



Awet Secondary School,
Kambi ya Simba, Tanzania,
August 2005

“In Tanzania, close to the towering Mt. Kilimanjaro, the vast plains of the Serengeti, and the Great Rift Valley, lies a village called Kambi ya Simba. It is a rural village, with one road in and one road out...”



NEXT GENERATION PRESS



IN OUR VILLAGE

KAMBI YA SIMBA THROUGH THE EYES OF ITS YOUTH

NEXT GENERATION PRESS

In Our Village

Kambi ya Simba Through the Eyes of Its Youth



A PROJECT OF AWET SECONDARY SCHOOL, TANZANIA, EAST AFRICA
AND WHAT KIDS CAN DO, INC.

Edited by Barbara Cervone

In Our Village

In Our Village

Kambi ya Simba Through the Eyes of Its Youth

BY THE STUDENTS OF AWET SECONDARY SCHOOL, TANZANIA, EAST AFRICA
AND WHAT KIDS CAN DO

Edited by Barbara Cervone



NEXT GENERATION PRESS

Providence, Rhode Island

Contents

Copyright © 2006 by What Kids Can Do, Inc.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, in any form,
without written permission from the publisher.

Printed in Hong Kong by South Sea International Press, Ltd.

Distributed by National Book Network, Lanham, Maryland

ISBN 0-9762706-7-6

CIP data available.

Book design by Sandra Delany.

Next Generation Press, a not-for-profit book publisher, brings forward the
voices and vision of adolescents on their own lives, learning, and work.

With a particular focus on youth without privilege, Next Generation Press
raises awareness of young people as a powerful force for social justice.

Next Generation Press, P.O. Box 603252, Providence, Rhode Island 02906 U.S.A.

www.nextgenerationpress.org

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PREFACE.....	V
GREETINGS.....	I
SOIL COVERS OUR FEET.....	3
RIVERS AND RAIN.....	5
WHEAT, MAIZE, AND PAPAYAS.....	9
LIVING WITH LIVESTOCK.....	11
UGALI.....	14
TWO METERS BY THREE.....	17
THE VILLAGE DISPENSARY.....	20
TWENTY CUSTOMERS A DAY.....	23
OX-PLOWS AND TRACTORS.....	26
A BUMPY RIDE.....	29
WIRELESS.....	31
MADE BY HAND.....	35
SINGING AND DANCING.....	37
THE MORE YOU WIN, THE MORE YOU PLAY.....	41
GOOD FRIENDS.....	43

VILLAGE GOVERNMENT.....46

WRITING DOWN EVERY WORD.....49

GOD’S BLESSINGS.....52

CHILDREN AND SACRIFICE..... 55

THEY CALL ME YAME.....58

I WANT TO BE A LEADER.....61

MORE ABOUT TANZANIA.....64

MAP.....70

OTHER FACTS..... 69

SWAHILI GLOSSARY.....71

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....74

Preface

IN TANZANIA, CLOSE TO THE TOWERING MT. KILIMANJARO, the vast plains of the Serengeti, and the Great Rift Valley, lies a village called Kambi ya Simba. It is a rural village, with one road in and one road out. Its 5,000 residents, spread over 40 square kilometers, are farmers. Their fortunes rise and fall with the crops and the weather. By every measure they are poor, in a country that ranks among the poorest in the world. They know scarcity, which can make “enough” seem like plenty. In a world of digital technology and designer coffee, they illuminate the night with lanterns and drink from streams and pumps that often carry illness.

Poverty alone does not define Kambi ya Simba. As in so many small villages across the African continent, life here holds much richness and many stories. Yet a romantic view of village life misses the mark, as its young people show us in this book. The village life they document is at once ordinary and surprising, entrepreneurial and backward. Its dreams are both wide and narrow, its times both good and bad. I asked Romana, one of the students on our project’s team, what she likes best about the village. “Here, you know everything by heart,” she said.

