the same state that it was before the rock hit it. At this point, Ana's spider web can be said to have a great deal of resilience, for it has the capacity to bounce back after a disturbance in a timely manner. But why should we care about spider webs when the world's problems seem so large? Why should communities be concerned with resilience at all?

Resilience is the capacity of a system, be it economic, social or ecological, to recover from a shock or disturbance. I am sure we can all think of at least one example where a well-known community was faced with distress. Remember hurricane Katrina and the big shock to the inhabitants of New Orleans in 2005? To a great extent, we could argue that neither the people nor the government were at the capacity to deal with such a disaster. New Orleans was not a resilient city, for it was unable to cope with the magnitude of the hurricane and its aftermath. In fact, it was the city of Houston, Texas, who rescued more than 100,000 refugees stranded in New Orleans without medicine, water, or food. Not all cities in the world are so lucky, however, to have such good neighbors. For example, the horn of Africa is currently suffering from the worst drought in history, and no one has any ideas on dealing with the massive death of livestock, and how to mitigate famine on such a large scale.

Communities should be highly concerned about becoming resilient, especially when faced with an increasingly uncertain world. Impacts such as natural disasters, financial crises, epidemics, political revolt, war, famine, migration, and climate change are real challenges for the 21st century. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has drawn up a list with at least 7 of the challenges for today's world:

- By 2050, climate change is expected to increase the risk of hunger by 10-20% compared to a no-climate change scenario.
- By 2050 we can expect 24 million more malnourished children as a result of climate change. Almost half of this increase, 10

million children, will be in sub-Saharan Africa.

- Between 1980 and 2006 the number of climate-related disasters has quadrupled.
- The number of people affected by climate-related disasters is expected to reach 375 million per year by 2015.
- In 2010, climate-related extreme events and disasters affected some 300 million people, most often in countries which have little capacity to cope.
- With climate change, two thirds of the arable land in Africa could be lost by 2025, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.
- By 2030, climate change could push food prices up by 50-90 percent more than they would otherwise be expected to rise, according to a recent report by Oxfam.

At Profugo, we have the long-term vision to foster sustainable change, but also to create the capacity in our Centers of Development (COD) to handle distress. We hope that the local population attains the means to lift themselves up in a collaborative fashion after natural disasters, financial crises, or in times of political uncertainty.

Allow me to mention at least two ways that we can move toward more sustainable and resilient communities. The first one is to develop social capital through better and more effective organizational schemes. Trust and understanding amongst community members must be enhanced to achieve coordinated actions to address common grievances. Social bonds and solidarity must be strengthened amongst families, so that the village as a whole can move swiftly in response to abrupt changes. Secondly, long term sustainable solutions must be made a priority. How great would it be if our neighbors in Wayanad had a solid source of food so that when grain prices swelled, the kids in the village did not go hungry? How nice would it be if our friends had dependable water sources, regardless of how long the dry season stretched? How wonderful would it be if the village was not restricted to the few hours of electricity provided by the local government? That day, coming soon and with all our help, will be a very nice day.

Upcoming Events & News

January 28 2012, 2-4pm — Café Profugo, 9 Rittenhouse Place, Ardmore, PA

Join us for a discussion with LeeAnn Peterson, a Peace Corps Alumni and member of Profugo's Board of Directors. As a volunteer, she was trained in Community Health and worked with income generation projects in urban and peri-urban environments across Mozambique. She will be speaking about her experience with different income generation projects from rural basketry artisans to a Women's educational center making peanut butter. Refreshments will be served!