

Alps Village, Chungcheongnam-do, South Korea¹

Alps Village, Chungcheongnam-do, nestled in the scenic, forested mountains of west central South Korea, enjoys a four season climate, a flowing stream, rural character, and a strong network of social relationships. However, the mountainous location and the short growing seasons limited agricultural production and jobs. As a result, the community of less than 200 offered few employment opportunities and experienced an out-migration of young people. Faced with these challenges, community leaders and residents implemented a rural tourism development strategy that focused on seasonal festivals as a way to use its existing assets. Local leaders created a non-profit, co-op business model in 2004 and sought central government funds from the Korean Agency for Education, Promotion, and Infrastructure (EPIS) to construct buildings and facilities for the business. They built a community center, which served as a common kitchen and dining area, office spaces, boarding rooms, and a tourist education complex. Over time, they constructed an athletic field, swimming pool, restaurant, aerial lift, guest houses, and other tourism amenities.

The first annual Ice Festival was held December through February 2008 with seven different themes. Every corner of the venue has ice fountains, snow sculptures, an ice cave that add a winter ambience to the festival. A multi-color lighting event opens each evening. Snow and ice sledding and a bobsleigh are available for visitors to ride. In addition, activities such as sledding on a rice-planting machine, eating roasted chestnut picked from Chilgapsan Mountain, building snowmen, drawing on gourds, and catching fish barehanded offer a rural experience. Traditional foods such as rice and soup, tteok-guk, udong, tofu, pork cutlets, and seafood pancakes are available.

Between 2010 and 2014, the number of visitors to the Ice Festival jumped from 21,100 to 250,000 with commensurate increases in revenues. The event has become renowned throughout Korea, with tourist buses coming from several larger cities (www.alpsvill.com). The community received numerous national awards for their efforts, including the Best Village Award from the Korean Department of Agriculture, Forestry, Food, and Livestock. Given the success of the winter Ice Festival, similar events have been implemented for spring (Beauty Festival), summer (Pumpkin Festival), and autumn (Soybean Festival).

Given the volume of tourist traffic, the community needed to address environmental and infrastructural pressures, as well as changes in the community's rural character and social structure. However, the rural tourism development also resulted in increased employment opportunities for residents throughout the region, increased incomes, return net-migration of young families, and an overall increase in quality-of-life. The community's project additionally brings tourists to other local attractions such as the Cheonjangho Lake shaking bridge, Chilgapsan observatory, Janggoksa temple, Chilgapsan trekking course, and the Rural and Urban Interchange Center. The rural tourism efforts in Alps Village represents a partnership between community self-help, bottom-up efforts and government, top-down assistance, which is representative of South Korea's current rural development approach since its earlier Saemaul Undong approach.

¹ Special thanks to the residents of Alps Village and Mr. Hwang Jun-Hwan, President, Alps Village co-op. Written by Duk-Byeong Park (Department of Community Development, Kongju National University) and Gary A. Goreham (Department of Sociology and Anthropology, North Dakota State University).



Community Center



Athletic Field



Mountain Stream Running through Alps Village



Winter Events Aerial Lift



Community-owned Cabins



Structure for Gourd Festival



Traditional Kimchi Pots



Stairs for Mountain Hikes



Roasting Chestnuts from Chilgapsan Mountain



Ice Festival Traffic



Queue to Ride the Toboggan



Riding on a Traditional Toboggan



Roasting Sweet Potatoes



Ice Festival



Snow Sculptures



Guests at the Ice Festival



Night Lighting Ceremony



Catching Fish Barehanded at the Ice Festival



Autumn Soybean Festival

NEPAL EARTHQUAKE RELIEF PROGRAM

Nepal was suffering by natural disaster from 25th April 2015 a 7.6 magnitude earthquake till date over 7000 people lost their life, and over 14000 people are injured and almost 191,058 houses are totally damaged . Likewise 175,162 houses were partially damaged. 10,744 government buildings had been totally destroyed, with another 14,741 partially damaged. 121 schools are totally damaged and 192 schools are partially damaged. 8 million people have been affected from the earthquake.

The conditions remaining are high risk to live in though, because they are partially damaged. The relief materials provided only for those who are near the road facility and many are deprived from relief and threatened by the pending manner of next time, so we thought to reach out and help that community.

Therefore, with my leadership, our team of four members, consisting of myself (Hira Lamichhane), Mr. Man Bahadur Shrestha, Mr. Chiring Sherpa and Harihar Bastola, moved to Gorkha, and Dhading. Our mission is to access and provide instant relief support for earthquake victims of Gorkha, Kavre and Dolakha.



Our team moving to affected area with relief material.

Mashel, a village in Gorkha District, 155 Km from Kathmandu was our first destination. This Village Development Committee has nine Wards. And there are 422 households in this nine wards village. Here in this village, we have distributed a rice sack of 20 Kgs; 1/2 l liter cooking oil, a packet of instant noodle; biscuit; salt; lintel; one sack of beaten rice to each of the family. Since there was no motorable road to the villages, we have called a representative from each family to

the main town by the road and handed over the relief materials at the presence of local administrators of the Village Development Committee. Total Expenses 700 USD.



