



The Kisa Project

A Family-Supported Girls' Scholarship and Leadership Initiative

Abstract

The Kisa Project is an innovative AfricAid initiative that will directly link families and groups in the U.S. with some of Africa's brightest young women – our Kisa scholars. American families and groups will raise funds for a Kisa Project scholarship, which will provide these young women with a school scholarship, entrance into a two-year leadership program, and individualized mentorship. During this period, the American sponsors will develop a meaningful relationship and forge strong bonds with their Kisa scholar, sharing in the joys and challenges of one another's life stories through an interactive website. Upon graduation, these talented young women will return to their home communities to implement vital community projects and provide life-skills mentoring to other young women. In this way, the Kisa Project helps to uplift and support the next generation of leaders across Africa – and within your own community.

Overview

At the heart of many of the greatest challenges facing the African continent is the lack of educational opportunities available to young women there, and the absence of the mentorship and training necessary for them to become leaders – leaders who are empowered to identify needs in their own communities and to take action to address them.

To help meet this critical need, AfricAid has created the Kisa Project, a family-supported girls' scholarship and leadership initiative in Africa. Through this program, AfricAid is providing school scholarships to some of Africa's brightest young women who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to continue their education. Believing, however, that these students need more than just a classroom education in order to gain the leadership skills necessary to become agents of change in their communities, AfricAid offers scholarship recipients a two-year Leadership Curriculum which runs concurrently with their traditional schooling and teaches them the additional skills they will need to become agents of social change. After completing this two-year experience and upon their graduation from secondary school, these AfricAid scholars have the option of returning to their home communities for a six-month Leadership Immersion program, during which time they become small project leaders and provide mentorship to other young girls in the areas of goal-setting, decision-making, communication and the formation of healthy relationships. To build upon this success, long-term mentoring is then provided to these Kisa Project graduates through an alumni network. Ultimately, these Kisa Project scholars and the girls they mentor will become the next generation of leaders in their own communities and in their nation's businesses, organizations and political institutions. In this way, each school

scholarship provided through Kisa has an exponential effect.

Kisa is the Swahili word for “story,” signifying the belief that everyone has a leadership story waiting to be realized and shared. The Kisa Project gives individuals the chance to connect their own life stories with their larger visions for change, and to work collectively to create a better world by allowing individuals across the globe to engage meaningfully with each other. Through scholarship funding, a two-year curriculum, and a comprehensive, dynamic website, families and sponsors in the United States are connected with individual young women in Africa, allowing them to learn from one another and to provide the mutual inspiration needed for each of them to strengthen their own community and family ties. Both partners have the opportunity to share the challenges and joys of their own life stories with one another in video and written format, revealing how their experiences fit in with their larger visions for a better world. Through these experiences, these partners grow closer to one another as they use the tools given to them to enhance their relationships with their respective families and communities.

In this way, the Kisa Project represents a break from the traditional mold. The initiative does not portray its partners in Africa as merely a set of numbers or a sea of impersonal faces, but rather brings the richness of each individual’s story to life, identifying it within a broader community of families working and learning together.

Rationale

Studies have shown that when an African girl receives an education, she is more likely to marry later, have fewer children and invest the increased income she earns into her children’s health and education. All too often in African countries, bright young girls who are succeeding in school are unable to continue with their education due to something as simple as a lack of money to pay the school fees. These are often the very women who would eventually want to work to address their communities’ most pressing needs if they had the tools to do so. AfricAid therefore believes it is vitally important to provide scholarships to these enthusiastic young women. However, even when young women in Africa are given the chance to go to school, they are all too often taught through rote methods and are rarely, if ever, given the opportunity to develop leadership skills. Through the Kisa Project, AfricAid provides the schooling and leadership training needed to empower Africa’s bright young women to become community leaders and provide critical mentorship to the next generation of young girls.



