



# The Spectacle



## WELCOME TO THE IISE

**"Not every day do you wake up, build an institution and begin changing the world!"**

It was 6:30 a.m., a cool breeze blew across the tropical lake. We walked on the recently paved path between still empty buildings when suddenly the silence was disrupted by loud laughter coming from the auditorium. The first three participants had arrived and were enjoying bananas and coffee. Eric and Julius from Ghana and Hussni from Saudi Arabia, all three of them dressed in nice suits and polished shoes. They cheerfully shouted, "We made history! We are the first participants ever to enter the IISE!"

After 11 years in Tibet it was about time to extend the reach of the BWB ideas. Knowing that the preparatory school and the vocational training centre in Tibet were in the capable hands of former BWB students, we were able to focus on setting up the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs. And, yes, again people doubted our plans. "Where will you find partially sighted and blind visionaries who are committed and talented enough to be able start their own social projects?" "Where will you find suitable

trainers?" The answers to these questions: Come to the IISE or read this magazine and you will learn more about the team of catalysts and about 23 participants from 14 different countries, each with passion, commitment and their own dreams.

We want to thank everyone who has helped to make this dream a reality.

We hope you enjoy the first edition of "The Spectacle".

***Sabriye & Paul***



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## ***FIRST IMPRESSIONS***

*Hussni J. Bugis (Saudi Arabia)*

### **My First Impressions of the IISE**

When I arrived at the IISE on Thursday morning at Trivandrum Airport, I collected my baggage and then stepped out of the airport. I expected someone to meet me at the airport, but unfortunately nobody was there, so I pulled my luggage trolley to one side. I was holding in my hand a size A4 printed piece paper with Isabel and Nora's mobile phone numbers. I reached a telephone booth and asked the person sitting at the desk to call one of these numbers. There were two telephones in front of him on the desk. I picked up the phone and heard Isabel's voice. It seemed to me that I had woken her up, because it was five o'clock in the morning in Trivandrum. I said, "This is Hussni" and she answered, "Where are you?"

At that moment I saw a man coming toward me looking at the large printed paper of the phone numbers in my hand. He recognized these numbers and asked me, "Are you Hussni?" At that point I hung up the phone on Isabel and told him, "Yes I am." He said, "I am Rajesh from the IISE. I was waiting for you and I had expected to see a person holding a white cane in his hand."

After meeting Rajesh, I then met my roommate Eric from Ghana and Julius, who had been waiting for me in the bus for about 45 minutes. We had a long drive in the early morning to the IISE campus. We were the first participants to arrive. We met with Nora and Sabriye and Paul and we had a nice conversation about our trips, mine from Saudi Arabia and the others from Ghana.

During the last ten days at the IISE, I have met with very motivated people



*Hussni J. Bugis*

coming from all over the world. They have one simple common vision that blind people and visually impaired people can have their dreams come true. The catalysts, who are going to give us their best knowledge and experience, will be the most important people to cooperate and live with during the coming months. I have also shared many ideas and dreams with my colleagues and friends from all over the world. I think when I go back home to Saudi Arabia, I will be able to set up my own project. I have dreamed of setting up a vocational institute of physical or medical massage for the blind and visually impaired people, and especially for young girls and boys. I would like to open for them many different job opportunities in organizations such as hospitals, hotels, health clubs, and personal clinics as well. I am so lucky and proud to be one of the first pioneers of this great project.

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*Gonpo Gyentzen (Tibet)*

### **My First Time on Campus**

My first day on campus was the most unforgettable day for me so far this year. I heard many things about the campus in Kerala from Sabriye and Paul, but I never had the feeling of what it



would be like to live here. When I first came here, things were very quiet and there was nothing to do, so I was depressed. At night I heard the sound of birds and other animals and I didn't feel well. Actually, I like the sound of birds and quiet places, but that night I was afraid of how it would be to live here on the campus for one year. Because the weather was too hot for me and also I was homesick. I missed the lifestyle in my country and really wanted to be with my family again.

It was very late when I arrived here on campus and everyone was already asleep except for a few people. It was the most quiet time I have had here and it was also the longest night for me. Before I arrived here I had traveled by plane for a very long time and I was so tired and wishing I could arrive on campus as soon as possible. Because of my homesickness, I had a terrible night. I was thinking of my life in the country and couldn't sleep the whole night.

Later it got better and I had lots of fun with many different people. I knew there was water here that we could swim in and that there are many places where we can do many different things. I went to swim one day with some of our friends and had a really nice day. Since I went to swim, I felt not as hot as I did when I first came here.

I have a very nice guy in my room, and when I feel unhappy he tells me lots of jokes and tries to make me happy to be here. He also told me we have to fight against our troubles. I am very surprised by myself, because before I came here I guessed something about my roommate. I guessed I would have a roommate who could see. When I got here it came true, and I think that I am a fortune-teller.



*The IISE campus*

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## ***A DAY IN THE IISE***

*Yoshimi Horiuchi (Japan)*

### **A Day on Campus**

6 o'clock in the morning: Birds start to twitter, but insects are not yet finished with the stage. Distant cries of vigorous roosters stir up the air from time to time. The cooks have started their work in the kitchen, and an early jogger can be seen in the beautiful landscape, but most of the IISE family members are still stirring in their beds.

6:45 AM: Lots of "Good-mornings" criss-cross in the auditorium as the mosquito screen keeps banging against the doorway. Some appreciate the first breakfast serving of the day, while others sip a cup of coffee to wake up. The morning gong sounds 5 times 10 minutes before the class, and the air is filled with the sound of chairs, canes, plates, silverware, "Thank-yous," and "Come-heres."

10 AM: Our classrooms are full of energy. In room Chomolangma, 10 people are fascinated by the story of a traditional wedding ceremony in India, while a Swahili song breaks out near the lake. In the library, participants from Nepal, Norway, Ghana, Germany, Japan and Kenya are hot in discussion about "how to say no." Catalysts are busy taking

notes and share their stories occasionally.

1 PM: Lunch has been served, but people linger around the auditorium to relax with full stomachs. The sunshine is blazing hot and throws the light evenly on black straight hair, braided blond, and curly brown. Construction people are hammering around us and throwing quick Malayalam words back and forth. A guitar is brought out, and the afternoon suddenly starts with a concert.



*Yoshimi Horiuchi*

4 PM: A touch of softness can be felt through the sunshine, and the cool breeze sweeps over the lake, where catalysts and participants throw water at each other. The auditorium is filled with the sound of scrubbing and the chattering voices of the cleaning ladies. A bunch of participants knock on the gate as they come back from a stroll in the village.

Half past 5 in the evening: Once again in the auditorium, participants take turns giving their feedback in the General Assembly. A guest is introduced on stage, and welcomed with a warm hand. A flock of crows hurries noisily back home, adding some background notes to our speeches.

Almost 8 PM: An announcement has been made for all the family members to stay in the auditorium, and curious murmurs are passed from one to another. All of a sudden, the chorus of "Happy

Birthday" starts and a participant is pulled up to the stage to be celebrated in a once-in-a-lifetime birthday by such a huge family. An enormous birthday cake is certainly covered with the warmth of over 30 beating hearts and sprinkled with the joy of sharing, a joy even sweeter than its icing.

8:30 PM: With much chair-scraping and plate-stacking, everyone comes out to have some fresh breeze. Music starts somewhere, and our Kenyan sisters proudly lead the dancers. A Spanish class starts in a circle, while Malayalam class is conducted by the cooks in the now quiet auditorium.

10 PM: "Good-nights" have been sent to our distant homes in various forms, and pleasant hot water washes off the dirt and fatigue. Silent prayers of different religions are made, and lights go off from one window to another. Now the insects are back on stage, and bats are off hunting, while 25 visionaries enjoy their colorful dreams. If you are curious to know the colors and smells of each dream, just keep on reading other pages!

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## ***DREAMS AND VISIONS***

*James P. Johnson (Liberia)*

### **A Liberian Dream**

My name is James P Johnson. I was born on December 25th, 1968. I am blind, but I am a visionary who provides educational services for visually impaired people in Liberia.

I envision setting up a computer center that will provide computer skills and training for Liberians who have visual disabilities. I also hope to help them to have internet access by setting up an internet-café. It is also my dream to

make a Braille press to scan textbooks for blind people from the primary to the university level. This should also create sustainable employment opportunities for visually impaired people in Liberia.

