

Dear friends of MEDEA e.V.,

This time I would like to write a newsletter and report of my visit to Swaziland. Beginning in mid-February I could visit Swaziland for three weeks, not just as a volunteer, but as a member of the board of MEDEA. So I was able to attend the big handover ceremony of the BMZ project at the Sikhhandza Bantfu school, for which our project partner Tatort - Straßen der Welt e.V. (with the Cologne commissioners) came to Swasiland and spend a week here.

Unfortunately my first days were a bit overshadowed by a small visit to the hospital because of a Salmonella infection. So in my first days I had to rest and we could not do what we planned to do. Since the visit of the Tatort Verein was expected one week after my arrival, we still had to prepare and plan, especially for the big day of the opening ceremony of the school on Friday, 24.02.2017. Thanks to the great MEDEA team on site with Precious, Dawn and Valencia at the side of Gertrud we were able to do the preparatory work well, and I was reasonably fit again in time for the arrival of our guests.



MEDEA team is planting a tree at the Sikhhandza Bantfu school

Gertrud had previously considered a great plan for the visitors to show as much as possible on projects and impressions from Swaziland in the 5 days. But that also meant getting up early and full days with a lot of driving. We could borrow from friends a nice 20 year old VW bus, with which we came to every place even in the bush.



On the road with MEDEA

Our first day started with a visit to the kindergarten and pre-school in Zandondo, where we were able to build the pre-school with dining area to the existing kindergarten with support from Daimler last year (2016). I've already visited the kindergarten in both 2012 and 2014, and the development there is just great. What I liked the most is that most of the kids look really healthy and happy there, and they were very open to us.



Preschool



Children playing

We were there for lunch and then sang and "danced" together with the kids, which was really fun for everyone.



Lunch time



All together dancing and singing

After visiting the preschool, we quickly took the opportunity to show the visitors a small project nearby: a gogo (grandma), for which we built a room in 2016. Just this second impression of the first hours in the Swasi bush has left a lasting impression on everyone. After these very happy and laughing moments with the children, our visitors were able to see for the first time the normal living conditions of the Swasis in the countryside. Although our Gogo was overjoyed and grateful for a solid roof and the 4 walls around her, she still lives in very simple and poor conditions.



Hut of Gogo



Gogo and me

This was our first day - already full of new impressions, but we had not set up a great program for nothing. So we quickly went back to Manzini, where we were invited to a late lunch at Caritas. As Caritas is our local project partner in the two projects we did with the Tatort Verein, there was great interest and joy in getting to know each other live and in color. William Kelly, the director of Caritas, welcomed us warmly and with delicious food. After the meal we were all excited about the previous work and the current state of the projects.

After this packed first day, everyone was overjoyed by a relaxing finish in a Portuguese restaurant. The relaxation was also necessary because the second day was just a little earlier, packed and planned longer ... It was namely the grand opening ceremony of the three new school classes of the Sikhandza Bantfu school !!

As we were told "spontaneously" a few days before the celebration that the Minister of Education of Swaziland would attend the celebration as a "guest of honor", everyone involved got a little bit more excited and the whole event had to start at 8.30 instead of 10 o'clock... Which meant we had to leave Manzini at 6.30am (it had been raining a lot the last few days, so we were a little worried about the last 10km dirt road) and also the kids and parents had to start early on their two hour walk.

So we had a lot of fun when we made it to school despite the muddy road and there were lots of children and some parents of the community gathered there to rehearse the last dances and songs. Even the Minister of Education was on time (which is always a surprise with Swasis). After a small culinary "appetizer" the official process started around 9 o'clock with various speeches and thanks and even more speeches.



Freshly grilled cow, which was slaughtered in honor of the opening ceremony



Opening with local council, board of crime scene, commissioner Tatort, chief of the municipality, minister of education, Gertrud, commissioner Tatort, coworker MEDEA



The 3 new classrooms

After all important people had said something (Education Minister, German representation in Swaziland, Ministry of Education, Headmaster, Bishop of Swaziland (which also blessed the new school classes) and of course MEDEA) the active part could be started. There were various dancing and singing performances by the girls and boys of the school, by the women of the community, and also the children of the "neighboring" school.



This successful event we could then end with a lunch for all. A big and exciting day for the community, for the school and also our project team, MEDEA & Tatort & Caritas, that after less than two years could help this elementary school to grow from 3 to 7 fully equipped school classes as well as a playground and kitchen with dining area. Unfortunately, I have not seen the school before, but I am absolutely impressed by what we have achieved there.



Commissars from Tatort planting a tree



The children at school

Since there is a children's household near the school with which we have been working for two years, we did not miss the opportunity to make a little detour there after the official ceremony. I also did not know the Lukhele children yet, just from many stories. Therefore, I was especially happy to meet the children once in person and to exchange a few words and laughs with them.



First sight on the child-headed household



Four of the Lukhele kids and myself

After these first two days full of different projects we enjoyed the weekend as relaxed "tourists". On Saturday we spend the day in the animal park Mhkaya, with a ride on the big Safari car. On Sunday we visited the Cultural Village, where a traditional Swazi village is built from earlier times and the different places are explained and different dances are performed.



On Safari Tour

On the last day, Monday, we went to the other joint project with the Tatort Verein: the garden project in KamKweli, which we carried out in 2015. Again, we had great concern about the road conditions, as unfortunately the weather was still very rainy. But we also managed that, even our VW bus has mastered unscathed every pothole and every slippery corner! At the garden we were warmly welcomed by the community - in our honor, they just slaughtered a goat which was already hanging on the tree And the fire was turned on!



The welcome at the garden



Inspection of the garden

We could all look at the garden and went together to the 500 m distant waterhole, a river, from which the water for the garden is pumped up.



Walk to the water



MEDEA & commissars in the garden

This walk then developed into a real bushwalk, with many acacias, strange frogs, insects, a lot of hot sun and all kinds of scrub. Again, it was great to see what was done in the middle of the bush and everyone was thrilled! The last day had also a nice ending - an afternoon on the great and very African Manzini market! Although 5 days are far too short for a visit to Swaziland, we could give an impression of Swaziland to our visitors and we could show the work of MEDEA! I'm absolutely fascinated and convinced!

I was able to spend my last days more relaxed with many conversations with Gertrud and our team, planning for the next days and weeks and a bit of holiday like a hiking day and a pool day.

And unfortunately the 3 weeks went by too fast But my next visit will definitely come!

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Ursula Wegener