

Joining the Board of MSF: “And what does MSF DO?”

Submitted by Simone Paige

I found myself in this work by accident because a friend coaxed me to test for the position. Like many Subud members I knew that the mission statement identified MSF as the foundation that serves long term needs of Subud, but had only a glimpse of how the work to accomplish the mission was proceeding. As a newcomer to the board of The Mohammed Subuh Foundation, I find I am continually discovering a larger Subud sphere of activity, a network of people and latihan spaces connecting groups to many forms of Subud outreach into the world. Recognizing the realities of places I once saw as remote, colorful internet impressions, I now stand in awe of members traveling to the Congo, striving to bring food, water, electricity to areas where the reality of basic resources is a daily question, working in India to serve slum children, or forming a legal entity to provide a Subud house in Viet Nam. Over the past year I have witnessed the potential value of Subud in the world as it works to nurture charitable, cultural, health projects and spaces where groups can develop their inner and outer forms of worship.

At our meeting in Bangalore, I was fully immersed and sometimes overwhelmed by the intricate details that arise in the process of overseeing MSF grants. As a beginning board member, I like the challenge of learning how Subud projects operate around the world under such diverse circumstances, laws, traditions. I have faced many questions regarding MSF’s priorities, funding, and its relation to other branches of Subud. (I sometimes dream of a computer chip for my brain that would fill in the many gaps). I confess that I have been a slow learner in regard to our efforts in distant countries. As a teacher, I sometimes drew a blank when Bapak spoke about enterprise for I was happily caught in my own groove doing helper work. Having studied and taught cultural patterns, I am delighted that my current job demands that I reach around the globe and begin to relate to a wider context. I hope that members will further question MSF and the work of the wings, for we learn and grow with new questions. MSF growth and expansion depends on members’ understanding of its mission and work, for its evolving task of providing for the future of Subud. As my first year comes to an end, I have a fuller picture of the need to deepen development of the latihan in all areas, but one cannot help but be touched by those populations suffering war, governmental chaos and corruption, deprivation, dislocation, etc..

MSF faces numerous challenges. We are working to approve and further support projects that will provide latihan and other facilities in the Congo, Viet Nam, India, the Ukraine, Columbia, Ecuador and elsewhere. I have been surprised that the work often brings the feeling that I am starting the latihan anew. I begin to appreciate Bapak and Ibu Rahayu’s talks, reminding us that our latihan links practical work and develops connections to members—teaching us how to respond as we become aware of one another’s gifts and needs. The urgency of this work was made clear as Ibu Rahayu presented two questions after her talk: “*Feel the state of the earth at this time: Feel the state of humanity at this time.*”

Continually shifting our agenda in Bangalore, we added meetings to accommodate members who came with proposals from India, Ecuador, Columbia, Viet Nam, Kinshasa, Kingantoko, Matadi. We also worked to strengthen our connection and understanding of

how our roles might be clarified as we work with WSA, SICA, SIHA, SES and Susila Dharma.

What has impressed me was how the board navigates a complex process of shepherding a group through the grant application into the final stages of setting up a stable Subud center. To those members who asked: "Aren't you the guys who hold the purse strings and hand out the money?" I tried to give a brief sketch of what we actually do. Giving a grant always entails *due diligence*; we need to know that the group has prepared to carry out a project with harmonious cooperation, engaging all members. Our chair, Rohana Mitchell from Australia, leads a set of queries until we are all satisfied that the project has been reviewed with considerable thinking. The preliminary planning, investigation, group decision making is examined as vital to the potential long term success of a Subud center. If Subud is to serve all of mankind, MSF is charged with spending its resources wisely and furthering that mission to the best of its abilities. In India we were able to work closely with the Chennai group to examine their application. Suggesting further review and discussion, we solicited concerns and ideas of members present so that the Subud house would truly serve the full membership of Chennai. In reviewing applications the board looks at several questions:

1. Is the house or land in a location that will allow all members to attend and make use of the center? In the case of some groups member may lack time and money for transportation.
2. Are the latihan spaces large enough and are the two spaces roughly equal to permit men and women to have adequate freedom? Will the space allow the group to grow where there is potential for growth?
3. Is there real harmony and support for a house? (Viet Nam submitted a proposal with all members' signatures in support of the project).
4. How will the house be maintained and how will taxes and electricity etc. be paid?
5. Who owns the land/house and which Subud organization within the country will ultimately own the Subud center? This varies from country to country.
6. To what extent do the members commit to repaying a loan and what are they willing to commit to the upkeep of the property?
7. Are the members happy and willing to make the trip to the location and do they feel comfortable there?

