Summary:

The Amani Youth Project's primary objective is to empower young people to serve as peace ambassadors in Turkana and Baringo. During the project, participants received training, traveled to war-torn areas to preach peace, and provided communities with access to basic resources like water.

Project Description:

My decision to make this a peace project was primarily influenced by the persistent violence between my community, Turkana, and the Pokot. Over the years, my region and the neighboring Pokot have suffered marginalization due to constant violence. As a result, this has seen slow development in the regions as both communities continue to languish in poverty. Having grown up in this place, I have witnessed unsuccessful efforts to achieve peace. These efforts, however, do not recognize the role young people can play in peace campaigns, even though the youth constitute a substantial proportion of those involved in raids. Therefore, Amani Youth Project was, and has been, an attempt to initiate youths to these efforts.

The project included the creation of a committee of twelve youths, six from each community. Implementation of the project was made possible by this committee. We targeted the border of Turkana and Baringo because that is the region where violence is more prevalent. Our efforts were mainly focused on the two counties' interior parts. The twelve youths from both communities that formed the project's committee collaborated to come up with these places. Local chiefs, community elders, primary and secondary school teachers, and security officers also played an essential role in helping us implement the project in these areas. Since we needed to bring members together and listen to their opinions about the conflict and the obstacles that prevented them from living in harmony, before talking to them, the local chiefs were particularly helpful in terms of mobilization.

Additionally, we provided water storage facilities, channeled water closer to the communities, and repaired inefficient solar panels and water pumps to ensure people's access to water. This way, water can now be accessed by communities and livestock, resulting in fewer water-related conflicts.

During the implementation of the project, we received tremendous support from the Kenya Scholar Access Program (KenSAP) and the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC). Founded in 2008, following the 2007 post-election violence, the NCIC works in the North Rift region of Kenya to foster peaceful coexistence between communities. It has done a lot of research on the conflict between our communities and has often served as the point of connection between the two communities. An intensive week-long training program by NCIC prepared us for travel. The opportunity to receive their instruction provided many benefits as it gave us an outside perspective on the conflict between our communities. In addition, their recommendations enabled us to engage in more informed conversations amongst ourselves and with our communities. KenSAP, on the other hand, supported us with mentors who zoomed in on some of our virtual sessions to advise us about the best ways to implement the project.

There were undoubtedly some changes we had to make to the original plan. When I first arrived in Kenya in May, the conflict was ongoing, the roads were unsafe, and I had to stay in Nairobi for a few days before going to Turkana. Even when I finally got to go, I couldn't implement the project immediately. Moreover, we had planned to hold training in Kapedo, which lies on the border of the two counties, but due to occasional attacks on the place, we could not risk it. So we were forced to start our training virtually before we could meet for in-person sessions. Even when the situation calmed down, we could not meet in Kapedo; instead, we held our meetings in Marigat, Baringo, where we thought it safer.

Another change we had to make was related to the purchase of materials. We discovered that the materials were more costly than the budget had estimated. As a result, we had to move funds around to provide for the more essential materials. Initially, we planned to hold a soccer tournament, but because of the budget and the prevailing insecurity, we had to resort to a different approach: purchase soccer
equipment, distribute them to the respective places, and encourage youth to play soccer in the process. Our team of volunteers traveled to the sites, donated materials, and helped with clearing new grounds for soccer playgrounds even though we couldn't hold the tournament.

Our peace campaign has continued since the project was completed. We created a WhatsApp group composed of young people from both communities. Originally intended to serve as a platform for the committee to discuss the implementation of the project, it is now open to all members of the two communities. While most of the population does not have smartphones or access to the internet, the gradual increase in numbers is quite promising. This platform enables us to carry out the dream of the Amani Youth Project, which is to invite as many young people as possible to become peace ambassadors.

In the future, we plan to facilitate the travel of many youths between Turkana and Baringo to preach peace. During summer, the program could only facilitate the movement of the committee members. In the process, the communities we visited raised a concern that we should make arrangements to facilitate the transportation of community members between the two locations. So, we have included this as one of our long-term objectives, and as a first step, we discussed the possibility of being involved in future peace projects of NCIC with representatives of the organization. Fortunately, they agreed that they would reach out when they plan to visit regions, either in Turkana or Baringo. Through this collaboration, we will be able to continue our mission and support the NCIC by providing members who can relate to the communities on a personal level.

