

Defusing Ethnic Tensions in the Kuria District
Davis Projects for Peace 2011 Proposal
Enzo F. Haussecker, Tristan S. Haussecker and Sarah A. Sypris

Summary

Ethnic groups in the Kuria District of Kenya are involved in ongoing inter-clan conflicts. They have on several occasions fought over cattle rustling and land disputes with deaths and loss of homes and other property being a common consequence. The need for a peaceful resolution to these conflicts has become increasingly more important as tensions have dramatically escalated in recent months. Our goal is to defuse these tensions by uniting the youths of these ethnic groups through a week-long workshop, which teaches them the value of living together in harmony. We also seek a long-term solution to these conflicts and have devised a plan to build inter-ethnic connectivity through a four year long relationship between students from rival clans.

Ethnic Tensions

There are four main ethnic groups involved in the ongoing conflict in Kuria. They are by clan affiliation the Abairege, Abanyabasi, Abagumbe and Abakira. Often, full scale wars between these clans will occur. The latest was in 2010 when members of the Abairege and Abanyabasi clans clashed in local villages. In the process many deaths were reported, homes torched, and property worth millions of shillings was stolen. As in many cases, the reasons for the fighting revolved around cattle rustling, which the Kuria are infamous for. Land disputes though have also played a role in sparking violent conflicts between these clans. Recently there has been renewed tension in Kuria over a border dispute between the Abakira and Abagumbe. These two clans have been at war over this issue several times in the last decade, and although they are not fighting currently, suspicions are ever present.

Diffusion

We seek to defuse these tensions in several ways. The first is by subsidizing the education costs of students from rival clans. This will allow two scholars from remote parts of Kuria to access four years of formal instruction at a local high school equidistant to the conflicting parties (which they otherwise would not be able to afford since high school education is not free in Kenya). There, they will develop to their full capabilities and leave equipped with the knowledge needed to fight poverty, ignorance, and violence in their communities. Additionally, these two scholars will work together with others sponsored by Kusoma International to take part in a week-long workshop this August, which we have designed to complement our efforts for ethnic diffusion by teaching them, as well as other local students, about the benefits of working together.

The assisting the workshop team members include two interns from Kusoma International – a nonprofit organization which seeks to reduce violence and improve the accessibility of quality education for children of impoverished and marginalized communities (particularly those in Kuria). Under the direction of Dr. Sangai Mohochi, who is Chairman of Kusoma International and also a longtime acquaintance of ours, these interns will work with us to foster a communal environment of open discussion, where students have the opportunity to reconcile their differences and build inter-ethnic connectivity.

Over the course of one week, the aforementioned students from different ethnic backgrounds (which total 35) will take part in games and various art and craft projects, which superficially appear unrelated to reconciliation efforts. For example, they could be asked “draw a picture of your partner in a place which makes you happy,” and then be asked to identify the differences between pictures, noting in turn the diverse nature of the background and not minor differences in physical appearance. Through these

activities and more, we can bring tolerance and respect to their communities.

In addition to the workshop, the students will also bond in working together on a local infrastructure project. A community library not far from the local high school is nearing completion and is set to meet the August deadline (just in time for the workshop). Many library books have been donated from charity and there will be a need for coding and cataloging them. This presents another opportunity for the students as we will lead them in this process and further efforts for connectivity outside the classroom.

Timeline

We will fly to Nairobi on July 24th and travel to the Kuria District upon arrival. There, Dr. Mohochi has arranged for one month of living accommodations. In the first week of our stay, we will meet with Dr. Mohochi, spend time reviewing scholarship applications and interview children from rival clans. At the end of the week, we will make a decision and select students who we feel are both open to inter-ethnic connectivity and have the greatest chance of returning to their clan in some kind of leadership capacity. In the second week, we will meet with Dr. Mohochi's staff to make all necessary preparations for the workshop (e.g. coordinate with interns, purchase workshop materials and set up classrooms). In the third week, we will carry out the workshop. Below we present the following program structure for each day. In the last week, we will meet with the finance board of Kusoma International to discuss stipulations related to future distributions of the two students' education fund (see the budget proposal for more information).

Time	Activity
09:00am – 10:00am	Art and craft projects
10:00am – 11:00am	Lectures to provide follow-up analysis for the art and craft projects and motivate ethnic diffusion
11:00am – 11:30am	Lunch
11:30am – 12:30pm	Lectures on inter-ethnic connectivity and it's importance in Kuria society
12:30pm – 01:30pm	Library infrastructure project: coding and cataloging of library books
01:30pm – 02:30pm	Games (e.g. capture the flag, dodgeball, soccer)

Potential for Future Impact

This project has the potential to prevent another war from occurring in the Kuria District. The relationships formed between the two scholarship recipients and other students from different ethnic backgrounds attending the workshop will be invaluable to bringing peace and stability to Kuria, especially if these students are to become future community leaders. As such, they would go on to echo a message of peace that will carry beyond the classroom and into the heart of the conflict zone.

About the Participants

Enzo F. Haussecker is an Applied Mathematics major at the University of California at San Diego. He is also a vocal advocate of issues relating to educational development and has spent over one year teaching elementary mathematics to underprivileged students living in the San Francisco area.

Sarah A. Sypris is a dual Biochemistry and Arabic major at the University of California at San Diego. She has been involved in several global volunteer projects over the last five years, ranging from rural communities in Morocco to urban areas in central Mexico.

Tristan S. Haussecker is an intern at Kusoma International.