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*Johnson K. Kortu (Liberia)*

### **Dreams and Visions**

My name is Johnson K Kortu. I am blind and a Christian from Liberia, West Africa.

I have a vision to set up a Braille equipment repair center in Liberia. This center will provide training for visually impaired and partially sighted persons in repairing Braille and modern electronic equipment such as computers. This center will also be available and ready to service any equipment used by the blind.



*Johnson K. Kortu*

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*Robbie Sandberg (Germany)*

### **My Vision**

Several years ago I heard about a school for the blind in Jenin, Palestine. Friends of mine had taken part in a peace march through Palestine and met a person who worked at this school. They were told that the school was lacking the most basic materials for educating blind students. There were no Braille machines

or books, not to mention computers or printers. I got in touch with this person and found out that the students did not even have canes, nor mobility training. I felt a strong urge to do something about this situation, but I did not know how to get an aide project off the ground. In addition, Jenin is quite difficult to get into. One needs to get into Israel first and then past several border check points. This is not possible without the help of local people or NGOs. I mentioned my idea to organizations sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, but they were more interested in political campaigns rather than an aide project.

I then stumbled on the Braille Without Borders website and it dawned on me that the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs course that they offer in Kerala, India might be just what I need to equip myself with the skills and knowledge to turn my idea into a project.

My idea is to provide the school with donated educational material appropriate for blind students. The ultimate goal would be to introduce mobility training. But that is not just a logistical problem, it will require changing minds as well. I don't know whether I can get that far. It's a very tall order. I'll take it step by step.

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*Mohamed Salia (Sierra Leone)*

### **My Country, my Experience, and my Dream**

From 1991 to 2002 my country suffered greatly under the devastating civil war. United Nations and British forces disarmed 17,000 militia and rebels in the largest UN peace keeping act of the decade. In January 2002 most of the estimated 45,000 fighters had surrendered their weapons. By early 2002 most of the ex-combatants were disarmed and demobilized, although



many still await reintegration assistance. On 18th January, 2002, the civil war was officially declared over. An estimated 50,000 people died during the war.

Post conflict Sierra Leone is battling unemployment and illiteracy, social injustice, and an inappropriate and inadequate educational system. In addition to the lack of basic livelihoods and supporting facilities, the youth have been and continue to be victims of exploitative socio-political establishments on all fronts.

My experience in the war:

At the age of 10 when the war started, I was living with my parents in our village which was in the eastern part of the country. Even at this early age I could still remember those terrible days. When the war finally reached the eastern part of the country we sometimes had to run to the bush for safety when villages close to our village were attacked by the rebels. For many days in this bush we were living in a small house my father built with sticks and palm leaves, which we used for roof and door.



*Mohamed Salia*

Sometimes we lived in the bush for several days, eating "bush fruits" for food because there was nothing else to eat. And after some days or weeks when we heard rumors from other village members about the rebels' defeat and retreat, we returned to the village again during the

night. In most cases we returned to find that our properties had been burnt down and that some relatives, friends and other members of the village who had been unable to run had been killed by the rebels. When we heard rumors from other village members that the rebels had left after their attack, my father took us back to the village, as this was our normal practice. We did not know however that the rebels were hiding in other surrounding villages, and upon our arrival in the middle of the night the village was attacked and my sister together with other villagers were captured and taken away. We never heard from her again. Eventually we heard from other villagers who were captured with her and managed to escape that my sister had been killed because after she was raped she was very wounded, could not be of use to them, and so she was shot and killed.

When things became very unbearable after the death of my sister and when most of my childhood friends were captured and conscripted into the rebels forces, some of them were sending threatening messages that they wanted me to join them; this meant that wherever they might see me they would try to capture me, because my father was a local village chief at that time. For these reasons my father finally decided to take me to the city for safety. When the situation improved he returned to the village, and I stayed with my Aunt. Most of these years I was not going to school. Many other things too terrible to tell happened to me and my family in those sad days.

My dreams:

Because of the above-mentioned struggles my beloved country is going through, and the struggles I myself have experienced, my dream is to help change conditions in Sierra Leone for the better. And because of my desire to make this

dream a success, at present I am a student at the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs (IISE) in Kerala, India. Here at the institute I am being trained in project planning, fund raising, communication skills, budgeting, public speaking, conflict management, computer technology, and English. The IISE is geared toward blind and partially sighted social entrepreneurs. Although I myself am not blind, I have a desire to help the blind and partially sighted in Sierra Leone. After finishing my course in December of 2009, I hope to use my newfound skills to further develop The Training Center for Women and Youth in Kenema District, a social project that I have already established in Freetown, Sierra Leone. I want to improve conditions in my community by helping people--particularly vulnerable and marginalized women--to become self-reliant through computer training, micro-credit, and small-scale enterprise development. I also want to create a computer training center for ex-combat Sierra Leonean youth to help them to find work and reintegrate into the society after the devastation they experienced during our civil war. As a fledgling organization, at the end of my course in December 2009 I hope to find future supporters who might have some advice or assistance for my project. As a young entrepreneur, I know that I can learn a great deal from others who are already established.

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## ***JOURNEY IN FIVE ACTS***

*Holiniaina Rakotoarisoa (Madagascar)*  
**Cultural Diversity**

The IISE has its own special way of living and learning. As we know, all the participants come from different countries. This means that there must also be different cultures. Therefore the

staff members decided to select one day during the first week of the course to exchange ideas about our cultures so that everyone could share his own and learn something about the others.

During this exercise, the participants were divided into three groups. Each group was made up of people from different countries and was led by two motivated catalysts. It was interesting because everyone took part and some were so funny. We dealt with the important following question: What are the differences of our cultures?



*Holiniaina Rakotoarisoa*

Everybody thought and got the following answers: The culture, the religion, the skin colour, the race, the way of dressing and living, the character and the language make the differences between two or more people.

The most important thing that came to our minds was that although we are different in some aspects, we can live together peacefully and happily if we respect each other. At last, we could draw a conclusion and define what culture is.

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*Marco Tulio Benavides (Colombia)*  
**You Can Do it**

Time passes quickly! Now we are in Act 2 of the IISE, and the first part of it



turned out to be very interesting as well as practical. It focused on Project Planning.

Project plan outline:

1. Needs and Beneficiaries
2. Objectives
3. Action Plan: what, how, where, who
4. Resources
5. Challenges
6. Measurements of Success

One could feel a little bit afraid when hearing this technicality related to projects; however, the way it was designed and introduced by Sabriye and the catalysts made it easy to understand, even to those of us who had never come across this kind of work.

As always, our leaders' words sounded pretty encouraging and calming: "You can do it--you don't need to go to university to plan and start a good project." Needless to say, our Sabriye and the catalysts are extraordinary actors. The role play presented to us was not only funny and made us laugh, but also it allowed us to apply the "action plan outline."

Also participants appreciate and realize that there is much creativity, talent and teaching innovation in the coinage of that enigmatic country called Tansalesia and, most important, this country actually represents the real scenarios seen in most developing nations.

In short, the second act is informative, enjoyable, yet a little bit challenging. But above all it introduces to us participants a vital tool for realizing our dreams.

Dear readers, you know what? I was fortunate, because they already made my action plan during the first session!

Well, it doesn't mean that I will go sightseeing the rest of the year. I am still here learning a lot and enjoying it very much.



Marco Tulio Benavides

*Khom Raj Sharma (Nepal)*

## **How to Behave with Blind People**

If you are meeting a blind or visually impaired (BVI) person for the first time, you may wonder how to behave. The obvious advice is to 'behave normally'. Here are some suggestions:

Please talk naturally. Don't talk down or address all your remarks to the person's companion as though the blind person were not there. Don't be afraid to say, "Nice to see you," for blind people say it too.

When you approach a blind person and say hello, say who you are in case he or she doesn't recognize your voice. Address him or her by name, if you know it. If not, a light touch will indicate who exactly you are speaking to. Before you move away, say that you are about to leave; anyone would feel foolish talking to an empty space.

Persons with blindness and visual impairment may need your help. For example, many blind people appreciate being helped to cross a road or find a shop. If your offer of help is rejected, don't feel snubbed. The next blind

person you come across will probably welcome your assistance. First, ask if you can help. Then walk slightly in front with the blind person holding your arm. If you are helping a blind person to get into a car, say which way it is facing and place the person's hand on the roof over the open door. If you are guiding a blind person onto a bus or microbus, you should go first. Never push the person in front of you.

