

HIGHER EDUCATION WORKING IN AFRICA, THE OPPORTUNITIES AND THE CHALLENGES! ZAMBIA – ‘THE REAL AFRICA’

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Context

Zambia has a population of 10.2 million people. The country is landlocked and borders on seven countries and, whilst some of its neighbours have the potential to negatively impact on Zambia to date, this has been minimal. The Zambian people believe their country is evidence of the ‘real Africa’. It boasts among its attributes the world’s largest waterfall, the Zambezi River, breath-taking lakes and wetlands, as well as an abundance of wildlife. More importantly, they lay claim to the fact that Zambia is one of the most peaceful countries in the world and that, as a race, they are generally a friendly people.

Whilst its borders may remain secure, Zambia continues to face serious internal problems. Low mineral prices have meant that the main industry centred on the copper mines has hit on hard times. At the same time oil prices have increased, industrialisation has been slow to develop and the country is over-reliant on imports. Children are meant to attend school at either six or seven, but many never start until 9 years of age. Many children never make it to secondary school due to distances of travel and the costs of secondary education. 83% of the Zambian population are described as poor, with 4 in 5 Zambians living on less than 2 dollars per day.

The biggest threat to the Zambian way of life however is centred on HIV/Aids. In 2001 1.2 million Zambians were living with Aids. In the same year 120,000 died from Aids-related illnesses. 29% of women attending antenatal clinics are HIV-positive, and death in child birth is estimated at 1 in 10. Life expectancy in Zambia is only 37 years.

Learning about sport development in Zambia

The author first visited Lusaka, the capital, in May 2004 with the remit of leading the first-ever national conference on sport and physical education. The trip included visits to local schools, the University of Zambia, national sports facilities and sport development projects out in the compounds. The conference was run by Sport in Action, which has ten full time staff fronted by an Executive Director, Clemente Chileshe, with additional voluntary support recruited from the communities. Its strategy covers both sport development and social development through sport, and is centred on a series of projects in the community and at their headquarters

Its day-to-day work is at the delivery end of sport and traditional games in their projects and in schools. Its work also covers delivering workshops centred on coaching trainers for sport, self empowerment through sport and sport management. The delivery of festivals centred on sport, traditional games, health and fitness and multi-sport youth camps is also a key part of the work. All of these strands include education about HIV/AIDS, child rights and substance abuse. Finally, Sport in Action has a key advocacy role around sport and recreation facilities for children, girls’ participation in sport, and abuse of girls and boys in sport.

Another visit was undertaken by the author in June 2005 where knowledge and understanding was further developed. Visits this time included three new project sites: the National Sport Centre, a government school, the University of Zambia, and Lusaka hospital (with seven wards for HIV/AIDS patients). Meetings were also held with the Sport in Action team, the Permanent Secretary for Sport, Youth and Child Development, the Director of the National Sport Council, and the newly formed sport network that draws together all key partners in sport.

What are the messages facing those who might wish to help?

The Zambian people are delightful and the Sport in Action full-time team and volunteers do a remarkable job in nearly impossible circumstances. They are marvellous deliverers in the field, but

facilities are very run down and equipment is in short supply. They survive largely on aid from other countries, although they generate internal income from some of their delivery. Whilst they focus on sport and traditional games, their underlying message is centred on HIV/Aids. They are a dedicated team who need help, and the author believes that Higher Education in Europe should play a key role in helping them become even more successful in assisting with the fight against Aids as well as in developing sport.

Support can come in many forms

Student support could be centred on placement of students for 4-6 week blocks, dissertation projects evaluating work and planning, and some limited academic exchanges.

University support could involve bringing key staff to UK, training staff on the ground, and secondment of staff from the UK to aid planning and monitoring support for sport development and disability sport; also equipment is desperately needed as is sports clothing, particularly for staff.

Wider support is a need for basic equipment for the Sport in Action centre, and there is a need develop the HQ base further with a hard play area for basketball (costing£2,000) and a conference/education centre (£6,000).

References

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