

## **Final blog post from Canada:** **Catherine Williams**

Posted on [September 18, 2016](#)

During the past three months in Kenya, I have made many wonderful memories and even better best friends. I'm so lucky to have had this experience. Not many people get this kind of opportunity and I am very grateful to have had this chance. I have no regrets about this summer and I don't think I will ever forget this amazing time. I have loved living in a culture that is completely different from the one I am used to. It has encouraged me to learn and to grow as an individual. It has taught me patience, gratitude, generosity, and adaptability. I have learned about horticulture and farming and had the opportunity to see the impact Farmers Helping Farmers and University of Prince Edward Island has on communities in Kenya. I have also learned important dietetic skills that will help me in my future career.

Some highlights from my summer include working with the local women's groups, educating the 'champs' about nutrition, and learning to cook with them...



Learning about what a typical day is like for a Kenyan woman working on her farm...



Meeting plenty of school children and teaching them a little information about Canada.



Adapting to the Kenyan climate, food and customs. I loved the feeling of having a new home and family in Naari. I now feel like I can adjust and adapt to any circumstance that comes my way. I know that this will be very useful in my future career, no matter where it takes me in the world.

The best highlight of all was having the opportunity to meet and live with Kenyan students. I learned so much about the Kenyan culture and now I have the chance to teach them about Canadian culture as they complete their masters programs at UPEI.



I think one of the best lessons I learned this summer is to broaden my perspective. Sometimes during school, I can be narrow-minded and I don't take time to look at the big picture of life. It is easy to fall into the habit of only thinking of yourself and your small life. The problems I worry about, especially during the school year, are really not problems at all. What I worry about seems silly and insignificant compared to what other people need to worry about. While I'm worrying about what grade I get on a test or what I'm going to wear to a party, others are worrying about how they are going to feed their children and how they are going to make it to the next day. I have become so grateful for everything I have at home. I have had such a safe and prosperous life and it's hard not to feel guilty at times for how lucky I am. Even in Canadian standards, I have had a very easy life with very few troubles. But I have come to accept these differences and instead of feeling guilty and sad, I need to do all I can to make a difference. I need to be thankful for my life and give back and spread wealth as much as I can. If I were so blessed to have such a wonderful life, then I have to use what I have been given to help other people.

Before coming to Kenya I was already very calm, relaxed and had a go-with-the-flow attitude, and I have increased these feelings so much more than I thought possible. I have embraced the “sawa sawa” attitude here. Kenyans say this phrase all of the time and it means, “it’s all good” “no worries” “it will all work out” similar to hakuna matata. My patience has increased a lot which is good because I don’t think you can ever be too patient.

I have gained many skills that will help me in my future career as a dietitian. One skill is conducting food recall interviews and having practice asking sensitive questions. It took a lot of time to learn about the proper way to ask difficult questions about food insecurity and hunger. I think my interviewing skills will transfer well to western culture.

One stereotype or assumption I had before coming to Kenya was that the locals would come begging for money. But I found this wasn’t the case. All of the Kenyans I met were very welcoming and did not want to beg. Another assumption that I had wrong was that I wouldn’t have access to any of the amenities that I was used to in Canada. But, in the nearest town of Meru, I could find many things I needed.

I have no complaints at all about my summer spent in Kenya, and I would do it all over again in a heartbeat!



## Kenya Reflections

By Kira Stratton



Hi everyone, this is Kira from the nutrition team. We have been back in Canada now for one month. I am so grateful for this summer as it was such an amazing opportunity. Our three months flew by and it really is surreal to be back in my normal Canadian life. There are many things that I will always miss about Kenya and I really hope to have the chance to go back one day to visit!



Coming back to Canada, all my friends and family are asking me how my summer in Kenya was. It is so hard for me to be able to put my experience into words. Pictures help, but nothing can truly capture the adventure I had. I tell them that I miss Kenya and some find that hard to believe! Of course like many North Americans, my friends and family had their doubts about Africa and Kenya. After three months of working and living in this African country I can say confidently I would recommend Kenya to anyone.



What really made this trip for me would be the people we met in the community. So many kind people in Kenya who are always giving. No matter how little they had, people were always giving to us because we were visitors. My favourite story is a home visit we did to a woman's home named Dorothy. Dorothy's daughter Joy, who was eight years old, was so excited to hear that visitors were coming to her home that she stayed home from school. After the interview and discussing their household food availability, we were about to leave when Joy came with a huge bag of carrots she had picked from her garden just for us. It was really so sweet and touching.