Please inform the blind person if you are approaching a flight of steps or a slope, and always say whether it goes up or down. You should not worry too much about delicate furniture or ornaments, as most blind people move about without leaving a trail of destruction behind them. Show the blind person around the room and describe the furniture as you pass it, mentioning only hazards that are level with the head.



*Khom Raj Sharma*

When a blind person is invited for a meal, he should be informed about the food being served. It is helpful if you describe for the blind the various sorts of food put on the plate in accordance with the location of the hours on a clock. For example: rice in the place of 12, soup in the place of 3, vegetable in the place of 6,

meat in the place of 9 and so on. The cups or glasses should not be filled to the brim--very full cups are easy to spill. If you are serving a bony piece of fish, offer to de-bone it. Otherwise, your visitor will tell you if any help is needed; usually he or she will manage alone quite happily.

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*Mohamed Salia (Sierra Leone)*

### **The IISE is a Wonderful Experience!!**

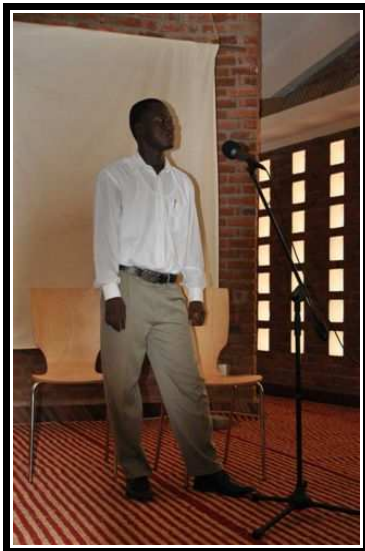
“Good bye Mum and Dad. I promise to be a good boy.” These were my last words to my parents outside the airport before going to board my flight for my IISE empowerment studies in India. As I finished saying these words, tears rolled down my cheeks, for this was the first time I ever left my family for such a long time, the first time I ever went to a foreign country and stayed with people I had never met before. As I finally boarded the flight and took my seat, I left my whole life behind. I had often thought in the last few weeks before leaving home that staying in the IISE for one year was not going to be easy for me because this place would definitely not be like home!

It has been two and half weeks now since I arrived at the IISE, and from the experience I have had so far with meeting participants, catalysts and the two directors of BWB, Sabriye and Paul, life has come to be even more positively challenging and full of fun than it was at home! With this first impression and my personal feeling, coupled with observations about the whole situation in this institution, I have the feeling that not only I but all the participants of the IISE will have a promising future after the training.

One of the most interesting experiences I had so far in the IISE was the cultural diversity sessions. The main aim of

these sessions was to break cultural barriers among participants and catalysts. At the start of each session for example, we were divided into groups of five participants and two catalysts per group to discuss and exchange ideas about each other's cultures. For example, the group was asked to think about the stereotypes of each others' culture and say what he or she likes and dislikes about it. Then, at the end of each comment from a participant, the group would discuss the issues raised and look at the advantages and disadvantages of it with the participant whose country's stereotype has been the topic of discussion. Then we ended up safely with smiling faces without hurting anyone in the process.

These sessions alone have been a positive and unforgettable experience for me. Since the time I was a child, I had



*Mohamed Salia*

developed the idea that there will always be trouble and difficulties when people from different countries and cultures meet or stay together. But from the various skills and techniques learnt in the IISE about accepting cultural differences, I have realized and understood that people from different countries and cultures can often live together in much more harmony

(peace and love) than brothers and sisters from the same country coming to live together for the first time.

Friends, brothers, and sisters, I must say that the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs is a wonderful learning environment for every true and motivated social entrepreneur. Apart from its unique method of teaching, good food, comfortable beds, internet facilities everywhere and environmentally friendly campus setting, there is also no differentiation between catalysts and participants. We all live as one family! I must also not forget to mention the wonderful Vellayani Lake; we go and sit by the lakeside every evening to listen to the wonderful sounds of nature.

In the "IISE dream factory" every dream counts towards a promising future for every true social entrepreneur. I believe my dream to change my society for the better by establishing a micro credit scheme for war-affected women as well as a computer training center for youths will become a reality.

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## ***IISE ON THE ROAD***

*Pynhoi Tang (Northern India)*

### **Marketing**

When we talked about going shopping I was so excited. I found that I had many things I needed to buy. When I went to the market, I enjoyed shopping on the different floors because each floor sells a different kind of thing. I also enjoyed the stairs that took me from the first floor to the top floor. The stairs are an electric machine. I also enjoyed the bus because they drove fast. We had pineapple juice and it was really nice to have, because the weather is hot, though the juice is a bit expensive. Anyway, I



liked it and I want to have it once more.

As we came down to our campus by foot there was no electricity. As I walked I heard different kinds of birds and insects making sounds. I want sometime to go inside the forest just to check how they sleep, but I am so afraid of snakes that I decided not to go. When I came back from the market, I checked the things that I bought and found that I had only bought cream, biscuits, and Pepsi.



*Pynhoi Tang*

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*Victor Gaigaie (Liberia)*  
**IISE on the Road**

I was in a group from the IISE campus on a trip to Trivandrum for shopping. While we were on our way, walking with our white canes, many people who live along the road leading to the bus stop came to see us. One of them asked me whether the school had opened and were we from the school? My answer to him was yes. Many of them were staring at us and speaking their local language called Malayalam, as if they were surprised to see us moving as blind people.

When we reached Trivandrum, I experienced an escalator-- electric stairs that nearly threw me down. When I noticed the stairs, I refused to walk on them because I felt it could break my legs and I have so much work to do as social

entrepreneur.

One unique thing I saw was that the goods for sale in Trivandrum are placed in categories and one can bargain with the seller. I bought a few items that were priced reasonably. When you buy at the shopping center, Big Bazaar, you will be issued a receipt of what you bought and then, exiting the store, you have to show your receipt to the security guard or else you will not be allowed out with your items.



*Victor Gaigaie*

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*Jessica Schroeder (Germany)*  
**A Cloud of White Saris on the Beach at Kovalam**

At the beginning of the third week on the IISE campus I felt as though I had ants in my pants. I was dead set on making a trip to Kovalam. Jenny, a volunteer on campus, told me a lot about Kovalam, with its beautiful beach and cozy restaurants. I was very excited to feel and smell the beach. Furthermore, it was a good opportunity for me to discover a small piece of the huge country, India. In my childhood I lived in a small village near the Baltic Sea. Sea waves, salt on my lips, and sand between the teeth are like home to me.

Eric and Hussni, two wonderful and very

funny guys from the campus, accompanied me to Kovalam and spent a very relaxed afternoon with me.



*Kovalam Beach*

Kovalam is about 5 km away from our campus. The easiest way to travel to Kovalam is by rickshaw. When you compare a rickshaw with a normal car, the rickshaw drives really slowly. Its highest speed is 35 kms per hour. Despite these logical facts, it seems as though the rickshaw would speed over the street or that which passes for a street. (The streets here are very rutted and pitted. You can compare them with a hilly landscape.) I felt a bit insecure in these cruising vehicles, because I could hear, feel, and smell everything in my surroundings. I heard the noisy sounds of the other cars and it seemed like they were only 2 cm distance away from me. I could feel the strong breeze of the wind on my skin and hair. And at last I could smell the smells of pollution, fruit, flowers and incense in the air. After forty-five minutes we finally reached our destination. I was really glad to get out of the rickshaw. I was always afraid that another car would crash into our small unstable vehicle. On the other hand the drive was really refreshing. In a normal car I would never have such a strong impression of my surroundings.

As soon as I got out of the rickshaw I could smell the sea and my heart was beating faster. We were all overwhelmed

with joy when we felt the soft sand under our feet and heard the loud, strong sound of the waves. We quickly removed our shoes and ran into the water. The coolness of the water was really wonderful. I washed my face and splashed with my feet in the water. I was shy to jump completely into the water. But suddenly my mind started to work and I became an adult again, and my adult mind said to me: "No you can't jump into the water. You have no swimming suit; it would be too embarrassing." So I gave up my plan and instead of swimming with clothes in the water, we went to the shops near the beach.