We drop the tripal (tarps) from helicopter.

Khare, a village in Dolakha, is also in the distance of 195 kms from Kathmandu. This ward has 120 households. Here in this village also, we have distributed a rice sack of 30 Kgs; two liter oil bottle; one packet of salt to each of the family. On top of the materials what we had distributed in above village, here, we were able to distribute 100 mattress each to a family. Here at this place, we had to call down a representative from each family to the main town by the road and handed over the relief materials at the presence of local administrators of the Village Development Committee, since there was no motorable road to the villages.



Handover the materials to villagers

The relief team spent the day on shopping and preparation for the next day's relief WorkTeam left for 13 kilo in Gorkha District. The later (13kilo) is situated to the north west of Katmandu on the way to Pokhara. The distance from Kathmandu to this place is over 140 Kms. The team spent a night there and the next morning to distribute the relief materials. The team distributed the relief material such as rice, lintel, biscuits, oil, salt blanket and Tirpal (tarps) to each family of the village which has strength of 130 households.



Credit goes to those who provided a donation for us. Specially Team Das USA (Connie Loden, Lori Lins, Peter Keys) and Wendy (USA), Carla Michele(USA) Catherine (Australia) Mikei(Holland) Dan Thamig (Canada)

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Agricultural Park Montespertoli - Italy

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The case study refers to an area of the Tuscany Region in Italy in the Municipality of Montespertoli, located about 20km southwest of Florence. With a population of 13,300 (2013) it accounts for 1.3% of the province of Florence's population. With more than 2000 ha of vineyards, Montespertoli accounts for 11% of county Florence vineyards. Technology, innovation and know-how play an important role in keeping this agriculture competitive and successful while preserving the traditional characteristics of this area. A scenario planning process was jointly conducted by Future iQ and Klink srl in order to ascertain the local population's views of the future of their region, with their views about the implementation of an Agricultural Park in the region included within this larger perspective. The Agricultural Park would be seen as an instrument to guide companies towards crop diversification, increasing the multifunctional role of local agriculture to a spread of agricultural practices with less environmental impact. It would also be an innovative project aimed at creating a network of local farmers.

Overview

The Municipality of Montespertoli wished to share with main local stakeholders, the definition of the future of the area. The role of the Agricultural Park would be instrumental to the future of the region. It would guide companies towards crop diversification, increasing the multifunctional role of local agriculture to a spread of agricultural practices with less environmental impact. It would also facilitate a network of farmers and local food/wine/oil producers, which would only strengthen the region's capacity for production and export. It would bring together the actions of local people to retain the strengths and world-renowned characteristics of this region.

The project was run over a six month period from February to July 2014 and included the following activities:

- Detailed survey work carried out prior to the workshop with participants
- Background research into the region and challenges being experienced
- Design and facilitation of Scenario Planning workshop with local artisans, wine makers, olive oil producers, farmers and agronomists.
- Production of Scenario Planning Report in English and Italian
- Production of videos and interviews with main stakeholders in Italian
- Production of the Action Plan in Italian

The Action Plan, developed via a CLLD (Community-led Local Development) perspective represented a milestone both for the development of private initiatives and for local

investments and shared choices. The Montespertoli community started to work together, using a diversity of approaches as an asset more than a problem.

Many of the initiatives flourished, starting from the creation of a local chain of producers of ancient grains (Associazione Grani Antichi di Montespertoli, <http://graniantichitoscani.com/it/produttori-grani-antichi-toscana>) to the development of an association among farmers and local producers of wine, olive oil, truffles and other local products (Associazione Produttori delle Colline del Chianti, <https://www.facebook.com/Associazione-Produttori-Delle-Colline-Del-Chianti-768778013191380/>).

Among other results, the decision of the Montespertoli Municipality to change local regulations about agricultural production to reduce bureaucracy burdens and to reinforce the use of local products to prepare meals for schools cafeterias.

Many other initiatives are on going also with examples of social inclusion (foreign workers that work on specific project with local farmers).

“Community driven Parco Agrario di Montespertoli results in a blossoming development of the whole district.” Paolo Santinello, Klink

Key Learnings about Community Development

The aspects of community development that have been important to the project are:

- a participatory approach
- starting of a shared regional planning project
- creation of a strong connection between groups of stakeholders and local government
- decreasing barriers among community members
- future thinking approaches
- willingness to shape the future
- valorization of local knowledge

More information is available from Anna Rodeghiero a.rodeghiero@klink.it

Below are some photos from the Agriculture Park Montespertoli. In addition, we have several YouTube videos that explain the project in greater detail.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEcY5dM9gk8#t=9>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zS6GOxtsuO0#t=3>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZ7HmEQ5tpA#t=4>





Widows' Empowerment Program: The Case of Ramula-Wajane Self-Help Group - Kenya

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Context

Kenya is one of the countries in East Africa, with a total population of 46 million people. According to Brookings (2016), Kenya's economy is the largest in the East African region and is much more dynamic than those of other member countries. However, abject poverty is still a problem. According to Karanja (2015), Kenya is ranked sixth among top ten countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with large populations living in extreme poverty. This problem will not be solved unless radical measures are taken to rescue the 18 million people under the poverty line. Among these vulnerable groups of people are orphans and widows.

