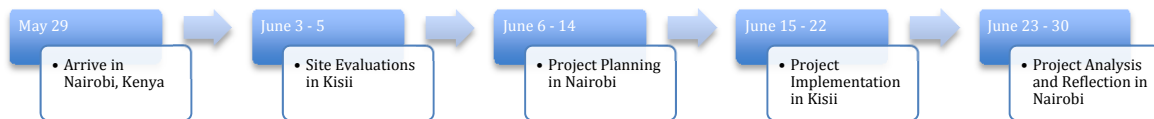


Environmental Education in Kenya
Kenya
Jesuit Hakimani Centre
Maggie and Katie Ferrato, USA, Georgetown University

SECTION ONE

Project Goals: To build Kenyan participants' understanding of the connection between environmental health and human prosperity through engaged discussion and practical projects.

Funding: In addition to the grant awarded to us by the Davis Center, we raised supplemental funds at Georgetown University. The Program on Justice and Peace, History Department and Government Department each generously contributed three hundred dollars to this project. This resulted in a total budget of \$10,900, which helped to counterbalance the cost of two international flights and allowed us to put more funds toward the project itself.



Our project, carried out in Kisii County, consisted of a workshop on the relationship between peace and the environment and two practical components at different sites. The workshop, which ran for two days with twenty-five participants, was a collaborative effort with the Jesuit Hakimani Centre in Nairobi. A representative from the Centre conducted the first day on innovation and creative thinking and we facilitated the second day on the interplay between the environment and society. The themes complemented each other and we were able to devote time to applying the innovation principles discussed the first day to persistent and emerging environmental problems in the region. We also held a film screening of the documentary *Taking Root*, featuring the life and work of Wangari Maathai, a prominent Kenyan environmental activist.

The day's topics and the evening's film generated interesting and productive discussions and in the days after the workshop we received positive feedback about the event. Nevertheless, we also faced unanticipated difficulties during our work, namely the challenge we had at times understanding the local accent as well as the participants' difficulty in understanding our American accents. Due to this complication, we chose to modify our and break into smaller groups for discussion. Another major constraint on the workshop was the expense of housing and feeding the twenty-five participants and the facilitators for three nights. With careful planning and support from the Hakimani Centre we were able to overcome this barrier. Since returning to the United States (US), we have been in contact with a few of the most involved participants at the workshop who are planning on addressing some of the environmental issues in their area through a project of their own and in conjunction with the new county government.

The final two parts of our project were carried out with participants from the workshop. During our initial site evaluations in Kisii, we met with representatives from three different institutions – two schools and a parish. This process was invaluable and helped us to focus our resources where they were the most needed. Ultimately, we decided to partner with both the Rianyabuga Junior Academy and Our Lady of Victory Parish. It was a challenge to integrate our own goals and vision with the needs of these unique communities but ultimately the preparatory work helped to strengthen the impact of our final project.

The day after the workshop we held a tree-planting event on a local hilltop now owned by the Church. The area had, in the past, been utilized for firewood and many of the trees that grow there now are of a water intensive species. The Church has embarked on a lengthy project to restore the hilltop and diversify the species found there and we had an opportunity to help them with this mission. Together with five participants from the workshop we planted 96 trees and cacti of different varieties. Despite the beating sun, the day was a success and participants were enthusiastic about being able to enact some of the principles discussed during the previous days. Additionally, we gave a donation to the pastor so he would be able to care for the plants and purchase still more trees for the hill.

Our second project, carried out in conjunction with the Rianyabuga Junior Academy, was more extensive than the first. During our site evaluation, the founder gave us a brief tour of the school grounds and talked with us about the most urgent needs of the institution. The primary concern was the availability of clean water for the students. The school had raised the money to dig a borehole for a well but had no funding for a hand pump. After deliberation we decided to provide both a hand pump for the school as well as embark on a tree-planting project with the students. The tree planting at the school took place the day after the workshop but due to scheduling constraints we were unable to be present. Two teachers from the school attended the our workshop and subsequently led the students in the planting of 2,000 seedlings. This endeavor was multi-dimensional in its impact. Exposing young children to environmental stewardship was an idea that was strongly supported at the workshop and it was rewarding to be able to carry it out. Furthermore, the trees will be able to provide the school community with source of sustainable income. Trees will be harvested as needed to expand the school and new seedlings will be planted. We gave a donation to ensure that the seedlings are cared for each month for the next year until they are old enough to thrive on their own.

The second part of our project with the school was the installation of the hand pump. The school does not have electricity and only electric pumps are available locally. Therefore, we needed to bring in a hand pump from Nairobi, which is 6 hours away. The purchasing and shipping of the pump itself took multiple days and we were faced with challenges every step of the way. Ultimately, the installation of hand pump taught us about the importance of creativity and perseverance when faced with unfamiliar and challenging situations.

Years from now, the trees that we planted together on the hill will continue to enrich the local environment. The school will be able to grow and sustain itself using the timber they harvest and students will interact with the environment as they replant the trees.

Throughout the planning process of this entire project we worked to ensure that it would be a venture that was both needed by the local community as well as sustainable. To achieve this, we thought of ourselves more as facilitators than directors. We worked with both the theoretical as well as the practical to ensure that we planted ideas as well as trees. Ultimately, the project belongs to those who participated. They made it their own through their discussions and their work. Since leaving Kenya, we have been in touch with some of the participants from the workshop; they are in the process of beginning their own environmental project in Kisii. It is inspiring to hear that others have taken our own passion to heart and that they will continue the work that we started together.

SECTION TWO

Peace is a word that defies easy definition, for it is both a state and a process. Short-term peace is the absence of direct violence and the ability to deal productively with isolated conflicts. Long-term peace is the entrenchment of habits and systems that treat conflict as an opportunity to build a more just and peaceful society. Additionally, it is the construction of a set of institutions that safeguard the human dignity and rights of all people without discrimination.

During our time in Kenya, we were granted a window into another reality. The challenges we faced while pursuing our project goals are the same ones confronting Kenyans everyday as they struggle to build their nation. Yet even in the face of corruption, poverty, environmental degradation and sickness there are people fighting on because they are optimistic about the fate of their fledgling country. It is easy to grow accustomed to life being simple—reliable electricity and Internet, functioning road networks, fair elections—but it takes forbearance to wake up every morning and try to build these systems from the ground up. While in Kenya we learned not to take basic services for granted when so many people are denied the same access. The amazing people that we met and the stories that they shared prompted us to take a more critical look at our own lives and the opportunities we have had.

“The people we had the chance to work with in Kenya taught me the importance of resilience, hard work and creativity in the face of seemingly insurmountable problems.” -Maggie Ferrato

“It was an amazing experience, I hope the people I worked with learned as much from it as I did.” -Katie Ferrato