



Student Movement for Real Change



www.StudentMovementUSA.org

Letter from **Lily Muldoon**
Kenya Water Project Director

Sunday, May 7, 2006
From Mombasa, Kenya

Dear Friends and Family,

Hello! How is everyone? I am doing great but sad that I am entering my last weeks in Kenya. I still have so many things I want to do and places I have yet to see. I have met amazing people and made good friends. A return trip to Kenya is a definite in my future.



For the last month I have been organizing the water project for the Student Movement for Real Change. I am working with a community in Kayafungo, a location approximately 50km northwest of Mombasa. I wrote in my last email about my quest to find a community that the Student Movement would want to sponsor. I knew immediately that the people in Kayafungo would benefit from the Student Movement funding when I was taken by one of the school headmasters to their communal water source.



I was taken to the Waa dam, shown in the picture to the left. Women in the surrounding six miles and the school children come to this dam, or as I would call it, dirty mud puddle, everyday to collect water for drinking, cooking and washing. The water is brown in color. Most families are too poor to afford to treat the water by boiling or with a chemical agent so are forced to drink the water directly from the dam. Consequently people often suffer from disease and diarrhea. One night a family generously gave me some of their water to clean myself. I could literally see living organisms swimming in the water and wondered how clean I was actually becoming.

I have worked with community leaders, other NGOs and water technology specialists to design a water-piping system that will bring clean piped water across the region, approximately 15km. We are taking on a huge project that will require a lot of fundraising but it will change the lives of 30,000 people! The water taps along the line will reduce the walking distance of some women from up to 16km everyday during the dry season to less than 2km. The pipeline will also bring fresh water to 10 schools that are currently closing school early daily so the students will have time to walk to a dam to collect water for the family and for school before returning home.

This project is very demanding for me on three levels. First, mentally I am extraordinarily challenged. I know very little about water projects and the community I am working with also know very little; they have never had piped water in the region and know just as about as much as I do about piping water. To deal with this, I spent a lot of time talking to specialists about both running NGOs and water engineering technology.



Second, I am challenged physically. Transportation is difficult in the area and I have a lot of places to go. I bought a bike and rode across the countryside anywhere from 5km to 22km a day to meet with women's groups, school headmasters, the chief and many government officials. Also, my immune system is being put to the test. After multiple nights without sleep and vomiting I finally made it back to Mombasa, the closest city, and went to the hospital to be diagnosed with intestinal worms. Gross!

Finally, organizing this project is emotionally challenging. Some days it is hard not to break into tears at the sight of how the people in Kayafungo must live. I lived with families who only eat one meal a day, cannot afford mattresses so sleep on mats made of palm leaves on the mud floor, and spend up to six hours everyday searching for water and firewood. I have stayed in Kayafungo for three weeks, returning back to the comfort of Mombasa only on some weekends. (Although, I can't say it is always comfortable in Mombasa because the past few times I have returned there is no running water or the electricity is out).

While in Kayafungo, I lived in a small room next to a house of nuns, but I spent multiple nights with families so that I could truly understand the needs of the community and how they live. Also, it was nice to get out of my room because it is infested with bugs and now a family of birds is nesting in the roof. I have gone with women to collect water, carried bundles of firewood on my head, and helped dig in the farm.



I have so many stories and can't wait until I get home so that I can share them with you all. I also want to hear yours! It is very difficult staying in Kayafungo and listening to their sad stories of disease and starvation but it is also inspirational because I know that the Student Movement has the ability to make their lives dramatically better.

Amani na upendo (Peace and Love),
Lily

