Summary of Project Goals: The goal of my project is to mobilize widowed women through training in seaweed farming and sustainable business entrepreneurship to educate them on business development and connect them to referral networks, salient corporations and middlemen to give them a comparative advantage in core markets. The women will gain leadership skills that will enable them to create accountability in the long run.

Other Fundraising Efforts: No outside funds were used for the project.

Project Planning, Implementation, and Execution: As a Tanzanian, I have always been passionate about tackling issues affecting underrepresented and underserved communities in my country. For generations, women have been on the frontlines of harvesting and planting seaweed along the beaches of Zanzibar but have not reaped the benefits of the area’s second largest industry, because women have little say in decision making in Zanzibar. My idea for this project came from a desire to empower bereaved women by providing them the economic and social capital they need to escape destitution, be independent and increase their visibility in this productive industry.

When I arrived in Zanzibar, I conducted field research in Paje village and neighboring villages such as Jambiani and Muungoni. My goal was to get an overview of the history of seaweed farming and find out the challenges and benefits of this economic activity. In Paje, I met Furahia Wanawake, an all-women’s group that is engaged in seaweed farming and processing. These women have been farming since the 1980s but have recently seen a decline in the value of seaweed by hundreds of shillings per kilo. Previously, seaweed was grown for export only, but organizations like Furahia Wanawake started facing competition globally. Hence, they felt the need to use locally sourced ingredients with seaweed to produce value-added products like soaps, massage and hair oils, body cream, shampoos and seaweed powder.

Compared to Paje, the 50 women that I spoke to in Jambiani village had lost hope completely. On top of declining prices and a lack of buyers, their yields were deteriorating due to climate change, pollution from hotels, and diseases. Many of the women started searching for alternative economic activities. Instead of aquaculture, they engaged in agriculture, worked as merchants for tourists or cleaners in hotels.

The atmosphere was different in Muungoni, where tourism was not a booming industry and where the ocean was clear and healthy. At Muungoni, I was transported by boat to multiple seaweed farms that had the two main varieties of seaweed in Zanzibar; Cottonii and Spinosum. At Muungoni, a training program was being run by the Department of Fisheries and Marine Resources in Zanzibar. Unfortunately, it was not possible to collaborate with them considering the differences in our target audience.

Based on this field work, I determined that the best group to focus on was Furahia Wanawake from Paje village. Their main challenges were with marketing, infrastructure and product development. Phase 1 of my project had to be amended since the Swedish Center and the Department of Fisheries and Marine Resources had already trained the women at Furahia Wanawake on seaweed growing methods. I chose to expand on Phase 2 of my project and partnered with the Small Industries Development Organization (SIDO), Tanzania Media Women’s Association (TAMWA) and the An Nasir Foundation. After discussions with stakeholders and further research, I realized that I should work on creating Furahia Wanawake barcodes for their products; packaging and labeling; renovations for their building; and extensive training on marketing.
The next step for me was to identify experts and guest speakers that would help me lead workshops and seminars on entrepreneurship, market access, sustainability, financial literacy, marketing, gender balance, and business leadership. I created lesson plans with them to ensure that they addressed the needs of the women in Paje. During my discussions with the experts, we identified that Furahia Wanawake’s main weakness was in the area of consumer targeting and segmentation. We decided to plan and host a comprehensive seminar on interactive marketing, brand purpose communication strategy, social media, pricing, the principles of consumer communication, and customer relationship management. Moreover, it was essential for us to stress the importance of barcodes because they would help the women in tracking, securing and distributing their products in Zanzibar and elsewhere.

With the realization that most of the women were over 40 years old, it was imperative for us to recruit younger women who were interested in social media to work on Furahia Wanawake’s online marketing. Before teaching them how to leverage social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Gmail and TikTok, I talked to mentors from a tech and media company to get advice. Their feedback also gave me clarity about how to approach my photography sessions.

Motivating the new recruits to post on social media daily was challenging because they were not accustomed to those platforms and were still in the exploration stages; therefore, I had to consistently follow up with them. I bought them a smartphone with a long-lasting internet bundle to enable access to social media. Additionally, I did a photoshoot with them to have initial material to work with. I also helped them grow their network and gain customers by increasing their following on all social media platforms and gaining them over 1000 friends on Facebook.

I not only felt accomplished when I saw progress with the new recruits, but also with the infrastructure improvements that I made to Furahia Wanawake’s building. Initially, the women could not move their products to their designated shop because there was no shade. After a few weeks of finding a trustworthy builder and sustainable materials, we were able to build a roof and a veranda. Another personal achievement that I had was exploring my passion for art; I managed to design Furahia Wanawake’s packaging. The only challenge that I faced was the delay in printing the labels in Dar es Salaam. Nonetheless, the final products were worth the wait.

Impact of COVID-19: While the pandemic altered my original plans, I ensured that site visits did not take place in areas with a high COVID risk.

What Peace Means to Me: To me, peace results when everyone has a fair chance to pursue their dreams, economically and educationally regardless of gender.

Though out my project, my goal has been to establish connections with the women seaweed farmers and to understand the impacts of this project on their business growth, financial security and household stability, helping them capitalize upon this entrepreneurial opportunity. By connecting with private investors, local governments and NGOs who have the expertise needed to expand this endeavor, future sustainability should be ensured. Lastly, I hope that this project can be modeled and replicated in other coastal towns, serving as a guide for sustainable entrepreneurship and peacebuilding.

The women of Paje managed to overcome resistance from their male counterparts and showed how much they could do as entrepreneurs and leaders in their community. A sense of peace was achieved when these women set the tone as the breadwinners of their families, thereby weakening the shackles of patriarchy.
This project also had trickle down effects on younger girls, specifically the new recruits of Furahia Wanawake, who would have been unemployed and potentially caught up in early marriage.

I believe that my project contributed to peace because it encouraged the women of Paje to see how education can help them experience growth in their socioeconomic endeavors. I trust that this project will continue contributing to peace if participants revisit and reinvest in the resources and skills that they gained. *This project changed how I think about peacebuilding, a concept that I previously associated with large scale U.N. missions. I now see that peace can be cultivated by any changemaker who can envision and work towards a better world.* – Samara Nassor

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Paje Women Empowerment Initiative: A Road for Entrepreneurs in Seaweed Farming

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