Not to mention how grateful and caring everyone was that we met. On one of our school visits, as we drove into the school yard, the school children came running down to the gate to greet us. The whole school trailed behind our car singing, cheering, and welcoming us like we were celebrities. We would have never seen that reaction in a Canadian school. I really appreciated how the people we worked with made an effort to voice their appreciation for us. Before leaving a meeting, presentation, or even a home visit, we were always given a short thank-you speech, prayer and most of the time a cup of chai before being invited back for another visit.

Thank-you to everyone I have met and to everyone who gave me such a wonderful experience. I will be back Kenya!

## **Making memories and even better friends**

Posted on [August 15, 2016](#)

### **Last Blog Post from Catherine Williams in Kenya**

It's hard to believe that we only have one more week left in Kenya! It feels like just yesterday we were arriving in Naari and getting settled in our new home. I am shocked about how fast my time here has flown. These past three months I have made many wonderful memories and even better best friends. I'm so lucky to have had this experience. Not many people get this kind of opportunity and I am very grateful to have had this chance. I have no regrets about this summer and I don't think I will ever forget this amazing time.

I have loved living in a culture that is completely different from the one I am used to. It has encouraged me to learn and to grow as an individual. It has taught me patience, gratitude, generosity, and adaptability. I have learned about horticulture and farming and had the opportunity to see the impact Farmers Helping Farmers has on communities in Kenya. I have also learned important dietetic skills that will help me in my future career.

Everyone I have met here in Kenya has been welcoming and has made me feel very at home. It will be tough to say our goodbyes to all of our friends. I will miss them so much. Luckily we have Sarah, Emily, Grace, and Ann waiting for us in Canada. I can't wait to show them around PEI and help them adapt to Canadian culture, just how they helped me adapt to Kenyan culture.

I will miss many things about Kenya but here is a short list of the aspects I will miss the most:

- Everyone's 'sawa sawa' attitude
- Living with a great group of students
- Our "dream team" nutrition team
- Wild animals
  
- The beautiful landscape
  
- Working with the incredible women's groups
- Eating fresh delicious fruit everyday
- Our sweet neighbor friends
  
- Most of all I will miss everyone I met here

I know I will be back in Kenya one day!

[Edit](#)

## **The Champs say ‘asante’ and a visit to Kamuketha School**

Posted on [August 3, 2016](#)

Catherine and Kira here from the nutrition team! We would like to update you on what we have been up to the past week.

Last Friday we said goodbye to Sarah Wangeci as she prepares to travel to Canada. She left Naari to spend time with family and friends before she comes to Prince Edward Island August 5<sup>th</sup>. It was sad to say goodbye but we are very excited to see her again in Canada! We were so lucky to have her work with us on our nutrition projects!

Kira, Sarah, and Catherine on their last day together in Kenya

After finishing our work with the Upendo and Joy women's groups a few weeks ago, we met with the Champs one last time to present them with certificates of appreciation and to say thank you once again for all of their hard work and dedication. When we met with the Upendo champs, they told us that they were spreading the nutritional messages that we taught them to other women's groups in their area! We are continually impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm shown by these women.

The Joy Women's group gave us aprons and hats to thank us for choosing their group to participate in the champs program. They said that we could wear them while we cook in Canada and think of our Kenyan Mothers. We will miss all of the champs very much!

Kira and Catherine showing off their new aprons.

With our champs work and home interviews completed, we only had one last school assessment to do. For this last assessment we let Farmers Helping Farmers staff members Stephen Mwenda, Salome Ntinyari, and Douglas Gikundi take the lead while we supervised.

We are teaching the FHF staff to carry out school meal assessments so that changes and progress can be monitored throughout the year and not just when students are in Kenya.

Douglas Gikundi, Stephen Mwenda, Catherine and Salome measuring portions of githeri at Kamuketha School.

We had a wonderful time at Kamuktha Primary School and we are confident that Salome, Mwenda and Gikundi will do a great job with assessing the nutritional value of school lunches.



Measuring the pot of githeri

Some of the sweet children at Kamuketha School

Salome, Kira, Catherine and Headmaster of Kamuketha drinking uji, made with milk provided by FHF.