While bereavement is a social fact in any culture, the reactions and practices relating to this vary from culture to culture. Widows constitute a large proportion of the adult female population in African communities (Wafula, 2014). In the ideal conditions, when a woman loses her husband, she is inherited by a close relative of the deceased and taken care of together with her children. This has, however, changed due to a multitude of reasons; consequently, widows suffer economic deprivation after the death of their husbands, which lead to their engaging in different activities just to survive. Also, after the death of a father, many orphans are forced to stop schooling and engage in different activities like working as house-helpers, doing menial jobs or even petty crime. *Wajane International Foundation Inc. (WiFi)* defines an orphan as a child who has lost either one or both parents. *Wajane International Foundation* seeks to provide a path for economic empowerment for the widows and education for the orphans as a means of mitigating the effects of the passing of the father in the family.

WiFi supports orphans by facilitating their education and widows by giving them the means to acquire the necessary skills and helping them access markets for their products, using the Big-Brother model of development. Under this approach, the widows are educated and guided to take charge of their development and growth initiatives and access to markets for their products. This is achieved through training in handicrafts and entrepreneurship, using locally available materials and local trainers who understand not only the culture, but who are able to communicate in a language the widows can understand.

Overview of Project

Ramula-Usire Widows empowerment is a program which was initiated to mitigate the effects of poverty brought about by lack of income occasioned by the loss of income and general livelihoods because of the death of male spouses, who are the main bread winners in local families. The project activities are centered on handicrafts and environmental conservation as a way of creating an income and use the Big-Brother approach, which seeks to disconnect the beneficiaries from the dependence on donors. This is achieved through training and involvement of the beneficiaries right from the beginning of the project and letting them take charge by instilling a belief in themselves and the fact that they can do it and all they need is an enabling environment and support with what they need to achieve their goals; mainly

skills in handicrafts, entrepreneurship and marketing, and support with the necessary resources needed to achieve these objectives.

This approach seeks to address the problem of abject poverty and abuse brought about by widowhood. This is because in most cases, once a woman loses her husband through death, the battles of property inheritance leave her disadvantaged and in many cases she loses everything, leaving her to take care of her children, in most cases with no education or an income. The available evidence has proved that, given the skills, the widows are able to rise above all these challenges and sustainably take care of their families without having to fall into the trap of prostitution or other such vices to survive. The projects include:



Forest Tree Nursery

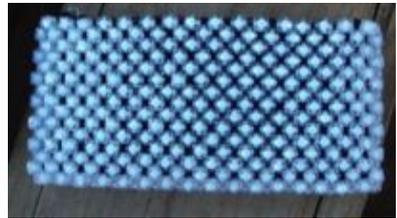
Under this project, the widows grow forest and fruit tree nurseries seedlings, which they sell to schools and individual farmers in their community at a small profit. Not only is there a ready market, but they have not been able to satisfy the local demand. This is mainly because with no electricity and the price of cooking gas being unaffordable to most villagers, firewood is the fuel of choice. Unfortunately, due to expanding populations and dwindling land sizes, the forest cover had continuously been depleted, necessitating a need for families to have their own woodlots from where they can get fuel.



Unfortunately, the biggest challenge for this project is the lack of water which means for the months of the year when there is no water in the water pans, the project stalls until the rains come.

Beadwork

The widows make use of colorful beads and fishing lines to make handbags, purses and tablemats, which they sell to the community. For this to happen, the widows are trained and retrained in beadwork.



Carpet Making



Capacity Building

For all these activities to be successful, the widows are equipped with business skills in order to ensure they are successful in their ventures and treat their activities as businesses which should be run professionally. Areas trained include: entrepreneurship, product branding and marketing and basic financial management.



These skills and the training in business and financial management equip the widows with the skills necessary to effectively take charge of their lives and families' livelihoods.

Benefits and Changes

There has been a noted change of attitude in the community. This is because people now seem to realize that the loss of a spouse does not have to be the end of life. In other words, there is life after the death of a loved one, and with or without a high education, one can still use locally available resources to change their circumstances. It has also resulted in a change of attitude where widows are more respected and viewed as an asset rather than a liability as was true in the past.

Quotes

Mrs. Sarah Ondego.

