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MSU STUDY ABROAD + TANZANIA PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Jonathan Choti, an assistant professor at Michigan State University, PhD student Tula Ngasala, University of Dar es Salaam faculty Faustin Maganga and Emiliana Mwita, and Sokoine University of Agriculture faculty S.I. Kimera led a group of five MSU students and six Tanzanian students on a study abroad program to northern Tanzania during summer 2016.

The students had a variety of learning opportunities during the project, including two weeks of classes learning the Swahili language and discussing topical issues about Tanzania, participating in a four-day homestay experience, researching agriculture and animal health with community members in Naitolia Village, and interviewing girls, women, and men about reproductive health and changes associated with adolescence.

The program emphasized water access and quality, and alternative sources of livelihood in the community. Students completed research on water scarcity and quality of village water sources, and educated school children on the relationship between water quality and health. The education also covered physical and cognitive changes during puberty, and training for older girls on how to make sanitary pads using local materials.

The study abroad program, which grew out of an existing project known as the Tanzania Partnership Program (TPP), challenges students to think of practical ways to solve issues facing rural communities. It also gives students an opportunity to build relationships and challenge their assumptions and stereotypes about sustainable and international development.

“If I had to summarize the experience in one word, I’d choose ‘fulfilling,’” said Alondra Alvizo, a participant in the 2016 study abroad program. “Being abroad taught me a ton about the world, but even more about myself.”

ABOUT THE TANZANIA PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Established by MSU’s International Studies and Programs, and generously funded by Gerald A. and Karen A. Kolschowsky, TPP works to improve the overall well-being of communities in Tanzania. TPP has ongoing projects in Naitolia Village in the north and Milola in the south.

The majority of Tanzanians live in rural areas, where they face numerous obstacles, including a lack of access to education and clean water. Through this program, MSU is applying a multidisciplinary, multi-partner approach to these development challenges, forging close connections with local partners to help them develop truly sustainable communities.

PROGRAM LEADERS

Jonathan Choti has a PhD linguistics from MSU and is an assistant professor of African Languages and Linguistics in the Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian, and African Languages. He teaches the Swahili language and courses in the Integrative Arts and Humanities program and College of Arts and Letters that focus on African cultures, languages, and literature. He was also the faculty leader of the TPP study abroad program in 2015. He obtained his master's degree in English language and linguistics, and a bachelor's degree in sociology, English, and Swahili from Egerton University, Kenya. He has been a high school Swahili and English teacher in Kenya, a management communication lecturer at Kenya's School of Government and a linguistics lecturer at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya. Choti is a member of a number of professional organizations such as Association of Contemporary African Linguists, National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages, African language Teachers' Association, Chama cha Ukuzaji Kiswahili Duniani, and Kenya Scholars and Studies Association. Choti's research interests focus on the phonology of Bantu languages and sociolinguistics (the relationship between language and society).

Tula Ngasala is a third-year PhD student in the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department. She grew up in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where she received her bachelor's and master's degrees in civil and water resources engineering from the University of Dar es Salaam in 2005 and 2007, respectively. Tula Ngasala has been involved in different civil engineering and water supply projects including design and construction of water supply systems, water storage structures, sanitation facilities, civil and highway structures in urban and rural areas of Dar es Salaam. Before she started her doctoral program at MSU, she worked for MMK Engineering Consulting Company as Civil Engineer and for Natural Resources Conservation Services at the United States Department of Agriculture as a water resources engineer. She has been involved in different community projects focusing on water quality analysis, sanitation improvement and conservation services in Dar es Salaam and Michigan. Tula is currently working as a graduate assistant in the department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. She was also assistant program leader of the TPP study abroad program in Tanzania in 2015. Her PhD research focuses on water scarcity analysis and water quality improvement through proper design and construction of water supply systems and sanitation facilities in urban and rural areas of Tanzania.

KOLSCHOWSKY SCHOLARS

David Ravitz, Junior, Environmental Engineering

"I would not have the same mindset on the world if it wasn't for TPP. After the experiences I have had, my passion for becoming an environmental engineer was re-invigorated. Without my experience with TPP, I would not be helping people the way that I am today. I am very grateful for the countless opportunities that they have presented to me."

Alexander Ray, Junior, James Madison College

"My study abroad experience has impacted my life in unprecedented ways. Before the program, I was unsure which way my life was headed. But thanks to the TPP program I have found my true passion while having the time of my life. The adventures, relationships, and knowledge I've gained on this study abroad will stick with me for the rest of my life. There are no words that can capture my level of gratitude for this opportunity and redefining experience."

Carly Cohen, Environmental Engineering & Environmental and Sustainability Studies

"I am incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to live in another country and work with students from universities in Tanzania. It was truly amazing to witness how each group was able to help the school and community enrich and better their lives. This trip was truly a life changing experience and reinforced my gratitude for everything I have. The time that I have spent here as well as the friends that I have made will always have a special place in my heart."

Megan Villone, Junior, Global and Area Studies

"I feel like this program has helped me grow as a student because I have never done research that includes field work. I have now learned how to do that as well as how to present it. I have been surrounded by so much diversity and intelligence. This program has also shown that the hard work I put into school can have a positive impact on others with the ideas I have to offer. It has gotten me so excited to apply for internships and to find organizations that are like TPP."

Alondra Alvizo, Junior, Agribusiness Management

"Studying abroad in Tanzania helped me reshape my perception of the world I am a part of. I felt like I was part of something so much greater than the busy day to day life I live as a Spartan at Michigan State. If I had to summarize the experience in one word, I'd choose 'fulfilling.' Being abroad taught me a ton about the world, but even more about myself."