*Jessica Schroeder*

There were a lot of small and nice shops. Most of them sell jewellery, scarves, and Indian trousers and dresses. Many shops exude a very strong and intense smell of incense. These smells always attract me very much. Whenever I smell them I have to go into the building from which the smell comes. I touched many clothes and jewellery. The sellers showed me willingly every item I was asking for. But at last I bought only one top. I was really surprised and of course very glad, that the sellers did not get angry due to the fact that I bought nothing from most of them. Only one seller harassed and followed us. Eric wanted to buy a drum.

One street seller offered a drum. Eric tested the drum, but it was really expensive. So he decided against buying it. But the seller ignored his decision and followed us for more than 15 minutes, trying to persuade Eric to buy his drum. Hussni and I repeatedly shouted "Don't buy it, it is much too expensive." Poor guy! But finally the importunate man left us and we were really happy about that.

After our shopping tour we went exhausted to a cozy restaurant. The milkshakes and the fan of the restaurant cooled our minds and we enjoyed our drinks. We talked a lot about arranged marriages and the differences between cultures. In between our discussions we made a lot of jokes and had a lot of fun.

After our nice break we again walked to the beautiful beach. What we experienced there astonished me very much. In the water stood a big crowd of Indian people. They were all dressed in typical Indian attire. What they were doing looked a little bit like a game. They stood very close to the water and when a big wave was coming they jumped aside. In between their activity they were staring with great interest at all the tourists. In my mind this huge crowd looked like a big white cloud that scurried around. I like this picture and I will always keep it in my mind.

I enjoyed the time in Kovalam very much, and I heartily recommend a visit there. And if you take Hussni and Eric with you, the trip will be a great pleasure.

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## **THE DIGITAL CORNER**

*Arky - Rakesh Ambati, Catalyst (India)*  
**House of Dancing Lights**

I never heard anyone mention the

house, the little house on the hill. Not until that overcast day I sat beside the fire at the roadside inn. Anna, the inn keeper said 'I have seen many learned men go over the hill'.

'Go where, Anna?' I asked.

'To the house of dancing lights, where the old white beard lives. Many learned men from lands far far away came here. On clear summer nights you can see the dancing lights over there' Anna said pointing to the window on the other side of the room. Looking out of the window on this clear starlit night I didn't see any lights on the hill.

'I don't see any dancing lights, Anna' I said.

'No, those were good old days, those men don't come anymore' said Anna with a sigh.

I decided to stay and visit the house on the hill the next day. Perhaps I would meet the old white beard. These country folks do have strange names.

I rose early next morning. The portly inn keeper showed me the path that led up the hill. The path was steep and disused for a long time. The path was covered with grass the whole way. Sweating with exertion, I reached the house. As I passed the gate, I saw a house built with strong oak and stone. It stood there bravely defying the menacing winds of the hills.

'Come in and sit in the shade' a voice called from the courtyard. I saw a white bearded face beckoning me.

'It's a hot day, drink this water from the spring for I have none other to offer.' I drank the cool water from the jug. His calm smiling face asked for no introduction and none was given.

'Is this the house of dancing lights' I asked coyly. 'That's what folks used to call it' he said. 'It was known by that name, when the learned men came here.' I said. 'Learned men, with strong hands built this house. They built it with ideas,



not with stone and oak' 'Alas, they come no more' 'In the dark nights they built log fires and talked of the things of learning, the night sky lit with sparks of joy and learning.'

Thus ended my meeting with old white beard. I left him there in the house of dancing light, now I knew how the house on the hill got its name.

Days flew by and I decided to visit my old parents in the country. I once again stopped by at the inn. Anna received me with joy and told me, 'the learned come again from the lands far far away, they all go to the house over the hill.'

'Ah, the house of dancing lights, Anna'. I remembered my last encounter with the white beard in the house over the hill. 'Yes, but we don't see dancing lights anymore' Anna said and went back to wiping the mugs.

I was surprised to hear that. I decided to visit the old white beard once again. Walking up the steep, well trodden path that led to the house, I saw litter everywhere along the path. I realized sadly how much things had changed around here.

The grand old white beard welcomed me with open arms and asked me to sit with him.

'So, I hear the learned men come again,' I asked the white beard, 'yet, the night sky isn't lit with dancing lights.'

White beard was strangely silent, his gaze so distant and disenchanted.

Coming out of reverie, the old white beard spoke. 'My son, the learned men of yore came here to give light of learning in the darkness of night, sharing the warmth of their ideas. They left this place a little better every time they left.'

'Men, who come now desire to take what cannot be given, they only cast shadows'

(This short allegorical story written by Arky describes the disintegration of fraternity of free thought in India.)



*Jayne, Arky, Amjad and Jenny*

*Robbie Sandberg (Germany)*

## **Web Anywhere**

### **Online Screen Reader Makes Web Accessible to the Blind**

A screen reader is a software which enables blind people to work with computers. It converts the contents of a computer screen into synthetic speech. Not only does it convey textual content, it also provides information on controls, format, menus ETC. However, screen readers are usually not available on public computers.

Web Anywhere is an online screen reader. This means that it is activated by visiting its website and therefore does not need to be installed on the user's computer. It allows blind people to access and browse the web from almost any computer in the world. The only requirement is a sound card, which is standard equipment these days, - and an internet connection. According to its creators, Web Anywhere will work regardless of the operating system or browser used. The user can launch the screen reader by typing in the target web address at the command prompt. In Windows for instance, the user needs to press the Windows key followed by the

letter r and then type the following web address from memory.  
wa.cs.washington.edu

The online screen reader will launch and talk the user through the web. Tests have shown that tasks such as filling in a form, selecting list items and navigating sites are achievable with Web Anywhere.

It should be understood that Web Anywhere does not replace a computer-resident screen reader, which is used to access other applications besides the web. Its sole aim is to make the web accessible from computers which do not have a screen reader installed on them.

Web Anywhere was developed by computer scientists at the university of Washington. It is an open source project. More information can be obtained at: <http://webanywhere.cs.washington.edu/>

This superb innovation is good news for blind people all over the world, who can not afford computers, let alone the usually very pricy commercial screen readers. It enables them to walk into any internet café and check their emails, research, blog or shop. Computers in universities or libraries can henceforth also be used for internet access by blind users. The fact that Web Anywhere has been made an open source project means that it can be improved and contributed to by the target users themselves. It is a perfect example of how the web can be used to improve the world.

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*Karin Broeske (Norway)*

### **Proud User of Free Software**

Let me tell you about the importance of free software for blind and visually impaired users of computers. I am blind and I use computers a lot in my daily life. For me, it is a great tool that helps me to

study, to connect with the rest of the world, and many other things.



*Karin Broeske*

To be able to use all the features of a computer I use a speech synthesizer. It reads back to me what is written on the screen. This software is very expensive and not many can afford it. Some years back I had a very important exam at university. The day before my exam my computer broke down! I called the company that sells this software and explained the situation to them. This type of software has a license key that you can only get from the people who sell it. I asked for a new key so that I could take my exam. They refused to give me the license key! I was told I had to pay up to get it. There was no way I could get that money. I ended up not taking my exam and had to retake it the next semester.

Orca is a free-of-charge speech synthesizer that works with the operating system called Linux. Everyone is free to use it and even modify it so that the system will become better and better. If I had access to this software the day my computer broke down, I could have taken my exam and would not have had to take

it again later. Now I am a proud Orca and Linux user. In the future I will not have to worry about expensive license keys to be able to use my computer!

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## ***FLIGHTS OF FLAVORS***

*Holiniaina Rakotoarisoa (Madagascar)*

### **Rabitoto Henan-Kisoa (Cassava Leaves with Pork)**

Story: To me, this dish feels like my nationality. When I eat it, I really feel that I am a Malagasy. I can say that I pretty much grew up with it. It's our favorite family meal, especially in the countryside. We have it for lunch, and can enjoy it again for dinner!

Recipe: Collect the young and soft leaves from a cassava plant. Slice garlic and cut pork (with bones) into small pieces. Put cassava leaves in a wooden mortar, and pound it until it becomes a paste. Add garlic slices and pound some more to blend in.

Put the pounded mixture in a pan, add salt and water. Cover with a lid and cook over 2 to 2.5 hours, until the liquid is almost gone.

Serve with rojo mena (red rice) and ranon' apango (leftover-rice water).