There are many scholarship programs in Africa, but they are generally not available for students wanting to complete the last, critical phase of their education, nor do most provide leadership training of any sort. These programs are generally impersonal in nature and do not encourage students and sponsors to communicate consistently or meaningfully with each other. The Kisa Project, on the other hand, utilizes a unique approach to accomplish its immediate goals of providing scholarships and leadership training to young African women: it gives sponsors the opportunity to directly provide educational scholarships to specific young women with the ultimate goal of helping create a new class of women leaders in Africa. It utilizes new Internet technologies to facilitate personal communication, building bridges between distant communities and individuals through the sharing of video and written stories. And, most importantly, it brings groups of diverse individuals together as they work to implement their shared vision of a better world.

History

AfricAid is a 501(c)(3) organization that supports girls' education in Africa to provide young women with the opportunity to transform their own lives and improve the future of their communities.

AfricAid's origins date back to 1996 when its founder, Ashley Shuyler, traveled to Tanzania with her family at the age of 11 and saw first-hand the enormous educational needs that exist there. Determined to find a way to help, she formed AfricAid, which gained its nonprofit status in 2001 and has since raised over \$600,000 in its efforts to help support the educational needs of girls in Africa.



Since 2001, AfricAid has provided educational opportunities for thousands of young women in nine schools across northern Tanzania. Specifically, AfricAid has awarded over 200 secondary school scholarships, built classrooms at three overcrowded schools, helped build a pipeline to bring much-needed water to one school, started a school lunch program, provided computers for vocational training and supplied over \$100,000 worth of textbooks, school supplies and other classroom materials to needy Tanzanian schools. Most recently, AfricAid has expanded its reach to establish an innovative, countrywide teacher-training initiative, Teaching in Action, that is working to improve the quality of teaching in hundreds of Tanzanian classrooms.

Since its beginnings, AfricAid has been a family-based organization. As AfricAid grew, Ashley's parents, Rick and Nina, became more involved in its work and soon other families began working together with AfricAid to help it achieve its goals. Each of these families has experienced the meaningful nature of working on a project that is larger than themselves. Now, by offering other families both in Tanzania and the United States a similar opportunity, AfricAid's Kisa Project is providing the tools by which participants in both countries learn and work together to enrich their own communities and connect to families in other parts of the world.

AfricAid's Vision

AfricAid envisions a future in which all African girls have access to high-quality educational opportunities that can empower them to identify needs in their own communities and take action to address them.

This vision can be summarized in four actionable components:

- 1) Provide educational opportunities for young women who might not otherwise be able to attend school.**
- 2) Enhance both the quality of education offered to young women in the classroom and its applicability to post-educational career and life opportunities.**
- 3) Create opportunities for young women for personal growth outside the classroom through community-based service and leadership initiatives.**
- 4) Encourage these young women to continue to engage with their own communities and mentor the next generation of young girls.**

Moving forward, AfricAid will continue to support and expand its existing programs that meet at least one of these four core criteria, such as the Teaching in Action teacher training seminar. However, as AfricAid's new initiative, the Kisa Project, grows from a pilot project into a larger program, it will become the focal point of AfricAid's work.



The Kisa Project

Overview

The Kisa Project is designed to offer an opportunity for young African women to obtain schooling they might not otherwise be able to receive and to then further educate and empower them to become leaders and mentors in their own communities. Through an interactive website, these young women connect with their American sponsors and, together, share and reflect upon their own life stories while considering how their experiences fit in with their respective larger visions of a better world.

A pilot version of the Kisa Project will be implemented in January, 2010, in two Tanzanian schools. Once the program's success has been established, it will first be expanded to additional Tanzanian schools and then to schools in other Sub-Saharan African countries.

Student-Leaders

As the program's starting point, each year AfricAid selects a new set of young women to participate in the Kisa Project. Female students studying at the A-Level, the final two years of secondary school, are eligible to participate. It is at this level that the greatest need for scholarship assistance exists because, while only 20% of students pass the rigorous national examinations needed to continue on to these last two years of secondary school, tuition costs increase dramatically during this period, forcing many of these exemplary students to drop out of school. By providing a scholarship at this educational stage, AfricAid supports the schooling of these young women who have demonstrated the greatest potential for educational and professional success, but who otherwise would not be able to finish their schooling to achieve those goals.

Kisa Project scholars are selected on the basis of a number of criteria, including a demonstrated capacity for leadership, a commitment to their community and financial need. The selection process is conducted in conjunction with partner schools, which are chosen on the basis of their commitment to providing high-quality education to their students.

