School of Public Health Student Helps ‘Stomp Out’ Vector Bourne Disease in Sub-Saharan Africa

University at Albany School of Public Health MPH student Lindsey Rae Jackson is a distinguished member of the Masters International Program, a partnership between the U.S. Peace Corps and several Universities that combines field experience with a graduate level education. Lindsey is currently living in Kenya, where she is working to help implement the “Stomping Out Malaria in Africa” (http://stompoutmalaria.org/) initiative which was launched by the Peace Corps in 2011. Under this initiative, specially trained malaria prevention Peace Corps Volunteers, like Lindsey, are working with local health officials from across sub-Saharan Africa to support targeted malaria prevention and treatment interventions.

Since arriving in Africa, Lindsey has worked on a number of projects to promote healthy lives in impoverished areas. From promoting gender equality and empowerment of young women, to coordinating programs aimed at promoting awareness of locally endemic diseases, including HIV/AIDS and malaria, and even working to establish libraries and health clubs for the schools in her community; Lindsey has been prolific in her efforts to improve quality of life in the Kenyan village of Chebukaka, where she has lived since 2012.

Most recently, Lindsey worked with local community officials to obtain a small grant to support a new initiative to eliminate tungiasis, also known as ‘jiggers’, a serious disease caused by the burrowing of female sand fleas into the skin (often the feet), from her community. It is estimated that 2.6 million Kenyans are infected with jiggers, despite the ease of prevention through adequate hygiene and pest control. In Chebukaka, poverty has kept basic necessities, including soap, out of the hands of most villagers. Lindsey has worked to fund resources for treatments of both individuals and homes, to assist in controlling the debilitating disease. She has also promoted awareness of simple prevention methods throughout the village, such as the benefits of wearing closed toe shoes, for example. The emphasis placed on prevention is validated by the economics of the disease, as it costs far less to successfully prevent the disease compared to the costs of treatment, which equal roughly half a one year salary for the average Kenyan living in Chebukaka.

On April 3, 2014 the School of Public Health Graduate Student Organization (GSO) is hosting the annual School of Public Health International Night. Our GSO’s International Night is designed to
celebrate the cultural diversity of our student body and to raise awareness about global health issues. This year’s International Night has been scheduled to help mark The World Health Organization’s Global Health Day 2014 (http://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2014/en/) and its theme “Protect yourself from vector-borne diseases - *Small Bite: Big Threat.*” Donations collected at International Night will be used to help Lindsey’s efforts to provide the villagers of Chebukaka with long lasting insecticide-treated bed nets, which, when properly used, can prevent the spread of malaria. Lindsey is scheduled to make an appearance via Skype to share her firsthand perspective of the need for improved malaria prevention resources and education in Sub-Saharan Africa.

All University at Albany students and faculty are invited and encouraged to attend.