

Tujikaze Project
Kenya
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In rural Kenya, as in most developing countries, girls face a multitude of challenges in pursuit of education and better living conditions. Many ethnic groups in rural areas, including my own, still maintain some cultural beliefs and gender norms that greatly disadvantage and undermine the position of women in society. Growing up in Rift Valley, Kenya, I have been exposed to some of the structural barriers that exist in most societies and continue to hinder young women from achieving their educational goals. Through the experience of my childhood, I have become aware of how such barriers, coupled with poverty, can hinder young women from reaching their full academic potential. It's as a result of this experience that I am determined to address these challenges and bring about change through Tujikaze. I believe that by increasing opportunities for young women, through education and running, young women can emancipate themselves from the barriers that prevent their success.

Tujikaze, Swahili for "let's strive", is a weeklong mentorship and education program for young female athletes from disadvantaged backgrounds in Rift Valley. The project selects young women in Grade Ten and Eleven based on financial need, academic ability, and leadership potential and encourages them to succeed for themselves and for their communities. The central aim of Tujikaze is to support the holistic well-being of the selected students by providing opportunities for physical exercise, leadership training, and discussions around mental, sexual, and reproductive health. While in the program, Tujikaze mentees will be able to learn from experts, community leaders, and fellow mentees and will be paired with mentors who will be a source of guidance on any challenge that they may face after the completion of the program.

During the weeklong program, I will work as the program coordinator directing the students and supervising staff and mentors, many of whom will also be college students returning to Kenya for the summer. The staff will be students who, like me, have come from communities in the Rift Valley community and have gone on to American universities. The mentors, who I intend to be either upperclassman at American universities, or graduates, will play a key role in the experience of selected students. I have begun outreach to identify mentors, and the response has been encouraging. Many successful women from the Rift Valley who have overcome similar obstacles are eager to give back to those in their position. With the tutoring that I have done in high school and since completing in 2019, I am well equipped to instruct and oversee a large group of students.

As Kenyan schools have been opened and will be in session, it is possible to deliver the program in person. To ensure that this can be done safely, I will work alongside staff at the secondary school at which we are based to ensure the safety of all students housed there, making sure to abide by all COVID-19 regulations put in place by the Kenyan Ministry of Education.

Following the reopening of schools in Kenya, I have been in touch with and partnered with county sports officials and various heads of schools from the thirteen counties of Rift Valley. This has been a natural continuation of the work I had undertaken with Zeraki Africa connecting rural secondary schools with the newest technology to improve the delivery of education. Through my work with Zeraki, I developed and maintained my relationships with principals to launch Tujikaze. With their help, I have been able to begin identifying and selecting students who might be the best fit for the program. Officials from eight

of the thirteen counties have already submitted the lists of the prospective students from their respective counties and I am currently in touch with the heads of select schools to collect more information on the students who stand to benefit most from the program.

I will work alongside my mentor and advisor, Yvonne Bungei (Williams '17), and Connor Cobb (Wesleyan '18), the Director of College Access and College Readiness with the Kenya Scholar Access Program (KenSAP) to design the curriculum. Yvonne, who, like me also hails from the Rift Valley, has had a childhood and secondary school experience similar to my own and is uniquely positioned to develop a curriculum for students like us. Connor's experience developing courses for Kenyan students will ensure the Tujikaze curriculum can be successfully and professionally implemented.

I am currently seeking a grant to launch the first phase of the Tujikaze project in July of 2021, when Kenyan students are on holiday from school. The grant will enable us to provide room and board for the mentees during their one-week stay in the program, as well as books and sports gear. We will also use the funds to organize a five-kilometer Peace race at the end of the residential session in West Pokot County, one of the Rift Valley counties where young women have been adversely impacted by conflict and violence from the practice of cattle raiding. Ultimately, we hope to use Tujikaze as a means to guide and unite young women in the task of liberating themselves through education and empowerment.

While Tujikaze will be implemented for the first time in 2021 it is my goal to run the program annually, growing the number of students that the program impacts each year. Eventually, I hope to develop a network of students that have benefitted from the program so that female students in secondary schools throughout the Rift Valley are both eager to join Tujikaze and aware of the opportunities available to them through their education.