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SUMMARY OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

■ General Developments

March saw a very short-lived influx of volunteers to the micro-finance group. Both Kristal and Pia arrived and left within the month. Although only here for a short time, both volunteers were able to quickly become acclimated and understand the different aspects of the micro finance project, which translated to them both being able to effectively contribute. However, following their departures, and Ainsley's imminent one, this project will only have one volunteer in April.

One question we came up against in March is the issue of how to handle groups that finish their fifth loan but do not all necessarily have the capability to be successfully independent. Even the ones that could become independent could also still gain a lot from continuing to work with us. This is an issue that has yet to be resolved with a definitive answer.

■ Group Meetings

Group meetings have been constant and successful in March. We have had good attendance across the board. The new members are showing up regularly and seem eager to participate and learn. However, rainy season has started this past week. Heavy rain has been and continues to be very strongly correlated with absences from meetings, so we hope to convey to all the group members in the coming week that rain is no excuse for not showing up.

Many group meetings have consisted of discourse about the possibility of a fifth loan and how the members would use the loan money. Through these discussions, the women are starting to think more in depth about the future of their businesses in a strategic manner. We are still struggling with the concept of realistic projections for businesses but we remain optimistic.

■ Training

In March, we had two important trainings. The first was a general bookkeeping training that, as opposed to focusing on the math aspect, focused on understanding it conceptually. We realised that a huge majority of the women were going through the motions of bookkeeping without understanding the reasons why they were doing it or the idea behind it. We conducted conversation-based seminars that covered what to include in expenses and income and what the meaning of your ending balance is. We taught them that if they start with an accurate number representing their cash-in-hand at the time, and include every expense and income, they will end with an accurate number representing their cash.



A group of local Tanzanian women involved in the micro-finance project.

The second training was a marketing training session focused on “the four Ps” of marketing: price, place, product and promotion. This training was devised by Pia. We did this training with every group for one week, encouraging conversation and thought about the topics we were covering. The following week, we asked the groups for feedback.

■ Business Visits

As usual, we continued doing a business visit to a member of each group after the training session concluded. One huge success with these visits was finally seeing Elinipa's products, which are solar panels. As she does not have a place of business but instead sells door-to-door, seeing the products did suffice, and was quite helpful because it sparked a long conversation about the different directions in which she could take her business in the future. This was great because doing a business visit with her had been on our calendar for the past three months, so finally getting it done was nice. We also visited Vicky's shop, which is another one we hadn't visited for a long time as it is a one-hour hike to get there.

Upon arriving, we were pleasantly surprised to see that she was doing very well, and had internalised a lot of the lessons that Pia's training had covered. She is now selling gasoline, as no one had access to it up by her village. She also has a solar panel, and as there is no electricity in her village, she basically has a monopoly on electricity, so people pay her to charge their phones.

During the first week the volunteers were busy with the networking event and International Women's Day. The volunteers have since concentrated on further bookkeeping and English training, along with marketing training and cost per unit analysis.

LOAN PORTFOLIO

GROUP	NO. WOMEN	ISSUE DATE	TOTAL LOAN VALUE (TSH)	REPAYMENT 31.03.2015	DEFAULTS	OUTSTANDING BALANCE @ 01.04.2015
Chemchem	9	9 loans, 26th January	1,800,000	987,500	0	812,500
Tupendane	7	7 loans, 21st October	2,700,000	2,608,000	0	92,000
Ikusura	8	8 loans, 21st October	4,000,000	4,000,000	0	0
CHE	9	6 loans, 20th August 3 loans, 23rd July	3,750,000	3,750,000	0	0
Tunaweza	9	9 loans, 27th November	1,800,000	1,000,000	0	800,000
Amani	7	7 loans, 13th March	3,700,000	296,000	0	3,404,000
Mshikamano	7	5 loans, 13th March	1,300,000	131,000	0	3,569,000
TOTAL	56	51 Active Loans	19,050,000	12,772,500	0	6,277,500
Available Cash						
Next Capital Required						4,000,000

MONTHLY ACHIEVEMENTS

■ Networking Event

This month saw the second networking event which all groups were invited to attend. We had speakers from Inherit Your Rights talking about a variety of legal issues including property rights and human rights. The women were also given the opportunity to talk one-on-one with the lawyers if they had any issues they wanted to raise. We also had a talk from Dr Jackson covering health, nutrition and family planning. Again, the women seemed to enjoy the talk and spoke to him after. The final talk was from Margaret in ChemChem, she discussed how to raise local chickens, the other women had plenty of questions and seemed very interested, so there is a chance we will see an increase in chickens around the groups.

