Building Hope Through Education, Service, and Construction  
**Place of Work:** Kailhura, Uganda; Duke University  
**Project Lead:** Kennedy Robinson (Home Country: United States, School: Duke University)  
**Student Team:** Julia Saunders; Ethan Rheude; Alba Uriarte; Vanessa Lin; Kala Siddalingaiah (Home Countries: United States, Schools: Duke University)

**Summary**
Over the course of eight weeks, five engineering students from Duke University worked alongside the non-profit Bringing Hope to the Family (BHTF) to make education more accessible for local students in Kailhura, Uganda. These students worked together during the school year to complete a full structural design for a new secondary school that would serve over 300 in the surrounding area, as well as take an active part in the construction process for its implementation during the summer of 2023 for eight weeks.

**Project Description**
- How did you decide what issue(s) you wanted to address and what approach(es) or strategies you chose to implement in your project?

Education is something that the general American population takes for granted far too often yet is one of the most valuable things in the world. The opportunity to learn is a gift that many people do not have access to, especially higher education, despite being just as capable as myself or my classmates who attend one of the most prestigious universities in the United States. Tackling this issue is why I was so excited to discover Duke Engineers for International Development (DEID), a club at Duke that focuses on collaborating with underserved communities to address their needs through student-led projects.

- Why did you choose your host site? In what ways did local relationships support you or contribute to the project?

Through DEID, I was able to meet a valuable mentor in Dr. David Schaad, a professional engineer and professor who had been traveling to over 10 countries with DEID for almost twenty years. He believed in empowering his students to lead and execute projects rooted in global development that they had a deep passion for. Dr. Schaad has been traveling to Kailhura for almost a decade, and his relationship with the community is one of love, trust, and excitement for the future. When DEID discovered that there was a need for an expansion of education in this community, we began to lay the groundwork for what became a life-changing project for all involved. By collaborating with BHTF’s administration, local government, and a team of engineers, our students were invigorated to provide their skills for this community to both design a much-needed structure and help build it. Not only did they receive mentorship from local engineers on-site during construction, but they formed unique bonds with their fellow laborers from the community. These relationships were essential to our project’s success as they provided a cultural and technical learning experience for both parties.

- What changes or adjustments did you make to your original plans, and why?

Although our students traveled to the site with their full design plan, there needed to be adjustments made in order to keep the design in line with the community’s codes and structural standards, or the local government would not approve the team to begin construction. Although this resulted in a slight delay, it provided a wonderful mentorship opportunity for our students as it required both teams of engineers to teach and assist each other on the differences between their industry’s standards.

- Did other fundraising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?
In addition to the generous Davis Projects for Peace grant that we received, our team worked hard throughout the year to fund this project through other campus fundraising efforts, grants, and partnerships with other organizations. This project was able to come to fruition with the help of the Duke Engage Program, which supports students, faculty, and local partners to address societal issues while learning how communities develop solutions and create change from within. They helped fund all student travel, lodging, and any miscellaneous expenses related to logistics. Our team also received the Maclin Community Grant and funding from the Lorde Foundation, both from the Pratt School of Engineering at Duke University which further helped with the cost of materials for the structure.

- Are there opportunities for continuing your work on this issue? If so, please describe.

Looking into the future, there is much work to still be done on this project in the community of Kaihura. Our student team only had enough time to complete 50% of the construction of the structure they had designed. Therefore, we are hoping to be able to send a second team in the summer of 2024 back to the same community to finish the work necessary for complete implementation. Once this implementation is complete, it is intended that DEID will continue to return to Kaihura to for extensive check-ins to ensure that there are no external issues with the structure or internal issues with the logistics of the school. This will allow our team to assess the impact that our project had on the larger community, as our main purpose for this project was to institute a foundation for peace to be cultivated. By helping to provide greater opportunities for education in Kaihura, our project directly impacts the overall positive growth of the community.

Reflection
- How do you define peace?

Ultimately, I’d define peace as the presence of unity across a group of people, no matter their individual journeys in life.

- In what ways might your project contribute to peace? What changes occurred? Short-Term? Long-Term?

By partnering with Bringing Hope to the Family, our project directly contributed to the continued education of hundreds of students, many orphaned from a young age and unable to take care of themselves. Education is an essential key to harvesting peace in the students’ lives and the community around them. It promotes economic growth in the surrounding area while simultaneously decreasing the rate of crime or violence. Another effect that our students saw while on-site was the inspiration the construction had on the young students in the community. Because our site was next to the upper-primary school, those students were able to watch the structure grow day-by-day and additionally, so did their excitement. During their breaks, these students often discussed their studies with us, and many expressed that they were now working extremely hard to do well in order to be able to attend secondary school. It was simply amazing to see how passionate they were about getting to continue their education, which is often taken for granted among many students in the States. This passion made it evident that these students would excel far beyond what is expected of someone who began in their situation in life. In the long term, this structure will help BHTF expand the amazing support they give to their community through education and empower them to continue to do so.

- Identify a significant conflict you observed or encountered in your work (it could be any level of relationship: intra- or inter-personal, community/group-based, and/or societal/global). How did you navigate the conflict and what would you like to learn more about as a result?
While our team’s time in Kaihura was nothing short of incredible, there were clear cultural differences and stereotypes that are imparted on both sides that can make it difficult to focus on the work at hand. Our student team was a wonderfully diverse group of individuals who worked extremely well alongside the local team commissioned to aid in the construction. Understandably, our two groups became comfortable enough with each other to share and learn about each other’s culture; however, certain stereotypes were voiced by the local team that caused our student team to reflect on the culture which they had willingly immersed themselves in. Luckily, there was no active conflict between the two groups, but it was important that we communicated and educated the local team about the stereotypes they had regarding certain individuals based on race. We were very lucky that our team was well-prepared for cultural conflict such as this due to our many training sessions to educate ourselves on this topic. However, the actual conversation with a community member while in-country is very different, so I’d love to continue the relationships that I’ve built during my time there and will continue to do so. These relationships we made during our time there were undoubtedly the most valuable aspects of this project.

- Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you?

Being immersed in such a wonderful community for over two months truly allowed me to understand a completely different worldview with regard to opportunity, perseverance, and generosity. This project has challenged me to push myself to take advantage of every opportunity that is presented to me and to graciously share it with those who are equally deserving. I’m also inspired to continue working in a global development space that aims to establish and promote pathways to education across the world.

Personal Statement
"This project has provided my team with a deep understanding of how we as students can use our privilege, knowledge, and skills to help increase access to education on a global level. It’s inspired us to both continue learning from and working closely alongside communities in need to implement change and peace across the world."