Katete: Tikondane is “the real Africa”

By Wolfgang Käseler
Translated by Erik Eriksen for Tikondane Community Centre

Katete, a place in the Eastern Province of Zambia. Somewhere between Chipata and Lusaka on the Great East Road. A stopover for me on the road from South Luangwa National Park back to the capital. Tikondane is the name of a remarkable project there, which has dedicated itself to the fight against poverty in Eastern Zambia. Here, in Tiko Lodge, I have spent a couple of days.

This is about my experiences in Katete and at Tikondane. And about the people whose fates are tied up with this place.

The bus from Mfuwe had dropped me off in Chipata. Now I am looking sceptically into the interior of the shared taxi that is waiting on the Great East Road. It is already filled well up. Two men sit beside the driver, three women of sturdy stature behind them. How can I too fit in there? The taxi driver lets one of the women climb out. After I get in, also the woman presses herself in and the driver even manages to close the door. Somehow. Four cramped bodies in the back seat are for better or worse merged with each other for the journey to Katete.

**Great East Road in Katete, the Height of Tikondane**

**Why exactly to Katete?**

An evening conversation in Mfuwe had resulted in the deflection. In connection with a safari in South Luangwa National Park. Rosal is Dutch and works in Katete as a volunteer. She has given me the tip and spoken about the interesting stories and impressions tha
awaited there. And told me about Tikondane Community Centre, a remarkable project. Much more was not necessary in order to convince me. My next destination was clear.

**Arrival at Tikondane: First impression**

The journey from Chipata to Katete goes surprisingly well. Some 140 kph had my curious glimpse in the meantime spotted on the speedometer. A bit fast on a road where pedestrians and cyclists are on their way, as well. Where, moreover, animals again and again are forced into the road. My bottom had gradually begun to ache and also both legs demanded a new sitting position. Naturally a completely hopeless desire in light of the situation in the back seat with the three well-developed women. Even greater the joy that I can leave the crowded vehicle quicker than expected.

**Tiko Lodge: One of the guesthouses**

*Tikondane*, for short *Tiko*, is located somewhat outside *Katete*, some 2 km in the direction of *Lusaka*. The first impression: cheerful children playing, a peaceful scene. My accommodation for the next days is a cosy room with warm tones of yellow and red. I have to laugh when *Tobias*, the friendly man in reception, wants to know for how many weeks I will be staying.

**Tikondane: Frida, Tisauke, Vitalina and Anna, the nice women in the kitchen**

A first stroll around the premises of Tiko brought about an image of impressive variedness. In the restaurant are products from their own cultivation utilised. Even animals are kept for this purpose. Chickens, pigeons, rabbits and goats. *Nsima*, the traditional Zambian dish with a pap
of maize meal, stands at the centre of the menu. Moreover, they make their own bread and produce peanut butter and banana jam. What else is there? Soap from their own production. Moreover, there is being woven and sewn. All products are on sale in a shop on the premises. Even furniture for their own needs is made. Besides, a school and a hall for meetings and events belong to the project.

Donations from the British Channel Island of Guernsey have made the construction of the building possible

A total of 85 people work in different fields. In Tiko, they have all found a home and a job that they did not previously have. The Community Centre has become a big family for them. Also Abel is one of the many friendly people; he is responsible for finance and administration. And asks likewise for how many weeks I will be staying. I now know the question and also Abel learns that I will be staying merely for a few days.

**Musa, the man with the big hands**

*Musa* is a friendly and helpful young man who accompanies me a few times in the next days. He has huge hands from birth. What has nature thought of there? *Musa* tells me about his life. His mother died early; later, he lived on the street for several years. Has begged and occasionally worked here or there one, two days. For a meal, in order to survive. People have teased and ridiculed him because of his hands. Often he just wanted to hide because of shame.

*Musa* came to Tikondane 8 years ago. He was hard-working and willing to learn; had first worked in the garden, then in the restaurant and the reception. Now he works as a tour guide for guests at *Tiko Lodge*. As DJ, he accompanies events for children and youth. Moreover, he is responsible for internet and the 6 computers of Tikondane. From where has he got the knowledge? *Musa* has copied everything from friends. Even English has he learnt this way. He is popular now and is respected by everyone. He has even found a wife. First, her parents were against him; he had to fight for an entire year. Then the parents-in-law saw him at work at Tikondane Community Centre. That has convinced them. They have accepted him and apologised. It sounds almost like a fairytale, but it is a true story, which it would not have been without Tikondane.
Kachipu, a village near Katete
Together with Musa I visit Kachipu, one of the villages that are supported by Tikondane. Dirt roads and trails lead there. A sandy surface and headwinds make our journey by bike more difficult. In the village, two years old Benny is delighted with our arrival. It is a touching image when his small hand grabs the disproportionately big hand of Musa. Suddenly, however, he begins to cry. Out of the blue. I want to know what is wrong. But Benny does not understand me; he does not speak any English yet. Neither Musa nor I know what grief has come upon the little man, who just yet was so cheerful.