After visiting Kamuketha school, we had the opportunity to visit the Muuchui Women's Business Center in Kiirua. Muuchui was one of the first women's groups to work with FHF. It was amazing to see how successful they have become over the years with the help of FHF! We got to see where they buy and sell cereals, the many greenhouses and screenhouses they use to grow food and their office space.

While we were in the Kiirua area we also visited screenhouses and greenhouses that have been built with the help of FHF. It was interesting to see how different the climate was compared to Naari. In Kiirua it was much more dry and water is a big challenge for farmers trying to grow crops.

Near Kamuketha

Catherine and Kira made a new friend at one of the farms.

Those are just a handful of the activities that we have been doing this past week. We only have a couple more weeks left in Kenya! Time is flying! Soon we will have to sadly say goodbye to all of our Kenyan friends!

# Nutritional Wednesday

Posted on [July 17, 2016](#)

By Emily Kathambi

## Nutritional Wednesday

It has been more than a month since we moved to Naari and on this particular Wednesday I decided to join the nutrition team in the field. The morning was chilly and cold with mist covering most of our neighboring forests. This was not helping with my wardrobe malfunction that happened when I tried to sport a long free flowing dress that looked horrifying on me. I came to a conclusion that it was in my best interest to stick to my casual jeans and shirt.

We left home at half past nine and got to Kiirua secondary school early enough and with lots of time to spare. We met with the deputy Head teacher Mr.O Muriithi and proceeded to the kitchen to meet with the cooking staff. Here the girls explained what they would do and got to it, they took weights of the ingredients used to make the lunch meal which was Githeri. We walked to the nearby Kiirua primary school to do the same and take the measurements of the ingredients they use. In this primary school our visit coincided with the 10 o'clock tea break and it necessitated us to help in the kitchen with serving porridge, working on the ingredients and taking the measurements.



Sarah weighing the kales. Assessment of the weighing scale used at the secondary school

As we waited for the lunch bells to be rang we visited the respective gardens in both schools, these were very well maintained with combinations of vegetables that ranged from kales, collards, spinach, cabbage, tomatoes, carrots and orange sweet potato . In addition to this I looked at their three cows (couldn't help it) and indulged the farm manager and gave commendations and recommendations where needed. We also assisted in the secondary kitchen with peeling potatoes, carrots, onions and

preparation of green peas for the staff. The cook mama Ann had never seen that many people in her kitchen at the same time and her work done in such a short time. She definitely will have a tale to tell.



The team admiring the vegetables. Having a discussion with the farm manager on cow management

At around 12.45pm, the lunch bells were heard and the team headed to the primary school to take further measurements and returned to the secondary school where we measured the pot size and food portions per student. When all this was done we headed to the Head teacher's office where we had a sumptuous hot meal for lunch complemented by various discussions and lots of laughter.

In general, it was a great, quiet and relaxing day with many differences from a standard day with the vet team. I got to learn and understand what the nutrition team does and the activities they carry out and the impact it is expected to bring in the society in the short and long term. In addition to this I got to have a hot meal for lunch and book an early spot in one of the cook house events with the champs that they will be involved in later in the summer. Till then, goodbye and Kenya Hakuna matata!!!!



Sarah and Salome serving porridge. Kira and Catherine engaging the adorable students

# Final report card on school lunches!

Posted on [July 13, 2016](#)



Hello! Catherine from the nutrition team here to update you on our work with schools in the Naari region of Kenya.

You may know from previous blog posts that we have been assessing the nutritional quality of school lunches. We have gone to six primary and secondary schools in the Naari and Kiirua area, which are supported by Farmers Helping Farmers. We assess the lunches they serve to students, which is githeri (a stew of maize, beans and vegetables from their kitchen garden).





We have visited Michaka Primary, Mitoone Primary, Muutio Primary, Kiirua Primary, Kiirua Secondary and Naari Girls Secondary Boarding School. We have really enjoyed visiting these schools and observing how they prepare meals for their students and what is being served.

At these visits, we measured and weighed the ingredients that go into the githeri, the pot used and the portion size that the students consume. At home, we used a data analysis program to calculate the nutritional content (calories, protein, fat, carbohydrate, vitamins, and minerals) of each portion of githeri.





