

# PRINCETON IN AFRICA

## Final Report

This report focuses on your observations, reactions, realizations, and insights after completion of your fellowship. It will be shared with board members and future Fellows and used to improve the quality of fellowships. We hope it will help you to continue processing your time in Africa. We encourage you to make additions in the form of personal letters, a collection of anecdotes, photos, etc., and you are encouraged to draw conclusions or highlight observations with additional commentary as well as simply relating events.

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### Your Personal Information

Organization: The BOMA Project  
City, Country: Nanyuki, Kenya

FELLOWSHIP END DATE: 5 August 2012

ANTICIPATED RETURN DATE: 11 September 2012

What do you plan to do next? Please be specific! (e.g., attend Harvard Med, be a barista at Starbucks, teach English in Cameroon, etc.)

Waiting to hear back about a job (with One Acre Fund). If I get it, I will return to Kenya (or Tanzania) in late October. In the meantime, I plan to attend a Radiohead concert in London and visit with friends and family!

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### Your Travel and Other Logistical Information

1. How will you travel when you depart your host country? Please be specific in terms of what airlines(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.  
I will fly from Nairobi to London on British Airways. I have a five-day layover in London and will then fly from London to JFK (New York City) on British Airways as well. I bought a round trip ticket with a flexible return date when I flew home for a break around Christmas. The BOMA Project uses Raptim, a travel agent for humanitarian organizations. They are able to get relatively cheap prices and can help you change dates easily. The original ticket was \$1400 plus a change fee.
2. Any travel tips to share with future Fellows?  
I read in The New York Times that the best time to purchase tickets is about 6 weeks out from when you plan to fly. I would also suggest trying to get as flexible a return ticket as possible...you never know what will come up!
3. Did you experience any health problems during your stay in Africa?  
No.
4. Have you utilized the health insurance PiAf or your host organization provided you? Please describe any interactions or experiences—positive or negative—you have had with your health insurance company or policy. Please include the name of the provider in your response.  
N/A
5. Did you take anti-malarials during your fellowship? If so, what kind and how/where did you acquire them?

Through my family's health insurance, I was able to obtain about 50 pills to start relatively inexpensively. In Nanyuki, I was able to buy anti-malarials from the local chemist (drug store) and was reimbursed through work.

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## Your Work

6. Please summarize all of the work you did this year as you would on your résumé or CV.

Developed and carried out one year and three year Impact Assessments; visited 196 small enterprises in nomadic communities in northern Kenya, evaluated business operations and changes in participant livelihoods, coordinated field logistics. Designed and implemented demographic and market participation survey in nineteen rural communities. Conducted extensive research on revenue-generating strategies specific to northern Kenya, established key contacts as part of efforts to diversify participant incomes. Provided field support during participant training and grant disbursements.

7. How would you evaluate your work? What do you feel you were able to contribute? How might you have been more effective?

I worked as hard as I could during my year at BOMA, particularly on the impact assessments. I feel I went above and beyond the organization's expectations for my projects. I was able to contribute several surveys and data collection tools that will continue to be used by BOMA in the future. I hope I made a positive contribution through my attitude and passion for my work.

I could have been more effective with a better understanding of the capabilities of Excel and with more statistical knowledge. I struggled with analyzing the data for the impact assessments and the process could have been easier and more efficient had I known more/been able to code my data.

8. What accomplishments from your fellowship are you most proud of?

Carrying out every stage of two Impact Assessments from creating the survey, interviewing close to 200 businesses, analyzing the data to writing the final reports.

Developing a data collection tool that BOMA will use moving forward to assess the extent of economies in potential new sites.

Gratitude and positive feedback from participants I visited in the field.

9. During PiAf's Pre-departure Orientation in May 2010, you listed three things you hoped to gain from your experience as a PiAf Fellow. What were they? (To refresh your memory, we have recently emailed these to you.) Did you achieve these goals? How has your fellowship affected other goals you have/will set for the future?

Knowledge and experience  
Close friends  
Empowerment

Regarding my goals: I certainly gained knowledge and experience. I made close friends (though perhaps not as many as I would have liked and the transient nature of Nanyuki meant I didn't get to spend a lot of time with them).

I definitely feel empowered, both professionally and personally. This year fostered tremendous reflection and growth.

My fellowship has informed the kind of work I hope to do in the future and equally importantly, the *way* I want to do work in the future. It has taught me the value of maintaining work/life balance and the importance of respecting and making time for the things you love to do.

10. 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?

I think this position suits someone who is independent, adventurous, confident and socially mature. The nature of the position and the social environment necessitate an ability to be comfortable in a diverse situation with (sometimes) relatively few peers/people of similar backgrounds. Further, this fellowship suits a very flexible person, in terms of schedule, living accommodations and social networks...as well as intellectual/professional flexibility. Over the course of this fellowship, I've often had to hold contrasting ideas in my head, whether it be the goals of a project and the project's timeline or the encountering extreme poverty and extreme wealth in the course of a day...not only is the work rigorous, but the experiences of daily life require awareness, compassion and patience.

