

Barbara Ellard Dziedzic
2009 Advocacy Project Peace Fellow with the
Undugu Society of Kenya

The Advocacy Project (AP) is a Washington, DC based NGO that develops partnerships with NGOs around the world. Every year, graduate students travel abroad, work with locally based NGOs in the developing world, and upon their return to the US, the fellows raise awareness about the experiences and needs of the community where they volunteered. As a public high school teacher, I will seek to connect the youth in the community I serve in Nairobi, Kenya this summer with the youth of the public school community I serve throughout the year.

Long heralded as one of the success stories in Sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya has nevertheless struggled with flare-ups of violence in the last few years, particularly around election cycles. While it is often assumed that it is tribal tensions that fuel this violence, generational tensions and disenfranchised youth are also at the root of the conflict. As is the case in many countries in the developing world, a “youth bulge” in which an increasing percentage the population are below the age of 30, has the capacity to destabilize the country. Giving voice, vocational training, and positive pathways of participation to these young people becomes an essential part of stabilizing the society and supporting their democracy.

The Undugu Society of Kenya (USK) has been operating in Nairobi for thirty years and seeks to address issues of poverty and social injustice. I will be working with their youth education and advocacy programs to expand a project that began last year the 2008 AP fellow. She sought to give young people a venue for self advocacy by teaching them how to take photographs and blog about their experiences living in the slums of Nairobi. The impact of her work on these marginalized youth can be felt in the poignancy of the blogs they posted. While this was an effective form of raising international awareness, access to the internet in Kenya itself is somewhat limited and often expensive. My goal is to increase the accessibility and sustainability of this project.

While internet use is still limited in the developing world, radio access is more pervasive because it is inexpensive and relatively easy to produce. Youth radio programming has been a successful way for young people to facilitate and participate in dialogue and self-advocacy projects. While the blogging gave the youth at USK an international platform for advocacy, radio could allow them to be heard in their local communities as well. With the help of the JJCF, I will be bringing to USK audio recording equipment, editing software, and two laptop computers. These transportable story stations will provide greater sustainability to the project, allow young people to gain valuable and transferable skills in radio, and give them a platform for self advocacy and expression. The project will seek to partner with a local radio station that already has a youth component or sees that advantage of beginning one.

Upon my return to the states, one of my main venues of advocacy work will be in

Maryland's public schools. One of the primary goals of 21st century public school reform is making schools globally relevant and aware. By bringing together USK and Arundel High School in Gambrills, MD, I hope to link two communities in a way that would prove beneficial to both. Rather than an asymmetrical partnership of donor and recipient, this joint venture would instead be a cultural exchange of knowledge and resource. Upon my return to the states, students at Arundel will participate in a cross-curricular global studies cohort that allows them to learn about Kenyan history, politics, and culture; this will be enhanced by online dialogue with the youth of USK as both sides seek to come to a greater understanding of their commonalities and differences in experiences and needs. It is the hope that this will result in some type of youth initiated project of celebration and advocacy.

- To read my blog or learn more about the project I will be working on as an Advocacy Project Fellow visit <http://advocacynet.org/page/dziedzic>