



A beautiful and rewarding exchange in rural Mozambique

Before departure

After almost three years of mostly theoretical studies, I wanted to get my hands dirty and do some actual work. For several years now I've been very aware of, and alarmed by, the impact our western way-of-life have on the planet. The many injustices between people of this earth and between genders all played a part in me wanting to help, in my own little way, the people of Africa. In my studies I am focused on sustainability and energy. At school I came in contact with older students who had been doing fields-studies with the organisation Project Vita in earlier years, which led me to give them a closer look. The organisation's goals and ambitions seemed to align very well with my own and I therefore decided to reach out to the founder of Project Vita. This all resulted in a few meetings with Michel Olofsson where we brain-stormed project ideas and eventually found some common ground where we could work out a project outline for an energy system that is to provide a community center in Mozambique with electricity.

Before departure there were several practical tasks to get through, such as visa application and a number of vaccinations. The official language of Mozambique is Portuguese, and as I had taken Spanish in school which is somewhat related to Portuguese, I felt I had a small head start in learning it. I prepared myself by taking several classes in Duolingo before I felt ready to put my knowledge to the test.

I was fortunate to be able to meet and partly plan the trip with my two traveling-companions at home a couple of times which made everything less scary. In the end it felt like going away on an adventure with fellow friends, and I knew that whatever we were going to face, we were going to face it together.

Upon arrival

When we arrived in Vilanculos, Mozambique, Michel had arranged a taxi to take us the first three hours of our journey. The taxi driver greeted us at the airport with a nice Project Vita sign. With one hour of our journey remaining, Michel and his girlfriend picked us up in Morrumbene, the city located closest to our final destination in Linga Linga. This last part of our journey was taking place on a small dirt track in the dark, and we were at the same time quite excited but exhausted when we finally arrived at our compound. Upon arrival everything was beautifully arranged, and we all got individual bungalows where we crashed after a delicious traditional course prepared of Casava leaves from the garden. The first week in Linga Linga was spent getting to know our new environment and learn to find our way in the village, shop in the local store and also relax and try to take in the beautiful environment along the coast. The main work with the field studies went on for the remaining seven weeks.



Financials

In Mozambique most things were less expensive than in Sweden, although the difference was not as big as you might expect. Things that were in season were however really cheap. For example, a big perfectly ripe avocado cost about two Swedish krona, which was a nice surprise to a vegan such as myself. Moreover, most vegetables and fruit were quite cheap, as well as fish and seafood since we lived in a fishing village.

Accommodation

We were offered accommodations through the organisation we made our project with, Project Vita. The accommodations were absolutely beautiful and made for a very enjoyable stay. We each had our own 30 square meters large bungalow with a private bathroom and shower. And as for the best part they were all located only 50 meters from the beach and the ocean. The bungalows were made from straw and palm leaves, and every night we got to fall asleep to the sound of the waves and the breeze just outside. The price I paid was about 8000 Swedish kronor per month, which included breakfast as well.



Project

In the village we stayed in, Linga Linga, a community center is soon to be built. The center is supposed to be a place where people of the village can meet and hang out and get access to certain energy services. For example, the center will contain computers with access to the internet that can be used for learning and also a hall with a projector and lamps that can be used in meetings. Furthermore, the center will have a shop with a fridge and freezers to provide people with the possibility to store their produce, as well as electricity outlets to charge their phones. Our part in this project was to design a

reliable, low-cost and sustainable energy system that can provide this community center with the needed electricity.

During our field studies we had a lot of contact with and got plenty of support from our contact person Michel Olofsson. He supported us nearly every step of the way by answering questions and help arranging both interviews and meetings. A typical day during our field studies, me and my project partner would often start with a workout session in the “gym” where we stayed. Thereafter waited a yummy breakfast with fresh avocados and newly plucked coconuts from the surrounding trees in the sun. When this part of the day was over, the actual workday took start. The morning was often spent either discussing newly gathered data, planning forward or working with the literature study of our report. After a dip in the ocean during our lunch break, the temperature started to drop a little and we took our chance to conduct the main field work. This could be either interviewing people in the village, visiting the site where the community center is to be built to collect data, going to the nearby city to collect data about the available electrical components or meeting important people discussing the implementation of our project, such as the mayor of the district. Meeting all these different people and seeing what resources were available to work with in the village was very interesting and exciting. It often left us feeling deeply inspired and filled with ideas and new questions that we wanted to continue to sort out the following days. Overall, these experiences felt very rewarding and we often found ourselves in trains of thoughts that we don't expect we would have had if we would have tried to write this same report from home.