We compared the nutrients in the lunch to one third of the daily amount recommended for children by the World Health Organization, since lunch should provide at least one third of the children's nutritional needs. We then created feedback reports for the schools that show the githeri recipe, which nutrients are adequate and inadequate and recommendations to improve the overall nutritional quality of the school meals.



I loved seeing the ways Farmers Helping Farmers has helped these schools: providing screen houses, drip irrigation, water tanks, and horticultural support. All of these are imperative to providing healthy, vegetable-filled lunches for the school children.



Some schools even have new energy efficient kitchens provided by FHF. The famous Souris Village Feast funded Kiirua primary school's new kitchen! We saw first hand just how important these kitchens are. The energy efficient stoves cook food faster, use less fuel and are less smoky than traditional cooking stoves. There was definitely a difference between the old-fashioned kitchens and new kitchens provided by FHF. Along with the kitchens, it was amazing to know that the vegetables grown in the screen houses are benefiting the children and improving the nutritional quality of the lunches. The vegetables grown in the screen house are added to the githeri, which would normally only be maize and beans. One school that grew orange sweet potatoes in their kitchen garden had higher levels of vitamin A in their githeri than other schools that were not including orange vegetables in their recipe.



Each school we visited had a different recipe for githeri. Some added green leafy vegetables; others added cabbage or orange sweet potatoes. Some were using mpempe whole grain maize and others were not. Some were adding too much salt, others used very little. Some used solid fat while others used oil. I enjoyed the unpredictability and variety of visiting the schools.

After analyzing the school's lunches, we went back to each school with our recommendations. At these feedback sessions we discussed the report with the headmaster and teachers, answered any questions they had, and set goals and timelines with them for making changes. Some examples of recommendations we make to schools in regards to improving the nutritional quality of their githeri are: soaking maize and beans in water before cooking, using mpempe (whole grain) maize, gradually reducing salt content, adding green leafy vegetables close to serving time to retain nutrients, including one green and one orange vegetable, using oil fortified with vitamins, and a long-term goal of doubling the amount of vegetables used.





Another long-term goal that we set with the schools is to have one half cup serving of vegetables in each portion of githeri served to the students. The nutrition team will go back to these schools next year to see if improvements have been made.

The discussions with teachers went very well; they understood why we were making suggestions, asked important questions, and set realistic goals for implementing the changes. We found out that some schools even taught their students about our nutritional messages! I am so happy that the leaders of these schools acknowledge the importance of nutrition, and understand that it will improve the student's health, ability to learn, and academic performance. Visiting these schools was an exciting and rewarding experience!



Bonus photos: Catherine and Kira mastering the art of making chapatis and uji!





# Nutrition home visit highlights

Posted on [June 21, 2016](#)



Catherine here- one of the members of the nutrition team for 2016!

For the past couple of weeks the nutrition team has been completing home interviews with women in the Naari area. In these interviews we talk with the women about the types of food they consume, food availability and the food in their shamba (kitchen garden). We are using the data collected in these interviews to evaluate the food security and diet diversity of the Naari community, which will continue to be assessed over the next three years. So far we have interviewed over twenty women who are all members of the Upendo women's group. These interviews typically take one hour. These home visits are always enjoyable. The women are open, patient, agreeable, and they welcome us in to their homes with open arms. We leave a small token of our appreciation for their time: a bottle of vegetable oil fortified with vitamins.

I want to note some of the highlights from these home visits so far:

- We met a little girl around eight years old, named Joy, who stayed home from school just to see us. She wanted to give us a gift of a huge bag of carrots that she picked herself. She especially wanted to stay home to give us a message to send back to the people working with Farmers Helping Farmers: She wanted to thank everyone at FHF for providing a solar light for her family. Before having the solar light she couldn't study past dusk, but now she can do her schoolwork at



night. This ability to study has led her to become top of her class! Joy and her family wanted to thank FHF very much.



*From left to right: Joy's grandmother, mother Dorothy, Joy, Kira, and Catherine.*

- One of the most memorable farms that we visited was the home of a woman named Mary. It took us a long time to reach her shamba (farm), which is located up a large hill so close to the forest that trespassing wild elephants were a problem at her farm. We were amazed at the size of her shamba (farm) which is the biggest one we've seen so far. She even gave us fresh avocados which she grew on her shamba.



