# DNS Zambia Trio

*First period report: Liga, Andras, Vali*
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## Computer Work

So you go from Europe to Africa thinking about living in the great savannah wilderness with some remote villages around. And you find yourself in the middle of high grass and trees, everything green, just a village house here and there, surrounded by mountains at a few hours distance. But you are working with computers all day.

That's how our volunteer story in Zambia starts. Mkushi College of Education was started by DAPP to provide teachers for rural areas. Zambia has one of the youngest and fastest growing populations in the world - half of its entire people are 17 years young or younger – and it needs an ever growing number of schools and teachers, especially in its rural areas.

The College of Education is placed 10 km away from Mkushi on a red dust road cutting through the high grass called by the locals "bush". The local people are mostly farmers so corn fields replaced the bush here and there. As your car bumps across a river you see more trees and bush, corn fields, a few houses, directions signs for three churches and one school. Plus the sign board for Mkushi College of Education.

Here it used to be a Farmer's Club project which was renovated and expanded into a campus, the middle-of-the-bush-in-Zambia version. 44 young men and women study here for three years before receiving a Primary Teaching Diploma from the Ministry of Education. Then they go to be teachers in rural areas. As part of the facilities we found two classrooms equipped with a total of 42 computers. So our first task was to "fix them".

It turned out that only 24 are working, the rest being damaged by power fluctuations, the worst enemy of electronics in Zambia. We labeled all computers with ID numbers, and set up the working ones. Almost all were filled with viruses on both partitions and boot sectors. So we had to clean the boot sectors, reinstall operating systems, software, and learning materials. The last software we set up is DeepFreeze, a utility used by internet cafés to make their computers immune to viruses, spyware, system errors, tampering with system settings, deleting system files,

etc. So the computers were ready to welcome our inexperienced students who couldn't wait to download an .mp3.exe file from some shady website.

We also set up the network, updated the server software, installed the latest version of DMM on the server and created user profiles for each students to access their DMM materials.

Two weeks later the computer network was bulletproof and running with minimal maintenance needs. We also set up a thorough documentation about the software and hardware state of each computer, the network and server configuration and a walk through for common maintenance actions. We update this documentation as we go. This ensures that future volunteers will need only a few hours reading our documentation to know everything about the computer system here, instead of wasting days investigating each computer and particular aspect. This will help with continuity from one generation of volunteers to another.

We are also providing maintenance for the staff's laptops. Almost every day someone needs help with something, from small things like getting a music player to crashed systems. Most of the times systems are badly messed up. While many people here are comfortable operating a computer, very few know how to reinstall a Windows, for example.

Getting back to our students, after setting up the network we started computer classes. First we gave the students a questionnaire about their computer experience. On this base we divided them in two groups: almost half of the students never used a computer before [Group 1], while the other half had a beginner/intermediate experience level [Group 2]. The problem is that we only have 24 working computers, while there are 44 students.

First lesson was a theoretical introduction to computers, describing the main hardware and software components. This lesson was useful for learning some basic key words but sure enough the students were anxious to use the computers.

On the second and third lesson we asked the 'never-touched-a-computer-before' group to operate the computers with the help of one friend who had some experience. Then we assigned them some basic task such as creating a folder with a specific name, navigating in folders, creating a Microsoft Word document, typing, copying documents, and deleting documents. This was a successful exercise as everyone in Group 1 got in less than two hours the basic ability to operate

a computer. The future teachers in Group 2 successfully assisted their colleagues. It was necessary at this stage for Group 1 to have constant assistance so we used the teaching skills of the students in Group 2.

We also expected that more experienced students will help the beginner colleagues at any time in the future, which indeed happens, helping to close the gap between their knowledge levels.

For the fourth lessons we introduced both groups to the online interactive learning module. They had a few sessions of study and resolving tasks using this learning module. The students showed great collaboration skills and resolved most difficulties by helping among themselves.

Apart from lessons we made one computer laboratory available throughout the day, functioning like an internet club. Students can come here whenever they have time to browse and learn. As I'm writing this text one of the students, Shadrik, is using a computer next to me researching about language learning on a resource website of Cambridge University. He never clicked a mouse before 3 weeks ago.

During the next classes we introduced the students to relevant online services. Our goal with computer training is to give them the ability to find any information and learn anything that interests them using the internet. A secondary goal is to train the Computer Functional Group so during the next three years they spend at the college these students will be able to maintain the computers network themselves.

Currently the students are out on holiday and will return next week. We should resume the computer classes then. In the mean time we continue to provide maintenance for the staff.

A good idea is to start computer classes for people in the nearby community, as some of them have computers but don't know much about using them. We could ask a small price for the lessons. This budget can be used to improve the internet club classroom. But for now the priority is planning the bus travel.

## Planning the Big Bus Travel

During the last week we got together with the staff the college and started planning the travel. We have taken on planning the route. We chose to go through Malawi, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, then back to Zambia near Victoria Falls. We are checking the locations of Humana Projects we can visit and which can host us along the route. Also contacting other organizations, businesses, mines, schools and universities, national parks, museums, etc. for arranging visits.

We are doing all this according to the Budget which we have received from Zimbabwe. Another task is do double check the budget with the actual prices of items in the countries we're going through. The single problem worth mentioning is that the Budget includes a group traveling with the bus and a second group traveling with the train to Tanzania only. This obviously creates some problems but I'm not going into that now. The bus will arrive to Mkushi any day now and then we'll take further decisions together with the staff.

