

## AlTo Update January 2016: Sharing Stuff

It would no doubt be more convenient if we just owned our own.

And for certain kinds of equipment--headlamps, GPS units, cameras, tents--we do, thanks to generous donations from AlTo supporters like you. But for many, and especially the larger items--motorbikes, boats, cars, PA systems--we use them regularly, but AlTo has made a choice mostly not to own them ourselves.

Take boats, for instance. To reach our new protected maleo nesting ground location on the remote beachside of Kaumosongi in Tompotika, you can either hike up and over a steep and somewhat treacherous headland (takes two hours and one or two deep breaths), or if the waves are not too high, you can take a boat from the nearby village. If AlTo bought our own boat, it would be convenient: in our control and ready on demand.

But it would require a significant outlay of cash up-front: nearly USD \$1000 for a sturdy locally-made double-outrigger canoe with a good motor--the kind all the locals use to take to sea around here. And on first starting up the new program at Kaumosongi, we weren't yet sure whether such an investment was warranted. So we got in the habit of hiring boats from locals, *ad hoc* for a journey or a day or two at a time.



Photo: Robin Moore

It's not always easy: if it's an unusually rich fishing day, it may take some time to find an able-bodied fisherman willing to leave his trade for the few hours it takes to ferry us to Kaumosongi. Another day, we might find every available boat is in need of some kind of repairs before being deemed seaworthy. But at the start of each week, the call for someone ready to earn some extra cash to carry AlTo staff and their supplies to Kaumosongi for the week's shift is usually extremely welcome--it can make a family's day.

And what began as a financial calculation has since revealed itself to have many other benefits. On the boat ride over, a chat with the boatman will sometimes tip us off to the whereabouts of illegal bomb-fishing activities, which we can in turn report to our contacts in the government Fisheries department. It is invariably a great way to spread the word and draw locals in to the latest news concerning their village's AlTo maleo and sea turtle programs--and even those of the other (friendly rival?) village. It's also a chance

to ask about the health of the neighbor's ailing mother, or get news of the planting now that the rains have returned.

And finally, not having to own our own private boat means not being the agents of consumption of new resources to manufacture it, not having to maintain it, and not having to store it or worry about it when we're not using it.

In short, we have found that hiring, renting, borrowing (and lending) things from villagers whenever we can--rather than owning them ourselves--though not always the most convenient, is usually our preferred way to get along. The small daily transactions through which this practice is played out are in fact much greater than they appear--they help make up the fabric of interconnection, trust, and belonging. Through sharing *stuff*, we *share* stuff.

*Not* being self-contained--in fact, being dependent upon others in the communities in which we work, just as they in turn come to depend upon us--is what makes ALTo part of the community; this is what gives us common ground. And it's common ground, ultimately, upon which successful conservation is based.

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