*Mary showing us her shamba.*

Distractions are never in short supply during our interviews, whether it is toddlers, animals, or phone calls.



*(Catherine and a kitten.)*



*Esther, her grandson and Mary (our translator).*

We can't wait to do more home assessments with the women of Naari!

## **A Blog Post Dedicated to Mukimoooooooo**

Posted on [June 10, 2016](#)

[1](#)

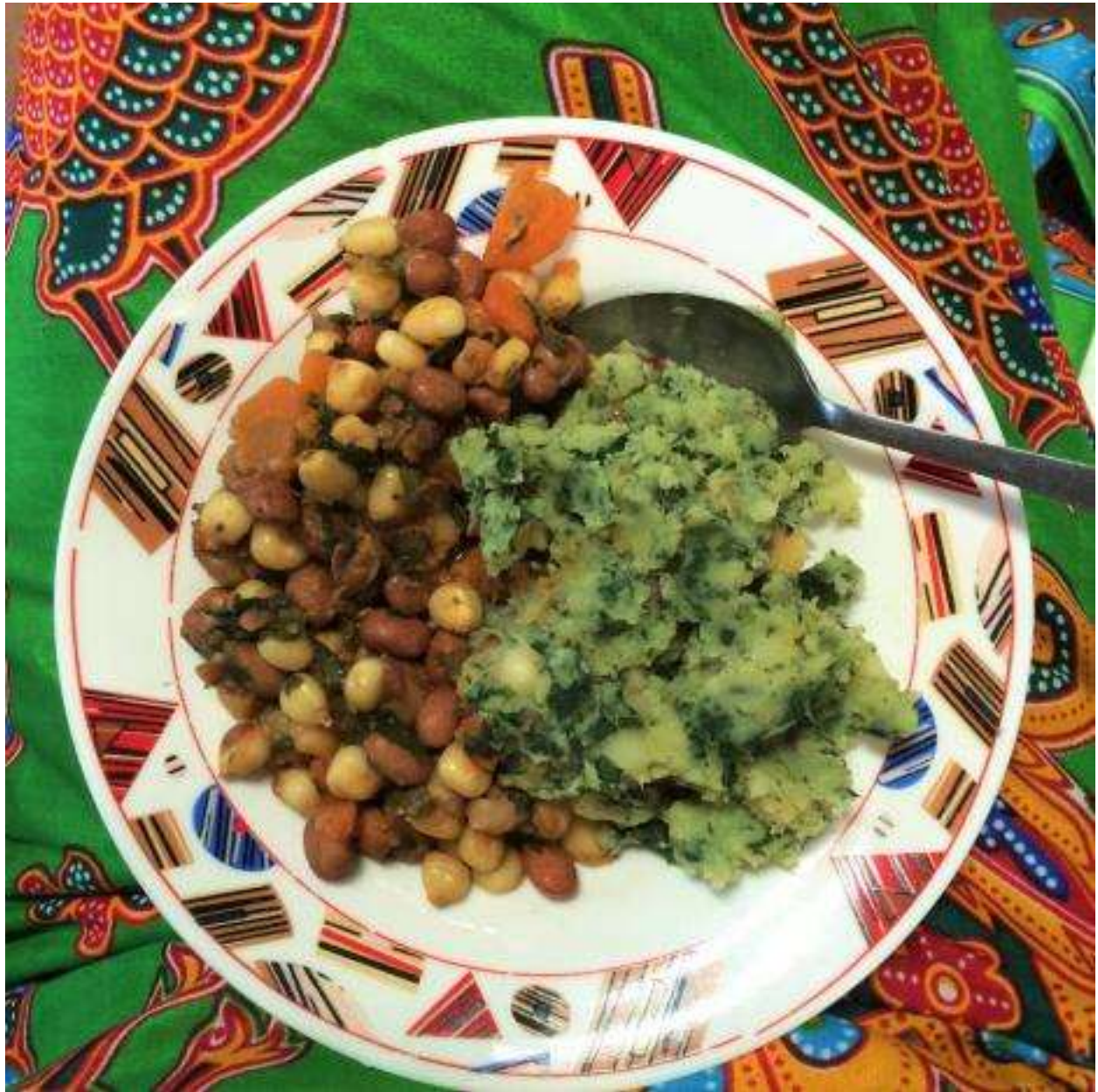


I do not think I can go back to Canadian mashed potatoes. They simply cannot compare to what I like to think is the Kenyan version; Mukimo! This beautiful, creamed, green and starchy dish has filled what has been missing in my life. I would like to take a minute to give thanks to this wonderful creation. Mukimo has raised my standards of potato cuisine.