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*Hussni J. Bugis (Saudi Arabia)*

### **Sambosa (Deep-fried Meat Pie)**

Story: Sambosa is a typical food that we eat during the month of Ramadan, which is the month of fasting in the Muslim culture. According to the Western calendar, Ramadan is usually in August. We prepare this dish as the first daily meal after the sunset. It's our breakfast, you see.

During Ramadan, all shops and

restaurants remain closed during the daytime. But after Asur (third prayer of the day), they open their doors to welcome customers for grocery shopping. And after sunset there is nobody in the streets, as they are all at home to break the day's fasting together.

In most families, Sambosa is made by the female members. But in my family it works a little bit differently. After Sur, all of us sit around the table, and prepare it together: my wife, three sons and a daughter, and myself. For me, Sambosa is our special family tradition.

Recipe: Mix flour, water, and yeast, and knead into a dough. Let the dough rise a bit. Spread it on a flat surface as a thin sheet and cut out circles of 10 cm in diameter.

Chop onions into very small pieces. Put a little oil in the frying pan, and cook onions until brown. Add salt, black pepper, cumin, chopped garlic and green onion. Add ground beef or lamb, and stirfry until meat is cooked.

Place the meat mixture on the circle dough, and fold in half. Close the edges firmly with fingers. Deepfry until outside is crispy and crunchy.

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## ***IISE HAPPENINGS***

*Pynhoi Tang (Northern India)*

### **Pynhoi's First Birthday Cake**

On January 17, Pynhoi Tang, a participant from Shillong, northeast of India, turned twenty-four. She was the first person to celebrate a birthday with IISE family on campus this year. What is more, she had the first birthday cake ever in her life. Let us listen to her story:

"Actually, I didn't remember that it was my birthday. When Paul and Sabriye came to





*Pynhoi Tang*

me in the morning that day and wished me happy birthday, I was really surprised, because none of my 6 siblings including myself had ever celebrated birthdays before, as my mom could not afford it. I just had to run upstairs to check the date!

"After dinner, Jane, my roommate called me to go back to the auditorium because we were having a general assembly. As soon as we reached the auditorium, where we usually eat and have meetings, Jane went on stage and told everyone that today was a special day for someone. Then, they gave me such a biiig cake to cut! I was so surprised and excited because it was the very first time I ever cut a cake.

At the same time, I wished my mom, brothers and sisters knew what was happening to me. If my mom knew that I was so full of joy and that people in the IISE family gave me so much love and fun, she would be so happy as well. She used to say that she could not do so many things for me, but god will lead my way through so that other people will come and share with me. But I used to say that it is OK because she gave me such a great life to see such a beautiful

world and people around.

"What is birthday to me. Uh.... it's a day to remind me of the day that I came to this world. You know, I am happy to become a year older, but I don't want my hair to become gray and my skin to be wrinkled!"

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*Robert Sabwami Namasake (Kenya)*  
**Water All Around Robert**

Robert Sabwami Namasake, a participant from Nairobi, Kenya, has been a waterphobic since he was a child. Now that he is on campus of IISE where the Vellayani Lake is about 100 footsteps away, however, he decided to give a try with his unfriendly water. On his third day at IISE, he went right into the lake water with Jenni, the swimming instructor, who is a volunteer from Germany.

"I have to admit that I was scared a bit. I looked ahead, and to my left and right, and there was nothing but water, water, water. The more I looked around, the more I withdrew to the shore. I couldn't help thinking "What if..." all the time.

But it was a chance for me! Previous to my arrival in Kerala, I had heard that there is a lake just adjacent to the campus, and there will be swimming lessons offered, along with some boating activities. I had never dreamed about swimming by myself before, but after reading the information, I thought that an opportunity has presented itself. So here I was, surrounded by a lot of water up to my chin, standing several meters away from the shore. Thanks to Jenni, who kept assuring me with safety and guided me through, I managed to stay in the water for half an hour that day.

If given a chance, I think everyone should learn how to swim. It's not only good for entertainment or leisure, but also very helpful when it comes to the survival

situation. After going home, I want my four-year-old son, Emanuel, to start swimming lessons as well.

Yes, my waterphobia is fading away bit by bit. I have tried swimming many times afterwards, and I don't feel as uncomfortable as I was before. I'm still using the life jacket and the ring, but I picture myself as a "swimmer" in the near future!"

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*Sahr Yillia (Liberia)*

### **Long-term Desire Satisfied**

Sahr Yillia, a passionate participant from Liberia shares his impression on his first encounter with a violin on campus. His "long-term desire" was fulfilled in the first weekend we had on campus at the IISE, when a group of four musicians came to give us an afternoon concert in the auditorium: violin, guitar, flute, and viola. The violinist had won a championship in the United States.



*Sahr Yillia*

"I love all kinds of music; music is a comfort to my soul. So of course, I had heard about violin before, as it plays a key role in both classical and jazz music. But I had never seen a violin, nor had I heard its sound directly before.

I knew that the instrument is crucial in many types of music, and I had imagined

it must be a huge instrument. So I was very surprised to see how small the violin is, and to discover how unique is the sound it creates! I must say, even if a person is in a sick bed, the particular sound can encourage him or her for sure.

And the girl who played the violin was just superb! The way she handled the instrument was so amazing, and her solo was full of melody. I was extremely happy that one of my dreams has now come true.

I am so grateful that such a beautiful concert has been offered to all of us. You may say it's just some music, but for me, it's one step forward to realize my big dream to become a social entrepreneur!"

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*Eric Ofori (Ghana)*

### **Surprise Visit of the Cobra**

It was a sunny afternoon as we sat under the coconut trees near the beautiful Vellayani Lake. Viewing the lake and listening to the crowing "kah kah" of the crow, the whistling of sparrows, the honking of the herons, and the clattering of coconut leaves caused by the gentle breeze from the lake, we felt embraced by the magnificent gift of nature.

This atmosphere to me was ideal for the magazine group of the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs to deliberate and plan for the maiden edition of our magazine. As we were busily brainstorming on the subject categories the magazine should include, Rose, a catalyst, suddenly alerted us to stand up. "Look!," she said, "a cobra is coming toward us. It is just behind Eric." We all stood up, startled and wondering what to do next. The cobra, upon sensing the commotion it has caused, raised its head in preparation for an attack. Blind as we

are, we never thought of an attack. Rose, the only sighted person in the group, prompted us to wait as she announced the exit of our shy and frightful visitor, the cobra.



*Johnson K. Kortu and Eric Ofori*

After the incident, I asked Rose about her impressions of the cobra. "Yes," she said, "I had seen them at the zoo and in documentary films. But never in the wild, however." She really admired the colour and appearance of the cobra. Sabriye, who is blind, asked, "How does the cobra look?" Rose answered that it looked gray and green in colour and that the head, when lifted up in the air, was like a diamond shape.

Rose finally observed that because the blind could not see the snake, they were not scared, but that sighted persons would have run for their lives after seeing the cobra.

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## **GREEN SCENE**

*Jessica Schroeder (Germany)*

### **Our Earth**

My earliest childhood memories are my impressions of nature. I remember how I jumped barefoot through puddles that the rain had left. I felt the soft mud under my feet and I giggled so much about the sound of the splashing water. I remember the taste of my first

fresh watermelon. I remember in detail how amazed I was--then I bit a very big piece and it seemed as though my small face would drown in its sticky sweet. I remember how I crawled on my knees through soft green meadows. I still love to lie in the grass and touch the blades, to feel the patterns of the leaves, to put my nose in a blossom and smell the fragrance of every flower.

In my childhood, my point of view was that life on earth would last forever. I had no idea that human beings are able to damage the earth and destroy animal and vegetable life. At the age of fifteen I became aware that our behavior on earth has a direct impact on the health and duration of the planet. The media broadcast a lot of news about famines, natural disasters, climate-transformation caused by pollution of the environment from exhaust-fumes and other environmental poisons. My friends and I talked a lot about our hopes and fears, and we thought the situation was so deplorable that we would not be able to ensure the survival of our planet. I was so shocked and felt so helpless and powerless.

My friends and I started some small projects to make society aware of this terrible situation. We cleaned up litter that had been thrown in our forests and wrote articles about the subject for our school magazine. But after a few months our thoughts and actions turned to other things: relationships with members of the opposite sex and first experiments with alcohol and parties, and we no longer thought about this important issue.

