

- Georgina Sweet Fellowship 2011 -

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Due to unrest, including sporadic grenade attacks, in Nairobi and Mombasa following the territorial incursion of African Union and Kenyan military personnel into Somalia to combat Al Shabab forces which had taken over the governance of much of Somali territory, I arrived in Nairobi at the beginning of August 2012. I presented a paper at the Gender Based Violence conference at Kenyatta University the first week I arrived.

After the conference, I began my research associateship with the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) where I am working on their gender and equality programs. The pending national elections in March 2013 have raised serious concerns – there is debate over the operationalization of key Constitutional provisions aimed to promote gender equality in parliament. Building capacity among women aspirants, and finding enough women to fill the constitutionally mandated quota is a significant challenge in a country so comprehensively dominated by an aggressive masculine political culture. Several NGOs here are working on building capacity of women to run for election, and also running civic education programs on the importance of registering to vote, explaining voters rights as they are articulated in the new Kenyan Constitution (2010) and the importance of non-tribalism in voting preferences. I am working with the KHRC on their programs in these areas, and will deliver training in rural areas as a component of my PhD field work.

During my time with the KHRC, I have been fortunate enough to travel out on field work trips to Taita Taveta and Kisumu to conduct interviews with local human rights network leaders, as well as local community leaders in communities which have reported gains in the promotion of women's rights – in Taita Taveta we explored the changes in attitudes of local elders to dealing with gender based violence and female genital mutilation (FGM); and in Kisumu we profiled a program which increased the number of girl children who receive school bursaries.

The KHRC and I have a data sharing agreement which reflects the complimentary nature of my work, and it's relationship to their programs. I am finalising a similar agreement with Liverpool Voluntary Counselling and Testing (LVCT) an indigenous Kenyan NGO specialising in HIV/AIDS testing and counselling. Through LVCT, I will be interviewing sex workers and street families as part of LVCT's outreach program in a clinics in Nairobi and city fringe areas.

I have taken some Swahili lessons, although travel has made a concerted effort in this regard difficult, but I have enrolled in an immersion course in Nairobi which begins in November which is exciting. Many people in Nairobi have very good English, so communication has generally not been a problem, and I have been supported in my field work by my colleagues at the KHRC and local community educators (women who live in slum areas who volunteer to engage in community education around sexual and reproductive health, civic education and human rights advocacy) whose logistical and translation support has been invaluable.

I also presented a paper at the African Sexual Health and Rights Conference in Windhoek, Namibia in the first week of September.

For the next six weeks until December, I will be conducting interviews in two slums in Nairobi, with women in Kibera and Kangeme. I have met some of the ladies in Kibera previously at a community meeting, and they are currently planning a community project which incorporates the stories they tell me in their interviews, as well as other artistic contributions from their communities. I will also facilitate this project by providing logistical and operational support.

Reflecting the complimentary relationship with the KHRC, after I conduct my interviews in communities like Kibera and Kangeme, I will also be delivering civic education training to groups of women and men in the lead up to the elections in

March. The KHRC will also be training women aspirants who are campaigning for seats within slum constituencies in the legal requirements for running for office, and also building capacity in dealing with often intimidating and violent patriarchal political and social systems which actively reject women's candidacy and presence in public life.

As I require few material resources to conduct my research, the Georgina Sweet Fellowship has provided a significant portion of core funding for my stay in Nairobi, and to date has been spent primarily on accommodation, language training and transport to sites and facilitation of interviews.