A key member of the community and who was also key in the formation of this group. As a community leader, she is one person who has witnessed a big change in the community. In one interview, Mrs. Ondego said:

“I am amazed by the change of attitude and self-belief evident in the widows. While before they had the ‘I-am-a-widow-and-thus-helpless’ attitude, now they have a can-do attitude, which has transformed their begging and fatalistic view to life to one of ‘If-you-show-me-what-to do, I will do it.’ This is a big transformation!”

Prof. Calvin Le Roy Snyder:

Imagine changing from a mother who didn't know where the next meal for her children was coming from to a woman who is part of a group who opened their own bank account! And this in less than a year! *“When I heard about the progress of the widows, I was flabbergasted. This is God's provision for His children!”* exclaimed Snyder.

Key Lessons about Community Development

1. First, working with rural communities entails first seeking to understand their worldview and culture. For this project to succeed, an understanding of the local culture had to be taken into consideration. This explains why the people do what they do the way they do it.
- 2.
3. Secondly, the beneficiaries (widows) were involved right from the planning, initiation and management of the project. They took charge of it; and to them, it was theirs, not a project brought by a stranger from outside. This has ensured success and longevity.

Conclusion

Aid in itself has never worked anywhere in the world. It goes without saying that when money is given out, there are more people who are only too willing to receive and spend it. Unfortunately, the donor community is not only dwindling in number, the amount of money they are willing to give is also going down. So it is essential to come up with approaches to make sure that every dollar given goes a long way in changing the lives of the beneficiaries

References

- Brookings (2016). *Africa's Powerhouse* (Online). Available: <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/africas-powerhouse/>
- Karanja, S.(2015). *Kenya Ranked Sixth on Extreme Poverty Index* (online). Available: <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/1056-1056-u6geog/index.html>

The Palestinian House of Friendship

The Palestinian House of Friendship (PHF), is a youth development program based in Nablus on the West Bank of Palestine. This area of historic Palestine has been occupied by Israel and young people are under stress on a daily basis. They cannot visit the ocean, which they can see from their windows. They cannot go into areas that were annexed by Israel that were formally their land, they are subject to arrest without charges, (called administrative detention). These conditions are often traumatizing. In this context, PHF is working to give children and teens a healthy environment using music, theater and sports, allowing them to play and be creative. With international support, PHF supporters have just finished building a skate board park and playground in Asira -- and these have quickly become a sorely needed community gathering place for families in the area.

The skate park was built by Skate Pal, an international organization that builds parks all over the world. Skate Pal also sent young people to teach skateboarding to Asira's kids. See the attachment for some beautiful pictures of and words about the park and the community spirit. PHF plans to host an international skateboarding, art, music and theater festival this fall, bringing people from around the world to Asira.

PHF continues to build the Smiling Faces Summer Camp, its internationally-honored Girl Scout troop and a recording studio and radio station. All of these activities provide much needed opportunities for young people to gain self-confidence and develop leadership abilities.

PHF sponsored a quilt making program and the women in the community created a 70 square foot quilt using traditional Palestinian embroidery telling their story. The quilt is now traveling in the United States.

There are currently two chapters, one in New York and one in Massachusetts of Friends of PHF in which CDS member, Esther Farmer, is active. We have succeeded in getting a music studio donated to PHF. This is important as it will be part of an oral history project in Palestine. Community members want to make sure that they preserve their history and culture. In addition the studio will provide a non violent outlet for young people to express themselves.

This is an exciting community development project that is giving people hope in a situation often perceived as hopeless.

Visit the FB page: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1010699985681402/>

To learn more, go to the PHF website:
<http://thepalestinianhouseoffriendship.org>

Below is a written account of the last 10 days spent teaching skateboarding in the West Bank, our journey home to London, and a few thoughts about the whole experience. There's some pics and video clips, and if you scroll to the bottom you can see an awesome video diary from Rachael Sherlock that covers week 3 of our journey- filmed on her GoPro and edited with her super skills!



The last ten days were in many ways the most intense of our whole trip. We'd expected a relaxed week, easing ourselves back into our normal lives - but the West Bank had other ideas. Looking back I'm absolutely stoked that things happened the way they did and I feel like it was one of the most important weeks in terms of what I gave of myself and what I gained from others.



We finished last week on a high, with some awesome sessions where we had a lot of kids progressing really well. Friday night was mad busy at the park and we were so happy when the boys from Zababdeh turned up with nine full set ups! It made a huge difference, but it was so busy that Rachael and I gave our boards out too, and I was still running lessons with five or six people having to share one deck. It's awesome that so many people want to skate, and frustrating when we don't have enough boards for them all.. It's been one of the biggest challenges of being out here as it's really difficult to get things imported to Palestinian territories.

After all the stress of Friday, we took Saturday to chill and headed to Ramallah. We met with some of the local skaters, visited a few spots, and found a place with an outdoor swimming pool that served Palestinian beer!