I'm sure that almost everyone has had experiences similar to mine. When I was twenty years old I met Philip, a passionate and attentive guy. He was very concerned about the environment and he shared his sorrows with me. I must admit that at the beginning of our



friendship I had difficulty listening to his great and horrible speeches regarding the consequences of human behavior. I didn't want to know that we must conserve water and energy, that every day nineteen kinds of animals suffer extinction, that poisonous chemicals from factories are draining into rivers and lakes and destroying the habitats of animals and of people who have no water filtering systems. I didn't want to know that almost every person in the world contributes in small part to the destruction of biodiversity and nature. I had enough trouble with my own stuff--lovesickness, poetry-writing, and singing in my band were the things I was interested in.

Philip gave me a book called *Coming Back to Life; Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* written by Joana Macy and Molly Brown. This book reminded me of the time when I was fifteen years old and I started to become really keen on how to protect our earth. Before they wrote the book, Macy and Brown offered educational courses that caught on all over the world. The courses motivate people to feel and talk about their concerns relating to the survival of our earth. People share their great concerns and through the exchange they start to develop ideas about how to protect our environment. Brown and Macy's book gives a detailed description of the training and its theoretical basis. In the following paragraphs I will give you an overview of the training and its aims.

The training is divided in three phases. In the first phase participants are encouraged to feel and discuss their pain and fears about the situation of the earth. As I mentioned in the above-paragraph, people tend to suppress their feelings about this issue. They are scared that their pain and their desperation could be so overwhelming that they might lose control of themselves and lose all hope

and joy. People in industrial nations especially tend to control their feelings. The destruction of our environment is so huge a matter that we don't want to feel our own desperation. In Brown and Macy's course one is allowed to feel this pain and to express it in different ways such as painting pictures that represent their feelings or completing unfinished sentences presented to them. (For example: "The thing that concerns me a lot about the state of the world is...") They also use rituals and role-playing to create awareness of the various feelings concerning our earth.



*Jessica Schroeder*

In the next phase of the course participants learn how to use these painful feelings as a source of power and action. By exchanging their thoughts and feelings they understand that they are all equal and that their feelings are normal and valuable. One important result of this training is that the trainees recognize that they can only do good work if they allow themselves to feel the negative emotions involved with it. Further, the participants get a lot of information about the theoretical basics of the reconnecting-work. Our earth consists of innumerable small systems which depend on each other and form one large unified system. The components of these systems cannot exist on their own. They regulate and balance themselves by exchanging energy between each other. Because of the strong negative impact of human

beings, the system is often not able to react in an adequate way, and this leads in the long term to the self-destruction of our planet. The main point of Brown and Macy's course is that we are part of the earth's system, that our actions have great positive and negative impact on the earth. The aim of the last training phase of the course is to create a collective awareness about the need to protect the earth and ensure her survival. Another important point of the course is that trainees learn to work for long-term goals that extend beyond their own life span.

When I started reading this book I found it a bit mysterious. There are many visual exercises and rituals which reminded me of the practices of shamans. Many exercises are based on traditional religious rituals of the world's different tribes. Later these exercises began to make sense to me. The book doesn't point a moralistic finger at the reader. Instead, it is written in a very empathetic style and explains in a clear and non-judgmental way why we sometimes don't care about the destruction of our planet. I highly recommend this book to everyone who would like to learn more about himself, about the working processes of the ecological-system, and about how to come up with creative ideas for the recovery of our environment.

Book title: Coming Back to Life. Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World.  
Written by: Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown  
First published by New Society Press, Gabriola Island, British Columbia, Canada

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*Hussni J. Bugis (Saudi Arabia)*  
**Friendly Environment**

The Braille Without Borders  
International Institute for Social

Entrepreneurs (IISE) in southern India (Kerala), is the most unique place that I have ever been. I will be living and studying at the IISE until December 15, 2009.

Overall, the campus here has been constructed and designed in an environmentally friendly way and executed in an ethnic style based in many ways on the ideology of the late renowned architect, Laurie Baker. In this article, I will try to clarify for the reader the atmosphere of the campus.

I will start with the IISE buildings, which are designed with a circulation system that allows hot air to rise and escape through openings at the top of each room or hall, letting cooler fresh air to come in through the doors and windows. The doors and windows are covered by metal mesh screens that do not allow insects such as mosquitoes, flies, or other pests of any kind to enter these rooms and halls.

The Ecosan toilets are designed to separate the solid human waste materials from the liquid. When a person sits normally on the toilet seat, a valve opens automatically, separating these materials. All solid materials go to the bio-gas tank to be transformed into gas for cooking in the institute's kitchen, and the liquid material is collected in another tank for a period of time, then processed to eliminate bacteria and, finally, used as normal fertilizer for trees and plants.

A rainwater harvesting system is another method that the IISE has implemented for shower and laundry purposes. Solar and wind energy systems have been designed to generate electricity for the campus when power cuts occur, which they do with regularity here. This energy saving system will prolong the life of electrical equipment at the IISE.

In addition, gymnastic equipment at such as stationary bicycles and walking machines are designed to retrieve water from the lake with hoses and pumps that carry it to the campus for general use.

Natural watercourses around all IISE buildings form a non-chemical ant prevention system, keeping the buildings free of ants.

As you can see, the IISE setting is very environmentally friendly.



*Hussni J. Bugis*

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## **WORLD AND LOCAL NEWS**

*Yoshimi Horiuchi (Japan)*

### **"Proud to be Kenyans":**

**An Insight on the 44th U.S. President by Kenyan Participants at IISE**

BBC News Item: Historic moment as Obama is sworn in

On Tuesday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Barack Obama took the oath of office, and was sworn in as America's 44<sup>th</sup> president and the country's first African-American leader.

More than one million people gathered on the National Mall in a wintry Washington DC to see Mr Obama take the oath. Mr Obama placed his hand on a Bible and

promised to "preserve, protect and defend" the US constitution. He used his inaugural address to vow to begin the work of "remaking America".

"The challenges we face are real," the new president said. "They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America - they will be met."

Invoking the memory of the US's Founding Fathers, Mr Obama said he would strive to rebuild his nation's standing in the world, saying: "We are ready to lead once more."

Excerpted from Kenya Broadcasting Corporation  
<http://www.kbc.co.ke/story.asp?ID=55063>

Commentary: "I feel so proud," Jane Waithera said with a smile. "People often call Africa the dark continent. Now, a man from my homeland leads the country whose every movement is closely watched by all the nations on the globe." All the Kenyan people have been delighted to see Barack Obama take his political steps higher and higher. They were aware of his continuous success long before the rest of the world. "I followed news about him since he became a senator. Actually, all Kenyans are just crazy about Obama. The fact that he started everything from scratch by himself and his main power lies not in insulting competitors or engaging in bribery to win the election, but in the sincere and strong speeches he has made... I mean, he is such a good role model to all of us."

When Obama won the election, many African countries were thrilled to receive the news. Kenya announced three official holidays, and Nigeria celebrated with fourteen long holidays!

"We expect to have a change in our

country," Robert Sabwami joined in. "Now that Obama is the President of the United States, hopefully it will bring a positive influence to Kenyan government to have much cleaner politics." Talking about Obama reminded Ms. Waithera of a quote. She told me with a confidence: "Najivunia kuwa Mkenya (We are proud to be Kenyans)!"

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*James P Johnson (Liberia)*

## **The Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities**

I believe that we must move people with disabilities out of welfare and into rights and development.

After the civil war, 16% of the Liberian population is disabled. Blind people in Liberia alone number approximately 77,000. The blind of Liberia have demanded a representative seat in the Liberian government.



*James P Johnson*

80% of people with disabilities live in developing countries, according to the United Nations Development Program. Comparative studies on disability legislation show that only 45 countries have anti-discrimination laws for people with disabilities. In these modern times this is a sad state of affairs. Nevertheless, both India and Liberia have instituted "People with Disability" Acts,

and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted on Dec. 13, 2006, and came into effect on May 3, 2008. So, there is hope that the situation for the disabled of the world will change.

The International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs, a branch of Braille Without Borders, located in Kerala, India, intends to improve the conditions of people with visual impairment throughout the world by providing education and training to ambitious and qualified blind and partially sighted social entrepreneurs. I am happy to be a part of this movement.

