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## My Summer Prince Ilboudo

The first two months of my summer flew by like the tropical wind. Suddenly, July was upon me and there I was airborne to a new part of my continent to do my summer service.

Yes, I did my summer service in Kenya with Juan Manuel, Irene and Mohamed (4th year) from PC, and some students from The International School of Geneva. Who could have thought that I could get along with some talkative Spanish speakers?! But I made it!

The project was directed by our dearest English teacher, Geoffrey, founder and director of KULE FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL, an NGO that has follows the mission of living the UWC ideals by working with the villagers in rural Kenya to help those in need while promoting international

understanding. All of us knew what awaited us on arrival but what we found was most unexpected. As part of orientation, we first visited the Kibera slums, the largest slum in Africa. The environment created a conflict deep inside me. I who had everything I wanted, everything I did not even need, I was facing a place of extreme poverty, a place where the kids were looking at me strangely because I was black (like them) and I was wearing nice clothes, a place where the women were feeding their babies, a few at a time, a place where men had nothing to do but play cards...yet, a place where, surprisingly, a beautiful smile was noticeable on every face. How can they be in these conditions and smile so brightly to us, I asked myself? How could they show us so much warmth in such horrible poverty? These slum dwellers even performed an amazing show for us. This day will always be unforgettable to me. We also visited less miserable places, including a private school for

the middle class in Nairobi and were struck by the contrast with the Kibera slums; indeed, these were two different worlds.

After the orientation, which included living in a comfortable hotel, we headed into the central part of Kenya in a little town called Murang'a. Apparently, it is the only decent hotel there so it was overbooked and we shared beds on the first night (a new experience!). Apart from that, the stay was fabulous. We donated some food and clothing to Koimbi orphanage where there are some students of the same age, skin colour and continent as me, but very different. Those students who go to school during the day and back home before evening to prepare dinner (otherwise none of the students will eat) were extremely poor and still they were welcoming and seemed very content to me. They were very thankful and even performed another show (traditional thing in Kenya?). After feeling like the messiah in this orphanage, we worked on the library project at Mukangu Secondary School. It is a very big library meant to benefit the secondary and primary school nearby and the whole community. The secondary school pupils and some villagers were very welcoming and really friendly. And... they performed for us!! It is amazing how happy some people can be even when so poor. Even more memorable was how we got to team up with the pupils and the villagers to do some landscaping of the unfinished library. Unfortunately, we did not do much building itself because of lack of funds with which to buy the materials.



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Another project was teaching at St Anna's Care Centre, an orphanage founded and run by a retired Anglican Church bishop and his wife. We taught some basic mathematics, English, history, geography and budgeting and we played games for a couple of days. St Ana is an amazing place with very charming kids, especially those from the nursery. By the way I forgot to mention that in the meantime we moved from the Muranga hotel to the homestead of the Chairman of the secondary school. That's when I realized that our comfort levels were decreasing, from the hotel in Nairobi to that in Murang'a and now the village house itself. Geoffrey admitted later that it

was purposely done in order to bring us out of our daily life style. He had got us! The highlights were more work with the community on landscaping the library site and, especially the planting of the banana trees by Juan Manuel, Mohamed Charity and I. We were giving birth to something and the chairman sure to always remember us by labelling them with our names. We thanked him endlessly. “The little we have, we share” he always said.



I also remember experiences such as the adventure of Juan Manuel with the tarantula in the toilet while he was peeing, my swelling toe when I was working and my fear of every single cat, our games with the manure while planting the trees, Irene's impatience with the secondary school girls who were examining her hair (pulling it,

she said) ...and many other things. We were very proud to work with the villagers to dig the ground for a village well. We also rescued a road from soil erosion. The only thing we were not very happy with was that we did not have enough funds to build a house for a homeless old woman. But we hope to fundraise for this project and make amends next year.

Did I get bored last summer? Not at all! As soon as I returned home in early August, I did my fieldwork research for Anthropology, worked on my EE, read a couple books, partied a lot with my friends and had fun with my family. But my time with KULE Foundation International was a truly exciting experience which opened my eyes about the world beyond imagination. Above all, I think I understand myself better, know what I want in life for myself and for others less privileged. I believe we are lucky to be on full scholarship, receiving such good education. KULE has taught me to look beyond myself more often. Thank you, Geoffrey!

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