

PROJECT REPORT: Bell, Books and the Clean Light that Lasts, Burundi
The College of Idaho
Student Name: Anniella Kabitso, Burundi, Waterford Kamhlaba
Part A: Final Written Report
SECTION I: Narrative

A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project

The goals of Bell, Books and the Clean Light that lasts project were to reach out to a segregated ethnic subdivision in Burundi, the Twa, in a way that would foster inclusion as well as foster peaceful talks with other ethnic groups that have systematically oppressed them. The project therefore aimed to emancipate participating Twa youth as capable and worthy selves through different training as well as through interaction with other ethnic groups. The purpose is to take a step towards greater acceptance and inclusion of the Twa into the Burundian society.

Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?

I did not try to raise any additional funds.

How did you come up with the idea for your project?

Being in the US now and being a minority group with often lesser opportunities and rights it made me reflect on another minority group back home that is Twa. Indeed, as someone from the other major two ethnic groups, I grew up having been taught that the Twa were not worthy of anything or even human rights because they are simply not considered as such. I therefore mirrored both settings, being in American and in Burundi, and I thought to myself that I can't be at a liberal arts college discussing issues of racism when I, myself, am guilty of doing that very thing to my own people.

Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?

This issue of ethnic segregation is not new in the history of Burundi as well as in our neighboring country Rwanda if we consider, for example, at the genocide perpetrated by Hutu against Tutsi -- a result of resentment bred from prolonged and systematic segregation of the Hutu tribe as a lesser kind of Burundian/Rwandan. The Twa situation is therefore not much different from what the Hutu lived at the mercy of the elite 'Tutsi' tribe. Theories as to why there is issues such as ethnic divisions often converge towards Belgian presence in both Burundi and Rwanda that set physical features and wealth as indication of which kind of people was to be elite. Though these divisions were set during colonial times, they have unfortunately marked both countries and inform political as well as economic structures until today.

Why did you choose your host site to work in?

I chose Burundi as my host site because it is my home country and I thirst to see a peaceful Burundi one day. I want to contribute to Burundi's development.

What was it like to work in your host site?

Working in my home country was not as easy as a task as I thought it would be. However, it did present some advantages such as familiarity with local procedures as well as useful contacts to ensure the smooth completion of such a project.

Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?

Yes, I did feel at some point that I may not be able to complete the project as getting the necessary paperwork and administrative approval required a number of signatures from people that attempted a substantial bribe to allow any humanitarian project to pass.

Moreover, if I look back, I remember being apprehensive about this ethnic group that I have never in my life have interacted with. All I had been told about them was that they were very backward people with bad manners; people who, understandably so, were weary of the rest of us from the other two major ethnicities.

What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?

Communication was not that much of a challenge as I am already a native and so could communicate in French the official language, as well as in Kirundi the native language.

How do you define peace?

I define peace as an environment where people are exposed to all types of ideologies and yet feel free to adopt whichever they want while seeking to understand and respect their peer's choices. Peace to me, is a safe environment for the self to thrive out in all the ways of expression there exists.

How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?

Because my project mostly communicated inclusion and fostered inter-ethnic discussions and interaction, I think that the small group of Twa I worked with felt included in more ways it ever did. I believe they now know not to grow up weary of the other tribes. The same goes for the rest of us that lived with and for the first time interacted with this minority group, going against Burundian societal rules and witnessing how alike we were. This project had a marked impact on me. I am sure the rest of the participants no see how nonsensical the divisions our elders subscribe to are, and that whatever warlike agenda that often follows also is so needless. Moreover, the intensive mentorship sessions we had fashioned our thinking towards what actually matters to us as young people that are responsible for our self-development as well as the development and prosperity of our country.

Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?

The project definitely changed me. It made me realize that ethnic feuds have held Burundi back. That these feuds could be overcome easily if we could have more widespread camps like the one we had; camps where we get to talk things out and work as a "we," as "the Burundian youth' without getting caught up in a hurtful past of conflicts over which tribe is better and hence deserves more.

Please provide a 1-2 personal statement sentence, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result. Indicate the student's name (yours or your teammate's) for quote attribution.

I don't mean to oversimplify matters but over the summer I realized that the thing about civil conflicts is that they are reborn time and time again as generations pass. It only takes one generation to rewrite the narrative for the rest to follow suit.

Section II: Photographs a. Paste 2-3 photographs on one page