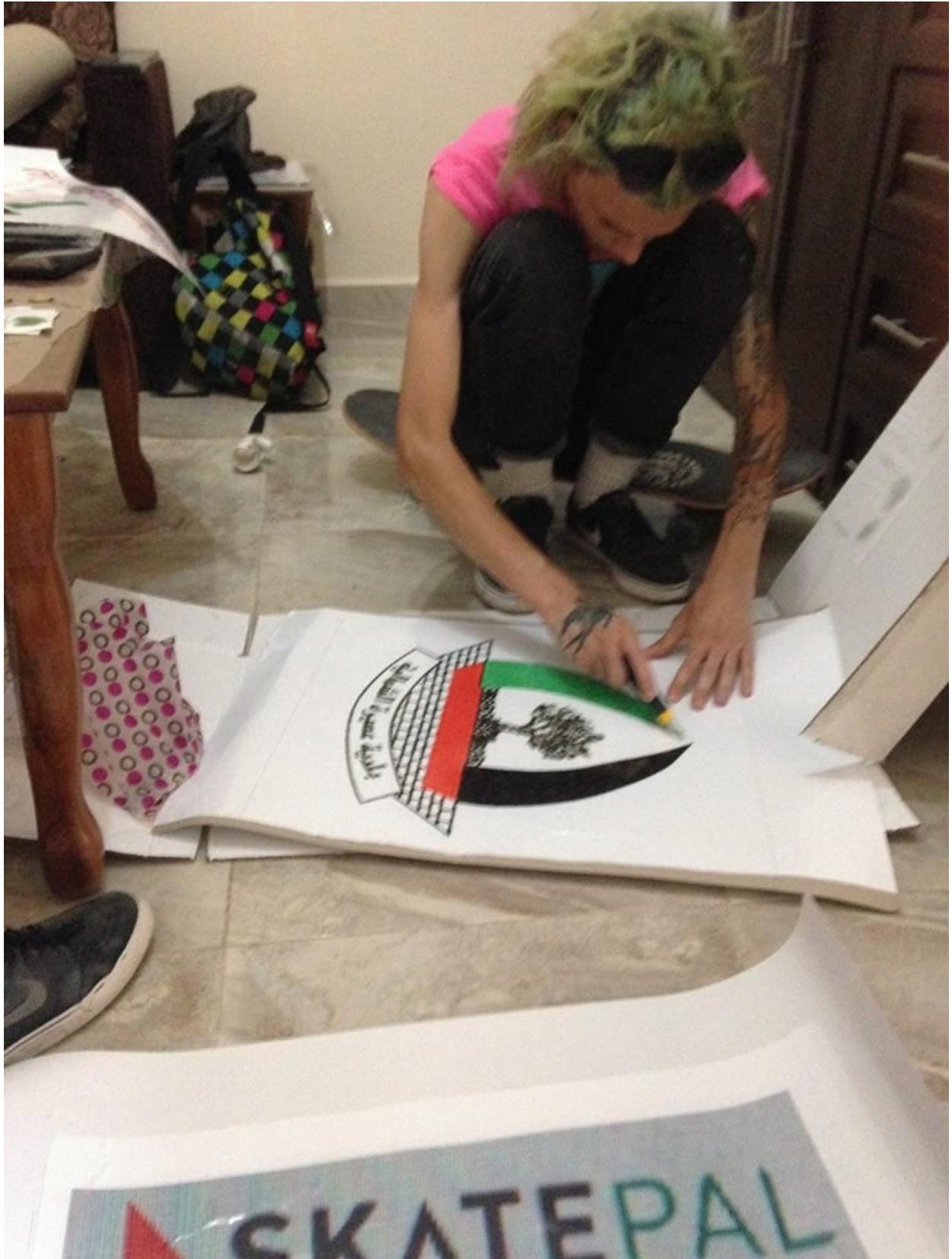








The boys got to continue chilling on Sunday too, but Rachael and I were up at 6am to go and visit the girls' school with our contact Mohammed. He asked us to plan some lessons for the girls, as they're not allowed to go to the park when boys are there. He also asked us to paint three logos around the park - the SkatePal logo, the Palestinian House of Friendship logo and the Municipality logo.. We only had five days left of the trip so we had to get straight to work planning the lessons, buying all the cutting knives, paints etc and making the stencils.



By Sunday evening one of the new set ups from Zababdeh had already gone missing, and whilst we were in Asira town a young girl came running over with it in her hands to show us. She was so stoked to have a board and she obviously didn't realise it had been stolen. When we asked where she got it from, some older men shouted at her and she ran away and hid it.

We eventually managed to get the board back, and we gave the girl some stickers and things to try to make up for it. We had to send a message that the boards cannot be stolen, but it was really tough and we felt so bad. It was probably one of the hardest things we did whilst we were out there, but it would be even worse if people stole all the boards and there were none left at the skatepark for others to use.

To smooth over the situation, we stayed in town for a few extra hours playing with kids, letting them skate our boards and making up our own rules for Backgammon in the coffee house.







