

Soma Nyekundu (Read Red)

Mukangu, Kenya

University of Richmond

Project Leader: Shamim Mohamed Ibrahim

Home Country: Kenya

University: University of Richmond

UWC School Attended: Pearson College UWC

SECTION I:

a. Ideally two pages not to exceed three pages in length

b. A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project

Soma Nyekundu wanted to ensure that the girls in Mukangu do not miss school when they are menstruating due to lack of sanitary products. Additionally, the project aimed to destigmatize and facilitate discussions about taboo topics such as consent, gender-based violence, and HIV/AIDS, among school girls and women.

c. Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?

Kumbuka Universal Learning Experiences (KULE), <https://kulefoundation.com/>, donated \$500 to buy books that I shared with students at Mukangu Primary School. KULE participants also helped saw reusable pads to distribute to two schools and donated menstrual cups to the project.

d. How did you come up with the idea for your project?

I started volunteering in Mukangu in 2015. Through my interaction with the girls, I learned about the challenges that they face because of their periods. In 2017, I received funding from Go Make A Difference (GOMAD) to start a menstrual health program in Mukangu. This project is a continuation of that program. Choosing to use reusable sanitary products came from a personal need of wanting to be more sustainable and reduce the amount of waste we produce.

e. Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?

Period poverty is very prevalent in Mukangu. Even though the Kenyan government removed additional taxation on sanitary products, access to good quality products is still a challenge to many low-income families. Some are forced to use cloth and other alternatives that negatively affects their hygiene. Lack of these products hinders the education of girls, with some even dropping out of school when they start menstruating.

The taboo surrounding menstruation comes from several cultural and religious aspects. It is seen as dirty and for some, a curse from God. Girls and women shy from and are ashamed of talking about periods and anything involving them. Conversations surrounding sex are also stigmatized for cultural reasons.

f. Why did you choose your host site to work in?

I have been working in Mukangu for the past four years. The Mukangu community is where I would make the most impact because I have a strong relationship with the residents. Having done the menstrual health program before made it easy to continue and expand the project. My knowledge of the area was essential in effectively addressing the needs of the girls and women I worked with. Additionally, the school girls had a need for the sanitary products and an even greater need for discussions on taboo topics because no one was having or facilitating them.

g. What was it like to work in your host site?

The community was very welcoming and excited to have me again. The village chairman and the Mother's Union helped me connect and meet with the different school heads. Discussions and workshops in the schools went well because, with the exception of the new schools, the girls knew me and were comfortable talking with me. The determination and the strength of the girls and women I interacted with motivated and inspired me throughout the project. Additionally, being able to speak the language helped in forming and building connections. Mukangu is very green and it was refreshing being in nature and surrounded by beauty.

h. Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?

I bought period panties for my project which can only be found in the United States. I had them shipped in advance of the project and they arrived in Kenya on time. However, they got held in customs for five weeks as the revenue authority was having technical issues. I could not distribute them during my original timeline. I was worried because I was going to travel back to school and the school term in Kenya was ending. Fortunately, I received them before my school started and was able to go back right at the beginning of the new term to distribute.

i. What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?

It was difficult communicating with girls in the new schools I visited as they were less comfortable talking to me especially about certain topics. It was challenging introducing menstrual cups to the girls and women. There was a lot of apprehension and justified uncertainty about using them. There were a lot of questions and pushback, but I eventually convinced some to take them. I am unsure whether they will use them, but the cups last for around 10 years, so they have it as an option to use in the future if they want to.

j. How do you define peace?

A community or a society is at peace when everyone in it has their rights met.

k. How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?

Everyone has a right to a quality education. A right is violated when a girl cannot get an education because of her gender or matters regarding her gender. Ensuring that girls do not miss school because of their periods is ensuring their right. Then the Mukangu community is one step closer to peace.

l. Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?

I have been having doubts about the integrity of NGOs and humanitarian work. I worry about creating dependency and the intentions of such organizations. I worried that my project would not benefit the community to the extent that I thought it would. What I have come to learn is that in order to help a community, you have to listen to them and what they want. You must humble yourself and accept that you do not know what is best for the people you hope to help. Soma Nyekundu has humbled and taught me a lot about how I want to handle service projects going forward. I've learned that I want to focus on

education because that is the best tool you can offer a person. The project and planning it has also taught me patience and how to be quick on my feet when obstacles come way.

m. Please provide a 1-2 personal statement sentence, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result. Indicate the student's name (yours or your teammate's) for quote attribution.

No one should miss out on getting an education, especially not because of something they have no control over. This project aimed to ensure that girls did not have and see menstruation as a barrier to their education- Shamim Mohamed Ibrahim

SECTION II:

