

Simple Lean in Rural Kenya  
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I'm not an educator; I've never even had kids. So what am I doing volunteering with a non-profit in rural (remote) Kenya as Global Education Partner for Jubilee Village Project (JVP) attempting to improve hundreds of village youngsters' chances not only at survival, but at becoming self-sustaining? Turns out my 35+ years as a businesswoman leveraged by barely two years of learning about lean tools were the only qualifications I needed.

JVP addresses eight areas called 'Millennium Development Goals' which the United Nations has identified as critical to alleviating global poverty. Education, Water & Sanitation, Health & Nutrition and Economic Development are four of these sectors which have been impacted by some really basic holistic work I've been doing in the school system in Kager, Kenya.

It all started with an imperative to improve kids' attendance, giving them a better chance to make good marks. But then some root cause analysis is needed – why don't these kids get good marks? They're intelligent and creative as all children are. But they need to attend school. So why don't they attend school? There are many reasons, and they're all interrelated. To improve attendance, they need to be healthy; and to be healthy, they need to drink clean water. To drink clean water, they need to accept that the water they are currently drinking is full of 'worms and germs' and then know what to do to get clean water. They also need to know that hand-washing after using the latrine isn't just another rule; it's critical to keeping debilitating diarrhea at bay.



Handwashing station

So one of the first school initiatives completed was a week-long healthy student initiative, using Training Within Industry Job Instruction (a technique that was introduced to Japan after the war and was an early contributor to Lean practice at Toyota and others) to instruct every child on the proper way to wash (and dry, which is even more important) their hands and 2) how to purify their drinking water and keep daily logs on water treatment. We took it even one more step: we taught the three school cooks (using TWI Job Instruction) how to prepare their food in a sanitary way, keep cooking utensils clean and healthy, store food and, of course, the importance of washing their hands after latrine use.



Linn teaches a kitchen sanitation class

Then we realized there was a microenterprise angle to this problem. To wash hands, soap is required. Soap is horribly expensive in Kager, so we helped to develop a soapmaking microenterprise which sells the school less expensive soap and earns income for three local women. We did this by first learning to make the soap from another organization in Nairobi already doing this. Then, it was amazingly simple to teach our friends in Kager, again using TWI Job Instruction methods. Upon reflection, this was probably one of the simplest solutions to a tough problem, (poor sanitation), yet one of the most beneficial.

If you know anything about community transformation in a developing country, you probably know how often ‘good works’ like this training are easily undone when the teacher returns to their homeland. Using TWI JI in this project was not only successful while I was there, the success has been borne out through higher attendance stats. And I am certain it is ongoing because *we taught the teachers to teach others using these methods!*

There are even more ‘lean success stories.’ Having learned just enough about A-3’s to be dangerous, I went to Kenya this past October (2012) with a key objective of addressing declining school grades. My Kenyan counterpart Andrew, the “JVP Education Champion,” and I scheduled several dedicated hours to addressing this issue and – you guessed it – I had a box full of blank A-3’s to work through with him to see if we could get to the root cause.



A shade tree becomes a classroom

Truly, Andrew at first was frightened by this process, but when we got to the 5 Whys and I led him through a couple of examples, his entire demeanor seemed to glow. He was thrilled with this process and took to it like a ...well you know. When we got to the word 'gemba' on the sheet, I explained it and he burst out laughing. "You mean, Mummy, that an American woman is here with an African man teaching a Japanese word to help my students learn? I love it!" This process has now been introduced by Andrew to the Village Education Committee (a very big deal), and we can't wait to see where it leads.

These may sound like very simple, basic things; but when you realize *they really do have the power to change a life*, it puts a new light on it. People in developing countries are human beings – bright, motivated, curious, industrious – and they need to learn Lean Thinking just like the rest of us. I only hope I can learn quickly to continue teaching 'the simple things' that help move this village toward becoming truly self-sustaining.

Next step: I'm going to 5S the raw materials storage of one of the women's Micro-enterprise initiatives, JubileeSpree. I have high hopes, and will let you know what happens.