Some people had also tried to break into the container of equipment at the skatepark. They smashed the padlock and we had to buy a new one to replace it. We never found out who it was, or why they did it, but my opinion with these things is that if you have to steal and break into things then something isn't right. Happy, fulfilled, content people don't steal from their own communities. And people with a lot of money don't need to steal a bunch of used skateboards. It's a testament to the desperation in the area, which is sad, and something that we also see in the poor and desperate areas of the UK.

We crashed out on Sunday night and on Monday we were up at 5am to climb a mountain with a local guy named Abood and his cousin. We took coffee and bread and hummus that Abood had made for us and we sat overlooking the whole of Asira watching the sunrise - it was awesome! Abood and his cousin were really funny guys and it was the perfect way to start the final week. Looking out over the different areas it started to hit me that we would be leaving soon.

It's strange that when I arrived here, I never even thought about coming back again in the future. It was just one month of volunteering, and then I'd head back home and carry on with my 'real' life. Now I found myself looking out over a town of people that I knew, that I had formed connections and friendships with. People I cared about. People I knew couldn't leave, couldn't come and visit me. Suddenly it seemed strange to just pop up in their world and then disappear forever.



We headed back down the mountain and spent the rest of the day at the skatepark in Asira. Josh and Christer left to go to Tel Aviv and then head back to London and Norway, and at the end of the day Domo and Robin travelled back to Zababdeh. Antoine stayed with us in Asira and thank god he did because we were about to have some of the busiest days of the whole trip!





Tuesday and Wednesday we had planned to do the lessons for the girls school. In the daytime it's really too hot to skate before 4pm so on Tuesday we went to have lunch in a local man's house. His family cooked for us a huge meal of chicken and rice and he told us about his experience in an Israeli prison, about his brother being shot and about his plans to hopefully leave Palestine in the future by studying and gaining scholarships abroad. Many of the people we have spoken too see educational scholarships as their only way out of Palestine. We were told that in many countries, the Palestinian school certificates are not valid, so once they finish school they have to gain qualifications from other places in order to be recognised as educated in the rest of the world. This particular dude was

26 and still had several years of study ahead of him before he could think about applying to leave.

After this we went to the park and laid out all of the equipment for the girls' lessons. We tried to tell any boys who turned up the day before that today was girls only, but of course they all turned up anyway, so Antoine sat at the entrance and kept them all from coming in.

The girls sessions were a huge learning experience for me. Before coming to Asira, we'd been told that they were not allowed to skate with the boys, but for the past three weeks of being here, we'd had mixed sessions every day and there had been no issues, so we assumed things were more relaxed than we'd expected.

What we found out now, was that for the girls who attend the all girl school, this is not the case. They come from very traditional families and are not allowed to mix with boys at all, even as friends. When they skated the park with us, after we had cleared the boys out, it was the first time they had had a chance to skate since the last girl volunteers came out here 5 months ago! And they won't be allowed to skate again until the next female volunteers come out in August.

We managed to give them two sessions, of two hours each, which means that in the past six months they've been allowed to skate for just four hours! Some of the girls have really fallen in love with skateboarding and even in this short time frame we've managed to get them dropping in, kick turning, riding fakie and beginning to practice ollies and cavemen.

Any skater will tell you how once you fall in love with skating, it's almost a torture to not be allowed to skate. It becomes your freedom, your release, your sense of expression and creativity.





What's interesting about the small villages in Palestine, like Asira, is that at first glance a lot of the oppression seems to come from the culture itself. Many things that women can't do aren't actually illegal, they're just seen as 'shameful' within the culture. This means that girls who come from relatively progressive, more modern families (more commonly found in the Palestinian larger towns and cities) can skate with boys in the park, but girls from very traditional families can't. By law, women are allowed to do most things, but because of the culture, they refrain as it would potentially be seen as shameful or crazy.

Many of the people we spoke to told us that Palestine used to be a rich, open minded and multicult-

tural place. There were many different religions, they had three international airports and lots of varied ways of life. Because of the Israeli occupation, Palestinians now only have 25% of their land left. This has meant that the culture has been saturated with strict traditions and, with no contact to the outside world, these traditions are not progressing or being diluted in the same way that they are in other places.

One of the amazing things happening with SkatePal is that it's injecting some modernity into these landscapes. People are seeing the skateparks as something new and exciting, with real potential to help change the areas. There's a brand new children's play area now built next to the park in Asira - one of only 3 ever built in Palestine - and there are talks of new shops and even a cinema being built there too.



The act of skating is capturing people's imaginations and allowing them to project new ideas. Some of the locals are even talking about starting their own production company to manufacture boards themselves (a dream that every skater has!).

One of my hopes for skateboarding is that the young girls who try it will love it so much that they will fight for their right to skate as they grow up. I'm excited to see some amazing girl skaters coming out of this area in the future and to see what other positive effects skateboarding can have on the local community.





In the evenings on Tuesday and Wednesday, after the girls sessions had finished, the boys came pouring into the park and we had some really busy sessions.

