

Projects for Peace Proposal

Submitted by Hyowoun Jyung and Laura Taylor

The program that we are proposing will utilize a proven framework to educate and empower ten college-age residents of Nairobi, Kenya, leaving a lasting impact on the lives of residents of the Kibera slum. Working in two groups, the participants will design and implement community health-related projects within Kibera. Half of the participants will be students at the University of Nairobi and half will be young adults who live within Kibera. A series of seminars will encourage discussion between the two groups and expose the participants to issues and solution strategies with which they might not previously have been familiar. Through this program, participants will gain practical experience and the knowledge that they can make a difference in their own communities, which will in turn open up greater opportunities for the future. Goals of the program are as follows:

- To engage and challenge participants regarding health and social issues facing Kibera.
- To narrow the gap between college students and the young residents of the Kibera slum.
- To provide space for open discussion and ideas.
- To empower the participants and the members of the community.
- To provide tools necessary to take initiatives for social change and community projects.
- To provide an opportunity for the students to take part in the work of NGOs.

Kibera, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Nairobi and one of the largest slums in Africa, is home to hundreds of thousands of people who live in utter destitution, ignored by the Kenyan government and denied many of the basic necessities of human life. A vicious cycle linking poor health, poor nutrition, a lack of education, and a lack of sufficient incomes keeps the people of Kibera in perpetual poverty; the lack of resources fuels poor sanitation, breeds illness, and prevents many children from entering school, let alone succeeding academically. The people of Kibera have no voice—they lack the economic, political, and social power to demand that their needs be met and to participate fully in Kenyan society. Furthermore, the lack of both physical and psychological security fosters the frequent eruption of violent and deadly clashes.

This does not need to be the case. Our Project for Peace will strive toward bridging the divide between Kibera and the greater Kenyan society. Kenya has a terrible record of resource distribution— incomes, life expectancies, employment, access to water, health care and education, disease prevalence and overall poverty levels vary greatly, with the rich drastically better off than the poor. To combat this, our project will link those who are in power with those who are not, bringing together middle-class university students and their peers living in Kibera, and young adults with experts in the field, in order to foster communication between individuals whose paths in life might not otherwise cross. Participants will learn from a series of lectures, seminars and workshops on tentative topics such as nutrition, sanitation, health disparities, HIV/AIDS, malaria, human rights, urbanization, gender issues, and ethnic relations. Corresponding discussions will encourage participants to contribute their own knowledge and develop their own ideas about how issues can be resolved. During the program, participants will visit different parts of Kibera, meet with doctors, health educators, social workers, and also interact with Kibera residents in order to mold their projects to the needs of the community.

Through the Project for Peace we are proposing, young adults from Kibera and the University of Nairobi will be empowered to draw upon their own and each others' experiences and insights to implement two health-related projects. Participants will research existing projects as they plan their own, and they will work closely with contacts from the University of Nairobi and various non-governmental agencies and community-based organizations, such as the African Medical and Research Foundation, fostering connections to valuable resources.

The projects to be undertaken will aim to improve the living conditions of Kibera residents in any of myriad ways including access to clean water or sanitary facilities, education about nutrition and disease awareness. Other project ideas include needs assessment or organizing workshops for women. We will leave it to the participants, who best know their neighborhoods' concerns, to decide the ultimate focus of the projects. The advantages to this approach are twofold: first, as Americans, we

cannot claim to know the best means of helping the people of Kibera, and second, it is our hope that the participants will come away with a greater sense of their own agency as citizens of their communities.

It is our hope that through this project, the participants will acquire both the interest and the social capital necessary to pursue future endeavors of their own initiative, rather than relying only upon outside assistance. Participants will attain practical experience garnering contacts among developmental agencies as well as writing a project proposal—much as the Projects for Peace initiative empowers young American students to realize our own potential for creating change in the world. Certainly, throughout the process, we too will gain invaluable knowledge from the participants and the community leaders with whom we will work, as well as from the experience itself. Through the discussions and team work involved in this program, we will all (participants and coordinators alike) gain invaluable experience relating to people from different backgrounds and utilizing conversation as a means to promote a more comfortable and stable world.

This project will be coordinated by Hyowoun Jyung and Laura Taylor, both juniors at Amherst College, who share a passion for social change and community development. Hyowoun, who has created her own major combining Sociology, Black Studies, and Political Science, has much experience with community outreach, facilitating workshops and leading discussions. She was one of the 2006 Project AHEAD interns at the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center in Chinatown, New York where she became familiar with the program design upon which our project will be based. Laura is a combined Anthropology and Sociology major who is pursuing a Five College Certificate in African Studies. Both are studying abroad in Kenya for the Spring 2007 semester. Contacts in Nairobi include Dr. Beatrice Aluvaala, a retired doctor who is working for the Christian Health Association of Kenya in program development and has established numerous HIV/AIDS and TB centers. Dr. Aluvaala will present an overview of the Kenyan health care system as well as its response to AIDS epidemics, and is assisting the coordinators in establishing more contacts. Dr. Ilakao is head of the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), a leading health organization in Africa that trains community health workers. He and Dr. Marjory, head of the Kibera Integrated Health Clinic, have agreed to work with us and provide contacts with doctors, researchers and social workers. Mr. Makawiti at the University of Nairobi Medical School will help to coordinate internships for our participants.

Preparation for this program has already begun—upon her arrival in Nairobi in January, Hyowoun began establishing contacts with organizations and individuals willing to contribute to the project. The five months that she will spend in Nairobi and the four that Laura will spend in Mombasa, Kenya prior to the initiation of this project will be vital to our ability to tailor the project to the host community. By March we will have identified one or two local liaisons to work as local coordinators. Through our own connections to the University of Nairobi, we will search for lecturers for the workshops, and by the end of April we will begin the participant selection process, selecting five Kibera residents and five University of Nairobi students to take part in the program, which we will advertise largely by word of mouth. Tentatively beginning in late May, the first week of the program will include an orientation and introduction to the program, to one another and to the staff at the Kibera Integrated Health Clinic, as well as workshops and training on team-work, and tours of Kibera neighborhoods and organizations. This will be followed by a series of approximately seven seminars and accompanying discussions, which will take place over the next two weeks. Whenever possible, participants will undertake field placements in order to gain practical experience as well as connections with health care and social service organizations. In the third week, participants will be divided into two groups in order to plan the projects, with project proposals written and submitted to the coordinators at the end of the week. Brainstorming about project ideas will involve researching the available literature and establishing connections at relevant organizations. The final three weeks of the program will be devoted to implementing the two projects and writing final reports. Ideally, the projects might be continued outside of the framework of this program. Furthermore, if successful, the program will be repeated annually.