

Introduction and Background

When I met Ellyn Ito, one of the founders of Seeds to Sew International, I had no idea that it would lead to such a fulfilling and life changing experience. I met her through my father who mentioned he was from Kenya and had a daughter currently attending Princeton University. It turned out that her husband was a faculty member at Princeton and her work for Seeds to Sew was based primarily in Kenya. Needless to say, we were both excited to meet and when we did, I mentioned my pre-health career and my hope to one day do a health related internship in Kenya. She told me more about Seeds to Sew program and its partnership with Dr. Kakenya's Center for Excellence, a school for girls in rural Kenya, and suggested I put together an internship that could bridge the two programs.

Seeds to Sew International Inc. develops programs to increase access to education and economic opportunities for women and girls in developing countries. With education, women and girls have increased self-esteem and ability to generate income. With these changes come an improvement in status which allows girls to better influence decision making in their communities, especially when it comes to decisions that impact the lives of women and children within their communities.

Dr. Kakenya's Center for Excellence, is a primary academy for girls in rural Enosaaen, Kenya. As the first primary girls' school in the region, it focuses on academic excellence, female empowerment, leadership and community development. The center currently enrolls 130 girls from grades four to eight. The center was opened in 2009 by Kakenya Ntaiya, a woman who grew up in the village of Enosaaen. As is traditional in the Maasai tribe, Dr. Ntaiya was engaged by the age of 5 and was set to be circumcised by the time she became a teenager. After circumcision, Maasai girls must stop their education and begin preparing for marriage. Dr. Ntaiya had other plans for her life. She convinced her father to postpone her circumcision until she finished high school and after that, convinced her village elders to let her leave Enosaaen and attend college in the USA. They agreed, under the circumstance that she would use her education to better her community. Her academy for girls is one way that she is fulfilling her promise, as well as her travels around the world to raise awareness about female genital mutilation and child marriage, and give other girls in Africa the same chance she had to, in her words, education, self-realization and leadership.

Summer Project

Along with Chris Ramsammy, a senior at the University of Toronto, I put together a curriculum for health education for the girls at Kakenya's Center for excellence. The curriculum included lessons about basic first aid, dental hygiene, the menstrual cycle, safe sexual practices, pregnancy and childbirth, as well as leadership and public speaking initiatives.

We arrived in Kenya mid-August, excited to start our project. We travelled seven hours from Nairobi to Enosaaen and met the girls the next day. We spent the first day doing introductions and ice breakers and describing the curriculum.

The second day we held a spelling bee as part of our public speaking initiative.



Unfortunately, on the third day, we learned of a new policy enacted by the Kenyan government that would cut our time with the girls short. The lessons we had planned were to take part during a time called ‘tuition period’. This period occurs during school holidays and enables parents who want their children to get a head start to send their kids to school during breaks to learn extra material. While we were in Ensoya, the Kenyan government decided that schooling during tuition periods was no longer permitted and the girls were sent home that same day.

Needless to say, we were disappointed that we would not be able to teach the girls everything we wanted. However, with your generous donation, we were still able to provide the school with a number of items they will be using for a long time to come.

Though we were not able to teach the girls everything we wanted, our remaining time in Ensoya did not go to waste. We worked with Seeds to Sew to launch a longitudinal impact analysis program to get a baseline assessment of the wellness of Seeds to Sew participants and their communities. Ellyn Ito hopes to administer this survey annually to be able to understand the long term impacts of the program. These programs train women in need skills that will help them generate income for themselves and their families.



Women in the sewing program are trained to make giving bags, patterned gift bags that are then sold in the United States. The income from the purchase of just one giving bag earns a woman in the program more than the average woman in Enoosaen earns in 5 days. Women and girls in the beading program make wristbands and necklaces in the traditional Maasai style. These beads are sold through Seeds to Sew and the proceeds go towards paying the school fees and school related expenses of the girls who participate in the program.

- 3 D-light solar lanterns (for the girls to do homework in the dark without electricity)
- 2 self-generating/recharging flashlights
- 3 First aid kits
- 2 educational posters (female reproductive system and pregnancy/childbirth)
- 3 bags of candy (for rewards)
- 11 skipping ropes (to promote physical fitness)
- 4 packs of cards
- 2 packs of bouncy balls
- 4 inflatable volleyballs
- 150 pieces of chalk
- 144 toothbrushes
- 7 sticker booklets
- 144 pencils
- 140 workbooks/notebooks

Our work for Seeds to Sew and the Kakenya Center for Excellence is far from over. I will be working as a Seeds to Sew ambassador this year, selling beads to students around campus. I also hope to have Seeds to Sew beads and giving bags sold at the University Store by the end of this year to generate revenue for women and girls in Enoosaen. I hope to one day soon return to Enoosaen and serve in any way I can.

I cannot possibly thank the Class of 1978 foundation enough for what you made possible but I am truly grateful for the opportunity your donation afforded me and what it helped accomplish in Enoosaen.

Ivy Maina '13

