

## **USAFI KIJIJINI OGADA: PROPER SANITATION IN OGADA**

### **VASSAR COLLEGE**

#### **LAURYN ONYORE, KENYA, VASSAR COLLEGE**

**Goal of the project:** Usafi Kijijini Ogada was a project undertaken in the Western part of Kenya between June and end of July aimed at fostering peace between the local government and Ogada village residents whose conflict emerged from the lack of proper sanitation provisions. This would be achieved through the construction of pit latrines at regularly visited areas and the provision of sanitary education to Ogada residents.

#### **Other fund-raising efforts:**

There were no other fundraising efforts made towards the project.

**Origin of idea for project:** As an Ogada resident, I grew up attending school and going to church while using the unsanitary community developed latrines in these places. I therefore yearned to improve the state of waste disposal in these places but lacked the funds to create any meaningful change. After learning about Davis Project for Peace two years ago, I was eager to apply for the grant and actualize my long term ideas.

**Proof that the above-mentioned problem exists:** Ogada village, like many rural communities in Kenya, is made of residents with no formal education and employment and is riddled with poverty as evidenced by mud-thatched houses and emaciated children with minimal clothing. Due to the lack of basic needs, it is inconsequential for the local residents and government to invest the already inadequate resources on proper sanitary facilities and sanitation education.

**Choice of host site:** The paramount reason why I chose the host site was because I had interacted with most of the community leaders previously and I was certain that they would all agree to the construction of latrines at the church and at the local school which are centrally located and used by most residents. Also, land at these sites is communally owned so the construction of these latrines would not lead to the loss of physical assets by any individual resident.

**Work at host site:** Working at the host site was both exciting and challenging. I was excited to be back home and to bring material change. COVID-19 restrictions posed a challenge as most of the construction volunteers were wary of being exposed to the virus and the government imposed several gathering restrictions. Also, since most residents believe that it is the responsibility of the local government to provide proper sanitation facilities, it was difficult to convince people to volunteer and help with the construction. However, being a local resident who speaks the local language bolstered my confidence which enabled me to effectively explain the goals of the project to the village members.

**Concerns about project success:** Frequently, I felt the odds were stacked against me and feared that the project's objectives would not come into fruition. I had assumed that because I was an Ogada resident, my project would be readily accepted by the rest of the community. Since I had been in contact with the local leaders for a while, I had virtually no challenges implementing the project on community land. However, due to my frequent interaction with these local leaders, the community members treated my project with suspicion and it took a while to convince them about the importance of the project and the implied benefits to the quality of their lives.

Also, I had greatly underestimated the construction constraints in the area. Since the area is made of clay soil with poor drainage, the dug holes had to be plastered for at least 40 feet below the ground, and the foundation had to be laid using stones. Failure to do this would lead to the latrines flooding during the rainy season which could lead to water-borne diseases like cholera and bilharzia which are deadly.

To successfully complete the project and stay within the budget, I constructed multiple door latrines instead of the one-door ones originally proposed. Instead of a one-door latrine in the market and another one-door latrine in the church, I constructed a 3-door latrine at the church which would also be used by people visiting the market nearby and by the clan that lives in the church area. I constructed a 3 door latrine at the chief's home, to be used by the chief's clan and the clan nearby. Also, I constructed a 3 door latrine at the local school to be used by male students and clan members near the school (female students had a great latrine already). Lastly, I constructed three 2 door latrines at midpoints to be used by six neighbouring clans. As a result, we constructed 15 doors instead of the 11 doors originally proposed.

Also, the progress of the project, especially the construction part, was slowed down by volunteers who failed to show up. This was mostly caused by the erratic nature of their menial jobs. I incentivised the volunteers to show up by providing them with meal stipends (from the money I originally budgeted for my food), which they took home to share with their families.

**Communication challenges:** As a local resident, I am fluent in the local language, Luo, and experienced no challenges communicating my intent to the community. However, since my project was heavily reliant on the aspect of volunteering, I had trouble communicating to the volunteers that this project's success was as important as their jobs. Since most residents have hourly menial jobs, missing a day of work, even for a greater cause, meant that they would not have food on the table that evening. The meal stipends that I issued, which the volunteers shared with their families, went a long way in increasing not just the number of volunteers but also the number of hours they were willing to dedicate to the project.

**My definition of peace:** My definition of peace is the state of coexisting in harmony which is brought about by prioritizing the wellness of a community, and the absence of prejudice and unfairness. When a community is at peace, communal friendship prevails over hostility, violence and suspicion.

**How the project contributes to peace:** Before my project, the community was in conflict with the local leaders since it seemed that the local resources were not being equitably used for the betterment of the community's quality of life. The construction of the latrines created peace in the short run as there is reduced contempt towards the local leaders due to the lack of sanitation education and sanitation facilities. As a result of the project, both the community and the leaders had to come together to discuss the state of sanitation in the village. As a result of these conversations, the local government agreed to dedicate more funds towards creating humane conditions for the community, and even promised to construct a latrine in the local market by August 2022. I believe that this is just the beginning of reduced conflict and that these discussions will continue in the long run.

**Personal changes resulting from the project:** By implementing this project, I have witnessed a decrease in conflict between the local government and the community, albeit to a smaller degree, and I am hopeful about the future development in this region. I have also become more adaptable towards unforeseen circumstances.

**Lessons learned from the project:** Before implementing this project, I had low expectations that any of the economic issues facing my community could be resolved. I have learned that any activity that brings a community together can have positive aftereffects which could drive more change. For example, several

students in the school, which was my major hosting site, are now hopeful that with hard work, they can bring actual change to the community. Also, when I explained to the community that the number of latrines that could be built was dependent on the number of volunteers who showed up, more people volunteered to provide manual labor which led to the successful implementation of the project. This project has also strengthened my interest in Development Economics and will help shape my long term field of study. Also, I have honed my leadership and organizational skills, and I hope to apply them towards helping reverse economic hardships and promoting humane living conditions in Kenya.

**Personal statement:** I have realized that to bring change, we have to change our perspective to resemble that of those we are helping, and to imagine how we would receive their help if we were in their shoes - Lauryn Onyore.



*Church members at the church working site*





*Completed and painted 3-door latrine at the church*





*Completed latrine. Solar and iron sheets donated by the local chief, flowers maintained by local high school students*