

Exploring the South Rift Kenya landscape through SORALO connection



Dr. Sam Owuor led a group of University of Nairobi's postgraduate students from the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies to a field class in the South Rift region of Kenya (23rd to 27th July, 2017). The field class was generously funded and professionally hosted by the South Rift Association of land Owners (SORALO). The students came from a range of backgrounds – from biodiversity and natural resources management, water resources management, geomorphology, climatology, to environmental planning and management. The team visited various areas of the Olkiramatian and Shompole group ranches to understand the different land uses (the livestock rearing zone, the community conservancies/grass banks and the farming areas). They learned about the water issues through visiting the Oloibortoto water intake and talked to local WRUA representatives. They undertook a strenuous hike up the rift valley wall to see the different habitats, and enjoyed talks from the various resource assessor teams at the Lale'enok Resource Centre and went on a walk with the habituated baboon troop. On their trip down, they visited the Ologesilie Prehistoric site and spent some time in the Magadi town learning about the Magadi Soda Factory on the way out.

The main aim of this fieldtrip was to expose the students to a variety of practical situations, people and landscapes in order to facilitate their learning. In addition, the institutional and personal ties between SORALO and the University of Nairobi were strengthened. The resource assessors and staff at Lale'enok thoroughly enjoyed the visit, as did the students, all of whom rated their experience at Lale'enok 'very informative' (5, on a scale of 1 to 5 presented in a Feedback Questionnaire). Other valuable feedback came out of the questionnaires that were administered, and validated many of SORALO's efforts in the South Rift. SORALO family is grateful for the chance to have interacted with so many great young minds.

“This field trip was the epitome of practical learning. It was also interesting to see the locals were the pioneers and at front line of all the conservation work being done in this part of the South Rift and made me see what sustainable livelihoods and environmental conservation should be” – Environmental Planning and Management student



“I would highly recommend this place for our department to engage more students in research work. This would give them an opportunity to meet their academic requirement while at the same time enrich the documentation of the work being done by the Research Centre...[if] we had a week here we would probably do more and learn more” – Environmental Planning and Management student

“Stakeholder engagement in conservation is very important. SORALO has done this excellently” - Environmental Planning and Management student

“I was so much impressed by the way SORALO has ensured maximum collaboration with the stakeholders and most importantly the landowners to make it work to conserve the area as well as enhancing the livelihoods. I didn’t know people can actually live with wildlife, but yes, it is possible” – Environmental Planning and Management student

“What I found most relevant in this trip was the practical experience to relate course work in class with actual stuff in the field. The chance to also relate with the community was a big plus” – Environmental Planning and Management student

“Landforms describe all the geographical aspects of a place, be it biogeography, human geography, environmental geography, climatology, hydrology, etc. This trip provided almost

all landscape terrains; plains, mountains, escarpments, arid and semi-arid [lands] among others. All types of rock were available...the most interesting part was the sedimentary erosional cycles of Olorgasalle. That was breathtaking, and the fault line, in real life” – *Geomorphology student*



“Different layers of deposition can be identified and related well with what is taught in class”
- *Geomorphology student*

“When I came to this place I sincerely didn’t know what to expect. I came open-minded ready for anything. I’ve come to understand more about my country and gained knowledge and understanding about different ecosystems and the way they work and late with each other. Coming here was a great experience for me” - *Environmental Planning and Management student*

“I would like to sincerely thank SORALO for the generous funding and sustaining their cooperation with the University of Nairobi – within the context of the Horn of Africa Regional Environment Centre and Network. Thanks to you – John Kamanga and team SORALO. I also want to express our appreciation to the team at Lale’enok Resource Centre for their warm welcome, coordination of the field class and making sure that the field class was a success. Samantha, Albert, Joel, Resource Assessors, and the entire team Lale’enok – Ashe oleng”. – *Dr. Sam Owuor*

“We as postgraduate team would warmly love to appreciate Dr. Sam for his selfless effort and kindness he has shown us before and during the field trip. To some of us, if not all, it was a great experience to visit this part of the world. We have now seen and learnt the reality

that field-workers have to undergo to come up with great wealth of information. Your commitment, love and down to earth character is a special gift from GOD. May you continue being the person that you have always desired to be. In all your endeavors we pray that the Almighty GOD will always protect, bless and reward you abundantly, as your efforts can never be rewarded by human beings. Thank you so much. May you live long!!!”