Country

The village of Linga Linga is quite poor but very beautiful. It is a coastal village with a lot of sand and beaches. The main road is a sand road and people mainly get around by walking or traveling together on truck beds heading for the nearest town. Most people live in houses made of straw, palm leaves, concrete or tin. To make their living, many women tend to handy crafts such as weaving baskets and baking etc. Many men are fishermen, however, most don't get paid very well due to the fact that they have to travel all the way to the nearest town to sell their catch. Furthermore the fish will go bad quickly in the heat which means that they are pressed to get everything sold the same day they catch it.



The village has about 2000 inhabitants and is divided into two zones. Zone A is connected to the national electrical grid while Zone B is not. We lived in Zone B, but had access to electricity thanks to a stand-alone solar system. Closely located to us was the local hospital. This also had access to electricity enough to support a fridge and a few lamps, thanks to a project similar to ours where two students set up a stand-alone solar system for this purpose.

Although my Portuguese is not the best, I still felt I had the chance to connect to some of the locals. Everyone we met were very friendly and glad to say hi. I personally felt very welcome, and we often found ways around the language barrier through made-up sign language and google translate. I was very glad to find that, as long as there is a will and interest in each other, we humans find our own ways to interact and show appreciation. It was fun to get to know some of their native language and

also teach some of them a little bit of English. Here are some writings in the sand from when a villager tried to teach us a common greeting phrase.



Leisure and social activities

The village we stayed in was very small and quite secluded so we did not meet any other foreigners except the ones we were traveling with. Our spare time was therefore centred mainly around the village, which gave us the opportunity to really experience their way of living and take part of what activities were available at site. We were, for example, able to participate in some of their day-to-day activities such as going to church, weaving baskets and baking coconut bread. One time we also got the chance to see how a beekeeper in the village takes care of his bees and honey. These were are really interesting and fun activities to take part of and gave us the chance to get to know some of the locals.



Our visit to the local catholic church stuck with me especially. Even though I don't believe in any religion myself it was a very powerful experience that affected me deeply. The service itself was quite similar to any service in Sweden with some preaching and singing, but I found it very beautiful to, for a moment, get to be a part of and witness such community. Everyone there made sure we felt welcome by granting us warming smiles and offering us to read from their books. The church itself was just a raw concrete structure without many decorations or paintings, but still I found it all very beautiful and peaceful. I felt like something in the simplicity brought us all closer together and showed that we can choose to make something meaningful even without redundant resources.



Towards the end of our stay we decided to host an event ourselves, and invited all the people in the village for a party. With help from some locals we prepared food for about 300 people and also invited a local group of women to perform their traditional dance for everyone. Afterwards we had arranged for a DJ from the village to play some music and we all got to dance together. It was a very memorable day and night with a lot of beautiful encounters.



The time we spent to ourselves was mostly spent at the beach, either taking walks, swimming with the waves or watching the beautiful night sky with all the stars and the moon.



Sustainability

During our field studies our everyday life was quite sustainable. We lived mainly from what was available locally, and got around mostly by foot. Our main carbon footprint during our studies came from our weekly travel to the city located about an hour away by car, to buy our supplies such as food and clean water.

Our project was linked to several of the Global Sustainable Goals. The main goal that we worked towards through our study was goal number 7 “Affordable and Clean Energy”, by designing a sustainable energy system in a rural village that otherwise has limited access to clean energy. Further, goal 4 “Quality Education” and goal 11 “Sustainable Cities and Communities” were touched upon. The reasoning behind goal 4 is that the community center will serve as a place where youth can study with access to light past the school hours. Goal 11 is worked towards by creating an inclusive and sustainable environment where the people of the village can come together, exchange knowledge and grow both as individuals and as a community.

Other recommendations and observations

My biggest tip when traveling to unfamiliar countries is to always try to learn the local language and try to interact and take interest in the local residents. It is often the encounters that you will end up learning the most from, and that will stay with you when you get home. I realize that sometimes it may feel easier and more comfortable to talk to your fellow traveling companions when traveling, but it is far more rewarding, challenging and interesting to try to seek contact with the locals and take in their perspectives. Even though you don’t feel like you are familiar enough with the language it is always worth a try – as long as there is mutual interest you can come a long way with charades and google translate.