## Power Structures in Zambia

Have you ever wondered how the people in Zambia see us, the Europeans, or simply white people as they call us? It is strange to be called European or even muzungu – meaning white face in Bemba language. However we are also generalizing and stereotyping Africa most of the time we use this term to refer to 55 countries with thousands of distinct tribe ethnicities and languages. I heard many people who visited just one single country on this huge continent talking of how much they know about AFRICA.

So the idea I got is that people here - in Mkushi, Central Province, Zambia - think that we, white people, are more knowledgeable and we can and should show them what and how to do. Europe is the model of development and civilization Zambia should follow. I get this idea speaking with students, hearing from staff and a delegation from the Ministry of Education of Zambia. Other

DI's confirmed they felt the same way. One DI had a struggle to stop people from calling him "boss", for example. The rural communities expect the "rich" muzungu will give them money, or chickens, or mosquito nets, or whatever.

We enforced the perception of paradise-western-world by showing pictures of towering skyscrapers shining in the night, by telling stories about cities, cars, planes, entertainment. People here know nothing about the historic and present injustice perpetuated by the western governments. They are unaware of the dark side of foreign aid when it creates dependency and strengthens colonial power structures. Just like everyone in the world, they don't see how the western societies obsessed with development became blind to real human needs.

No, in this part of Africa, Europe is the model of rightness. I can see the students here comparing Zambia with Europe – with the romantic image they have about Europe – and this creates a feeling of lacking and being inadequate. "We think we've got to look to Europe for standards, to America for help and development".[1]

It can be so after 60 years of British rule. After the Christian missionaries thoroughly indoctrinated 87% of the population they even pray to a white God. Now the British are still here, the Christian churches outnumber schools a few times over and there is a wealth of active foreign aid organizations.

DAPP is doing a lot of work here. And yet DAPP is run by one Danish woman – the country manager – and everyone else is Zambian. I could see while visiting the office in Lusaka and while living at the NHQ in Ndola that people are really working. Here at the college I can see bright, hardworking and open minded students who will do a lot of good in the communities where they will be teachers.

So I dislike this mindset that we can come here and tell people what and how to do. Unless you manage to transfer some capacity building skills the change is not meaningful or sustainable. But it will enforce the wrong power balance which places the white foreigner providing aid above the local people. Sure, there are a lot of things we can share with the people here and we are doing this every day. But I believe it is important to step lightly. Develop the abilities of our students in

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[1] http://www.povertycure.org/issues/paternalism

a way which builds confidence in them. How to help without enforcing the wrong power balance? How to make people look away from the western "model" and look into themselves, to their own resources and strengths? They should be proud of who they are.

## Meeting the Local Community

During the last weeks we made visits to villages around the school. People are friendly and welcoming. They always ask us to come again. Apart from visiting families we have also attended church services and went to a wedding. I will write a detailed review of these experiences in the next report, as it is still an ongoing investigation and I'm trying not to draw any conclusions yet.

There are still many visits we need to make in the community to achieve the two goals we follow with this activity.

One goal is to learn about their culture, their way of life, their ideas. This society is changing fast. Christianity already wiped out their traditional culture and traditions. The consumerist society is coming in strong and people are unsatisfied over irrelevant things like not having an Iphone. In this context we feel compelled to learn about these people's culture while it is still different from ours.

Second goal is to reveal the strengths of the community. For example the Jehova's Witnesses Church is holding twice per week classes for children who do not afford government school. This is a brilliant idea and completely sustainable. We're planning to attend these lessons and see how we can improve this strength. Another strength is farming, which seems to be more developed in this area of Zambia. We're planning to investigate what makes farming more successful in this area and how can be improved further. To be honest we know little about farming. But we believe people are not much aware of their own strengths so making it clear to them can be a first step to improvement. Water and sanitation, access to education and healthcare, other income generating activities are also up for investigation. Of course we're also noticing weaknesses – alcohol consumption is one – but a strengths based approach is probably better in this situation. So let's bring out the strengths!

## Current Situation and Future Plans

Right now we're getting ready to leave the NHQ in Ndola. We have to come here every month to extend our visa. Is takes time and effort but it gives us the chance to meet other DI's and learn about the city.

Liga had malaria a few weeks ago but it wasn't so bad. Vali just had it now. He had to stay one night in a hospital with quinine dripping in his veins. Andras is planning to get malaria soon. We want to praise the DAPP staff on their serious care about our health. They are always quick to take us to the best private hospitals and clinics and thanks to them we feel safe here.

In the future we'll continue working with computers as described above.

There is partnership related work that needs to be done in Lusaka and a graduation ceremony to be organized at the college. We shall contribute on both.

Planning the trip is a priority so we will continue together with Kennedy, our project leader.

As time allows us we'll continue learning about the local community strengths, as described above.

During our visits in the community we became acquainted with a group of kids who used to learn with the previous DIs. We'll start activities with them as soon as we go back to Mkushi. It's good to ensure continuity for this project.

Finally, we haven't attached any pictures to this document to make it streamlined for reading. Plus it would be hard to choose from so many good photos. Please go to facebook.com/africaishappynow where you'll find a few Zambian albums with captioned images. If an image is worth 1000 words then an image with a caption is worth the complete story behind it.

We send you many greetings from Zambia. And we do miss Norway! Some smoked salmon with baked potatoes and a pinch of lemon like Janos makes it would be great instead of shima every day. But we shall continue to enjoy Zambia!