Amani Ya Yaaku  
Doldol, Kenya  
Northwestern University  
Edwin Pokisa  
Instagram: yaakubeadwork  
Facebook: yaakubeadwork

Summary of the Project
The aim of the Amani ya Yaaku Project was to develop a cooperative business model involving honey-making and bead-making among the Yaaku people. The project sought to empower the community through the sales of honey and beads. In addition to that goal, the project sought to develop awareness about the Yaaku culture to the rest of Kenya, and, ultimately, even to the whole world.

Project Description
As a member of the Yaaku tribe in Kenya, I have always felt the burden of my community being unrecognized and marginalized. This situation motivates me to do more for my community and create awareness about our people, our heritage, and our culture, especially to other Kenyans. Therefore, I wanted to use readily available resources from the Yaaku community for their recognition. Honey harvesting and beadwork making are activities that are native to the Yaaku tribe. For that reason, I decided to market their honey and beadwork products.

A committee of members was formed to spearhead the project. We started by identifying and training project participants. We decided to choose Kurikuri village as the host site. It has a serene environment and also is one of the ancestral lands of the Yaaku community. The people of the area were very hospitable and supportive.

No other fundraising efforts contributed to the Amani Ya Yaaku project; the Davis Projects for Peace funding was enough.

The project was lucky to have the presence of Anthony Kigondu, an experienced community-based developer, whose advice was of great help to the team. Anthony connected us with a few markets, supermarkets, and safari camps where we sold honey. We purchased modern top bar beehives, which are preferred to Langstroth beehives due to the comparatively larger volumes of honey collected from them. The beehives were distributed to members of the Yaaku community according to how large each household was. We also purchased a honey refining machine, which will be used to refine and purify the honey before it is sold. Honey-harvesting suits were bought and given to community members so that harvesting honey will be easier and more efficient. Beads and strings were also purchased and given to select women’s groups, where the women will make beaded bracelets, necklaces, belts, and even bead-covered utensils.

In order to pursue our objective of getting more people to know and learn about the Yaaku community of Kenya, various online platforms were opened, including Facebook, Instagram, and the Jiji app. Our way of shedding light onto the Yaaku tribe was by showcasing various beadwork done by the Yaaku community. All the accounts opened were given the name Yaaku beadwork. This was a way for us to promote our project and also add a little curiosity to readers on what the term Yaaku is. Posting of the beadwork was done at irregular intervals depending on the amount of pictures we had. The most active platform in which our work received a lot of recognition was the Facebook app, where we were able to sell beadwork ornaments to locals and also tourists in the Nanyuki area.

One of the major challenges we faced was that there was a drought in the Kurikuri area. Therefore, there was no readily available honey. However, honey jars had already been bought and branded with the history of the Yaaku community. Luckily, there have been signs of rainfall this month. Hence, our first harvesting, refining, and honey production and sales will be done by select Yaaku ambassadors in October.
Reflection
Peace involves recognition and empowerment. When people are recognized and empowered, they become stronger and more confident in taking charge of their lives and demanding their rights.

The short-term change that happened as a result of the project was that families were able to get stable income. People from the Yaaku community got a ready market for their products.

In the long-term, I hope that a percentage of the profits from my honey and bead making project will eventually be reinvested into the community in a number of ways, including but not limited to creating youth empowerment programs, such as education assistance, tutoring groups, youth mentorship programs, and youth sports competitions; and organizing community talent and fashion shows to highlight our abilities and cultural practices. Profits could also be used to start other projects in the area, including the building of a community borehole to bring potable water to the area and agricultural projects that can introduce farming to the Yaaku.

This process has brought about both personal growth, and the fulfillment of our objective of making the Yaaku community more known in Kenya is slowly taking shape. The online platforms which were opened are gaining followers, which shows that we have a percentage of people interested in our work.

Personal Statement
“Once we the Yaaku people have a stable source of livelihood, through sales of our own honey and beadwork, then we can have some (economic and even political) power in raising our voice to the leaders for consideration of recognition.”