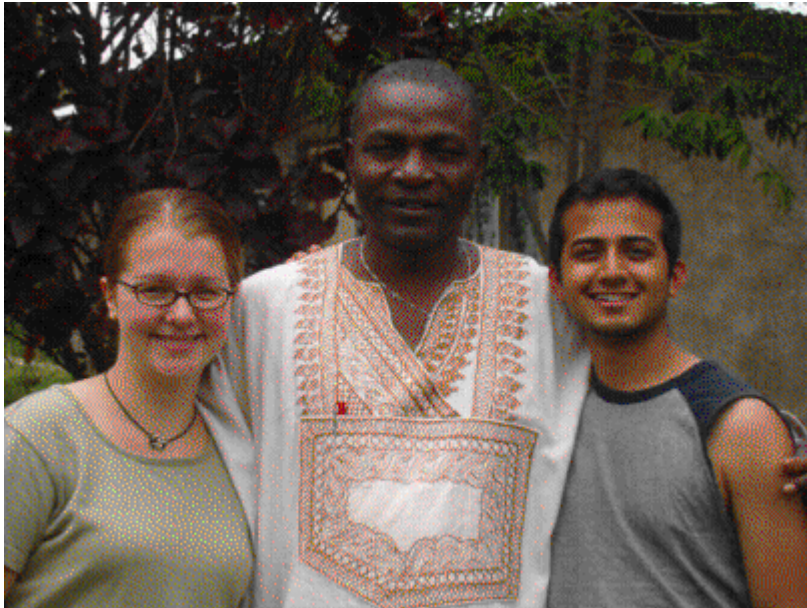


Aman Shah, '08

Kabula, Kenya

During the summer of 2007, Heather Petrat and I had the once in a lifetime opportunity to travel to Kabula (a village town in the Western province of Kenya) and immerse ourselves into a culture and environment very different from the fast-paced world of New York. For six weeks, we volunteered through ICODEI (Inter-Community Development Involvement) an organization whose helping hand has touched the lives of many in need of medical attention, personal health education, and elementary school education for youngsters. The organization has drawn volunteers from many different parts of the world to its cause, not only giving those who come a chance to make a difference in the lives of those in need, as small as it may be, but also to embrace a new culture, and get a glimpse of a different way of life.

As soon as we arrived at the ICODEI compound, Reverend Reuben Lubanga, his family, and the ICODEI staff members embraced us and welcomed us into the ICODEI family. Reuben's wife, from the time we met told us to call her Mama Betty, and she was our African mother, a lovely genuine person who helped us every step of the way, from showing us around town to the various customs of the area.





*Top: Heather and I with Reverend Lubanga;
Bottom: Mama Betty and I*

During our stay, we lived in the 4-person concrete/manure huts below. There were several volunteers from the U.S. and many who had also traveled from Australia, Denmark, France, etc.





Top: 4-person volunteer huts

Bottom: Fellow volunteers

As mentioned above, ICODEI has several volunteer programs. These include an on-site clinic, a mobile clinic, AIDS Awareness classes entitled EMPOWER, Nutritional education classes, micro-enterprising, and elementary education. For the first few weeks, Heather and I volunteered with the mobile clinic staff and traveled up to three hours to remote villages providing health services to villagers who otherwise would not have received any medical attention whatsoever. During the first few days, I aided nurse Chebet in diagnosing some of the patients and later moved to the pharmacy where I prepared and dispensed medications. The first week was especially rewarding because we saw up to 300 patients a day!





Top: Diagnosing with the aid of translator Ben

Middle: Pharmacy – filling a prescription

Bottom: Nurses Rose and Chebet and I

During the second half of our stay, Heather and I had the privilege of teaching an AIDS awareness course. The course was entitled EMPOWER, in hopes that by “empowering” town leaders with the knowledge of AIDS prevention, they would spread the word to their friends, families, and anyone else who cared to listen. Teaching these classes was the most rewarding of all the experiences Heather and I had in Kenya. Since most of the students spoke English, there was no language barrier like there was at the clinics where most of the patients only spoke Swahili. The students were very friendly individuals and welcomed us to their villages and gave us the opportunity to learn about Kenyan life from their perspective.



*Top: Teaching one of the EMPOWER sessions
Bottom: EMPOWER graduates*

After completing our volunteer services for the day, we would return to the ICODEI compound and spend some time with the elementary school children playing on the school grounds and the family. Heather and I brought several toys such as coloring books and balloons which the children were happy to receive.



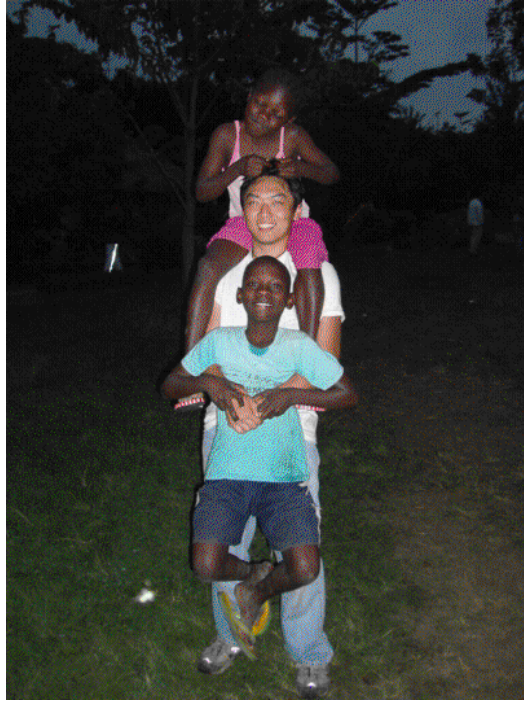


Top: ICODEI school children

Bottom: In many cases, the mobile clinic and EMPOWER classes were held close by or in classrooms of local schools. Children always ran to greet us and loved to jump in for a picture! Before setting up for the day, we spent some time with the children playing some games like limbo and duck-duck goose.







*Top to bottom: Lubanga family children-
Stallone, Edwin, Wendy, Pauline, and Joshua*

My summer of service was certainly an unforgettable eye-opening experience. Although I was able to serve underprivileged individuals, I feel I have gained more from them than I was able to give back. My experience and understanding of the Kenyan way of life has reinforced my appreciation for what opportunities life has presented me so far and what I have already. The people I met further reinforced the importance of family and social bonds, which lays at the foundation of Kenyan culture and are what really matter in life. Camaraderie far surpasses the joys that can be brought by materialism; the joy in the eyes of the impoverished provides a reality check for our society in that America has come to value the wrong things in life: material possessions. We can all truly learn something from the Kenyan culture and values. I thank the Lubanga family and ICODEI staff who welcomed Heather and I with opened arms and Dr. Larow and Siena College for such a memorable experience.