

GLOBAL VILLAGE PEACE HUT INITIATIVE

BEYOND BOUNDARIES~INTERNATIONAL PEACE INITIATIVES~ KENYA REPORT

November 2012 ~ January 2013



Beyond Boundaries (BB) is an inter-generational team responding to requests for support and collaboration from the emerging global community of people and places creating a regenerative future.

BB is a non-organization, or rather an 'organizing principle' a dreaming of cross-cultural collaboration, co-creative learning, and bearing witness to good works being done 'beyond boundaries' of nation, race, religion, age or gender.

We travel in service, in care for people, place and planet. In the winter of 2012-2013, a group of five of us travelled to Kenya, responding to a call from International Peace Initiatives.

MEDICINE JOURNEYS



Dr. Karambu Ringera is the Founder and Director of International Peace Initiatives (IPI), in Meru, Kenya. In May, 2011, she showed up unannounced at a Nature-of-Council course Marlow and his wife Leslie were offering in Findhorn. The meeting was auspicious. She'd heard about Findhorn, found herself in Great Britain, and came on impulse.

Envisioning the possibilities of a marriage between the *nature* of council and her bustling nest of social justice initiatives, she invited Beyond Boundaries (BB) to bring the Way of Council to

her staff at IPI and to collaborate in building a small, round, earth-bag Council house for councils, prayer meetings and ceremonial gatherings, in the middle of their beautiful grounds at the Kithoka Amani Community Home (KACH).

Amani means *peace* in Swahili. KACH is a community-based alternative to orphanages, a home-away-from-home, for children left behind by AIDS/HIV, civil and domestic violence, and poverty. Karambu's long-range vision is planting the seeds of a Pan-African peace academy in Kenya, where Africans, plus other 'internationals', can gather to share and learn ways of compassionate, collaborative, sustainable living.

For more information visit: www.ipeacei.org



SONGLINE THREADS

Peter Caddy, one of the founders of Findhorn 50 years ago, first came to The Ojai Foundation in the 1980s, around the same time Joan Halifax, Gigi Coyle, and Jack Zimmerman were nurturing the roots of Council there. In the decades to follow, Gigi and others from Ojai brought Council to Europe and to Findhorn. In 2009, Gigi initiated the Beyond Boundaries (BB) pilgrimage and, along with Win and a team of six younger pilgrims/council carriers, embarked on a year-long, global service and learning pilgrimage, bearing witness to projects and communities doing good work in the world, including Findhorn. In 2011, Gigi sent Marlow and Leslie to Findhorn to keep the momentum going, and, as it turned out, to meet Karambu.

Findhorn—Ojai—Three Creeks—Kenya....

Each of these watering holes is woven together through the practice of council.

Each has round, earthen buildings with reciprocal roofs, dedicated to round, reciprocal conversations.

Each is a node on a widening web of communities sharing work that reconnects.

Each is a circle on a venn diagram of spiritual centers linking around the world.

Each has residents who shuttle between the centers, keeping the gifts moving.

~ Marlow

GLOBAL VILLAGE COUNCIL HOUSE INITIATIVE

The inter-generational BB team we put together for Kenya – Gigi, Win, Siri, Sam, Marlow – combine years of in-depth council experience together with hands-on construction experience from the recent earth-bag Council House at Three Creeks...an ideal mix of physical and metaphysical skills for the IPI project.



From the ground-breaking ceremony mid-November to our closing circle at the end of January, the hut invited gatherings and ceremonies. At one point we had more than 50 people inside the fresh mud walls, sharing their visions for the hut and the future. From 5-year-old children to senior staff, they spoke of a place to listen, to pray, to connect...we were already living the dream together.

WAY OF COUNCIL

Council was what called us there, and council was what we lived, the practice of listening together for what would serve this connection with IPI and the greater world. We began each day in a circle before trainings, attuning for the day with our 'mjengo' – work site – team; and we spent time in council with each other, the kids, the staff and the community... circles overlapping circles! It was a cross-cultural bridging, an adventure in translation and transmission...and a steep personal learning curve for everyone involved!

