

## **Rutgers Students Help Transform Lives of Kenyan Students**

As part of the Global Literacy Project's "2003 Global Citizens" summer program and supported by the Rutgers University Paul Robeson Cultural Center, the New Brunswick Rotary Club, the Alumnae and Faculty of Douglass College and the Rutgers Political Science Department, several students and a faculty member from Rutgers University spent six weeks in Kenya this past summer where they worked to advance literacy in several local schools and created a community library in Teso District of the Amagoro Constituency in Western Kenya, one of the poorest regions of the country. The program was geared towards giving participants insight into the relationship between their own culture and those of the people of Africa. The sharing of ideas is very important, said Professor Olubayi Olubayi, adding: "The students and faculty come back and share what they have experienced – making this a two way street of learning where everyone benefits."



(L→ R) Jaymie Stein, a Douglass College senior; Sivan Yosef, a Rutgers College senior; Amina Adams, a Masters policy student in the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy; and Eva Sas, another Rutgers College senior (shown here with their local GLP guide Sarah Nyongesa), traveled to Kenya to experience and learn about Africa in person.

The visit to Western Kenya's Teso district prompted plans to return to Kenya next summer to bring school supplies to the many schools district-wide that are facing severe shortages. The endeavor would be a project adopted by students participating in Rutgers University's GOYA student organization that emphasizes leadership and community service and the Global Literacy Project, a non-profit group involved in creating libraries and educational support programs in rural areas of Africa.

The study trip was made up of students who spent the past year volunteering with the Global Literacy Project. The students observed everyday life in the African villages, and they went on safari viewing an abundance of grazing animals and birds in their natural settings in one of Kenya's 57 conservation areas.

### **TRIP ITINERY**

The students spent 4—6 weeks in Kenya depending on the modules they participated in. The itinerary for the trip included:



Trips into several national reserve areas which included some rather exciting encounters...



Three weeks in a Teso village... Here we can see Sivan, Eva and Jaymie as they get to know their hosts.



Visiting also meant sampling food prepared by village women and learning about the customs and culture of the people. While in Teso, the students volunteered at several local schools...



They also worked with members of the surrounding community to create a community library at Kakapel Community Learning Resource Center. Below is a picture of one of the many discussions that went on every day.



Finally, they spent some time in Nairobi the capital city of Kenya. There they visited several other schools...



Students of St. Georges Girls High School in Nairobi where Amina and Sivan facilitated a workshop on women's leadership.

...and the national museum where they met up with a group of elementary school children...



The group also visited the Global Literacy Project science library established at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology with the contribution of journals and reference texts sent previously.



## **LESSONS LEARNED**

While visiting at JKAT, the students were also shown some of the innovative science research being carried out at the university to assist farmers in Kenya...



On a quick side trip to Taita to visit several rural primary schools, they saw that as in Teso, there was a need to help students who lack the financial resources to buy pens, paper, and pencils, and where teachers have to write out everything on the blackboard for students to memorize. Many schools in these rural areas were actually built by the parents of the children and these same family members must provide firewood as well as food to feed the children.

However, while many people assume that Africa is impoverished and everyone lives in squalor, the tour that the students took demonstrated that the story was much more complex and mainly centers around the fact that while African states need significant outside support they have the ability to use any received assistance in many innovative ways.

Accompanying the scholars was Dr. Olubayi Olubayi, who teaches Swahili in the Department of Africana Studies at Rutgers University, New Brunswick..