

Kenya on My Mind: An Interview with Mayor Heidi Davison - Transcript

TEXT: In September 2008, 9 American women traveled to Kenya to develop empowerment networks with Maasai women.

TEXT: The State Department's Office of Citizen Exchanges sponsored the program.

TEXT: Heidi Davison, the Mayor of the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, was one of the participants.

TEXT: Like her counterparts, she continues to be influenced by her exchange experience.

HEIDI DAVISON: The trip to Kenya for me was a wonderful and an exceptionally memorable experience, and it still is. I think about it actually a lot. It comes to mind in my daily doings for whatever, I see something, I hear something, I read something and something about my trip will come back to me. So, it left such a deep and lasting impression on me. One of the things that I think was so valuable for me was that I have in my, throughout my life, as I've read, as I've watched television programs, as I've gone to movies, anything that's intended to be an educational experience, to help enhance my world view, I think has unintentionally left more of a distorted view of other people around the world that you don't realize is a distorted view until you have that very personal experience of spending time with people from another country, another culture and you begin to experience what life is like for them. And that I think, in and of itself, is the experience that truly enhances and changes, transforms your view of other people around the world. So, I think with having the Kenyan women last year and being able to visit with them in their own country, you begin to really understand that people are very much alike, they have similar personal desires for themselves, for their families, for their communities and the difference is just in the magnitude in the challenges that we all experience. I found a very deep and abiding love of education when I was Kenya and the difficulty in trying to get their children educated and for us, we have that same love of education here in our country. The magnitude of trying to deliver education for them and for us is completely different. They have challenges. They have environmental challenges, with water, with drought. We do here. Delivery of water services. We have those challenges here. It's the magnitude of the problem that I think becomes all the more apparent when you have the opportunity to make that personal visit. But I found that all the members of our group, the ladies, have been very engaging. They are all very bright. They are all very articulate. They are doing work in very interesting areas of their community. They exhibit leadership skills on a daily basis. They're hungry to learn and hungry to provide their experiences to their communities to make their communities better places, which is exactly what I do as the mayor.

TEXT: exchanges.state.gov/citizens/prof

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