Kambi ya Simba first entered my own heart through my son, Carl, who started an agro-forestry project there while in college and now runs a microfinance program for rural women in a handful of Tanzanian villages. At once, I imagined a connection with the work of What Kids Can Do, our nonprofit organization whose mission is to bring

youth voices to the public stage. Since its start in 2001, WKCD has worked closely with teenagers around the United States, using a variety of media to publish their thoughts on community, family, school, society, and, increasingly, global understanding. *In Our Village*, created with a team of secondary school students in Kambi ya Simba, marks our international debut, as the first project WKCD has carried out with young people outside North America.

I first met the students and faculty of the Awet Secondary School when my family and I visited Kambi ya Simba in December 2004. Their generous spirit and curiosity about the world was as large as their school was spare. The school's headmaster hoped that when we returned to the United States, I might raise funds for the school. Instead, I proposed another trip, this time to write a book with his students documenting life in Kambi ya Simba through the eyes of its youth. His generous assent gave *In Our Village* its start.

For two weeks in August 2005, I came back and worked with a team of Kambi ya Simba students, gathering the photographs and stories presented here. Our core group included ten student collaborators sixteen to eighteen years old, their three young teachers, my teenage son Daniel, and myself. On our last day, forty or more students crowded the classroom where we were meeting and joined the final stages of our process.

We began our work together by taking stock of the village's assets, whether hard or soft, ample or constrained. The students generated a list of thirty or more, from land, livestock, and tractors to friendship, faith, and the wisdom of elders. We narrowed the list to twenty and the students wrote down everything they knew about each, creating a common pool of knowledge from which to draw. In three teams, we then fanned out to

collect the photographs and interviews that fill these pages. We worked on weekends and after school until the sun gave way to kerosene lamps. Each expedition to take photographs entailed walking five miles or more, stopping along the way to review photos and notes.

None of these students had ever held a camera before this project. Within minutes, however, they mastered the three digital cameras I brought, and thereafter they were loath to put them down. They took over a thousand photographs during our two weeks of work, and, with only a few exceptions, the pictures here are theirs.

Creating the accompanying narrative was less straightforward. Instruction at Awet Secondary School is in English, but neither students nor teachers are practiced in class discussions that are not linked to the prescribed curriculum. Moreover, I spoke "American"; they spoke "British" (and, of course, their national language *Kiswahili*); and some of the villager residents we interviewed spoke only the local *Iraqw*. We worked hard to understand each other.

For that reason, I have rendered here a mix of voices, hoping to make the "we" in this narration as true as possible to its diverse contributors: students, teachers, the villagers we interviewed, and local "experts" who provided many of the facts and figures. I drew, as well, on essays written by all 350 students at Awet Secondary School as part of our project. I tried hard to keep my own voice from intruding, seeking always to shape one coherent text from the words of many.

As we finished, I asked students to reflect on their work on this project. This is what they told me: It stretched our imagination in so many ways. Before this, we had never seen a book with photographs. Few of us have journeyed beyond the town of Karatu,

nineteen kilometers distant. Of the larger world, we know only what our teachers have told us, a small encyclopedia we carry in our heads, containing facts and words, a few pictures, and no sound. Lacking electricity and computers, we have not traveled the Internet or watched other media that would show us life elsewhere, true or false.

Also, on our parting, they told me this: It astounds us—and we remain unconvinced—that anyone outside our village would care about our stories and our challenges. In a sense that goes beyond this phrase, your interest means the world to us. To us, it means “the world.”

Barbara Cervone

Providence, Rhode Island
U.S.A.

Greetings

IN OUR VILLAGE AND THROUGHOUT TANZANIA, we greet each other from early in the morning until late at night. It is the way we start a conversation. We shake hands as part of the ritual. This communicates solidarity. We use an African handshake, which has three parts. We start by clasping right hands and, without letting go, we slip our hand around the other person’s thumb, then go back to the clasped hands.



Our greetings vary depending on the ages of the two people, expressing respect along with friendship. So when a younger or lesser status person greets an older or higher status person, they say *shikamoo* (I respectfully greet you) and the person responds *marahaba* (I am delighted). When two adults of roughly equal status greet, they say *habari*. If it is morning, they might say *habari ya asubuhi*; if it is evening, they would say *habari ya jioni*. When two young people meet, one might say *mambo* or *vipi* to which the other might reply, *poa* or *safi*.

