

Final Report Part I

First Name	
Last Name	
Organization	The BOMA Project
City, Country	Nanyuki, Kenya
Email Address	
Fellowship End Date	2014-06-27
Anticipated Return Date	2014-08-05
Comments on your end date or return date:	
1. How will you travel when you depart your host country? Please be specific in terms of what airline (s), what cities you will fly to/from, how much your ticket cost (was this travel part of a roundtrip you purchased earlier?) how did you find/purchase your tickets, etc.	From Kenya, I will fly one-way to Lusaka, Zambia (about \$400), backpack for three weeks where I will end in Johannesburg and fly one-way to Dakar (\$600), visit for four days, and ultimately depart for Washington, DC with a 21-hour layover in Istanbul.
2. Any travel tips to share with future Fellows?	Save your vacation days, properly plan elaborate trips, and visit as many fellows as you can in other cities and countries. Always hold safety as your number one priority, but take a step outside your comfort zone.
3. Any tips on finding housing or furnishing an apartment to share with future Fellows?	N/A
4. Did you take anti-malarials during your fellowship? If so, what kind and how/where did you acquire them?	Mosquitoes wouldn't last a second in Kenya's chilly central highlands, but I did take lariam/mefloquine each time we travelled north. This was readily available for purchase in town and covered by my host organization.
6. Please summarize all of the work you did this year as you would on your resume or CV.	<p>Generated quantitative analysis and reported on savings and micro-enterprise performance outcomes in collaboration with M&E Director to assess performance along program objectives and to guide revisions of BOMA's model</p> <p>Led a 3-month data-driven assessment and reconstruction of BOMA's primary measurement of participant success</p> <p>Published BOMA's first micro-savings evaluation in February 2014, involving collaborative questionnaire design, field-officer capacity building, data collection oversight, quantitative analysis, and creation of timely feedback loops</p> <p>Designed and led sessions dedicated to field-based data collection, survey spot-checks, and training-of-trainers during 5 week-long workshops over a six-month period for 25 BOMA village mentors, 3 field officers, and 36 enumerators</p> <p>Developed working proficiency in Swahili</p>

<p>6. List the three things that you are most proud of contributing to your partner organization over the past year.</p>	<p>Creating a system for BOMA to track participants, periodically assess performance, and quantify the extent of our savings program.</p> <p>Leading the push to modify and formalize our definition of extreme poverty against which all exiting participants are measured.</p> <p>Perform data analysis in the form of savings assessments, graduation reports, and exit evaluations as diagnostic tools for BOMA's operations team (i.e. putting numbers behind qualitative claims to drive where field resources and attention can be most optimally deployed).</p>
<p>7. What kind of a person would do well in this fellowship or one like it? Do you have any specific advice for future Fellows who are interested in this position?</p>	<p>Nanyuki: This fellowship is nestled in an un-intimidating and comfortable environment: un-intimidating in that my town is safe, approachable, and easy to navigate; comfortable in that residents enjoy good access to goods and services, amenities, and means of transportation. However, these same aspects make Nanyuki a place where life is slow and engaging social networks are not "crawling out of the woodwork". More is demanded of the fellow to make connections and create a motley crew of friends and acquaintances. Translation: it helps to be outgoing, otherwise the comfortable compound risks turning into a place where weekend afternoons are spent blogging and reading instead of absorbing the charm and dynamism of a medium-sized market town.</p> <p>The North: BOMA works in about two-dozen different communities several hours north of Nanyuki. I spent almost one-quarter of my time in the field, which (depending on the place) can turn Nanyuki on its head in locations where you'll be lucky to find a mattress to sleep on, meals are sparse, and showers take place under moonlight in the middle of the desert. It helps to have a high tolerance for goat meat (no joking intended), long, bumpy car rides, and an ability to operate effectively, tactfully, and sensitively in intimate communities. Bring your sunscreen, but don't forget a blanket. And good luck training for that marathon if you're sipping down sugar-doused chai and gnawing on red meat for two weeks at a time!</p> <p>In a sense, this is a fellowship of extremes. Office tasks involve analysis, data cleaning, and close collaboration with team members of various program items. During these periods, you enjoy a 9-6 routine and a normal social life. Without making a value judgment, this work can be slow-paced, formulaic, and academic. Field tasks involve managing a team of enumerators, training front-line field staff, and speaking with communities. Again, without any value judgments, this work can be unpredictable, uncomfortable, and frustrating.</p> <p>Someone who holds up well in changing environments is better suited for this fellowship than the one who prefers consistency and total control of workflows and schedules.</p>

