



Laidlaw Scholarship

Summer 2025

Health Education

Project Report

I. Introduction

This project was led by the third generation of Laidlaw Scholars to work under the Kibale Forest Schools Program (KFSP). The health education project, composed of the three authors of this report and four KFSP staff members, was one of two projects running simultaneously in the summer of 2025. Six weeks were spent in the Kabarole District of Uganda, based at the KFSP Office in the village of Kasiisi.

KFSP partners with 16 government-aided schools that are within 5 kilometers of the boundaries of Kibale National Park. The schools are located mainly in the Kabarole district, and we visited 7 of these schools: Kasiisi, Kigarama, Kiko, Kyanawara, Iruhuura, Kiamara, and Kyakataru. The KFSP office, as well as the Kasiisi Guesthouse where we stayed, are located on the grounds of Kasiisi Primary School. As a result, we spent the most time with these students, both formally and informally.

The goals of our project were to update existing health curricula and finalize the Village Health Team Handbook and Forest Workers Handbook. This report will detail the work carried out by the health education team, along with the challenges encountered and advice to future generations participating in similar projects. It aims to document the activities of this summer and to guide future curricula and programming, both under KFSP and within similar settings.

We sincerely thank Shamy, Patrick, Isaac, and Alpha for guiding and mentoring us throughout our six weeks. We were inspired by their commitment to KFSP and to public health.

II. Village Health Team Handbook

The Village Health Team (VHT) Handbook was created to provide medical knowledge for Ugandan village health workers. VHTs were developed by the Uganda Ministry of Health to strengthen the delivery of health care at the household level. These teams consist of local volunteers who act as liaisons between the community and health services. The project of creating the KFSP VHT handbook was begun three summers ago, intended as a tool for VHT volunteers to learn more about common medical conditions. In the past six weeks, we have worked to refine the handbook – creating graphics, adding information, and editing formatting. We added sections on conditions such as ringworm, flu, shock, heart attack, jaundice, and stroke, in addition to sections on first aid and mental health. To create royalty-free images and diagrams, we utilized AI image generation, as well as Canva to create the book's cover.

III. Editing Health Curricula

A second objective of our LiA was editing existing health curricula. We created materials for health club meetings on sexually transmitted diseases, including informational power points and a series of games. We presented this curriculum at schools with the guidance of KFSP health team members. We also created graphics to be printed and displayed at schools to raise awareness of important principles of hygiene and first aid.

IV. Forest Workers Handbook

The Forest Workers Handbook provides a guide for individuals working in Kibale National Park. The emphasis of this handbook is on protecting the health of wildlife – great apes in particular – through

preventative measures, such as hand washing and mask use. This guide was tailored to the experience of forest workers based on notes from focus group-style discussions between the KFSP Health Team and local organizations, including the Nutrition Project, Kibale Chimpanzee Project, and Fish and Monkey Project. KFSP also met with field managers working in the park. Based on the concerns shared by these community members, we included sections on protective gear, waste management, keeping equipment clean, hand washing, tippy tap construction, and community outreach. As a reference for best practices, we used guidelines from The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

V. School Health Initiatives

One of the largest in-school programs the KFSP health team conducts is the reusable menstrual pad (RUMP) program, in which they educate students on how to make RUMPs from easily available materials. Because some families lack the financial resources to buy their daughters menstrual pads, girls are sometimes forced to miss school during their periods. RUMPs offer an affordable and reusable option for girls that allows them to participate in their normal activities without feeling inhibited. By encouraging education and discussion about menstruation and menstrual products, this program also helps destigmatize menstruation among both boys and girls. During our time with KFSP, we traveled to several schools and made RUMPs with their health club students.

Another key effort of the KFSP health team is to promote hand hygiene. The KFSP health team travels to local schools and teaches health club members how to make tippy taps -- hand washing structures made from local materials, such as string and sticks. These hand washing stations dispense water with a foot-operated mechanism, ensuring the user's hands are kept clean after washing, and are often constructed near latrines. After learning how to make tippy taps ourselves, we aided in these collaborative demonstrations, constructing tippy taps alongside health clubs' members at several schools. Tippy taps were built in locations deemed most important by the schools teachers.

In efforts to encourage people to keep their food off the ground in order to avoid contamination by debris and germs, the KFSP health team teaches health clubs how to construct food storage racks with locally available materials. We were trained in how to make these and taught the health club members of two schools.

With all of these initiatives, the KFSP health team educates the boys and girls in health clubs and encourages them to share the knowledge with their peers, as well as their families and communities at home. This key element of programming is intended to maximize impact and reach.

VI. Trainings

We conducted several successful training courses for the KFSP staff on topics including PowerPoint slides, data entry, data analysis, and graphic design. These were topics that the staff expressed a desire for assistance with, and we appreciated the opportunity to pass on some of our technological knowledge to them to help them streamline and improve the quality of their work.