This dish was used as an example in our very first Champs cooking session. Three of the women Champ leaders educated the other members and friends of the Upendo women's group on the importance of adding more green leafy vegetables to meals. This nutritional message was most definitely understood as there was no left over samples for me to go back and even get thirds!



I now would like to challenge Canadian families to try the same thing and add more green leafy vegetables to meals. One great way to start is with mashed potatoes! Below you can find a Canadianified version of Mukimo to try with your own family. Enjoy!



*On left: Githeri (maize, beans, kale, carrot, onion, oil, and salt) On right: Mukimo (Irish potatoes, maize, beans, pumpkin leaves, butter, and salt)*

### **Canadian Mukimo**

Ingredients:

- A pot full of washed, peeled, diced, and boiled potatoes
- ¼ – 1/3 cup butter to taste
- 1 24 ounce can of white beans
- 2 cups spinach (or your favourite leafy green vegetable)
- Spoonful of water
- 2-3 tsp of Salt to taste

1. Begin by adding butter to boiled potatoes and mashing until creamed. Add butter slowly until desired preference is reached.
2. Drain and rinse white beans, then add to potatoes and continue mashing.
3. With the help of a blender, blend washed spinach with water to get into a smooth and light liquid consistency. Add more water if needed to assist the blender.
4. Add smooth spinach to potato mixture. Add salt to season. Continue to mash the potato mixture until creamy. Serve warm.

## Meet our ‘Champs’ in Kenya

Posted on [June 7, 2016](#)

Catherine and Kira here from the 2016 nutrition team, with an update of our work with the Michaka Upendo Women's Group.

One aspect of our project this year is working with local women's groups to improve the health and nutrition of their families. The way that we do this is by using a 'train the trainer' model. We choose six leaders from a women's group who are good cooks and farmers and we teach them nutritional messages which they will then teach the rest of the members of their group. We call these leaders "champs." These champs provide the whole women's group with education through practical examples of cooking traditional Kenyan meals with added nutrition. These champs will be good role models for the rest of the Upendo community.





The first champ starts teaching! How exciting! All nutrition messages are in Kimeru and laminated for each champ to keep.

We had our first meeting with the six Upendo champs last week to teach them the nutritional messages and cooking tips. The messages that we are teaching this year include: choosing mpempe (whole grain) maize, soaking beans and maize to improve digestibility and reduce cooking time, adding orange sweet potatoes to traditional Kenyan dishes as a source of vitamin A, adding vitamin C-rich foods to meals to improve the absorption of iron, adding green leafy vegetables to githeri and mukimo, adding nutritious cereals to uji porridge, and avoiding drinking tea with meals to improve the absorption of iron.



Pounding mukimo.

The champs were very excited and made it clear that they felt empowered to teach their fellow community members about these simple, achievable changes to improve the nutrition of their families.





This week we had two sessions where, together with the champs, we prepared healthy meals using the food from the women's shambas and after cooking, the champs taught the nutritional messages that coincided with the foods. We had the first session with the women's group on Monday and the second session on Tuesday. Three champs taught the nutritional messages each day.



*'Shaving' the kale for the githeri. Not an easy skill to learn and there were chuckles from the women as we all worked on it. You roll and bunch the kale and make a very tight fist with just a*

*little overflowing your index finger and thumb. And use a very sharp knife to shave off thin pieces. No cutting boards allowed!*

We spent each morning helping the champs prepare the food, which consisted mostly of the women laughing at our pitiful cutting skills: no cutting boards available! We were trying our very best and I could tell that the women appreciated the fact that we were trying hard. We were genuinely interested in how they cook their traditional Kenyan dishes and we definitely want to make some of them when we get back to Canada!



*Kira and Catherine serving fruit salad for dessert. The vitamin C helps with iron absorption and iron deficiency is still a concern here. The women loved it but thought it was too baridi (cold!)*

The women were very gracious and made us feel comfortable and welcome. They were immensely appreciative of all that we had done. In turn, we were extremely proud of the great job the champs did teaching the women and answering all of audience's questions. This was a great activity for the women to practice their public speaking skills and build their confidence.