Lots of families turned up and all the girls who were allowed to skate in the mixed sessions came down too. Antoine was so rad at teaching during these busy times and helped the kids to progress a lot - we literally wouldn't have been able to handle these sessions without him!

It was really emotional saying goodbye to so many people and all of a sudden everything felt super rushed, like there was no time to really absorb all that was happening.

We made some stencils of flowers, shapes, skull and crossbones, etc and sprayed images onto some of the old decks, that we then gave to some of the kids with messages on them to 'keep pushing' and 'stay rad', along with tshirts, stickers, pens and pencils, Bones wheels, a Girl deck, Vans merch, and anything else we had to offer. One girl gave us all bracelets made from paperclips and many of them asked when we were coming back - it was really sad to say that we didn't know.







Below is a little edit I made from the last week - the footage is pretty bad quality as my phone is

the pits - but it captures the feel of the last sessions we had, some clips of Robin and Antoine killing it at the Plaza and in the park, and some of the time spent street skating with the kids too!

[Vimeo](#)

On our final day in Palestine we said an emotional goodbye to Antoine and went with Abdullah to Qalqilyah, where we had a final skate on the mini-ramp and a farewell pizza.





Abdullah is one of the raddest people I've ever met, and at just 17 years old he's a super sick skater and a really intelligent guy. He told us a lot about his personal experiences in the West Bank, and was a big help with our whole trip.

He took us to the Israeli checkpoints that lead into Tel Aviv and waited for us in case we didn't get through (which was good because they didn't let us through the first one).

I felt really guilty walking through the checkpoint and into Tel Aviv, leaving Abdullah at a point where he, as a Palestinian, was not allowed to go any further. I think that knowing how many of the people we met are literally trapped inside the borders of Palestine is what made it feel so strange to leave.

Inside the checkpoint, the soldiers scanned our bags and found the bottle of water and mud that I had taken from the dead sea. They totally freaked over it and thought that it was a bomb given to us by some Palestinians. We had to spend around half an hour in a locked cell whilst men and women with guns surrounded us and checked out the bottle. It was nuts! I have to admit I was freaked out for a minute and it was a stark reminder of how serious these check points are and what many people have to go through on a regular basis. Being surrounded by people with guns from another country is scary even when you have nothing to hide.



When we finally made it through the check point - WOW! We were just two hours from the village of Asira where we had spent the last month, but being in Israel was like another world. The climate was perfect, everything was super modern and the beach was beautiful. It reminded me a lot of being in California or - as Rachael said - it was like being inside a Sims game. The difference between the Israeli and Palestinian states couldn't have been more drastic, and acted as another reminder of the complex situation over occupation. I'll be talking more about this in a separate blog post next week, so follow my [Facebook page](#) or [IG](#) to keep updated!

We spent the last day skating along the beach, chilling on the sands and planning what we'd be doing when we arrived home. We'd missed a whole month of hanging with our girls Nefarious crew so skating and chilling with them and some pizzas was top of the list!



As we head home, all that's left to say is thank you once again to SkatePal, thank you to skateboarding, thank you to everyone who supported our campaign to make the journey and to everyone who has taken an interest in what we've been doing. Thanks to LLSB for the pads, boards and support, thanks to Like A Girl for the grip tape and other supplies, Better Extreme for hosting the Jam, thanks to all the people we met who made our experience what it was, thanks to everyone who came and skated, to all the other volunteers out there with us, and to Nefarious for being our crew dem! And shout out to Rachael for telling me about this opportunity in the first place and being an awesome

travel buddy <3 Check out her video diary from Week 3 of our adventure below!

Watch this space for more blog posts reflecting on what we learned, reconnecting with some of the people we met, and making plans for the future. If you'd like to get involved with SkatePal yourself (girls are desperately needed!) then visit www.skatepal.co.uk and begin your journey today! It's been one of the most rewarding and educational and eye opening experiences of my life so far.



Threads of Peru

Threads of Peru is a not-for-profit social enterprise that connects the world to handmade treasures of the Andes, helping to strengthen ancient craft techniques and empower artisans. We aim to:

Strengthen Cultural Traditions

The tradition of weaving stretches back through 5,000 years of history in Peru, from the coastal cities of Paracas and Nazca to the high Andean peaks of Cusco and Ayacucho. Even today, back-strap weaving is an incredibly important component of identity in the high Andes, as much as traditional alpaca herding and the native Quechua language.

Empower Indigenous Artisans

Threads of Peru works with weavers who are predominantly women. International development studies show that when women receive their own income, the health and well-being of their children improves at a much faster rate than when men have sole control of the family's income.

Connect Cultures

Threads of Peru aspires to be both an educational resource and sales platform for traditional textiles, educating the wider global community on the value and unique beauty of Quechua weaving. Our website, blog, and social media networks are collaboratively maintained by team-members who have all been deeply inspired by the Threads of Peru mission and seek to share that passion with the world.

2015 – A Year in Review

At Threads we're taking time to reflect on the past year and start thinking ahead to this year's goals and upcoming projects.