Following their selection, profiles of the new scholars are posted on the Kisa Project website and, as described in the **American Families** section below, these women are then paired with an American family who raises the funds for their two-year scholarship.

Over the course of their final two years of traditional secondary-level schooling, the scholars participate in a Leadership Curriculum¹ that equips them with the skills and knowledge to create a vision of positive change in their communities. Adult Kisa Project mentors meet weekly with

¹ Curriculum adapted from socially responsible Leadership Curriculum in use by Educate!, a non-profit organization working to support Uganda's future leaders.

the scholars to implement the curriculum and provide personalized guidance and long-term mentorship. These mentors are recent graduates of Tanzanian universities and, after an intensive Kisa Project training program, have the ability to guide their group of scholars to help them build the confidence and creativity they need to realize their vision of positive change.

American Families

American families are a crucial ingredient in the Kisa Project. These families are matched with the program's Tanzanian scholars and, in cooperation with other participating American families, undertake the fundraising efforts needed to provide the two-year scholarships for these young women. As these families work together to enrich their global community, and as they share stories and ideas with these young women across the ocean, they grow closer to their Tanzanian counterparts while strengthening their own family and community ties.

We use the word “family” in its broadest sense. American families of all types are invited to participate in the program, including families of parents and children, “families” of students at schools and “families” of individuals in various organizations. Through curriculum materials provided by AfricAid, these families are given the opportunity to learn about Tanzania, their own leadership potential and the possibilities for engagement with their local and global communities. Additionally, the families are provided with all of the necessary tools to help them work effectively to raise funds for their Tanzanian student's two-year scholarship.

Through the Kisa Project website, the American sponsoring families and their Tanzanian scholars create online profiles, which include biographical information, vital statistics, a description of goals and a barometer that indicates how much the American family members have raised for their Tanzanian scholars. The American families also have access to the personal narratives and periodic updates created by the young women in Tanzania (see **Story Sharing**, below) and are able to post stories and letters themselves. Finally, American family members have the option to meet their Tanzanian counterparts in person during an annual AfricAid trip to Tanzania.

In all of these ways, American families are themselves able to grow closer while developing a truly meaningful connection with bright young women on the other side of the world.

Story Sharing

Each month, the American families and their Kisa Project scholars have the opportunity to communicate in both written and video format. For the written aspect of this communication, the group mentor at the scholars' school guides the selected students in the process of answering a question designed to elicit reflection upon a particular aspect of their own personal narrative and commitment to their community, which is then shared with their American family members on the website. The American family members are then encouraged to reflect upon and provide responses to the same questions.

For the video portion of this communication, through a partnership with the Center for Digital Storytelling, AfricAid guides the scholars through a process of personal reflection, narrative building and digital media production. These girls articulate stories from their own lives, reflecting on how their personal experiences create their dreams for the future and visions for social change in their home communities and across the country. The women create illustrations, take photographs and are guided through hands-on computer tutorials to bring their stories to life as completed videos. The workshop process therefore provides participants with the opportunity to develop critical leadership skills while increasing their technology literacy and self-confidence.

After graduating from school and completing the Kisa Leadership Curriculum, the participating scholars have the opportunity to use their videos during an optional six-month Leadership Immersion program (see **Community-Based Mentorship: A Leadership Immersion**, below). During this time, the young women share their individual videos productions at community screenings, bringing parents, siblings, teachers, village leaders and young girls together to identify and discuss their individual and collective visions for change. At the same time, the digital stories are shared on the Kisa Project website so that their American families can better understand the richness and complexity of the challenges and joys faced by these women each day. American families are also given the tools to create and share their own personal narratives, should they choose to do so.

Digital stories are created using a portable computer lab, which is stationed in the local AfricAid office when not in use by the scholars. During this time, the lab is available on a fee-for-use basis to other local non-governmental organizations, serving as an additional source of revenue for the Kisa Project.