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*Yoshimi Horiuchi (Japan)*

## **What is Equality?**

Exerpt from the article: Exam centres granting extra time for blind  
12 Mar 2009, 0503 hrs IST, Lakshmy Ramanathan, TNN, Times of India

CHENNAI: Clearing the air on whether visually impaired students are entitled to extra time while writing board examinations, Vasanthi Jeevanantham, director of government examinations, said on Wednesday, "There will be no extra time for visually impaired students who will be writing their boards this year. They will only be provided with a scribe. This will be communicated to the chief educational officer and district officer later today."

The director, however, added that students with minor visual impairments caused by accidents or injuries who chose to write exams without the help of a scribe would be given extra time.

Teachers across state have also been requesting better scribes, alternative questions to maps, graphs and match the following' segments in the question papers for the blind, but the director said any new consideration will be taken up



only next year. "We will not issue any new concessions because elections have been announced and exams have already started," said Jeevanantham.

Displeased with the cut in time, the principal of a city-based school for the blind said, "We received a letter from the DGE this year saying students of class ten would not be granted extra time. The communication was silent about the class twelve exam. Students need extra time for papers like history, geography and economics as they have to visualise elements such as maps and graphs."

(inputs from Karthika Gopalakrishnan)  
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Chennai/Exam-centres-granting-extra-time-for-blind/articleshow/4253284.cms>

Commentary: When I took major examinations such as entrance exams to universities, assessments for language proficiency such as TOEFL, and tests for professional licenses, I requested extra time (time and a half.) I did not feel ashamed to make such requests, as I knew it is absolutely fair to do so.

First, it is impossible for a Braille reader or large print user to "take a glance" at a page. For instance, if you have a question with four possible answers, a sighted examinee can scan through the choices in an instant. On the other hand, a Braille user has to read it line by line to grasp all choices. Second, as mentioned in the article, visualization of images takes quite a long time. Third, it is more difficult for Braille readers to read and write at the same time as Braille reading is often done with two hands. Finally, when students have to take exams orally, it will still take much longer as the examinee often has to ask the reader to repeat a question several times in the case of long and complex contents.

These facts should be clearly explained,

not only to the examiners but also to the examinees. In many cases, the examiners think that it would be unfair to have such adjustments, and insist on equal time. The blind students, on the other hand, try their best to prove their ability even though there are some disadvantageous factors that their sighted peers do not have. It might be advisable to have a set of standards for the examinees with special needs. Concrete numerical data, such as time required to read one page, should serve as backup to support this standardization.

Equality should not just be a superficial appearance such as amount of time provided for each student. Instead it should be ensured through thorough investigation of the overall requirements and be based on facts.

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## **COMEDY AND HUMOR**

*Jayne Wairimi and Lucy N.K. Karimi  
(Kenya)*

### **Jayne and Lucy's Joke Shop The Blind Tourist**

There was a blind man from Nigeria who decided to visit Kenya. When he arrived on the plane, he felt the seats and said, "Wow, these seats are big!" The person next to him answered, "Everything is big in Kenya."

When he finally arrived in Kenya, he decided to visit a restaurant. Upon arriving, he ordered a beer and got a mug placed between his hands. He exclaimed, "Wow these mugs are big!"

The attendant replied, "Everything is big in Kenya." After a couple of beers, the blind man asked where the bathroom was located. The attendant replied, "Second door to the right."



*Jayne Waithera*

The blind man headed for the bathroom but accidentally skipped by the second door and instead entered the third door, which led to the swimming pool. He fell into the pool by accident. Scared to death, he started shouting, "Don't flush! Don't flush!"

### **Interestingly Painful**

A guy goes to the supermarket and notices an attractive woman waving at him. She says, "Hello!!" He's rather taken aback because he can't place where he knows her from. So he says, "Do you know me??" to which the woman replies, "I think you're the father of one of my kids." Completely shocked, the guy's mind travels back to the only time that he was unfaithful to his wife and says, "My God!....are you the stripper from my bachelor party that I made love to on the pool table with all my friends watching??!!" Confused, the woman looks into his eyes and says calmly, "No, I am your son's teacher!" Moral Of The Story: You Need to Know the Complete Picture Before you Open Your Mouth!

*Hussni J. Bugis (Saudi Arabia)*

### **Mosquitoes in the Dark**

Among the many various goals of the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs (IISE) there is a goal to improve participants' work in a group setting. Starting with Act 2, participants were introduced to a case study known as Tansalesia. My Tansalesian work group planned to establish a project for visually impaired people living in this imaginary country. My group includes myself from Saudi Arabia, Eric from Ghana, James and Victor from Liberia, Jessica from Germany, and Yoshimi from Japan. We were assigned the classroom called Chomolangma as our meeting room.

Very often at the IISE we experience power cuts both day and night. One night after dinner my team decided to continue our work on the the Tansalesian project, so we agreed to meet in Chomolangma. I went there ahead of time, turned on my laptop to get ready for our work, and waited for the rest of the team to arrive. Before they arrived, the electricity went off, although I still had some light coming from my laptop screen. As a partially sighted participant, I use headphones to listen to the screen reader for some of our work.

Jessie, Yoshi, and James (all totally blind participants) arrived next and we all sat around the table discussing our project when suddenly James from Liberia stood up and started to hit and smash the palm of his hand on his own chest, shoulders, arms and thighs because he was being stung by mosquitoes that were flying all over the place; everyone of us in the room could hear the buzzing sound of mosquitos in our ears.

I turned my head towards James and saw in the dim light of my computer screen the

outline of his standing body. Immediately I said to him, "Do you know, James, why mosquitoes like you so much?" He replied, "No! Why?" I answered, "Because you are wearing a black T-shirt and black shorts." "Is that so?" James replied confusedly.

After a few moments the electricity came back on again and while I was looking at the members of our team, I noticed that James was wearing a red T-shirt. I asked him, "Weren't you wearing a black T-shirt a little while ago?"

James answered, "No, I entered the room shirtless and I just put my T-shirt on."

I had not realized that James was shirtless when he entered the room. When we all understood that it was my poor eyesight and James's dark black skin that had made me think he was wearing a black T-shirt, we all burst out laughing. Especially Yoshi. Yoshi laughed so hysterically she fell off her chair and slid under the table.

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*Isabel Torres, Catalyst (Spain) and Paul Kronenberg (Holland)*

### **The Towel Thingy**

From: Isabel  
Date: 05.09.2008 22:53:20  
To: braillew  
Subject: MOST URGENT

Hi Paul,  
I promised Satheesh that I would write "MOST URGENT" in the subject field of this email and since I like keeping my promises . . . This email is about the "towel thingy" of which I sent you a picture yesterday.

Today there has been a long cross-cultural debate at the site about best methods of drying and hanging towels.

Basically, we are trying to figure out whether the best solution is to mass produce the designed model for all bathrooms.

Here are the pros and cons . . . Actually, just the cons:

1. The towel thingy is a little bulky and does not fit easily in smaller bathrooms. One solution provided by Ajith is to affix it to the back of the bathroom door. I agree.

2. In other bathrooms, where it is possible to affix the thingy to the wall, it seems to be protruding a little too much thus preventing full opening of door. According to Mr KK Nair this could be solved by eliminating one hanger from the design, in which case of course one towel would have to be hung next to the other. In my opinion, the door opens wide enough.

3. Mr KK Nair also contributed to the controversy by adding that a wooden hanger would deteriorate fast as a consequence of humidity. I mentioned Scandinavians actually living in wooden houses, which are most of the time exposed to rain and snow, but to no avail. I am informed this is a different type of wood we are dealing with here.



*Isabel Torres and Sabriye Tenberken*

4. And here is my own little contribution: if I was sharing a hanger where one towel goes on top and the other hides underneath, I would want to have mine on

top - what about you? There is a question I cant help asking myself: why do we need the towel thingy anyway? In my tiny apartment, I just use a hook on the door and that has never prevented my towel from drying (without fungus or funny smells).

Here are some arguments in favor of hooks:

1. They are dirt cheap and never look bad.
  2. You can have two, three or even more in one bathroom.
  3. They never prevent any door from opening to its fullest.
  4. They promote equality amongst bathroom mates.
  5. They can also be used to hang clothes.
- I may stop the list here, 'cos if liking the hanger makes you a "hanger man, " I don't want to think what promoting the hook may turn me into . . . Finally if towels get really wet, participants may also hang them on their balconies. Of course, this will give the whole dormitory building a "Little Sicily" flavor . . . but would this be that bad? As a girl from the South, I guess I cannot really trust my judgment on that one.

