

Zanzibar SDA Dispensary

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Zanzibar SDA Dispensary was officially registered January 31, 1988, with the Tanzania Union Mission officers as trustees.

Developments that Led to the Establishment of the Dispensary

The first evangelism strategy of the SDA Church to the Zanzibar and Pemba islands was the use of literature evangelists (colporteurs). Evangelists from the Pare Mountains started visiting Zanzibar Island in the late 1930s and several times tried to sell Adventist books to government officers, but it was not easy for them to sell Christian books to Muslims. Immediately after the church declared the Tanganyika territory an SDA mission field in the 1940s by the then East African Union of Seventh Adventists, the leaders planned to evangelize the southern part of Tanzania and the island of Zanzibar.¹

In 1945 W. Marais, a South African missionary in Kenya, went to solicit ingathering funds on Zanzibar island, and other church representatives have since made similar annual visits and have also sold many SDA books. In 1956 an African literature evangelist and his family went to Zanzibar from Tanganyika, and his work resulted in the first baptism of a Shiraz in 1958. In the year 1986, the Tanganyika General Field's leadership sent an evangelist named Mr. Yohana Rukwaro to Zanzibar.² Welcomed and hosted by Dr. Laban Mugendi, he stayed with him for three years. When Rukwaro started selling books, it helped to create awareness of the Adventist message on the island.³

The second strategy was evangelism through health services. The Tanzania Union and the division sent medical doctors to Zanzibar to conduct "How to Stop Smoking" programs and present lectures on the hazards of using alcohol and pork several times. Because such topics were compatible with Muslim beliefs, they received a good response. For that reason the Tanzania Union Mission leadership saw the possibility of establishing a health facility in Zanzibar that could be an opening for potential evangelism.⁴

Founding of the Institution

In 1987 the Tanzania Union Mission in Arusha formed a three-person committee consisting of the following individuals: Elisha Okeyo (executive secretary), Mr. Haire Zerai (treasurer), and Dr. Godfrey Chamba (the Health

Ministries director) to look into the possibility of starting a health facility in Unguja (Zanzibar). The team visited Zanzibar Island to meet the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar leadership to inquire about the possibility of establishing a Seventh-day Adventist Church health facility. After the team met Zanzibar's Chief Minister, the Honorable Mr. Sharif Hamad, and shared the SDA health department mission and vision for the Zanzibar Islands, he showed great interest. He said that he had once visited one of the church-owned health institutions when attending a parliament meeting in Dodoma, and was impressed by the quality of services that he received. In late 1986 the Tanzania Union Committee sent Dr. Ellison Mujungu, then Health Ministries director of the Tanzania Union Mission, to Zanzibar to locate and purchase buildings. With the assistance of Mr. Yohana Rukwaro, an SDA already in Zanzibar, they located a place called Meya in Zanzibar with a two-building property belonging to Mr. Abbas Hussein. The buildings had been formerly hotels. The union mission bought the premises the same year and then immediately started renovation to meet the standards for a health facility recommended by the Zanzibar Revolutionary Government Ministry of Health. Medical, surgical, and laboratory equipment and medicines for the pharmacy arrived from the Tanzania mainland, and then the union began to recruit the first staff members.⁵

The office of the chief minister allowed the church to open and operate the facility in accordance with the Zanzibar Revolutionary Government health provision policies. Such regulations required that all health services must be provided free to the people. However, the church could open a separate pharmacy for the public to buy medicines in the other building on the property. The two separate services started operating simultaneously, helping to solve the institution's financial sustainability.⁶

Initial staff transferred from mainland institutions included: administrator in-charge, Dr. Josiah Tayali from Kamunyonge SDA Dispensary in Musoma-Mara; Mrs. Rosemary Biseko, a nursing officer and Mr. Sylvester Biseko, a pharmacist from Heri Mission Hospital; Mr. Twalib Khamis, a retired laboratory technician from Zanzibar Government Hospital; Mr. and Mrs. Zawadi Mbwambo, nurses from Heri Adventist Hospital; and Miss Magdalena Mdee, a nursing assistant from Magomeni SDA Dispensary in Dar es Salaam.⁷