<p>8. Do you feel like you are a more competitive candidate for the types of work positions you would like to pursue? Please briefly explain why or why not.</p>	<p>The response to this question is a categorical "yes".</p> <p>Constant exposure to monitoring and evaluation issues at BOMA gave me the language to articulate problems and solutions with a high level of familiarity during my job interview process. My work with BOMA rendered almost second-nature and natural otherwise daunting and awkward tasks like addressing a team of data collectors, conducting client visits with field officers, and analyzing and drawing conclusions from a dirty dataset.</p> <p>Grasping field-based practical challenges and constraints is so central to M&E that I would not have been considered for my future job without the ability to use the shared vocabulary of practitioners, managers, and problem solvers in this area.</p>
<p>9. What have you learned about your own values and worldview through living abroad this year?</p>	<p>Didn't someone smart once say, "I'd rather live with a good question than a bad answer"? Rather than emit heaps of newly claimed wisdom, I am better served by framing what I've learned around a key question germane to personal values, professional practice, and academic theory.</p> <p>I have learned that giving (very broadly defined; help, intervene, contribute, and act are all synonymous here) is never black and white, and that the question of "how to give?" in a way that affirms dignity, that breaks cycles of dependency by addressing root causes, and that aligns with the long-term strategy of a given community will be central to my work as a development practitioner.</p> <p>On a personal level, I remember reflecting with unsubstantiated pride a few months into my fellowship how I had "learned to give"; I had grown a little less self-centered, a little less obsessive about my use of time, and a lot less attached to "things". What this narcissistic observation ignored is that giving is not a box that one checks as a personal accomplishment. It's a dance between two people, and this dance isn't always equal. What's good for one person (satisfaction from having performed a good deed, at the individual or institutional level) does not represent an automatic gain of equal magnitude for the recipient. What if giving perpetuates need? What if giving disrupts a process of natural development already in place? Whose interests does giving serve?</p>

<p>10. Looking back, what does PiAf mean to you? How did this experience affect you? What did you learn or gain from your fellowship? This is another chance for you to give us good fodder for our marketing materials! :)</p>	<p>My post-fellowship plans would have been tough to navigate without BOMA, but it would have been impossible without PiAf. In hindsight, it's so abundantly clear that orientation was more than a fellowship orientation, but a bona fide career orientation out of undergrad and into the ocean of opportunities that would soon sit before us. How to approach these opportunities, weigh options, and avail ourselves of available resources were invaluable take-aways from this initial orientation. Needless to say, the PiAf family has been pivotal over the last year, knowingly or not. Whether it was visiting fellows on site, sharing pictures, or exchanging rants over Skype, this network was (and will surely remain) an endless source of support, friendship, and really, really good questions along the way.</p> <p>Thanks to both BOMA and PiAf, I've been blessed with the opportunity to go deep in a technical discipline within a field that inspires me, in a region to which I've been drawn for years, and which will offer a lifestyle for the foreseeable future compatible with my long-term goals.</p>
<p>11. What will you miss most once your fellowship has ended?</p>	<p>Since I'm headed to Rwanda in September, I don't expect to fully part with the dynamism and energy of a fast-growing NGO, the peaceful quaintness of rural life, and the bottomless capacity to absorb novelty in a foreign country. Nonetheless, I will miss the near total autonomy I have over my work plan and key initiatives. I will miss the specific community of running buddies, fruit and newspaper vendors, and dingy restaurants that I've grown close to. I will miss the peak of Mount Kenya (admittedly a fair trade for sunsets over Lake Kivu), and parting with the ubiquitous sounds of Swahili will not be easy.</p>
<p>12. Are there a number of things in your life that once seemed unusual but now seem normal? Please share a few...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paying for my internet by the megabyte - Camel roadblocks - Spending hours around a dinner table with a composed patience that defies reason - Lunch for a buck - Eating with my hands - Shivering when the temperature drops below 70 degrees (F) - Warm beverages - Using the metric system (fear not - my American pride remains strong) - Sunshine in January

<p>13. If you could go back to the start of your fellowship year and do anything differently, would you? If so, what? What do you know now that you wish you had known at the beginning of your PiAf fellowship?</p>	<p>I believe that the fellowship experience ought to be lived without constraining expectations and preemptive overanalysis. Lessons come from failure, innovation from constraints, and discovery from ignorance. However, if I could go back in time, I would have brought a more critical lens to development work from the outset. Since the beginning, my primary concern was trying to understand how I could do my job best. I paid less attention to why my job exists and how our work sits within the context of the good, the bad, and the ugly of international development. Only late in my fellowship did I get a well-informed, pragmatic, and humbling taste of jadedness through incidental field experiences and reading on the topic.</p> <p>I also would have admitted my knowledge gaps earlier on, particularly with respect to data cleaning in statistical analysis software. Admitting a gap is the first step to filling it.</p>
<p>14. How do you think Princeton in Africa board members and staff helped you over the year--or could have helped you more? Do you have any specific suggestions for improving interactions with the PiAf office or program representatives?</p>	<p>The Princeton in Africa community underpins my fellowship at multiple levels, from founding board members to individual fellows. In hindsight, it's so abundantly clear that orientation was more than a fellowship orientation, but a bona fide career orientation out of undergrad and into the ocean of opportunities that would soon sit before us. How to approach these opportunities, weigh options, and avail ourselves of available resources were invaluable take-aways from this initial orientation. Frank's candid discussion of failure and continued insights all year helped keep me grounded, while all staff members added value in numerous ways from beginning to end. I'd write pages of acknowledgements if space allowed, but Stephanie's visit to my site, Katie's presentations at orientation, Agatha's attitude and energy, Mark's career insights, and panels composed of both board members and PiAf alums left a strong, positive impression.</p> <p>Needless to say, other fellows have been pivotal over the last year, knowingly or not. Whether it was visiting other fellows on site, sharing pictures, or exchanging rants over Skype, this network was (and will surely remain) an endless source of support, friendship, and really, really good questions along the way.</p> <p>Our fellowship class was destined to grow and develop over the year. PiAf's job was to orient, inform, and support without impinging on our growth opportunities or limiting our freedom to make decisions as young adults. I emphatically commend PiAf for doing just that. Fellow fellows - I welcome any disagreements or qualifications informed by your specific fellowship circumstances.</p>