

Title: Hope for Kibera: Afya na Maendeleo (Health and Development)

School: Amherst College

Students Information: Hyowoun Jyung, USA and Laura Taylor, USA (neither attended a UWC)

1. SUMMARY Participants were the two coordinators, Laura and Hyowoun, and ten interns, selected through an application and interview process. Five interns were from the University of Nairobi and the other five were from Kibera, an impoverished community on the outskirts of Nairobi. The entire group met at the AMREF Kibera Integrated Health Clinic from 9 am to 4 pm, five days a week, for five weeks starting on June 25th. No other funding was involved, although the staff of AMREF-Kenya were very generous in allowing us to use their facilities. The first two weeks of the program consisted of a tour of Kibera, teambuilding training, five lectures (on the Kibera informal settlement, water and sanitation, drug abuse, community mobilization and project planning), discussions about these health and social issues, and conducting a needs assessment in the community. With this training, the interns spent the following three weeks brainstorming, planning and implementing their chosen community-based project: the establishment of health/awareness clubs in two Kibera secondary schools. In their proposal for this project, the interns highlighted advantages of empowering high school students and working within the existing community structure to ensure the sustainability of their project. In order to help the clubs get off to a good start, several activities were organized for the club members, including a one-day joint event to bring the two clubs together and inspire the members to take an active role in their communities. Independently, the two clubs selected their officials, organized a joint clean-up, and held a joint discussion on HIV/AIDS. After the official five weeks of the program, our interns opted to work with the clubs for an additional two weeks (through August 13). A survey designed by our group showed a great need for information among the club members, so our interns used this extension period to organize a three-day workshop to educate the club members about HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and sanitation; a one-day teambuilding and leadership training retreat; and home visits to community members living with HIV.

As project coordinators, our goal for the Hope for Kibera project was to empower our interns, providing them the tools, confidence and experience necessary to take action in their communities, as well as to inspire them to take responsibility for creating change. In addition, we aimed to unite Kenyan youths from two realms of society that are often seen as distinct and incompatible by creating a safe, open space in which they could work together and share their ideas and experiences.

2. EVALUATION As it turned out, we had brought together Kenyan youth from many diverse backgrounds – in addition to the split between the University and Kibera, we found that tribal and other class differences are highly divisive within Kenyan society. However, in bonding over group lunches and numerous hours spent together, we all quickly learned that these groups are not nearly as separate as expected. By the end of the program, we had all reevaluated previously held stereotypes and indeed had become good friends.

This experience was both challenging and empowering for all of us because we brought to Nairobi a program designed in New York – meaning our interns did not fully know what to expect going into the program, and we struggled at times in adapting to this different setting. Misunderstandings resulting from cultural differences and miscommunication distracted the group from the larger goal on a few occasions. However, the program was beneficial to all, as our interns learned how to take charge of the design, proposal and implementation of a project, and we gained valuable leadership experience. This program provided an opportunity to better understand both the Kibera community as

well as Kenyan society to people who had not been previously engaged – including some of the University students who had never before been into Kibera. Additionally, they gained connections in other organizations with whom they will hopefully be able to work in the future. All of this boosted the group's confidence so much that they hope to continue working together to write proposals and get funding from other organizations to set up more health clubs in other schools. Thus, for those interested in fully taking advantage of this program, we provided an opportunity to gain social connections and the inspiration to continue being involved in their society.

Additionally, one neat thing about their project is that the group chose to empower other Kenyan youth, meaning our goal was met even beyond what we had imagined. Indeed, the club members have shown remarkable enthusiasm for their new clubs, initiating their own events to promote awareness about health issues.

Other challenges less related to the meeting of our goals regarded the coordinators' lack of experience dealing with money in a developing country. This led to some uncomfortable situations that required adapting as the project continued, including a slight conflict with our interns over the use of the money we allotted to them as their project budget.

3. IMPLICATIONS Some of our interns have shown interest in staying involved with the project since the nature of the group project calls for follow-up with the health clubs. In fact, it has been less than two weeks since the coordinators left Kenya and the interns already had a group meeting! Unfortunately, over time others might not stay actively involved given their circumstances, obligations, and so forth. Nonetheless, we have every intention of keeping in touch with those interns who stay involved, and we hope to do fundraising activities for future club events. It is possible that other students from Amherst will be able to use service fellowships provided by the college to go to Kenya in the summer to continue working with the existing clubs or help to establish similar clubs in other schools. We believe that the Hope for Kibera group will stay in touch, as the friendships built during our time together will surely remain strong. This gives us great hope for the lasting implications of our project, as we believe that positive interaction is key to promoting peace within a society so divided by tribe, class and education. Furthermore, the clubs will not only promote such interaction, as the members come from different ethnic backgrounds, but through the clubs, the members will develop their sense of ownership of their community while striving to have a positive impact.

The challenges we faced during this project taught us so much not only about working in a different culture, but also about coordinating a program, organizing lectures, managing a budget (and how difficult it is to spend money in the best possible way), facilitating group discussions and finding a proper balance between leading a group and allowing them to figure things out for themselves, and balancing our relationship with our interns between that of friends and that of employers to employees. Additionally, we gained valuable experience working within a slum setting, through which we learned about the culture of NGOs and foreign aid in Kenya and Kenyan culture generally. In doing this project, we grappled with norms deeply ingrained by Kenya's history of colonialism and poverty, which have created a sense of dependency (reliance upon outside aid) and often prevent people from taking an active role in helping themselves and one another. We witnessed how various constraints prevent many Kenyans from volunteering and learned why some Kenyans may choose not to share information or resources, thus exacerbating social inequalities. Most importantly, we learned the importance of change coming from within a community, from within individuals even though that can be a long and complicated process.