Discussing the proposal that Chennai had submitted to MSF required that we address many of the above questions. Chennai had a piece of land in the Southwest of the city that was close to some members but far from others. As in any group project, some dominant members were eager to push forward with the project against some quiet resistance. It was unclear if all the members of the group would make the commitment to travel to the new center. One attending member raised the question of child care for the women. Although many expressed a desire to find a means of transport to the proposed center, there were differing opinions on the location convenient to the members.

The result of our discussion was that the Chennai members decided to test about the location and the possibility of starting over with a new project. Testing that they had a good site and with a group consensus they immediately returned to work on the plan, adding a plan to put a school for young children on the premises. In two days the group moved toward a unified support of the project. They saw the site as one that would

increase in value and draw more facilities and also agreed on the need to increase the security on the premises. They felt the need to cooperate and begin construction as soon as possible to guarantee they could build on and secure the site. As we said our good-byes, a new plan was being drawn with larger spaces for latihan. Chennai intends to submit this plan in a few months. The board will continue to review the plan via email and hope to support the project as soon as possible.

We later met with a representative of Subud Viet Nam and worked through another set of problems on house ownership, as Viet Nam does not recognize the rights of religious groups to own property. An international corporate entity of Subud members based in Australia was set up to conduct the project. A representative for the group from the international board said to me, "MSF is the water tank and we come for water to make this project grow."

"Well, Minh Su," I said, "We may be the water tank, but we still have a lot of empty space in our tank and a budget of \$60,000 a year for Subud houses, so we have to take care that our principal does not shrink. Of course, it is preferable that it grow." He responded poetically in the form of a proverb. "Oh I see, he said, we cannot deprive the tree of water or its roots will die."

MSF has now an endowment of under 3 million and distributes approximately 175,000 per year for several efforts: translations of Bapak's talks, the Care Support Team (formerly the Almoners), the archives, ISC work, the *History of Subud*, some youth initiatives, and other projects related to the long term growth of Subud. Perceiving that we were the water tank, Viet Nam was requesting a large grant. The plan for the house called for a number of further questions including the need for an impartial valuation of the house, a plan to include bathrooms and a plan to provide two latihan spaces. In this case Minh Su will return to the group with the request for more information and modifications to the plan and will resubmit their proposal. Their representative also feels they can find additional sources of funding, as we suggested.

Because seven board members must follow the progress of grant applications and discuss information often by email, we decided in Bangalore to ask national committees, zone reps, and the International helpers to assist us in gathering information. In their travels to groups they are in a position to help evaluate the preparedness of a group to undertake a project and to follow up on the progress of the group.

As the meeting schedule slowed a bit I had some time to learn an Indian dance that we would perform at the closing ceremony. There were breaks from the business of MSF-- wonderful latihan, Ibu Rahayu's talks and testing. When Ibu Rahayu asked us to feel the state of humanity, we were made aware of the obstacles to peace. The problematic condition of the world underscores the crucial importance of building the latihan, of developing our resources as wisely as we can.

Our meetings spilled over for two extra days. We added meetings to discuss the Kingantoko water project and to explore further cooperation with WSA, Susila Dharma, and the Wings to increase our capacity for oversight and support, and to eliminate duplication of work. In the beginning I wondered if it was OK to ask for a bathroom break but by the end of the meetings, we were all a bit more relaxed, tired but still working with breaks. At one point I was relaxing with some members; one was saying to the other that it was wonderful that his friend had been given by God some difficult problems for he had been blessed with good opportunities for purification. In that

response I was realized my own crash course in purification. Working on subjects of house constructions, foreign laws, ownership issues, problems on which I am largely ignorant, I felt that one dimension of Subud evolves as we wrestle with our nafsu, trying to find our latihan in new situations. I was forced to abandon the idea that I would soon gain a quick mastery of the dynamics operating in the Congo and elsewhere. I have gained enormous admiration for those members working in embattled countries at a most difficult time in our history. I am fortunate to be forced to work in a new way and to follow my testing, showing I was to be stretched like a rubber band to embrace a larger sphere. There is much to be grateful for as we continually receive new challenges in the work that Bapak has set out for us to do. In India, I remembered hearing in the seventies how Bapak stressed a need to learn to work together. Working on such diverse projects and problems across the globe I feel a sense of wonder that Bapak provided a blueprint which serves us even now, in this unanticipated era, allowing us to stay connected and work toward a better future even in the darkest of times. And how fortunate we are that Ibu Rahayu is able to continue this work, that her presence inspires us to come together to recognize how our latihan is “for all of mankind.”