

TEACH PEOPLE TO FISH: SHIFTING MY PERSPECTIVES ON AIDE TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



The concept of empowering communities to be self-sufficient through teaching them how to sustain their own communities is much clearer to me after my recent visit to Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya.

I am a coaching associate with Emerging World. Emerging World delivers immersive experiences for global corporations to bring out the best in their people. It enables people to see the world from different perspectives to shift their businesses and



help to shape a better future. I returned to Nairobi for my 3rd time in May as part of program called 'Go with Maersk'. 56 Maersk new and emerging leaders from 26 countries joined some senior Maersk leaders to spend the week assisting local socially based organizations (partners) and communities around Nairobi to improve the conditions and skills to bring change. In total, about 100 of

us broke into 11 teams of 5 Maersk emerging leaders, 1 senior leader, 2 local partners and a coach and we used the WIAL Action Learning method. The local partners represented 9 Kenyan organizations: Malaika Gifts & Interiors, TruTrade Africa, Humans Needs Project, Partners for Care, Nope, Let's Create Africa, Green Pot Enterprises, Soko and Home 254.

We spent time working on a real and current problem each local partner organization brought to the hands-on immersive experience. Using Action Learning we worked not only on the 'Action' – solving the local partners problem – but also on individual leadership skills and team development.

The Action Learning technique is very powerful because it creates a safe space to explore the challenges from many different perspectives. Being that the Maersk leaders were from 26 different countries, one can imagine how the diversity in perspectives enables broader, outside-the-box thinking and inclusiveness not usually found on our day-to-day teams.

Some interesting learning emerged from the experience. The team I was fortunate enough to coach was the Human Needs Project. This organization built a town

center in the Kibera slum. Kibera is the largest slum in Nairobi, and the largest urban slum in Africa with an estimated 500,000 people. A great majority living in the slum lack access to basic services, including electricity, running water, and medical care.

Challenged Assumptions!

Assumption #1 *The people in the slum don't want to work*

The Kenyan's of Kibera are not only willing to work but have a strong entrepreneurial drive. I was surprised by the sheer amount of commerce and trade happening in and around Kibera as we visited the area.

Assumption #2 *The people of Kibera aren't solving their own problems*

We met many of the staff at the Kibera Town Center (KTC). 80% of the staff come from within the Kibera community itself. A few community members of the KTC staff made it out and have since returned to work to bring change to the community. These returning change makers are so much more effective because they come from the community itself rather than an outside aide organization. These influencers are deeply rooted in the community and therefore have a greater impact. Change comes from within.



Assumption #3 *There is no drive in the people of the community*

During our visit we were able to spend time with some of the local students that were in a computer training class on Artificial Intelligence held at the KTC. I was amazed at how thirsty they were for learning. The students I spoke with were clear that a better future was dependent on their ability to get useful skills for employment.



Assumption #4 *Solving the complex issues faced by Kibera is hopeless.*

The mere fact that the KTC exists in Kibera leads me to believe that it's not a hopeless situation. The founders, leaders and staff of the KTC are on a path to improving conditions. They may be slow in coming, but they are making change.

The question to us: Why are we throwing 'aide' at the problem when in fact what we can be doing is to share our skills and teach communities like Kibera how to fish?

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day: teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. Finding a way to donate your skills

is as important if not more important in bringing change to these communities.

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