The Ministry of Health of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar officially registered the dispensary January 31, 1988, with the Tanzania Union Mission officers as trustees. The chairperson was William Taylor, secretary was Elisha Okeyo, and treasurer was Haire Zerai. It immediately opened and started its work with only outpatient and pharmaceutical services for the first two years (1988-1989). At the end of 1989, the government of Zanzibar brought some equipment for maternal and child health services and two nurse midwives were deployed to assist in free baby deliveries and reproductive health services. Five years later the government allowed private clinics to start operating as private dispensaries with user fees paid by patients for all outpatient services. It meant the merging of the pharmacy and the outpatient clinic.⁸

History of the Institution

In 2013 the East Tanzania Conference of SDAs renovated the dispensary with funds from both the conference and the East-Central Africa Division. The goal was to upgrade both the physical plant and the quality of services. The dispensary has been a blessing to the people of Zanzibar. It focuses on three types of services: curative, promotive, and preventive. In 2013 alone, the dispensary treated a total of 3,300 patients and offered free services to a total number of 7,800. It checked developmental milestones and vaccinations in young children, monitored and vaccinated 2,100 pregnant women, and had 3,200 women attending its family planning services. During the same period, the clinic conducted a total number of 140 health talks.⁹

The East-Central Africa Division president, Dr. Blasius Ruguri, officially opened the renovated building August 4, 2014. Currently, the Zanzibar Adventist Dispensary is ranked second in providing free maternal and child health services on Zanzibar, and its laboratory is one of the centers for malaria control on the island.¹⁰

After decades of an unsuccessful struggle to introduce itself through the colporteur ministry, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tanzania has used its health ministry department to acquaint the Zanzibar Islands with Adventism. The dispensary that started in 1987 has acted as a wedge to allow the Adventist presence and message to reach the island. Before 1986 no known Adventist congregations existed on Zanzibar.

In 1987 the union mission requested and received permission to open a dispensary. A Zanzibar government official who had experienced quality health services offered at one of the Adventist Church's health institutions on the Tanzania mainland facilitated the process of establishing the facility. Literature evangelism also continued, resulting in the baptism of nine in 1989. In 1990 12 more accepted baptism, and in 1992 a church of 70 members organized on Zanzibar. In Pemba 32 people now worship on Sabbath. General Conference president Robert Folkenberg inaugurated the first church building on the island of Zanzibar with more than 50 members.¹¹

Outlook

The Zanzibar SDA Dispensary plans to upgrade its present programs by adding specialized medical services such as ultrasound, dentistry, and surgery in order to attract more clients and increase contact with the local community. The vision is to transform it to become a better living center where people will get proper lifestyle orientation and high quality services and hence reach out even more to Zanzibar.

List of Leaders

Dr. Josiah Tayali (1987-1989); Daniel Matekere (1989-2000); Clifford Majani (2001-2004); Ezekiel Nyairo (2011-2017); William Kirat (2017-2018); Emmanuel Ryoba Charles (2018-2019).

Okeyo, Elisha. *The church on the Move, Tanzania*. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Ufunuo Publishing House, 2016.

Tayali, Josiah. "ETC Year End Committee Health report, 2013," available at the conference secretariat office, Morogoro, Tanzania.

"Zanzibar Island–Tanzania." Accessed February 17, 2020. <https://www.britanica.com/place/zanzibar-island-Tanzania>.

NOTES

1. "Zanzibar Island–Tanzania," <https://www.britanica.com/place/zanzibar-island-Tanzania>.
2. Elisha Okeyo. *The church on the move; Tanzania* (Dar es Salam, Tanzania: Ufunuo Publishing House, 2016).
3. Laban Mugendi, interview by author, March 20, 2019.
4. Okeyo, *The church on the Move*.
5. Elisha Okeyo, interview by author, April 22, 2019.
6. Dr.Laban Mugendi, interview by author, University of Arusha, April 1, 2019.
7. Abdallah Hassan Abdallah, interview by author, Zanzibar, Mji Mkongwe, April 3, 2019.
8. Magdalena Mdee, telephone interview by author, October 11, 2019.
9. "ETC Health Year End report-2013."
10. Rhoda Mulungu, telephone interview by author December 12, 2019.
11. Elisante Mshama Jr., interview by author, Dar es Salaam, December 20, 2019.

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