So, Paul . . . what do we do with the towel thingies? Please, don't let us hang too long for your answer!!!

Big smiles,  
Isa

Date: Sat, 6 Sep 2008 11:22:44 +0800  
From: BrailleWB  
To: isabel  
Subject: Re: MOST URGENT

Dear Isabel,  
Thank you for your e-mail. We nearly got a heart attack when we read the MOST URGENT header. We've had some bad experiences with headers like that in the past! But then reading your e-mail we felt INDEED this is most urgent. WOW, what a discussion! When we finished reading

your e-mail we rang the farm project's alarm bell and had an emergency meeting with the entire Towel Rack Think Tank Assembly (TRTTA)!

After several hours of ferocious debate we finally came to an acceptable compromise amongst the different twisted parties! We thought that we had had some tough meetings in the past but this one was THE MOTHER of all debates!! We are still dripping blood sweat and tears! Well, not to let you wait any longer, here is the advice of our Towel Rack Think Tank:

It is suggested that you forget about wooden racks. Instead, an economical solution could be found by attaching two hooks to either side of the wall parallel to the shower partition. Between these two hooks a clothesline can be attached. Clothes hangers can be used to hang on this line so there is space to dry clothes as well as towels.

Our TRTTA team suspects that the local Trivandrum TRTTA team had too many difficulties in thinking outside "the rack. " You, as a visionary, were able to make the transformation to elevate the matter to the hook level . . . Our TRTTA team took this a step further to the level of the line. The reason: if towels hang on a hook against the wall, the surface of towel to air ratio is less in comparison to "free hanging towels." (Reference: "The Physics of Drying Towels"; MIT Applied Physics Quarterly; Autumn, 2008.))

We hope that the TRV-TRTTA Chapter is willing to consider the above mentioned option.

Yours sincerely,  
The Tibet Shigatse Towel Rack Think Tank Assembly (TTSTRTTA)



*Hussni J. Bugis (Saudi Arabia)*  
**Unidentified Foster Family**

I consider the foster family to be one of the best means of support for the participants of the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs (IISE) to overcome homesickness. The idea of this program is to spend some time with the foster family during weekends or holidays.

One afternoon, the IISE had a small tea party in the auditorium to introduce all participants to these families. Each family was linked with one or two participants. That day every participant was wearing a name tag; a schedule had been made with all the names matched up with various families.

At the arrival time, most participants and catalysts received the foster families at the main gate and walked with them to the auditorium. All participants were introduced. All families sat with their participants and enjoyed tea and coffee with varieties of delicious biscuits and cakes.

Johnson from Liberia, Robert from Kenya and I, from Saudi Arabia, could not identify our foster families, simply because they did not show up.

My dear friend Yoshimi from Japan was linked only by herself to one of the foster families. Also Robert was supposed to be on his own, so the organizers decided to link him with Yoshimi. I noticed every family so far had only two participants.

Johnson and I, the orphaned ones, sat at one table, staring at the two empty chairs; well, maybe not Johnson, who is totally blind. We didn't give up our hopes that our family might show up at the last moment.

All the guests and participants were having a good time, chatting and laughing with each other. They just enjoyed the social setting. Whereas Johnson and I sat by ourselves, talking to each other and wishing to meet our family.

Simon and Jenni are two volunteer students from Germany. They both do so many jobs around the IISE campus, helping catalysts and participants with daily life tasks around this beautiful place.

Simon and Jenni entered the auditorium, which was fully occupied by participants and families, except for the two chairs at our table; so they came to join us. I then said jokingly: "Oh, here is our foster family!" and shook hands with them. I honestly forgot that my fellow Johnson, the Liberian guy sitting beside me, could not see Simon.

Johnson stood up and shook hands with Simon, believing that he was our real foster friend. He also hugged him and welcomed him with great respect. At this moment Simon played the role of the foster friend, hugging Johnson and asking him how he is doing and what is new.

Jenni and I were silently laughing at the incident until Johnson finally realized that the person sitting beside him was only Simon, and not our real foster friend. Then I exploded with laughter, with my eyes full of tears.

Up until today, while I am writing this article, our foster family have not turned up. While most participants spend a very nice time with their foster families, especially at weekends, I just feel sorry for Johnson because he is always asking me when our foster family will arrive! But, with all my respect to our foster family, I do not have any answer for him.

*Editor's Note: By time of publishing, we*

are all happy that a new foster family was found for Hussni and Johnson!

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*Victor Gaigaie (Liberia)*

## **School for the Blind**

This article about my experience in a school for the blind in Liberia contains a lesson.



*Victor Gaigaie*

I had a funny experience when I newly went to the school for the blind. Every evening we were having prayer service before going to bed. One night during the service, each student was asked to quote biblical verse. All my colleagues knew how to quote biblical verse, but I could not because I didn't know any.

When my time came to quote, I was thinking of what to say and a thought entered my mind to say, "God-time is the best," without any reference from the Bible. All of my friends began to laugh at me. Then, our director at that time said, "Victor's quotation was also right in the sense that of all the time we have, God-time is the best. When God-time has reached for you to do something to improve your life or to change other lives, nothing can stop that time." The director made my quotation to be meaningful and to have a lesson in it to learn.

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## **MOVIE CORNER**

*Arky - Rakesh Ambati, Catalyst (India)*

## **Documenting a Human Tragedy**

The story of India's green revolution has a dark side. It is the shade of dark crimson, the color of blood. Between 1996 and 2006 100,000 farmers committed suicide in Vidarbha region in the north Indian state of Maharashtra. Since June of 2005 two to three farmers take their lives every day. The seeds of this problem were sown with the introduction of the green revolution in the mid 60's. Farming in India was largely organic, needing little investment. Farmers would use the seeds that they saved from the previous harvest. But the green revolution changed all that, now farmers had to buy seeds, fertilizers and pesticides by borrowing money at high interest rates from Sahukar's (private money lenders) and in the course of time farmers were trapped in huge debt. Such disasters don't go unnoticed--they rarely do. Headlines trumpeted, relief poured in and so did the politicians with their 'packages'.

Now just few years on, this issue is forgotten by the mainstream media. Suma Josson, a journalist turned filmmaker, documents the problem that took many years in the making. In her latest documentary film, "I Want my Father Back" she asks a few crucial questions. I managed to catch this documentary at the recent KAFISO Third National Short and Documentary Film Festival. The documentary managed to walk away with the first prize that it so richly deserves.

The film deals with the disastrous way in which India's green revolution pushed traditional farming practises aside in a mad dash to increase crop yield. New hybrid seeds were introduced with heavy subsidies. Fertilisers and pesticides were

introduced at low prices, and attractive loans were offered for those who could not afford to buy them. Cash crops like cotton and soya soon replaced the food crops. Farmers went into debt to manage their homes and farms and were getting low prices for their crops largely due to corrupt and inefficient marketing practices of farmers co-operatives. Trapped in deep debt, the farmers resorted to taking their own lives.

Josson's film deals in detail with every facet of this problem, effects of globalization, economic policies of successive governments that helped create new markets for large multinational corporations. The menace of costly Bt cotton seeds with their false claims of high yield, its adverse effects on environment and the health of cotton industry workers. Lack of measures to protect and promote the indigenous seed varieties that are resistant to pests and well adapted to local conditions. Also the erosion of traditional farming method of cultivating heterogeneous crops which provided a safe net in case of single crop failure. Perhaps it is the director's early training as a journalist that played a large role in her investigative approach. The documentary provides a revealing mix of scientific evidence, farmers' insights and experiences, along with the voices of activists.

The mass suicides of farmers is not the problem of Vidarbha alone. In the other Indian states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab farmers are committing suicide in large numbers. Every day we hear similar stories from other parts of the world. This documentary forces the audience to think and to ask itself: Is this the state of the world to come?



*Participants and catalysts by the lake*

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*Special thanks to **Lena Behrendes** for the photographs she contributed to this first edition of our magazine!*

**Layout:** *Nora Hartenstein*  
**Edited by:** *Jessica Schroeder*  
*Rosemary Mahoney*

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*For more information about the IISE, please visit our webpage*  
[www.bwb-iise.org](http://www.bwb-iise.org)

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