■ Loans

This month saw the end of Ikusura's loan so we have now collected new loan applications and will assess whether

we continue with new loans. They have completed their five loans, so future loans will need to be considered and discussed carefully

We also gave out new loans to the Amani group. Most of the women purchased pigs which they will sell for meat in the future, so there will be some wait before we see the return on this.

Mshikamano also received new loans. In this case, we added three new group members to the loan portfolio on their first loan, while the original two members received a sixth loan.

■ Training

We have continued refreshing the ladies on expenses and income so that they record correctly in the books. This has shown us that there is still some work to be done as they are often surprised by how much they have to record.

Pia has been running Marketing training and has the women think about what they can do to their business in order to improve it and gain more customers. Some women have some great ideas which we hope will be implemented soon.

■ Ikasura Volunteer Visit

This month we had the women of Ikusura host a Projects Abroad social night. This involved a tour of their farm with explanations of all the eco-friendly ways the farm is run. They were then given a meal cooked by the women. Overall, it seemed to be a successful evening and will hopefully be repeated in the future.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

We will continue stressing the importance of bookkeeping, which includes refresher training on revenue and expenses and cost-per-unit exercises. To help the women better understand cost-per-unit exercises, we will train on specific businesses including cost analysis on raising chickens/pigs and making chapati/batiks/soap/jewellery. We will provide exercises with charts and ask women to calculate and fill in numbers themselves. One main goal is to ensure that women understand not only how to calculate numbers for bookkeeping but the concept and meaning behind it too.

Over the next several months, we will also keep building on English training, providing flash cards and picture-with-word exercises for women who cannot read. We will also urge members that understand bookkeeping well to help train other women in their groups.



Micro-finance volunteers experience local food at their placement in Tanzania.

Another future development is finding the next step for women moving past the fifth loan, which means preparing them adequately to handle loans from a larger organisation, if that is possible. Most women, however, will not have the assets/security to approach larger organisations or banks for loans – for these women, we evaluate financial health after their fifth loans are completed, to see what improvements in understanding they have developed. Eventually, the goal is to urge groups of women to create their own “banks” and run a regimented system amongst themselves.

For all groups, we are continually looking to increase the size of the market for their products and advertise as much as we can, whether that is bringing products for display at the PA office or consulting them on ways to diversify locations for sales.

The marketing website (<http://sokonitanzania.weebly.com/>) will be updated and publicised to the PA Facebook page to aid these efforts. Also, after conducting marketing training this month (led by Pia), we will be conducting discussions with all the groups and soliciting feedback on what they think about product, pricing, placement, and promotion to see how each woman improves her business over time.

■ Group-specific Future Developments

Chemchem – The cake mix business (group activity proposal) got off to a slow start; the women mentioned that the mixes had trouble selling, as people questioned what was in the mix. They will try selling on the street and showcasing the cakes as opposed to simply marketing by word of mouth and neighbours. The women have also discussed potentially diversifying products on primary businesses, so we will consult on these over time; businesses discussed are juice, batik clothes, and food.

Tupendane – This group has recently attended more meetings and has been more active than usual, which is encouraging. However, the PA team has noted that a number of the women are no longer in need of loans, so the plan to replace Tupendane with another group is still in place.

Ikusura – They have been hosting the networking event and the farm excursion. Both were very well planned, including lots of food and drinks. We haven't had much time for the trainings in the first two weeks, but have been focusing on checking their books and doing marketing training which we will continue.

CHE – Right now, we are in the process of evaluating applications for CHE's fifth loans, which has slowed because of reduced attendance at meetings and the need for continued bookkeeping training. They have expressed a continued interest in soap training, so we are trying to facilitate a date and time for the event.

Tunaweza – There is a continued need to train the Tunaweza group on bookkeeping concepts, although they are in a relatively good position given that the group is only on their second loan.

Mshikamano – We have decided to stick with total cash-on-hand amounts for bookkeeping for all groups, which means we will need to retrain Mshikamano. Active business visits will continue to help the women grow their markets.

Amani — The group is doing fine and their businesses are growing. According to business visits, they are even better than what appears on the bookkeeping. We have constant training for Angelina to teach her the alphabet and we see she has been practicing. We do have a few problems with the chairwoman: she is not doing bookkeeping properly and doesn't want to say where the money is from. We have still been "obliged" to give her the loan but said we would take it back if she doesn't commit.

Agape — We are still at the beginning of the process: some women only show up once, expecting to immediately receive the money, while others are putting effort into their bookkeeping even though they still don't really understand why they are doing it. We have been doing bookkeeping and marketing training with them.