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## Your Reflections

11. What did you find most inspiring about/during your fellowship experience?

The strength of our participants who struggle without resources to make the lives of their children better.

12. What have you learned about your own values and worldview through living abroad this year?

I think the answer to this question will continue to evolve over time, however a few initial observations:

-This job solidified the importance of addressing 'human problems' if one is committed to sustainable and meaningful solutions to environmental/ecological issues; without securing the futures of human populations, wildlife and ecosystems will not be preserved.

-I've learned the importance of economics/financial awareness in development, conservation and daily life.

-I've begun to develop a very basic understanding of the challenges of institutionalized poverty, the prejudices that surround it and the importance of compassion, empathy and dignity in serving those in need.

-I've become aware of deep currents of cynicism in development and how/where to avoid or engage with them.

-I've struggled with being an outsider.

-I've struggled with reconciling my own beliefs with cultural/spiritual norms.

-I've developed a more nuanced and informed understanding of armed forces and the men and women who chose to serve in them. My time spent with members of the British Army was an incredible opportunity to discuss international politics, personal morality and countless other aspects of service. While still wary of armed conflict, I am no longer naïve (or as naïve as I once was).

13. 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!) ;)

Princeton in Africa believed in my capabilities and trusted me with an incredible professional and personal opportunity. The work I did was exciting and invigorating and the responsibilities I was given were humbling. I feel I rose to the challenges and approached my work with passion and empathy. The experiences I've had already inform my daily decisions and will continue to do so. Princeton in Africa is already a watershed; I can feel its influence in almost every facet of my life.

Professionally, it gave me unprecedented responsibilities, opportunities and experiences.

Personally, it gave me the chance for intense reflection and provided the space to make real and meaningful changes.

I am beyond grateful for this opportunity. As Ernesto Guevara said, "I am not me anymore, at least, not the same me I was."

14. What will you miss the most once your fellowship has ended?

My unprecedented access to northern Kenya. The pleasant company of my coworkers. The friends I've made here. Being able to see Mt. Kenya at the end of my road. Seeing red-cheeked cordon bleus in the garden. Visiting friends that have a leopard tracks in their yard.

15. Are there a number of things in your life that once seemed unusual but now seem normal? Please share a few...

Seeing a sofa on the back of a motorbike on my walk to work.

Driving behind a pick up truck with a cow standing in the back.

Bumpy roads.

Riding motorbikes.

Camels. (still pretty unusual)

Seeing Rendille and Samburu warriors with beads and feathered headdresses herding their goats by the side of the road.

Having a Major in the British Army cheer for me as he drives by while I'm on my morning run.

16. What perceptions of Americans/expats have you encountered while in Africa? Are there any common misconceptions?

That they are loud, uninformed and rich.

17. What misconceptions do Americans/foreigners generally have about the country in which you are living?

I am often assumed to be English/in the British Army (which has a training unit in my town) or a white Kenyan, so I don't experience much American-specific interactions. White people in general are always assumed to have money. When I walk into town or around my neighborhood, someone always asks me for financial assistance, be it school fees, money for food or money that will be used to buy beer. It is constant and omnipresent. It is also always assumed that I am a visitor and that I don't know anything about Kenya/East Africa/Africa. I'm always being told 'Welcome to Kenya!', which, while nice, is a little late.

18. 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?

I would have made more of an effort to integrate the things I love into my daily life. Too often I let the things that make me happy go by the way side and I suffered for it. I would have planted a garden earlier and spent more time in the kitchen. I would have learned how to (or gotten better at) make more things from scratch, like yoghurt, cheese, sausage and kimchi. I also would have tried to make more time to travel more within the country and throughout the region.

19. Do you have any specific suggestions for improving your fellowship position or Princeton in Africa fellowships in general?

It would be great to come up with better visa options, in Kenya specifically but throughout the program. Even if PiAf cannot organize visas for fellows, an accurate database about the viable options in each country would be incredibly helpful. For example, it is possible to get a six month Kenyan visa if you send your passport to the Kenyan Embassy in New York or Washington DC. If I had known this information, I could have saved time, money and being hassled at the border. While countries tend to be a bit hesitant to give information on how to work illegally, it is available.

20. 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?

I felt generally well-supported by the Princeton in Africa staff. The Program Director, in particular, made herself available via email or Skype quite frequently, which was nice when I needed some quick assistance. The one thing I would emphasize a bit more in Orientation and throughout the year is the importance of mental and emotional health. While I agree with PiAf's unofficial goal for fellows to be 'low maintenance and high yield,' too often fellows sacrifice their well-being because they don't want to be a burden on their co-workers and friends. If Princeton in Africa wants to foster the development of young people committed to long-term and sustainable careers in Africa, the importance of awareness and balance should be well-communicated and integrated into the program. Fellows are often independent and emotionally mature (hence their ability to live and work in difficult places) but a program-based reminder of the importance of reflection (and respecting emotional health) could be very useful.

21. Any other comments/suggestions to share?

I'm working with several members of the board on assessing fellow impact, for both PiAf and partner organizations. I look forward to helping develop a more substantive system of evaluation and feedback.