COUNCIL WITH IPI STAFF

The original impetus for BB coming to IPI was Karambu's desire to introduce council to her staff and faculty, at an organizational level. The KACH/IPI staff is around twenty people, including kitchen, farm, household, jewelry workshop, and administrative teams. Given very full schedules, not all of the staff were able to be present for all of the trainings, yet some were extraordinarily present. In addition, Karambu had extended an open invitation to a number of visiting 'internationals' who joined our circle from time to time. Open-house council! We never had the same people in session from day to day, even for the opening 3-day intro to council. We were also introduced to 'Kenyan time,' an infinitely flexible notion of how and when something should begin.



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After that weekend, it was clear our plan for continued trainings would need to be flexible and adaptive. We turned into the skid. Rather than building the arc of our program developmentally over a span of days, we shifted to a looser vision of offering selected, intense and stand-alone councils and teachings over the whole two and a half months. We were continually challenged to include our hosts, even when they were not culturally inclined to include themselves. We coined the term 'pudding' for a thick field...what it's like to set off from safe harbor into a thick fog bank. The council practice of one person speaking at a time was initially a bit shy-producing in a culture where it is common that everyone will speak at once, with many repetitions to get points understood. For many, being the center of such focused listening was unique, a little scary, yet both eye- and heart-opening. Often we did not know how to read the field, and we learned. We learned how to ask the right questions, how to invite, when to push, how to listen together for what served the bigger picture.

We found smaller circles worked well, men's and women's councils, spirals, fishbowls. We focused on practices within the organization of IPI, asking how are decisions made? How are decisions communicated among the staff? How does visioning happen? We asked, we listened, and we made recommendations, and modeled them. We invited the different departments to hold their own councils, with the larger circle as witness. We modeled peer reviews and dealing with conflict. We co-created an optional decision-making process, using council, deep listening, and voting to decide the animals that would adorn the council hut. The day we left, they began their staff meeting with a check-in council for the first time. The seeds germinated and are growing....

When the farm group sat to evaluate their challenges and growth, they gave seats for the animals and the plants, and dared to bring voice to the perspective of the beings they work with. I had tears in my eyes, seeing 'Council of All Beings' invented spontaneously in the circle. ~ Siri

COUNCIL WITH KIDS



An incredibly joyful and inspiring aspect of our work was council with the children (ages 6-12). On the request of one of the Children's Home house-moms, Siri and Sam offered a variety of games, activities, and questions to support council at the group home.

At the end of one particular council session the talking piece was placed back in the center and the 'last round' was announced. As the colorful mini soccer ball sat idle in the middle of the circle, Edwin, one of the youngest, bravely stepped forth and picked it up. This was surprising because every time he had received a talking piece in the past, he had chosen not to speak. This time, without hesitation, he began speaking to the circle in a calm and quiet voice. Smiles erupted across everyone's face as Edwin shared with the group. As he finished and returned the piece to the center, the entire circle broke out in applause. It was an incredibly touching experience and demonstrated the wisdom of the circle, the power of creating safe places for true expression, and the benefit of practicing council with children.

~ Sam

COUNCIL WITH YOUTH

One of the most enthusiastic new carriers of council in the KACH community is Joy Karambu, a young farmer who asked for and coordinated two youth introductions with Sam and Siri. Both days local young people involved in youth groups were invited, as well as the teenagers and youth of IPI. The days were strong, with 'aha' moments, and the biggest gifts were probably with the youth of IPI, such as Joy. We sat with her before and after the experiences, listening for the form of the day and harvesting the mutual learnings. She dreams of college in the US and a gold medal women's soccer team.

LIVING COUNCIL DAY-TO-DAY

The best and most effective training strategy, to no surprise, turned out to be a by-product of living and working side-by-side with our Kenyan colleagues for the two and a half months of the overall project. Though we were only four or five people, we were a significant presence in the daily life of KACH and the community.

