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Peabody students build bridge between Uganda, Vanderbilt

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Alice Bator, Moses Musaazi, Ogechi Achuko, president of the African Student Union, and Sarah Quirk

[Watch a video](#) about Kasiisi Project.

Peabody students Alice Bator and Sarah Quirk spent just two months in Uganda during the summer of 2009, but walked away with a lifetime of knowledge in topics ranging from technology, sustainability, diplomacy, community organizing, economic development, women's rights and much more.

Bator and Quirk traveled to Uganda to further the work of Kasiisi Project Vanderbilt, which they founded. Kasiisi Project Vanderbilt supports the national non-profit Kasiisi Project, which aids schoolchildren in rural western Uganda by building schools, funding scholarships and promoting conservation education.

"I have been involved with Kasiisi Project since fifth grade," Bator, a Peabody junior majoring in human and organizational development and a member of the Peabody Scholar program, said. "In 2008, Sarah and I introduced it to Vanderbilt."

"Since then, Kasiisi Project Vanderbilt has supported a full secondary school scholarship for a Ugandan eighth-grader, partially with funds raised from an event called Kasiisi Café. The organization has also led other fundraising efforts, partnered with the African Student Union, volunteered with the African community in Nashville, and more.

In the summer of 2009, Bator and Quirk traveled to Uganda to meet Kasiisi students and communities and to work on a project that blended invention and economic development to help Kasiisi schoolgirls. That project, led by Moses Musaaazi, a professor of electrical engineering at Makerere University, centers on producing affordable, biodegradable sanitary pads.

"In Africa, particularly Uganda, many girls miss school because they don't have access to sanitary pads. In the past, the pads were 100 percent imported and too expensive. My goal was to find an appropriate napkin, produced by local materials, that was affordable to local girls," Musaaazi said during a November 2009 visit to Vanderbilt.

Driven by the philosophy of "appropriate technology," Musaaazi looks for solutions that fit the people and natural resources of the regions they serve and have benefits that extend far beyond the original problem.

"Dr. Moses Musaaazi is probably the smartest man I've ever met," Bator said. "Having this exposure to appropriate technology was fascinating. All of his solutions are affordable and can be made from local materials."

The sanitary pads Bator and Quirk worked to promote are called Makapads and were developed after three years of research by Musaaazi. They are made by local women of papyrus, which grows abundantly in Uganda, and cost just 30 cents for a packet of 10, compared to up to \$1.50 for imported pads. Makapads are also more absorbent than the imported pads and are biodegradable, a critical factor in Uganda given the lack of waste disposal.

Not only are schoolgirls now able to afford pads, enabling them to stay in school, the women constructing the pads have also been transformed.

"Lifestyles have changed. Women who had not been earning a single dollar now are making \$200 a month," Musaaazi said. "They are economically independent and they can make a better home."

While in Uganda, Bator and Quirk interviewed girls, gave out samples of pads to receive feedback, conducted research and advocated for the project with both public and private organizations.

"It was an amazing experience," Quirk, also a junior majoring in human and organizational development who plans to pursue a career in nursing, said. "We met with people at embassies and banks, wrote a proposal for using white waste paper to make the pads and did public relations work with the community. We learned so much from Dr. Musaaazi. He is always thinking - and it is always about how to help other people."

"It was the most independent thing either of us have ever done," Bator said. "We found an apartment and lived in the city. I had opportunities that I would never have here - meeting with UNICEF, the World Bank and other organizations. We were also asked to give a presentation to the Ugandan government. These are things that 20-year-olds don't generally get to do."

Back in Nashville, Bator and Quirk are working to raise funds through GlobalGiving.com to support the development of a production plant for Makapads, building of same sex latrines and peer education programs.

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