Kachipu has got 400 inhabitants. It is not long ago that one here learnt how to build houses from bricks. Some still consist of clay. There are simple conditions: Water is available in only two, three central places. Not only the cool wind and light drizzle provide for the dreary atmosphere. Nevertheless, I look into lots of smiling faces. With a 19 step programme, Tikondane has taken on the fight against poverty in this rural society. In order to act against chronic malnutrition and above all HIV/AIDS prevention.
**Tikondane: How it all began**

*Elke Kroeger-Radcliffe* is the founder of *Tikondane*. Unfortunately, I have not met her in person in *Katete*; she was travelling in Europe. *Elke* is a native German; a film about the Holocaust has made a lasting impression on her attitude to life. Therefore, she originally did not want to get married or have children. She studies cross-cultural psychology; through a scholarship she comes to London. There she nevertheless gets married and moves to *Sydney*. The cancer death of her husband, a professor, means the abrupt end of a happy marriage and turns her life around. *Elke* trains as a nurse and goes to Africa. In *Katete* she works at *St. Francis Hospital*. She even offers literacy classes there, but soon learns that this is not the most urgent need of the people here. That is the beginning of *Tikondane*, translated into English as “let’s love together”.

**Children in Katete**

**Visit to Kachipu village**

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**The children of Katete**

Several times I go to *Katete* to have a look around there. Already on the way, there are curious glances. Some people laugh and say hello. Several bicycle taxis with a narrow bench instead of a luggage carrier are on the road. A beloved means of transportation for overcoming the sometimes long distances. For those who can afford it. The others walk.

*On their way, barefoot in the market*

In town, I am the only White. Naturally, there is also here much attention for me. It seems that many have never seen a person with a white skin colour. At least for one or the other small child who begins to cry at the sight of me does that hold true. On the following day, there are fewer glances, so it seems to me, anyway. That is possibly due to my dark jacket, which covers at least my arms. It had become even cooler.
Market impressions in Katete

Striking is the high share of children that are on the move in Katete Stores. The name of the part of town where a market and various shops dominate the view. Many of the children run around bare-footed, in dirty clothes full of holes. In a way they act grown up at an age where they in Germany would be placed well-protected in the pram.

Mphangwe, the mysterious mountain

A cloudy mountain scenery provides for a panorama of Katete. Mphangwe is the name of the peak that even affects weather in the area, it is said. There would be cobras and pythons there. I would not return from there, I get to hear in town. But I trust Musa, who knows his stuff.

And, in fact, far and wide there are no big snakes to see, as we are off to climb Mphangwe on Sunday morning. Some birds are frightened; they are the only animals that show themselves. At the top, however, there is not much to see. We find ourselves, meanwhile, above the mix of clouds and fog that surrounds the top of the mountains. A view of the landscape is possible for merely half the stretch.
Departure from Tikondane

After four days, I yet again stand on the Great East Road. Waiting for the bus that will bring me from Katete to Lusaka, the capital. Ferdinand keeps me company. He works in the garden of the Community Centre; they have sent him to be sure that the bus and everything work. That is how one takes care of family members. And I belong a little bit to it, too.

Ferdinand wears a blue hoodie with the name Humboldt-Gymnasium Berlin-Tegel on it. There they have for many years supported the work of Tikondane; especially the construction of the school was significantly aided. What fate may have befallen Ferdinand before he came to Tikondane? But there is no more time for more stories; far away the bus is already to be seen.

Experiencing “the real Afrika” at Tikondane

An entire book could be written about Tikondane and its people. With 85 chapters; for each member of the family a new one. In each case a very personal story. The 86th chapter would be dedicated to Elke Kroeger-Radcliffe. This strong woman with the bright vision without which there would not be the Tikondane Community Centre. Only that the writing of the book about “the real Africa” would actually take quite a few weeks.

About the author
Wolfgang Käseler is an independent travel blogger.