Dr. Karambu pointed to our small team's collaborative style of exploring differences, openly discussing options, and conferring with each other before moving into decision-making and next steps, as one of the more impactful teachings she received. More than just a talking and listening technique, the staff and community came to see Council as a *friendship practice*, a way of showing respect beyond conventional social gestures and beyond race and class as well. In the end, everyone from the little kids to the elders had strong moving experiences of circle work. Integration, however, was, and still is, a work-in-progress. Before we left the KACH/ IPI team agreed to try a 90-day experimental program of folding council into their daily-weekly-monthly routine, and we agreed to check back in at-a-distance, to see how things develop. The gift keeps moving, one continuous motion....

As I was 'mentoring' a young council carrier, I was mentored by Marlow. I learned through collaborating, and it was also great for us 'youngers' to initiate and hold councils on our own. The debriefs were rich, among us and with our partners from IPI. It felt like a real in-depth experiential training, with learning all around the circle.

~Siri

MJENGO ~ WORK SITE

And of course we also came to build a sanctuary, a council house, a prayer hut. In the beginning there were many names for what would come to be called 'the Peace Hut'.

We began each morning and ended each evening with a circle. We listened to the place, we listened to ourselves, we listened to each other. We communicated what was needed, expressed gratitude for what we had done, and got to work. In the beginning it was a little awkward and foreign to our Kenya co-workers, but soon they were the ones gathering us and calling the circle. We found different forms and constellations, each of us placing ourselves in a position for the day or a task, with growing awareness for the whole as we grew in our specialized positions. We also had times where we sat together and talked about the experience... and it seemed like the most valuable communication actually happened side-by-side, working together on a project that we were all falling in love with together.



A key intention of the council-house part of the project was to train a small team of Kenyans in earth-bag building, so they could adapt the technology to local projects. The development of earth-bag building as an eco-friendly alternative to housing needs in developing countries, was the original dream of architect Nader Khalili, for which he received a U.N. Humanitarian Award. Our core team, Marlow, Sam and Siri, plus Sara (Marlow's daughter, a professional photographer, who joined us to help create a visual How-To manual to leave with the Kenyans) worked side-by-side for two months with five Kenyans: two women and three men. Two of the men were builders and knew the right questions to ask. From the first week, the women we worked with were already dreaming of building earth-bag homes for their families. When we left, it was clear this team would continue working together as a cohesive unit.



An important part of passing the baton was leaving the project unfinished. As we neared the end, we prepared the team to become self-managing, handing over several critical tasks, from final plaster detailing to hanging the door and installing window screens. On the last day of our stay we ceremonially passed the hut to our Kenyan team in front of the whole IPI community. We can report, in the month since our departure, the Kenyan team brought the project to completion, with "kudos" for both Beauty Way and TLC. In the end, we handed the sanctuary over, took down the invisible scaffolding of our support, and left the roots of council deep in the red volcanic soil, in every bag, in the gleaming eye of the peace-dove...all lovingly created with prayers for peace from our single beating heart.



While fund raising for the initiative, we received inquiries about sharing these gifts with yet other centers. This idea, of “playing it forward,” embodies a key intention at the very heart of the Beyond Boundaries vision: cross-fertilizing kindred communities around the world. In dialogue with Laura Whitney and others, it became clear that the marriage of council-and-earthen-council-houses, first seeded in Ojai and reiterated in the Heron Hut at Three Creeks, was a template for an on-going initiative. The original idea of bringing people who had worked on the Heron Hut in Three Creeks along to help in Kenya morphed thereafter into bringing 1-2 Kenyans along to work on the next project. Our dream is that it will be with First Nation Peoples, perhaps with Grandmother Margaret and the Cheyenne in Montana, for which we have an exploratory invitation.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE...

Any community project requires a community of support to make it happen. During our time at IPI and with your support, we explored and fulfilled our own adaptation of the old African proverb: “It takes a village... to build a peace hut.” Our work would not have been possible, would not have made sense, without the bigger circle of support and larger context of Beyond Boundaries. Thank you to the circle of support around BB and IPI, for the many who gave time, energy and money to make this project possible. Thank you to those who stayed at home, and read our e-mails and beamed us support while we were abroad... Especially Shay, Kate, Heather and Sierra for holding base camp at 3 Creeks.