VII. Leadership Talks

Over the past six weeks with the Kasiisi Program, we have had the privilege of learning from a vast range of speakers, generously sharing their experiences and different insights into leadership. These

talks included personal stories from Dr. Patrick Tusiime, Dr. Emily Otali, and a local reverend, each presenting their leadership story and experience to us and showing us what it really takes to be a good leader. These talks, in which they highlighted their setbacks and lessons learned, were inspiring and impactful.

We also had a session with Dr. Zarin Machanda over dinner, where she showed us fascinating slides on chimpanzees as well as other primates' behaviors. In another session, we met with a Ugandan lawyer who discussed her work in human rights and prosecution. She spoke about the empathy needed in these fields to advocate for and protect marginalized groups. We also heard from a research manager in the Kibale National Park with the Uganda Wildlife Authority, who shared her story with us and explained how much she loves what she does despite the struggles she went through to get to where she is now.

Beyond leadership, these talks were incredibly educational as they introduced us to various fields of work, deepening our understanding of the cultural and ethical workings of Uganda. These conversations highlight the experience at Kasiisi; offering real life advice to shape us into the leaders of the future.

VIII. Additional Activities

During our second week in Kabarole, we traveled with the health team and the conservation team to a rural village to conduct a free mobile health clinic. Throughout the day, we assisted with patient registration and recordkeeping. We also performed a demonstration of tippy tap construction for patients who were waiting in line to be seen. The mobile health clinic, which reached more than 200 patients in that one day, was indicative of the high demand for – and limited resources of – medical care, especially in these particularly rural regions. This experience was also incredibly educational for us as we learned about some of the most common ailments faced in rural communities. This informed the revisions and additions we made to the VHT handbook described in Section II.

In addition to wildlife excursions including chimpanzee trekking in Kibale National Park and a day in Queen Elizabeth National Park, KFSP organized several enriching cultural experiences for us. We visited a local market, toured a tea estate, participated in a craft-making session, and visited a crater lake. We also participated in a local village community experience, where we learned about traditional tools, spoke with a traditional healer, visited a local coffee farm, had a music and dance experience with local women, and visited a banana-themed tourist attraction. We also had an Empaako naming ceremony, where we were given traditional Tooro praise names -- used in greetings and as a sign of respect. This ceremony, conducted by a community cultural leader and our house manager Gorret, was incredibly thoughtful and welcoming. We have enjoyed learning and using the praise names of our colleagues and community members.

While we were there, another student from the United States was also working with KFSP to conduct a girls' sports program at the KFSP schools. We assisted her in teaching the girls jump-roping, frisbee, football, and bike-riding. Some of our team members also joined the conservation education team on several of their activities; we participated in beehive checks at the Kasiisi Farm, a training on beehive construction, and a training on the construction of improved cookstoves. In our free time, we also started a composting project with the gardener at the Kasiisi Guesthouse.

IX. Successes & Challenges

Successes:

In our time at Kasiisi, we found success in creating deliverables for an NGO, learning about a new culture, and building relationships. We contributed to the existing work of KFSP and previous Laidlaw scholars, finalizing the handbooks for official review and editing the health club curriculum. It was rewarding to share our skills pertaining to subjects like graphic design or data analysis with the KFSP staff. We were incredibly grateful to have the opportunity to learn about the rich Tooro culture of the surrounding area through activities and conversations with residents. As we learned about this culture, based in community values and a deep respect for tradition, our worldviews and perspectives have changed and broadened. This shift in perspectives was also championed through mentorship by the KFSP staff, as we were continuously inspired by their commitment to KFSP, selflessness in promoting health initiatives, and willingness to welcome us into their work. The accomplishments and importance of this organization cannot be understated. We were also inspired by the studiousness, hard work, and endlessly positive attitudes of the Kasiisi students as we shared their home and school for six weeks, attending nightly lessons and playing sports games. Our greatest success and the most rewarding aspect of our LiA was the forming of these relationships.

Challenges:

Working in a new place with unfamiliar people, cultures, and practices came with many challenges, both expected and unexpected. Different KFSP schools had varying degrees of English proficiency, with some schools needing every word translated. This reality can make presenting content a bit more arduous, particularly for the KFSP staff who must translate everything.

Additionally, we were aiding students in building tippy taps and food storage racks, which students were oftentimes more familiar with than us. In future cohorts, it may be more effective to have health team members work on developing PowerPoints, games, and activities for health club curricula and presenting to schools, as opposed to working on health-related engineering demonstrations.

As can happen in any team, we struggled with an uneven distribution of work between members. This caused some frustration and tension, which sometimes inhibited our ability to work efficiently and effectively. Additionally, because all of us were unfamiliar with one another at the start of the project, we struggled to figure out the work dynamics that worked best for us individually and for us as a group.

X. A Note to Future Scholars

Working with KFSP and Kasiisi offers a unique opportunity to learn from highly successful NGOs. KFSP champions OneHealth approaches – emphasizing the health of humans, animals, and the environment – which can support lasting change across organizations and sectors. We advise future scholars to take full advantage of opportunities to learn from staff members, local leaders, and fellow scholars. The projects we worked on were important, but the lessons we learned from inquiring about the vastly different lives of those around us were invaluable.



