

Mizizi kwa Amani: Roots for Peace
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Section I:

b. The primary goal of my project, “Mizizi kwa Amani”, is to encourage children from the Likii area to remain living with their families and going to school rather than living on the streets. The aim of this sustainable nutrition program is to better children’s school performance, health, and well-being by making sure that they are in school and are being fed. This project will ultimately create a more peaceful neighborhood in which children and families can focus on priorities rather than finding last resorts to feed themselves.

c. The parents of Likii Primary students will be contributing 60 cents per month per child to the project’s sustainability. A polytunnel (greenhouse) was also donated to the project by the Nanyuki Children’s Charitable Trust.

d. My project started with community work: creating a sense of trust and buy-in amongst community members. I met with parents and the school administration to figure out what they were looking for in a nutrition program and what they could offer in terms of support. The first challenge that I faced with the community work was the slow pace and unanticipated process of compromise and discussion in meetings. While our conversations were positive and productive, reaching agreements and conclusions in the face of language and cultural barriers took a long time. The original plan for my project was to plant food crops on the school’s 7-acre property to supply food for lunches; however as conversations with community members and the school board progressed, there was growing concern about crops being stolen by the school’s impoverished neighbors. They suggested that, instead, we should plant feeding grass (hay) and sell it to make money to buy food for school lunches. While I was hesitant to abandon such a large part of my project, it was important to prioritize the community’s wishes and create a plan that was going to end in success. In the end, I wanted the project to be sustainable, so it was essential that the community members were the main decision makers in the planning of the program.

After all parties (community members, parents, school administration, and I) had reached an agreement on an outline of the program, we held a meeting with parents and the school board in which we signed a contract that included all parties’ commitments and responsibilities, both immediate and ongoing, and stressed the importance of participation from all parents to ensure the program’s sustainability. Shortly after, we began the construction on the kitchen and *jiko* (stove). Construction of the kitchen and *jiko* took two weeks and the first porridge was served on July 14th.

The direct beneficiaries of my project are the 800 students of Likii Primary, along with their families. There is also a projected school enrollment increase of 25% due to the ripple effect of this project into families and the street children population in the greater Nanyuki community.

Sustainability of this project depends on parent and community participation and this is why I spent so much time working with and coming to agreements with the community before the physical aspect of the project began. The Simama Project, my partner organization, will provide various modes of support, such as advising and help with organization and implementation, but will not provide financial support. This means that the parents will be the funders of the program, along with several community sponsors for children without parents or without the means to pay and the revenue from the crops planted. The monthly fee per child is 55 Kenyan Shillings, about 60 American cents. This covers the cost of the cook’s salary, the flour for the porridge, and the firewood to fuel the *jiko*.

The long-term goal for this project is to add a school lunch program to the morning porridge program. The school needs to begin making an income on the vegetables from the polytunnel and the feeding grass harvest for lunches to be made possible. I plan to return to Kenya in about six months to assist with the transition to lunches as the school goes through the next phase of the project. While I am there, I plan on purchasing the few things that the school will need to begin having lunches (i.e. spoons, extra bowls, and cups), however my main role will be to advise and help revise the infrastructure as needed.

Section II:

a/b. Peace is the ability for individuals to survive and thrive in harmony with one another. In order for communities to achieve peace, all members' basic needs for survival must be met. Mizizi kwa Amani will continue to help children in the slum of Likii have their basic needs met, which will in turn empower them to begin to thrive in their environment by succeeding in school and building positive relationships.

This project made me think a lot more about how aid is given and received in developing countries. Often times "band-aid solutions" are settled for: solutions that only offer a short-term fix and do not reach the root of the problem. In order to prevent these short-term solutions, aid must address the root of the problem and there must be much more community work done in the aid process. If the change doesn't come from within the community, no lasting solution will be found. The goal of my project is to keep young children in school and off the street. When the average tourist sees a street child in Nanyuki, their initial reaction is to hand them a few coins, which isn't much to them. While this may seem like a harmless action, it actually will encourage this child to stay on the street. This type of help doesn't actually benefit the people who are in need, and can actually perpetuate the problem. My project provided an opportunity for meaningful and lasting aid to be implemented in a community.

Coming out of my time in Kenya and my work on this project and reintegrating myself into everyday life here in the United States has made me realize how these two worlds cannot be compared. Neither I, nor anyone I interact with on a regular basis in the US, have ever had our education interfered with due to a lack of food or other basic necessities for survival. In the US, there are systems in place to prevent children from falling behind or dropping out of school, as well as systems to keep children off the streets. In Kenya, there are very few programs that address these issues. One of the simplest ways to begin making a change within a community is starting a nutrition program at a primary school. My project deals with an issue that was so foreign to me given my life experience that I often had to work to put myself in the shoes of a Likii Primary student or parent in order to do my best work possible. To me, 60 cents a month is an inexpensive price to pay to have your children fed, however this is quite a significant expense to some Likii families, so it was an adjustment for me to discuss these costs with parents when a difference of five or ten cents was being debated. In order to understand these concerns the community had, I needed to remove myself from everything that I am used to and put myself in the position of one of these families. The difference in school performance, enrollment, and student health at Likii Primary will be noticeable within months of the commencement of the porridge program and the greater Nanyuki community will be one step closer to helping children off the streets and into school.

"This project empowered a community to take action and play a major role in designing the aid they receive. I have learned that what outsiders believe to be the best way to help a community may in fact be the wrong way. The only way to ensure lasting change is to make community members the leaders of the operation. The implementation of "Mizizi kwa Amani" was heavily dependent on community involvement and this will insure its sustainability in the future."

-Varney Glassman