*Upendo Women dancing and singing as we leave. And they gave us a huge bag of fresh carrots and tomatoes!*

We finished the second session with traditional Kenyan singing and dancing. The powerful Kenyan women's voices were beautiful and harmonious. It was extremely fun and is a moment we will not soon forget! Overall we are very happy with how our first champs sessions went and we can't wait to do it all over again with another women's group in Naari! If the women are anything like the Upendo women, I know we will have an amazing time!

## **What's cooking at Michaka School?**

Posted on [May 25, 2016](#)





It was a bright Monday morning with the sun shining in all its glory unlike the previous days. The nutrition students eagerly waited to start another new week after an exciting and fun – filled first week. As always, Prof. Jennifer Taylor now popularly going by her Swahili nick name ‘*Mama Ben*’ had briefed everyone on the upcoming activities including visiting Michaka Primary School. We left home at about 10am and the two chicken best friends, Helen and Georgie, as named by Catherine, one of the Canadian nutrition students, saw us off. The naming of the chicken was very tickling to the Kenyan students who only view chicken as a delicacy. We finally arrived at the school after a bumpy ten minutes ride.







The energy-filled pupils came running to meet us even before we alighted. They were singing welcoming songs as they closely followed the vehicles. The headmistress warmly welcomed us with hugs and began introducing her teaching staff. Even with the seriousness of the head teacher during the introduction session, the school children did not shy away from exhibiting their joy and amazement over the *wazungus* (white people). The analysis ranged from touching their skin, palms and hands to feeling and playing with their hair. Nonetheless, despite the pupils' cheekiness, we did not forget to state the purpose of our visit, which was to assess the nutritional value of the school meals and make recommendations on how to improve the meals where appropriate.

After exchanging pleasantries, we got down to business in the cook house (school kitchen). There was a huge black cooking pot half full with maize and beans boiling ferociously as smoke filled the room nearly wearing off the mascara due to our tearing eyes. The enthusiastic cook shredded vegetables including kales, spinach, pumpkin leaves and onions to be included in the *githeri* (a mixture of boiled maize and beans). Everyone looked determined with the measuring task; both the Kenyan and Canadian students began taking parameters of both the boiling pot and the raw but cut vegetables. Measuring how much vegetables are put in the main meal (*githeri*) will help tell if the nutritional value is good or needs some improvement. The team also visited the school green house where these vegetables (*kales, spinach, onions, carrots, pumpkins and sweet potatoes*) are grown.

The curious young pupils hovered around visitors, especially the white skinned entertaining them with lovely songs. The senior pupils who were preparing for their athletic competitions could not resist the stunning performance by their juniors that they later joined in. Soon enough it was time for serving lunch to the pupils and the nutrition students were delighted to assist the school cook in distributing the *githeri*. It was worthy observing that food was sufficient in amount that most students had a second or third serving and they really enjoyed the meal. We also had a chance of tasting the *githeri*; not only was it delicious but also very nutritious.

Kenyan teachers and Canadian visitors sharing lunch at Michaka



The Michaka screenhouse garden donated and first planted by the PEI Kenya Youth Tour participants in July 2015

## One Month in Three Days!

Posted on [May 20, 2016](#)



Hi it's Kira and Catherine the nutrition students from the University of Prince Edward Island.

The past couple of days in Kenya have been so wonderful. We have been so busy and have done so much already! It is very exciting to have met the women and men we will be working with this summer. Everyone has already been so kind and generous-three days and I already feel at home.

On our first day, the nutrition team spent time exploring the Kenyan culture. Our wonderful guide, Susan, took us to our first Nakumat (similar to a Walmart) for shopping, out for Kenyan coffee, to the David Sheldwick Wildlife Elephant Orphanage, then to more shopping at Kazuri beads where we met the hard working women in the Kazuri beads factory, to the Giraffe centre, and finally to meet Henry our travel agent.

