



Newsletter: September 2008 Douglas McFalls

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SEPTEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER

It was Friday, August 29. By 11:25 a.m. the delegate from the Swiss Embassy had finished her enthusiastic welcome and the Regional Commissioner of Mtwara completed his push for festival participants to carry the torch of promoting cultural festivals. The Commissioner walked to the stadium floor and began to beat the “opening drum”. Like a great wave of sound, the drums – over 100 of them – began pulsing. Then dancers– over 300 of them – began dancing and for 10 powerful minutes dancers and drummers “performed” their excitement for the First Annual MaKuYa Traditional Performing Arts Festival. It was electrifying! MaKuYa was a reality!

From that point on there were non-stop performances for the next two days by the Makonde, Makua, and Yao, each wonderfully unique in dress and dance. Dancers as old as ninety plus and as young as four performed. I’ve included just a fraction of the wonderful pictures that were taken by friends. I was too busy. It was very exciting, and I have never seen the people of Mtwara so enthusiastic. The performers performed with great passion, and were excited at all they were learning and discovering by dancing together. The performers from the villages were exceedingly grateful and helpful.



In addition to performances we had bandas (palm roofed stalls) where producers of local goods or services could display and sell their wares. We had a banda dedicated to ADEA artisans. Tables, sewing machines and all needed workshop supplies were brought to MaKuYa to give greater exposure to what ADEA has been doing with artisans. One banda was dedicated to traditional life. We brought five elders from the villages to show how traditional baskets were made, blacksmithing was done (using bellows made of gazelle skins) and other traditional activities, like starting a fire without matches. We had traditional clothes, foods and artifacts. To my happy surprise, the locals were very enthusiastic about this. The school children said they had read of such things in books, but never seen them. And the delight of the elders at having people so eager to learn of their knowledge (and feeling appreciated as a result) was personally very satisfying for me.



After the festival, it was encouraging to learn how local people benefited from the event. “I made in two days what I normally make in two months”, said a local tea vender. “I have never booked out my entire guesthouse. These two days of full bookings has allowed me funds to make improvements.” (We rented out 12+ guest houses). “I brought my children to the festival, I told them, this is how we used to dance in the village. We have never had such an event in Mtwara. Two days in not enough”. “If they will do this again next year, I will come from Germany to see this!” a visitor to Mtwara exclaimed. We’ve had nothing but enthusiasm from the visitors about the event! As for the many people who worked the event, it was wonderful to learn of all the mattresses, beds, bicycles and metal roofs that were purchased.



“MaKuYa 2009, More Than Just a Festival”: What the public saw of the festival went brilliantly – but behind the scene we faced many challenges: mostly with service providers and their dishonest dealings and failure to honor contracts, among other things. Mtwara has never seen such an event, and the service providers of this town do not have a strong tradition of honest dealings, nor are they experienced in being professional suppliers. Along with our dream to bring performers again to Mtwara, and expand traditional life education, we plan to do training and instruction to the service providers here. Mtwara has begun to open up with the road from Dar es Salaam nearly paved and more industry moving to the area. Our aim is to help local business understand what it means to work professionally, so that when other businesses from outside the region move to the area, the local businesses will be able to compete.



Also, we'd like to work on a small publication that documents traditional village dance, its meaning and practice. We realize that creating a festival will alter the spirit of dancers who danced in isolation for generations, so it is crucial that we learn what we can as soon as we can.

I am a bit exhausted doing the final report, but excited for the year ahead. Because of the festival's success, I have committed to spend one more year here, if the funding materializes for another festival. Next year's MaKuYa dates are August 28 – 30.

I owe many thanks to the MaKuYa team: Philipo Lulale and Domic Chonde whose collaboration made this festival possible. In addition, funding from Switzerland, the Finnish Embassy, Artumas Africa Foundation and the German Embassy was crucial.

On October 12, I will be visiting my dear friend Peter Gilbert in South Africa. It will be a welcome break! Then I'll be in Kenya with the Maasai, back in Mtwara in November to prepare for the Christmas Makutano Market in Dar es Salaam, then 3 weeks of language school (finally after 5 years!), then...Christmas somewhere...

On September 8th my father passed away from cancer. It is a sad reality for me to come to terms with, but he died at home in the care of my mother and two sisters (and home care). I am so grateful they were there to help. Thank you to those of you who learned this earlier, and were supportive of me. Since I was not able to be there, only time will make his absence more of a reality to me.

I hope your fall is wonderful and your life is rich in the things that matter.

Douglas

