

Tanzania Trip # 3

Feb. 19th 2009



I just returned from Africa, we concluded the filming for our Wheels 4 Villages Film project. We have now been there three times over the past year to document the impact bikes have on this area around Ugweno in the Northern Pare Mountains.

The film will be released in the summer 2009.

On this trip, Aaron Lutze came along as the cameraman who will also edit the film, together with Carmen and myself.

We distributed another 52 bicycles, which gives us now a total of 135 bikes that have been distributed in this area by Wheels 4 Life.

We also opened up 2 bike & repair shops in the area, with the help from the guys from the Tretlager Bike Shop in Winterthur, Switzerland, who raised enough money to buy a bunch of spare-parts, tools and a welding kit. Some of the money went into the construction of a brick building, although most of the costs for the building were donated by local volunteers who had received bikes from us, and from the people of the Nyotastar Center in Kivisini.

The second bike shop will be operated at Joseph Berekeli Jr.'s house in Toloha. He lives in a secure building and one of his rooms will serve as the bike shop. His shop is smaller and received less inventory than the Kivisini shop. However, the people in

Toloha are in desperate need for a bike shop since their village is located very remote and far from any shops. The moment we opened the shop people were buying things.

The plan is that these shops shall support themselves from the revenue they will generate, which means the shop keepers will earn a little income for their services and are supposed to buy more spare-parts with the money they made once their inventory gets low.

It was agreed that Aminelli, who is the mechanic we hired one year ago to look after the bikes we have distributed and who is also the caretaker of the Nyotastar Center, will be paid approx. US\$ 30 each month for running the shop and for his mechanical services. We also agreed to generate a career opportunity for Prefa, a 17 year old orphan who lives at the orphanage, and who has helped Aminelli with his work. As long as the bike shop is profitable we will pay him approx. US\$ 20 each month, and if things work out, we promised him a promotion and we would teach him to become a welder in the future.

When we first arrived in Dar es Salam, we went straight to a bike wholesaler to buy all the parts for the shop as well as 28 bikes, 4 of them as shop inventory and 24 of them were distributed by us to people in need of mobility..

We also bought another 25 bikes from our friends at World Vision, who had extra inventory of the "World Bicycle Relief" bikes in their warehouse in Arusha. Part of our project is to try out different kind of bike models to learn which ones work and which one don't work or are too expensive. The "World Bicycle Relief" bike is a typical African bike, designed with some more heavy duty and higher quality parts than the bikes which are usually available in Africa. They come with stronger wheels, frame and carrier-racks, they also have coaster-brakes and no unnecessary parts. The only drawback is the price of \$ 131.- , usually we pay approx. \$ 80 – 100 for a bike in Tanzania.

Thank you to World Vision and World Bicycle Relief for cooperating with us.

Carmen painted a beautiful sign for the bike shop, from a blank of wood we received from one of our bike recipients who is wood cuter.

We organized the grand opening of the Kivisini shop and hired a cook to make a simple meal for about 200 people. Many people from Kivisini but also from the neighboring villages came, as well as many of the people who had received a bike from us previously and many of the pastors and other partner who are helping us distribute the bikes. It was a wonderful day.

Elvida and Victor, who founded the Nyotastar Center, were also present. Without their help and support we could have not done this project or get the bike shops organized.

It was also fantastic to see how many of the bikes we had given out in the past, had really improved the lives of those people and their families; and how many of the bikes are being used by multiple people and for multiple tasks. We followed some of the people around, capturing their daily lives and how they use the bikes.

But we also learned that the infrastructure is as important as the bikes themselves. People need to be educated, not only how the bikes can help them improve their lives, income, careers, healthcare, etc....., but they also need to learn to look after their bikes. Some bikes we found in terrible condition, while others maintained their bikes very well. We also learned that some people are so poor, that they cannot even afford any spare-parts.

Taking also into consideration other factors like corruption and greed, we learned that it can be extremely difficult to ensure everybody who supports us, that the bikes really end up in the right hands. As one can imagine, everybody in Africa would like to get a free bike, if they need one or not; or whether they fulfill our criteria's to receive one or not. I think Wheels 4 Life chose the right method of distributing bikes in small quantities, where we can overlook all the projects and thoroughly consider every individual who receives a bike. I don't know how the bike organizations can pass out high quantities of any kind of aid, and being sure it really ends up where its really needed.

One also needs to understand that there are many different levels of poverty in the Third World. For example South Africa (I'm not even sure if its considered a Third World country) seems like paradise in comparison to Tanzania in terms of development and also standards of living. Wheels 4 Life caters to the poorest of the poor, to give them mobility and a chance to better their lives or help them break out of the vicious circle of poverty. We also supply people with bikes who help the poorest of the poor, like healthcare workers, teachers or missionaries.

There are millions of people who could greatly benefit from a bicycle, our mission is far from over and we continue to need your help as well.

Thank you.

Hans Rey

All photos by Carmen Freeman



Our new shop under construction, with the help of the locals.



The Grand Opening of our first Wheels 4 Life Bike shop





This is Joseph Jr. how is running our second bike shop in Toloha, out of his own house.





Aaron Lutze our cameraman and supporter, handing out the school supplies he brought with him from the Waupaca students in Wisconsin.



Our bikes in action









“Jumbo Wheels 4 Life – I could use a bike as well!”



This is one of the bikes we bought from World Vision, our friends from World Bicycle Relief are selling these bikes in Tanzania. They are stronger than the standard bikes.





We are open for business



Check out this homemade, belt-driven grinding wheel

