

LIFE IN TANZANIA

OPERATION UPENDO®, INC.

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A LOOK AT THE SOUTHEAST

Last week immediately after my retreat I traveled southeast to Mahenge, a town located high up in the mountains. It was shake, rattle, and roll all the way as the bus was old and rickety. But the view was awesome and reminded me of Hawaii, at least the part that I've seen. Mahenge is rain forest like—lusciously green and misty at times.

Like Sheep without a Shepherd

I traveled to Mahenge to assess the situation there concerning persons with epilepsy and leprosy. I visited two campsites—the center for people with epilepsy and the center for people with leprosy. Some people are afflicted with both diseases.

The camp for persons with **epilepsy** is home to approximately 20 families, and some time ago the caregiver and nurse abandoned the camp and left the people on their own. The caregiver's house is vacant and the dispensary has been closed (both are located on site). The camp for persons with epilepsy is not under control and the residents seemed to me like sheep without a shepherd. Needless to say they were

very happy to see me and thought I was the replacement. I was so touched by their plight I have to confess that I did consider staying. The residents were hungry and I observed that they had no food and, of course, I was concerned, but I was informed, however, that towards the end of last month they were provided with food but it wasn't clear how much so I don't know why they were out of provisions. I know that without a shepherd the people will abuse the situation so they may have shared their food with family and or friends living in the surrounding area who had none or they may have sold some of the staples to buy other things needed; it happens.

The residents who are epileptic are on medication but now they have to travel a long way for their meds or to be treated for other illnesses.

Inclusive Development

The persons with **leprosy** are no longer contagious as they have been cured of the disease but they suffer from the resulting severe deformities or amputations. The residents remain at the center because they have not been integrated back into the communities; partly because the communities

may not allow them to return since they don't understand the disease and some still believe it's a curse, and partly because the residents have been living at the camp for so long they consider it home. Inclusive development is a process that is critically needed in rural communities. The centers have served their purpose and now it's time to integrate the residents into the communities. At the campsites the thought of the era of segregation came to my mind and I thought *es tiempo*, that is, it's time. The time has come to desegregate, to consider inclusive development. Men, women and children need to be integrated into the communities where they were born with people they know. We need to love and to care, not to think about building more orphanages, centers and institutions where children, the disabled, the elderly, etc. are not loved and properly taken care of and in some cases even abandoned. I've seen it too many times. Also, in many instances the caregivers are merely there to supervise; the residents must do everything on their own whether they can or not, they have to take care of each other.

YOU have the power to make a difference!

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