Our second day was just as busy as the first! Both the nutrition team and vet team went for a visit to Kenyatta University. We met the dean and faculty of Applied Human Sciences and then later

the Vice-Chancellor of Kenyatta University. Our meeting was very nice and was my first ever video recorded meeting! After, we finally got to meet the new Kenyan graduate students, Emily, Sarah, Grace and Ann that will be joining our project. We were all so excited to meet one another! We quickly finished our meetings up and got ready for the long 5 hour drive to Naari. On our way we stopped at the huge dairy in Wakulima! We were given a nice tour of the dairy and the opportunity to see how milk is produced. We continued on with our journey and made it up some very rough hills up to our new home. Our wonderful cook Vincent made us a big meal as we were all pretty hungry and exhausted. I don't know about the rest, but Catherine and I fell asleep pretty fast!

On our third day, yesterday, we met with the Naari Dairy board and Upendo women's group leaders. It was wonderful meeting everyone that we will be working so closely with. I would like to note how grateful and appreciative they were of the work that has already been done and will be done. The farmers have noticed improvement in milk production since the projects began. On average, there has been an increase from 3.5kg of milk per day per farmer up to 7kg of milk.

I think that so far, one of my favourite memories from Kenya is every time we drive by a group of children. We wave and say hello and the reaction the children give us is incredible! They start screaming with smiles on their face, jumping up and down, and even chase after our car! It is just so adorable.

I am looking forward to getting into the Naari community and working with the Naari women's groups to improve nutrition within their families. Thank-you Kenya for being so wonderful so far.

Kira and Catherine.



Initial blog

## **The Champs of Past and Future**

Posted on [May 21, 2016](#)





Jennifer Taylor here, leader of the Nutrition Team for the QE II Scholars/Farmers Helping Farmers/UPEI project.

As we complete our first week in Naari, I am feeling grateful and somewhat emotional.

This week we met with women we worked with from 2010-2013. The Ruuju Women's group live about an hour from our home, so we decided to transport four of the 'champs' (leaders who are excellent cooks and farmers) to a local restaurant the Meru Slopes (since it was a half way point). It was wonderful to see the familiar faces and wide smiles. We ordered lots of Kenyan tea with milk and sugar and I told them to order whatever they wanted- they shared two huge platters of stewed chicken (all parts) and mukimo- a delicious combination of mashed potatoes and cooked greens (one of my faves). A conference was on at the hotel and service was incredibly slow- two hours to get our food!

We asked them to describe their experience working with nutrition students and to give us tips as to how we should work with the new women's groups here in Naari. They remembered the nutrition messages of soaking maize and beans to increase digestibility, and decrease antinutrients; use mpempe (whole grain) maize, to have fruit with meals to increase iron absorption and increase vitamin C; add extra greens and orange sweet potato to githeri (their vegetable stew) to increase vitamin A and to avoid tea at meal times to improve iron absorption. They said that teaching them the messages and having them lead the nutrition seminars, with prepared sample foods for the seminar participants to try was an excellent approach.

We were excited to learn that they had taught other women in their church, and continue to teach women in their community. Given that it has been 3 years since we have been there, this was so exciting. They remembered the binders of nutrition information we gave them but said they were a bit large to transport, and preferred some laminated materials. They definitely preferred having the information in Kimeru, their local dialect. We presented them with small gifts of chocolate, hand cream or soap and a small amount of money for their time. They loved the gift bags most of all!

On Friday, we repeated the process with a second group of women- the Muchui Women's group, but this time they came to our house for lunch. We all worked with our cook Vincent to make marinated chicken with vegetables, rice and shredded cabbage. I bought ice cream which they enjoyed- except Mama Salome thought it was too 'baridi' (cold!). We were a bit delayed eating (sound familiar?) but everyone enjoyed it. Doris, the treasurer, brought one of the red binders of nutrition information from 2013 which was very exciting. They didn't find it too large as the Ruuju women, but we will likely go with something more manageable this year.

One of the challenges that came up in both groups is what happens after the students leave, and there are no funds to prepare food for tasting when doing a nutrition seminar. Having food to taste is very important, since people don't always believe that githeri made with mpempe maize that has been soaked will taste good or that orange sweet potato is good in stew or chapati. I am not sure how we get around this issue given that we will have funding once per year to do this teaching and provide funds for the food.

When the Muchui champs were leaving, Naomi gave a speech about how much they appreciated learning about nutrition, that they would miss us, and they loved us. I was teary eyed as all I could think is that my students and I have learned so much from them.

We will start our work with the Uppendo women on Monday, and a new adventure. I am sure it will be as rewarding as what we have done from 2010-2013.