We also ask each other for news. How is everything at home? (*Habari za nyumbani?*) How are the children doing? (*Watoto wazima?*) *Hawajambo* (They are fine) or *salama* (well) are typical responses. We end the exchange with two words you will hear everywhere, all the time, in Tanzania: *karibu*, which means welcome or you are welcome, and *asante*, which means thank you.

For us, greeting and shaking hands is like breathing.



Soil covers our feet

THE LAND IS OUR LIFE IN KAMBI YA SIMBA. Soil, fields, pastures, streams, gardens, woodlands, these are the natural resources we hold close. In Tanzania, two-thirds of the population lives off the land. In our village, it is 100 percent. We are agro-pastoralists. Soil clings to our skin and covers our feet.

We measure our wealth by the land we own. The village government gives every family at least an acre. There we live with chickens poking about, perhaps a stand of maize, a compost pile, and a bucket of water. The prosperous among us own more land, a few as many as 30 acres. Their large fields meet the horizon.



One acre or thirty, land is a fragile resource. Jacob Casmiri Dallah, who for 35 years oversaw land and agriculture in our village, tells some history.

It is like this. In the 1950s, the British government was keen on proper land planning. In villages like Kambi ya Simba, they proposed separating the land for grazing, cultivation, and forests. They recommended proper agricultural methods. With independence in 1961, these plans disappeared. Good or bad, they had no following.

So we proceeded without plans. We knew how to subsist, but not how to sustain.

We grazed our cattle freely, harming our pastures. We plowed up hill and down, giving away our topsoil to the next heavy rain. We stripped forests for firewood, without replanting. And we grew. In 1960, our village had 700 people. Today there are almost 5,000.

Year after year, we took the fertility of our land for granted. We must now return to the soil the strength it once gave. For us, globalization starts under our feet.

Time has not, however, changed the spacious views across the Rift Valley to the east of our village or the huge shimmer from Lake Manyara. The soft panorama of mountains to the north and west makes us feel blessed.

Rivers and rain

IF LAND IS OUR LIFE, WATER IS OUR LIFE'S BLOOD. Our rivers flow down from the Ngorongoro Highlands, six kilometers to the north. The largest we call the River Seay. Like the *simba* (lions) for which our village is named, it crouches in a



ravine at one turn, stretches out in full sun at another, barely moving.

The river and the rain go together, and with them our fortunes. The right amount of rainfall, and the harvest is strong. Too much rain, and seeds wash away. Too little, and soil crumbles in our hands. Wet and dry, these are our *majira* (seasons). Short rains (*mvuli*) come in November, long ones (*masika*) in March and April. Rainfall averages 800 mm (30 inches), but it can vary as much as 50 percent year to year. The past three years have been uncommonly steady, though: It has rained

little in our village. Everything seems smaller.

For washing and cooking, we fetch much of our water from pumps. If you are lucky, the nearest pump may be just up the hill. If you are unlucky, it could be a walk of eight kilometers. Children—girls more often than boys—help collect water for their families.

They carry half-gallon jugs when they are young, and a gallon or more as they grow stronger.

We must preserve the water we have, just as we do the fertility of our land. Pantaleo Victory Paresso teaches geography at our school. He sees the village's rivers and streams drying up, and he worries:

We have not been wise guardians of the water we receive. We graze cattle by the river's edge. This destroys the vegetation that restrains flooding when rain falls heavy. We lack irrigation or a system for trapping and storing rain. In dry times, like now, we have no reserve.

We watch our permanent streams become temporary and temporary streams disappear. If the climate does not change, we may one day forget where our streams once flowed.

Adversity teaches us. In village seminars, we discuss how to begin conserving water. We bring whatever we have to the task: a rain barrel, a hose, a gutter that directs rain from a roof into a pail. Last year we planted 20,000 tree seedlings to regenerate soil.

Each *masika*, our teacher reminds us, brings hope and a second chance.

