

Internship Report

by Klára Vacková

EDUCATE A GIRL CHILD, BUILD A NATION



Place of the internship: Kampala, Uganda

Period of the internship: 15 July 2013 - 15 October 2013

Host organisation: Somero Uganda

GLEN home organisation: INEX - Sdružení dobrovolných aktivit (Czech Republic)

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Summary

The internship entitled "Empowering girls to lead a self-determined life" took place in Kawempe division, Kampala, the capital of Uganda. A landlocked country situated on the Equator, once called a pearl of Africa, went through severe local wars after it gained its independence in 1962. Since 2005 when the Lord's Resistance Army lead by Joseph Kony moved to South Sudan and Central African Republic, the country has been stable. Yet, it is criticized for its attitude to homosexuals which violates human rights strongly.

The partner organisation that hosted the internship is called Somero Uganda and it is a community based organisation situated in Bwaise slum, Kawempe division. Somero Uganda aims to empower slum girls and young women to lead a self-determined life. Its main instruments of empowerment are education, skills development, and sound health.

The intern's main job was to create a website for Somero Uganda (www.somero-uganda.org) in order to present the organisation's work. Also a new facebook page was created to support the online media presentation and make the organisation more visible not just for its supporters but also for possible future donors. In hand with this a social media workshop for Somero employees was held and knowledge on how to administer the website was passed on. Other than that several workshops and lessons for Somero students were carried such as "Introduction to journalism" workshop, photo project, classes focused on broadening the girl students' perception of the world, etc. Moreover, interns where there to answer any kinds of questions asked by the girls regarding both their personal and professional development. All projects were conducted successfully also thanks to all Somero Uganda employees who from the day one treated the interns as equal members of the team.

Shrnutí

Pracovní stáž s titulem „Posílení dívek k vedení samostatného života“ se konala v Kawempe, části Kampaly, hlavního města Ugandy. Jedná se o vnitrozemský stát ležící na rovníku. Uganda, kdysi nazvaná perlou Afriky, si po roce 1962 kdy získala nezávislost, prošla řadou krutých místních válek. Od roku 2005 je situace v zemi stabilní po té, co se Armáda božského odporu vedena Josephem Konym přesunula do Jižního Sudánu a Středoafričké republiky. Je však kritizována pro svůj postoj k homosexuálům, jímž silně porušuje lidská práva.

Partnerská hostitelská organizace Somero Uganda je komunitní organizací nacházející se ve slumu Bwaise v oblasti Kawempe. Jejím cílem je posílení slumových dívek a mladých žen k vedení samostatného života. Hlavními nástroji k jejich posílení jsou vzdělání, rozvoj schopností a podpora pevného zdraví.

Hlavním úkolem stážistů byla tvorba webových stránek organizace (www.somero-uganda.org) za účelem prezentace organizace. Byl také vytvořen profil organizace na facebooku jako podpora online médií ke zviditelnění organizace a její činnosti jak pro současné podporovatele, tak pro případné dárce. Zároveň proběhlo školení zaměstnanců Somera v oblasti sociálních médií a byla předána znalost, jak spravovat webové stránky. Kromě toho proběhla také řada workshopů pro studentky Somera jako „Úvod do žurnalistiky“, foto projekt, lekce zaměřené na rozšíření znalostí a chápání souvislostí ve světě, atd. Navíc studentkám byly zodpovězeny jakékoli otázky týkající se jejich osobního a profesionálního rozvoje. Všechny projekty se podařilo úspěšně dokončit také díky podpory zaměstnanců Somera, kteří stážisty od prvního dne považovali za rovnocenné členy týmu.

Introduction

My name is Klára Vacková and I am from the Czech Republic. I live in Prague with my husband and a cat. I graduated at Hradec Králové University (Czech Rep.) from Travel and Tourism Management at bachelor's level and got my master's degree from Political Science in Africa. Before entering university I had worked, studied and lived in Great Britain. During my studies I visited for long period (more than 3 months) Canada, USA and Cape Verde. Being inspired by two Czech female journalists – Lenka Klicperová and Markéta Kutilová, and also a female photographer Líba Taylor, I became more and more interested in women rights. Going to sub-Saharan Africa had been my long lasting dream. My reasons to apply for GLEN program (Global Education Network for Young Europeans) were as follows:

- 1) Do not regret after you are over 30 years old.
- 2) Break stereotypes.
- 3) Don't be just a "pub theorist".
- 4) Don't be a two-week safari tourist.
- 5) Make your dreams come true.
- 6) A program tailored to suit me well.