Our program also aims to register as a CBO within the sub-county, under self-help groups and organizations. We are currently in contact with the Turkana East social development office regarding this matter. Though this is a recent development in our plans, it is one we believe we should pursue. Our program is committed to ensuring peaceful coexistence and youth empowerment within our communities. We are hopeful that we will be able to establish a youth-run organization in the future.

**Reflection:**

To me, peace means a time when my community will be able to enjoy the same level of development that the rest of Kenya enjoys, free from violence and with access to equal opportunities. For this to happen, our communities have to understand the importance of living together despite differences and allowing room for economic development. It is our responsibility as young people to make our communities understand.

While Amani Youth Project’s impact on the two communities is considerably new, it has begun by educating the communities the value that peace has on development. By engaging in projects with our communities, we have taught them the spirit of community building. As an ultimate hands-on process of engaging them in community development, we encouraged members of both communities to actively participate in installing water storage facilities and digging pipe channels. The purpose also reinforced the importance of enriching one’s community from within and independently. Through this, I have learned that there is undoubtedly an enviable degree of satisfaction in helping others realize that they can build their communities with their little resources. The commitment the youth of both communities demonstrated towards this engagement highlighted that people long for meaningful experiences that make them feel proud of their lives; once they have satisfied that craving, they desire to be more outstanding in service to their communities.

In the extended time we spent with our communities, we selected representatives among youth to assist with mobilizing others. This was not only impactful during our peace campaigns but also beyond it. We saw the significance of this in action during the August elections when youths took responsibility for maintaining calm. Elections in Kenya are usually heated, and sometimes they cause divisions among members of the same community. Before the elections, the youth representatives met with their communities and encouraged them to maintain peace regardless of their political preferences. Consequently, the voting process went smoothly without causing unnecessary chaos. Having the ability to
stand by our communities and ensure stability this summer has been the most encouraging thing I have experienced.

In light of these accomplishments, I consider this project to have been an eye-opening and life-changing experience. My community, the team I collaborated with, and the new experiences I had, have instilled in me a sense of pride that goes beyond my accomplishments. My concern for the future has always been what I can accomplish with my life. I have learned through this immersive experience that taking action to make an immediate and meaningful impact on my community is as essential as having a clear vision of life. Now more than ever, I am convinced that purpose can be created or derived from the opportunities presented to me, and with this kind of mindset, it is easy to venture into new arenas.

Indeed, this project was challenging, and I felt immense pressure and demoralization. Still, I did not give up. In June, when I was starting to implement the project, an attack occurred in my hometown, and one person was injured and later died. In the immediate aftermath of the incident, I was among the people who covered his wounds, took him to the dispensary, and witnessed his death due to high blood loss. As a result of this challenging event, I almost lost hope.

Nevertheless, I did not wish to quit since I understood that it was the primary motivation behind the project. However challenging and heartbreaking, leading a project and enduring such an experience taught me that being persistent and resilient is essential to being a leader. I needed to maintain my composure and take things as they came. My ability to cope with such challenging situations further prepared me for the subsequent stages of the project. Insecurity persisted: raids continued, houses burned down, and people died. For the safety of our group, we occasionally hired security officers. These experiences taught me that leadership demands staying calm under pressure and demonstrating a solid commitment to a course of action.

Overall, I am pleased with the contribution of the Amani Youth Project to the conflict along the Turkana-Baringo border. By providing a platform for youth from Pokot and Turkana to come together, Amani has created a friendly atmosphere in which young people can participate in serious discussions about how insecurity between their communities can be resolved. Furthermore, our engagements this summer have enabled us to convey to our communities the importance of recognizing the young generation's role in fostering community cohesion and understanding. This has resulted in many youths becoming involved in activities aimed at enhancing community development, which previously had not been emphasized. It is safe to say that we are heading toward a more inclusive future in which the youth will eventually be fully consulted as valuable community members.

**Personal Statement:**
This experience facilitated a meaningful engagement between my community and me, something that has made me reanalyze my position as a curious student constantly looking for an influential course in life. It was as though I was facing the demons I had been running away from due to a lack of proper chance. This grant allowed me to have a deeper understanding of the problems in my community and contemplate ways to improve things. I thank Mrs. Davis for conceiving this vision.