

College of the Holy Cross  
Meghan Casey  
Vijana vya Vitendo: Chukwani/ Children in Action: Chukwani  
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Zanzibar, Tanzania

**Project Abstract and Mission:** To establish a women's empowerment sports program at the Chukwani School in Zanzibar, Tanzania. This goal will be facilitated through the construction of a football (soccer) field for girls and boys, construction of a net-ball court for females only, and development of community workshops for the encouragement of young women's involvement outside the home in such activities. Together, these components will create a more peaceful society by breaking down entrenched discriminatory attitudes, building relationships between men and women, and improving women's rights to participation and public space in a society where females often suffer from the structural violence of gender inequality and lack of community support.

**Gender Inequality, Sports, and Chukwani:** Zanzibar, Tanzania is a Muslim island located about 40km off the coast of Tanzania in the Indian Ocean. Despite tourism, the society remains conservative, a way of life largely seen in gender dynamics. In Zanzibar, women are undoubtedly in a position unequal to that of men: the Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey cites lack of say in decision-making, early marriage, and domestic abuse as common difficulties faced by young women. The segregation of men and women on a daily basis in Zanzibar exacerbates such problems as it prevents women from participating fully in society, denies them the right to assembly and public space, and blocks potential positive relationships with men. Ultimately, this discord creates discriminatory behaviors and patriarchal power structures that inhibit the existence of full peace between men and women in the home and community. In recent years, this gender dynamic has gradually begun to transform in small but meaningful ways. One such change can be found on the football field where, in certain villages, girls and boys have begun to play the sport together. Another sports-related change is the participation of females in an annual net-ball competition between various villages. Chukwani is a participating village whose single public school, the Chukwani School, serves about 1,800 children ages 7-18. There is no official football field at the school or in the village, and to practice net-ball 2 hours away is not realistic outside of the few competition weeks. In addition, without appropriate spaces and adequate equipment women are often forced to stay inside and sit during physical education classes. Therefore, there are effectively no opportunities for the girls in Chukwani to regularly exercise, integrate recreationally with males, or form an independent network beyond the school or family structure.

**Contacts:** Since September of 2013 while studying abroad in Zanzibar, I have been in close contact with two main partners through meetings on the ground at least once every week or every other week. The first is Khalfan Hassan, the assistant to the Head Teacher of the Chukwani School. The second partner is Ally Semi Ally, Director of Embrace Zanzibar, an NGO located in Stone Town that focuses on children's rights. Both are native to Zanzibar and have been crucial in gaining local support and accomplishing tasks that are more difficult for me as a foreigner, such as knowing where to obtain supplies. Beyond Khalfan and Ally, I have numerous local contacts from my time abroad including professors at the State University of Zanzibar, street vendors, my host family, and school children. All will be indispensable in community ownership of this project as well as in on-the-ground support and sustainability. To ensure high-quality completion of the project, I will reside in Zanzibar for a month with either Mama Shemsa (my host mother) or Ally.

**Project Plan:** The project is three-pronged: construction of a football field, construction of a net-ball court, and development of community workshops/programming. The land does not need to be purchased as it is already owned by the school, and labor will largely be carried out by community volunteers and students.

1. **Football Field:** Work that will be done prior to August 2014 involves clearing out shrubbery, leveling the field area, and planting grass in June 2014. I will maintain close communication but do not need to be present for this preliminary work as I trust Ally and Khalfan to be competent and reliable. Work on the actual field will begin upon my arrival. This involves painting lines and setting up goal-posts and benches.
  - **Goals:** The goal of the field is to provide a space where boys and girls can play the sport together, building relationships to promote more peaceful gender dynamics. A potential concern is that priority will be given to boys and that the field will end up unused by the girls. However, leaders such as Khalfan at the school are committed to preventing this from happening. Several male students have been spoken with as well and support the project's mission of female integration.

2. **Net-ball Court:** This work will involve clearing out shrubbery, leveling the court area, laying down cement, painting lines, and putting up the poles with nets. The shrubbery will be cleared in June 2014 at the same time as the football field, but the rest will take place in August 2014.
  - **Goals:** The goal of the net-ball court is to provide a safe space for female self-expression that is not hindered by male domination. This opportunity has potential to strengthen the female friendships formed on the court as well as instill a sense of team work and collaboration. This court will allow net-ball to turn into a comprehensive year-round program instead of one that takes place simply a few weeks before the inter-village competition.
  
3. **Programming, Workshops, and Cultural Exchange:** This final prong of the project will begin during my time in Zanzibar but will last long after I am gone as the efforts will be continuous.
  - a. Provide equipment such as balls, whistles, pylons, nets, cleats, and ref uniforms. This equipment will be a combination of supplies purchased in Zanzibar and brought from the US.
  - b. Create workshops with the teachers, students, and community regarding the engagement of women in recreational opportunities and the importance of this integration in achieving community peace and success. I will contribute ideas and ensure the planning of such workshops but will not lead them as I believe that the message will be received more seriously and effectively coming from respected locals such as Khalfan or female teachers.
  - c. During the project, a leadership team of females from the school will be installed in order to ensure that the project is by the girls and for the girls. This team will help create sports programming for the school and provide feedback on the workshops.
  - d. Host a celebration in the final day or two of the construction project in which the community will come together for inaugural games, music, and friendship.
  - e. Throughout the entire project, cultural exchange will be key in success. Such exchange will be achieved through daily collaboration, conversation, and relationships.

**Connection to Peace:** This project challenges gender stereotypes and harnesses the potential of sport for women's development. When girls claim public space through the net-ball court, they are able to acquire new interpersonal networks, a sense of individual and group identity, and access to opportunities to develop sports skills such as leadership, teamwork, and communication. Such skills empower them in decision-making and encourage more active participation in school, household, and community life. More balanced gender perspective in these arenas ultimately facilitates a more harmonious and peaceful society. When the two sexes integrate through football, the community will become more accustomed to seeing girls peacefully sharing space with boys. Furthermore, allowing women to build relationships with their male counterparts prompts the two to see each other in new roles as partners and stimulates more peaceful interactions in daily life. This is so in that the formation of equal, functional, and meaningful relationships creates a new environment of respect and understanding which in turn leads to minimized dissension and disputes between individuals and groups. As the UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka has stated, "gender equality is also smart peacebuilding." With 64.2% of the population under 25, now is a crucial window of opportunity for this step in safeguarding peace. This project capitalizes on existing momentum in Zanzibar to catalyze a greater movement in the youth towards a peaceful and free society for all sexes.

**About Me:** I, Meghan Casey, am a junior at Holy Cross. As a self-designed Global Health Studies Major and Africana Studies Concentrator, I have a passion for human rights in health. My journey in East Africa began 2 years ago in Kenya during a program in which I studied Kiswahili and peace development as well as attended a daily internship at a health clinic in the Kibera Slum. I have continued my language study intensively, and am now nearly fluent after my semester in Zanzibar. I plan to combine my on-the-ground relationships, extensive cultural understanding, language skills, and work experience in East Africa to effectively collaborate and complete this project. Being a woman, interning in the maternal ward of the hospital, and living with a huge Zanzibari family for 4 months, I both witnessed and experienced firsthand the absence of peace in gender relations and lack of opportunities that females face in everyday life. However, I can come home to a place of freedom and peace. My sisters, my friends—they cannot. This project is for the Zanzibari girls that I have known and loved, the courage that I have seen in those who break the cultural expectations, and the hope that society can and will be better each day.