

## Tumaini - Passing on Hope

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### *An impression of the work that is done by Streetkids International*

We were told to choose a topic that gets us talking. When I heard that, I immediately knew what I was going to talk about. There's one thing, one experience rather than I am still in the process of working through. And I thought, using this time to talk about it and then also starting a conversation might be therapeutic for me - in a sense.

This year I spent three months in Tanzania, completing the second half of my Fachpraxissemester. But those three months have become so much more than just an internship I got credit points for. In fact, all the requirements I had on the part of university quickly faded into the background and what I experienced was a profound confrontation with myself, an unbelievably intense culture shock - which turned into genuine love for that country and its people. And lastly, I was able to witness and be part of an extraordinary vision and fascinating work that developed out of it. And that's what I want to share with you today.

This picture, by the way, is just representative for a million images that will always stay with me. I can't even begin to describe how emotional, colorful, multi-faceted and precious those months have been. I'll try anyway, but only briefly. The main focus of this speech is going to be the work that is done by Streetkids International. I have come to deeply appreciate it and there's nothing I enjoy more than talking about it, spreading the word and hopefully excite and inspire other people along the way. Because I think a cause that essential deserves nothing less.

For me, personally, the time I spent in Mwanedege was quite challenging - on many levels. Not only was I forced to adjust to a different climate, a different language, different food but a whole other way of living and thinking. I was confronted with a culture that, in almost every way, seemed utterly converse to what I knew, what I was used to: the concept of time, of community and relation, the idea of communication and conflict, all of that did not coincide with the values and approaches I brought with me.

So I started questioning it all, reflecting on what I always believed to be normal or right or true. And I began to realize how narrow and self-involved my perspective actually was even though I had always thought of myself as a rather open, empathic person. I realized how strong and fixed my own opinions were, in any area, be it what I thought good pedagogy would look like, what healthy communication means or even how to live out one's own faith. So I was quite shocked about myself, when I saw more and more clearly, how self-centered I actually was.

Experiencing my own way of judging, feeling and thinking as only one alternative among many others - different, but in their differentness just as valid and true - that turned out to be extremely important to me. I was challenged to change perspectives over and over and over again, dealing with the insecurities that come with that mental and emotional switch. And then I had to ask myself what was still left, what remained out of all the structures I had built on for so long.

With all that chaos going on inside of me, I got one crucial piece of advice. It said: „Check mal mental aus. Schenk Liebe ohne was zu erwarten. Gib einfach.“ So that’s what I tried. I tried to stop focusing on myself and instead to just give and invest in the lives of others with all the warmth and sincerity I could find. And that’s essentially what has blessed me the most.

But let’s move on to the bigger picture.

Streetkids International is a small non-profit organization that has taken on the mission to help the poorest of the poor. It is based in Frankfurt. On-site in Tanzania, they now run four orphanages, a Montessori pre-school as well as a primary school. On top of that, Streetkids is supporting and collaborating with a number of other institutions, also in secondary education. The Call and Vision Secondary School in Mtwara or their partnership with a local craftsmen training center are just examples of how extensive and large-scaled their efforts have become.

The story actually began 20 years ago, at a cocktail-party in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. A local social worker walks up to one of the guests, a German IT-manager, and asks if he wants do do something for her country. They get to talking and the social worker shares about a different side of Africa. As soon as the next day, money is transferred and the first small house rented. That was December 1999. Since then, a lot has changed.

In 2001, the organization Streetkids International was founded and it expanded remarkably over the next two decades. Even today, they continue to grow. In the tiny village of Mwandege, about an hour outside of Dar es Salaam, Streetkids owns two compounds: Tumaini I and Tumaini II. They provide a home and shelter for about sixty children.

I think, for any European who has been brought up halfway protected and cared for, the world those children come from is just a severe shock.

In their short life, most of them have experienced extreme poverty, hunger, neglect and trauma. As orphans they belong to the most vulnerable group of people. Not only are they children and highly dependent on protection and care by others, but

they are at the same time forced to look after themselves. Most of the kids at Tumaini have lost both their parents and oftentimes all other relatives. On a daily basis they faced insecurities and dangers we as fortunately sheltered privileged could never imagine. As orphans, they have no rights and are exposed to poor treatment, misuse of power and horrifying abuse in all its forms.

What gets me the most is the fact that these children didn't do anything. They weren't asked, they weren't able to choose. They're just born into misery without even the slightest chance of what I in my greenness would have called a normal life or even a childhood.

These kids are not born with the privilege to choose; but there are others who are. And it's the selfless effort of those others that can gift these kids the privilege to choose. So that's what Streetkids does. It offers security, warmth, food and clothes but most importantly, it offers a future. And with that hope. That is what Tumaini stands for and what these kids are given - a future and hope.

I don't have words to express what I felt in those moments, when 5-year old Julieti burst into laughter and in her voice I could hear pure joy and the childlike exuberance I thought she would never show. Or when the face of 13-year old Mudi lit up with a beautiful timid smile as we were teasing each other on the soccer field.

Those moments were the ones that stayed with me. And I think, those are the ones that really count.

From the very beginning Streetkids International used an approach that was laid out in the concept of sustainability. The best examples are Aisha and Furaha, two orphans who grew up at Tumaini and are now giving back what they received in running the Montessori pre-school. Aisha got married last year and now Furaha is about to become a lucky bride at her wedding in January. Both of them are genuinely happy, enjoying the life they are able to live now. And they are passing on hope.

The story of Streetkids International is a perfect example of how far the commitment and dedication of an individual can go. It shows what can become of a single idea, and the effort and responsibility a person is willing to take on.

One social worker saw a need. She had the courage to walk up to a complete stranger and to share her vision. One manager let himself be touched by that need and that vision and he made it his own. It was a decision to open up, to listen and to help. And since that night many lives have been changed.

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