Lourdes working with the women of Chaullacochoa.

A Growing Family

In 2015, we welcomed two new team members: **Lourdes Hanco Chauca** and **Isabel Van Der Loos**. **Lourdes** hails from Lamay, a small community in the Sacred Valley. She grew up steeped in the local Quechua weaving tradition and is currently completing her Master's degree in Public Management and Business Development. With her combined weaving knowledge and administrative skills, she is a wonderful asset for Threads, not least of which because we are now able to conduct

more of our work in Quechua, the weavers' native language!

Isabel is originally from Holland and a long-time resident of Cusco, and has been helping Threads out part-time since early fall. In a very short time, she's become a master of inventory management and a huge help to the Cusco team.



Members of the Huaran weaving association after a dyes workshop

Threads' extended weaving family also grew! As our orders have increased over the years, we have been able to provide steady work to five communities as well as our Master Weaver family, up from just two in 2011. Last year, we began reaching out to **another three weaving associations** in two communities. One of them, familiar with our work in the region, took pains to contact us, tracking Dana down unexpectedly in the Ollantaytambo town square! If demand for Threads of Peru Quechua Collection products continues to increase, we hope to work full time with these new communities as well, bringing our

weaving family to **nine** groups in **eight** communities, and **149** weavers!

Developing New Skills

Threads has undertaken many development projects over the years, from providing the salary for an **elementary school teacher**, to building homestay rooms and teaching hosting skills to families interested in **community rural tourism**. Our primary focus, however, has always been weaving. Threads of Peru works with Master Weaver Daniel Sonqo to provide one-on-one training to the weavers in two communities to help them improve their weaving and develop new skills; last year, Daniel led four such workshops.

In November we saw the results of years of this training pay off in a **most exciting way**: three weavers took **top prizes** in a special weaving competition hosted by the Center for Traditional Textiles of Cusco (CTTC) and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism! The CTTC invited Threads to participate in the local competition, and we facilitated a number of weavers' participation in the event. Two of the winners made a special visit to our office in order to share in their glory. Lucia commented that it was Threads' sustained efforts to improve quality and accuracy that gave her the skills to be able to compete successfully. Our hearts nearly melted to hear those words!



Here, Martina smiles as she holds up her enormous cheque!



In



addition, one of the new groups to begin working with Threads – a group of mostly women in their 20s and 30s – benefited from a workshop by Daniel to learn how to wash textiles – an integral skill that they had never been previously taught! They were really keen students, which was wonderful to watch.

The Huilloc weavers gather round and listen intently to Daniel Sonqo.

Even without direct tutelage from a Master like Daniel, we have noticed so many amazing improvements in the weavers' skills – not only weaving skills, but also organization, leadership, time management and team building – thanks to our commitment to quality and our constant communication, making two trips per month to each community during peak periods and the daily weaver visits we receive to our Cusco office!



Here, two women in Upis compare the quality of two of their group's weaving samples. In June, we discussed what made one sample higher quality than the other, with each woman sharing their thoughts on feel, evenness of the edges, and tightness of the we



Strengthening Community Ties

Although Threads of Peru's primary goal is to provide opportunities for the artisans in these Andean communities to earn income in a way that allows them to maintain their traditional lifestyle as well as reinvigorate the Quechua weaving tradition, our relationship with the communities is not purely a business one and we take the opportunity to give back to the communities.

Since 2010 Threads has been coordinating a monthly donation by Reach Out Children's Fund. Every two months, we take up over 180kg of quinoa, rice, lentils, flour and cooking oil, as well as boxes of powdered milk, tuna, and fruit to the community of Chaulloqocha to provide school lunches for the children.

In July, Rumira Sondormayo celebrated their 17th Anniversary! We were honoured to receive an invitation to the event, where we contributed prizes of rice and sugar for the weaving and spinning competitions that were part of the day's activities. Read more about this event here <http://threadsofperu.org/celebrating-17-years-andean-style/>



Every Christmas, Threads of Peru also teams up with Apus Peru Adventure Travel Specialists to celebrate the traditional Peruvian Christmas *chocolatada* in the communities. In addition to steaming cups of hot chocolate and treats, we give out gifts of clothing and toys to the children, including jackets, sweaters and winter hats. It's always a fun day full of laughter and Christmas spirit!

The Year Ahead

So what's on the horizon for Threads in 2016? We are certainly not slowing down! Now that Lourdes has more than six months under her belt getting to know the weavers, we are planning to increase our community engagement throughout the year.

Building on the research conducted in late 2014 by Monitoring and Evaluation intern Harrison Ackerman, Lourdes has already completed an assessment of each community's strengths and weaknesses, and the next step is to discuss what their priorities are in terms of skill development. We can then begin developing new targeted workshops to implement, ensuring that what we do is effective and meets the weavers' needs and desires as artisans and entrepreneurs!



More information at: threadsofperu.com