Community-Based Mentorship: A Leadership Immersion

During the final unit of their two-year AfricAid Leadership Curriculum, the Kisa Project scholars are given the tools necessary to mentor other young girls in life skills, including goal-setting, decision-making, communication and the formation of healthy relationships. Upon graduation from the sixth and final year of secondary school and after taking a national examination, each of the Kisa Project scholars have the option of returning to their home communities and using these life skills to become mentors and project leaders among a group of 15 other young girls, approximately 11-15 years in age. They are expected to use their leadership skills to determine how best to organize, incentivize and regularly meet with this group during the six months they have to wait for their national examination results.

Should scholars choose to participate in this Leadership Immersion project, they immediately receive part of a small stipend that enables them to support themselves and begin saving for future education or professional activities. They receive the balance of their stipend at the end of the six-month period, after having demonstrated that they have effectively led a small

community project and mentored these young girls in the critical life skills they themselves have learned, as measured by pre- and post-evaluation surveys.

In this way, the Kisa Project effectively equips a corps of young female leaders to serve as role models and mentors to other young girls in their own communities. The reach of each scholarship provided by AfricAid can therefore have, ideally, a 15-fold effect.

Small Project Grant Fund

Upon successful completion of the AfricAid curriculum and Leadership Immersion program, the scholars are eligible to apply to AfricAid for a small loan or grant to initiate a community project, social enterprise or small business. In this way, the Kisa Project both prepares and supports young Tanzanian women in their efforts to realize their visions for a better world.

Alumni Network

Upon graduating from secondary school and completing the Leadership Curriculum or after going on to complete the Leadership Immersion program, the Kisa scholars are welcomed into a powerful alumni network of women leaders. As members of this network, they have access to materials and opportunities to participate in community-based leadership projects, ongoing career counseling and support from fellow alumni and local participating leaders.

Goals and Impact

AfricAid will seek to significantly expand the Kisa Project once the pilot stage has been implemented, evaluated and modified, if necessary. By 2015, AfricAid expects to have expanded the Kisa Project model to all regions of Tanzania and be positioned to introduce the initiative to other Sub-Saharan countries.

By 2015, AfricAid expects to have reached a total of 940 young women through its scholarship and leadership training, ideally 9,300 girls through the mentorship provided by the scholars, and 940 American family members through the sharing of stories and cultivation of relationships resulting from the Kisa Project.

	Partner Schools	New Scholars	Total Current Scholarships	Mentored Girls	American Family Members
Year One	2	20	20	--	20
Year Two	4	40	60	300	40
Year Three	8	80	120	600	80
Year Four	16	160	240	1,200	160
Year Five	32	320	480	2,400	320
Year Six	32 + schools in new partner countries	320 + students in new partner countries	640 + students in new partner countries	4,800	320 + family members for new country partners
Totals	32	940	1,560	9,300	940

Metrics

AfricAid measures the success of the Kisa Project using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods:

1. The number of girls provided with scholarships who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to attend school.
2. The success of the Leadership Curriculum, as measured by pre- and post-program evaluation surveys given to scholars.
3. The percent of graduates who choose to participate in the Leadership Immersion program.
4. The number of young girls who are mentored by Kisa Project scholars and demonstrate mastery of critical life skills, as measured by pre- and post-program evaluation surveys.
5. The number of scholars who continue to engage in community development work or other leadership positions, as tracked by alumni network communications.

6. The degree of American partner satisfaction with the program, as measured by mid- and post-program surveys.
7. The number of American families who maintain relationships with their Tanzanian counterparts through the website.

Financial Sustainability

American family members are expected to raise \$1,000 in each of two consecutive years for their Tanzanian scholar. After Year One, this sponsorship funding covers all ongoing costs of the program, except for the cost to install computers and Internet at new partner schools. AfricAid continues to seek grants to cover these expenses as we bring the Kisa Project to these new locations.

As a result, initial start-up costs will be sought for Year One, after which the program will become self-sustaining through the yearly sponsorship funding from American partners thereafter.

Conclusion

Through the Kisa Project, AfricAid creates vital opportunities for schooling for young African women and empowers them to become leaders and mentors working to help build strong local communities. Additionally, the project provides a unique opportunity to foster understanding as individuals and families around the world share their life stories, their hardships and their dreams, and as they learn about each other and consider how their own life experiences fit in with their larger visions for a better world.

When families share a common goal, great things can be achieved.