We want to acknowledge our team... each with a unique role. Marlow for leading us into new waters and asking what serves... Gigi with her endless guidance and care with all aspects and phases of BB’s work. The time would not have been the same without her and Win’s presence, helping to set the council field in Kenya and support manifesting this project every step of the way. Sam, poet and straw boss, had more hours on the site than anyone. Siri, for the breadth of her vision and creating the beautiful animals that adorn the hut. Sara, for her eye, attention to detail and beautiful photos, not to mention her courage to jump into such an unknown group-service adventure.

We made it through the tests of cross-cultural, inter-generational, male-female collaboration, with some bumps, great questions, and real learning. We survived two cases of Malaria, living in the children’s dorm and an encounter with a Lion pride...

*I am grateful for the opportunity
To listen together.
To ask, what serves, Self, circle, world.
How does change happen?
To practice bearing witness,
To open the heart to see and be seen,
Without having to make anything happen.
What is intervention?
How can I live without making assumptions?
How can I give in a way that is healing,
Creating peace, in me and the world?
One heart at a time.
Give me the strength
To show up when the body is hurt
To show up when the field is thick
To show up when I think I’m stuck,
And I will rise.
I will learn, I will live, and I will give.
I am part of a whole,
Moving towards truth,
Moving towards healing,
Moving towards a future worth working for.
~Siri*

For all those of you who helped make this dream possible, *Thank you!*



A synthesis of dirt and sand and sweat.
Making the structure within which Council can abide
A listening hut
A peace sanctuary
Where dreams are dreamt and hearts heard
A rubble trench foundation, freeing the waters to flow
Eight windows peering into the soul of structure...
And out into the world in which it lives

A dedication flag for the children
Passing the wisdom on
Sharing the teachings as we share Friday afternoon
tea
Reciprocal framed roof supporting the thatch...
Enclosing this capsule of rebirth
Stunning in its beauty
Subtle in its potency
And firm in its receptivity.

~ Sam

FINANCIAL REPORT*

This project, a cooperation between Beyond Boundaries and International Peace Initiatives, had a total budget of \$35,600.

Our projected BB budget was \$28,050 for project planning, international travel, visas and immunizations, room and board, and training materials. We successfully raised \$27,500, received by our fiscal sponsor, the Biosphere Foundation (BF), and we spent \$27,500. \$9,500 was transferred directly from BF to IPI Boulder to pay for expenses in Kenya.

Additionally, \$4,500 was gifted by other donors directly to IPI Boulder, the fiscal sponsor of IPI, for building materials and tools, as well as Sara's travel expenses and costs for the creation of the 'how-to manual'.

IPI Kenya matched our expenses with approximately \$3,600 of in-kind contributions of building materials and local labor, not to mention contributions to room and board and logistical support.

Biosphere Foundation

Total Projected Budget: \$28,050. Total Project Expenses: \$27,500.

BB Project Donation/Expenses: \$18,000 used to cover pre-planning, team briefings & trainings, visas & vaccines, Council training materials, airfares & travel costs.

\$9,500 was transferred as a donation to IPI to make expenses in Kenya easier to cover.

International Peace Initiatives-Boulder

Total BB Project Donations/Expenses: \$14,000

(\$9,500 from Biosphere Foundation* & \$4,500 from direct donors to IPI for this project)

Used to cover housing, food, training materials, local transport, internet & communication, photo documentation, Sara's travel expenses, IPI safari.

International Peace Initiatives-Kenya

Matching Funds/Expenses: \$3,600

In-kind contribution to BB team room-&-board, local labor, building materials & tools.

In-kind contribution to BB team safari, production of the earth-bag How-To manual.

* A detailed budget/accounting is available upon request, contact Gigi Coyle: gigicoyle@earthlink.net