1) During my internship I was 29 years old. I'd been thinking of participating at GLEN program for last four years. So eventually I grabbed the opportunity.

2) I wanted to show that even a married woman in Czech society does not necessarily have to stick to a stove and wait for her husband to return from work. This being written, I cannot be more thankful to my husband who from the first minute, I found out about being chosen for the GLEN internship, gave me a full support to have my journey to Uganda as smooth as possible.

3) Students of political science are often said to be very good theorists over a bottle of beer who are far away from practise. I didn't like to be a part of this cliché.

4) I've always preferred to go to places for a longer period of time if possible. To see more than just what one can see passing through by bus.

5) Africa as a continent had probably been my dream since I was a little girl. After living on Cape Verde for four months, travelling in Morocco for three weeks, the time for a sub-Saharan Africa had to finally become reality.

6) Everything seemed to be tailored to suit me well. A country with rich history, very convenient climate for living, a project which targets girls and empowers them through education in which I myself believe strongly.

And as said by many –Uganda is a country in Africa with one of the nicest people. Which I cannot judge from my position as I haven't seen enough African countries. Still, during many days and more and more encounters with locals I often remembered this and felt that there definitely must me some truth in it.

Uganda¹

Uganda is a landlocked country between the east African savannah, west African rainforest and north African semi-desert. It is a very green and fertile country with beautiful nature. Compared to other east African countries, it is rather small with just 241,038 sq km and about 35 million (July 2013 est.) inhabitants. With a median age of 15 years, Uganda has the youngest population in the world.

A country lying on the Equator, once called a pearl of Africa, went through severe local wars after it gained its independence in 1962. Since 2005 when the Lord's Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony moved out of the region, the country has been stable. Yet, it is criticized for its attitude to homosexuals which violates human rights strongly. The president of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, who was the first one to bring to Uganda political stability, has been in power since 1986. Next presidential elections are planned for 2016 but already now the predictions say that he will remain in power. Unfortunately this long lasting term in the presidential seat leads to even deeper corruption which, as Ugandans say, is the main current problem of the country.

Kampala, the capital and administrative centre of the country, is a modern city with all such a city comprises. From tall modern buildings in the centre, different categories of restaurants, bars and clubs, beautiful big family houses spread on the green hills over the city, to a moderate style of housing until slum areas spread around the city. The biggest slum area is situated in Kawempe division, approximately 8.5 km from the city centre. It is the area with the lowest average income, highly populated by youth. Young people from this area either grew up in slums or came to the city from countryside with a hope of better future which did not always happen. Living conditions in slums are characterized by poor housing, poor hygiene and talking about youth often there is no school attendance. All this being written, it is still a place where people live with smiles on their faces and strengths to live their lives as best as they can.

Education in Uganda²

The present education system in Uganda has existed since the early 1960s (the country gained its independence in 1962). There are seven primary school years (P1-P7) after which pupils sit for their primary leaving examinations (PLE). Those who pass successfully can enter secondary school. Secondary school consists of six school years (S1-S6). After the first four years, students sit for their O-level exams (Uganda Certificate of Education). If this is completed they can proceed further and after the next two school years sit for the final A-level examinations (Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education). Having passed A-levels, there is an option to continue studying for a degree on a university level.



¹Part of this text is copied from Somero Uganda website (www.somero-uganda.org) as it was written by myself while creating the Somero Uganda website together with my tandem partner Dennis Michels. All texts were revised by Dennis Michels and other Somero Uganda employees.

² To this part applies the same as in the note no. 1. Some information is also taken from my research presented in an article written about girl child education in Uganda (<http://goo.gl/l5qaZk>).

Two milestones for education in Uganda that cannot be left out are the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997, following the Universal Secondary Education (USE) ten years later in 2007. According to these two acts, primary and secondary education in Uganda should be free and compulsory for all children of school going age. Though parental responsibility for implementation remains as it is families who pay for scholastic material, school uniforms and feeding at school.

In reality, people often are too poor to take part of parental responsibility in education or do not see the importance of education for their children. Traditionally, girls did not attend school but stayed at home to help in households. Also the number of child labour is still very high, concerning up to 36% of boys and girls. Also very many children in Uganda are orphans as death rate is rather high due to HIV (7,2%) positive people. Even though schooling in Uganda is, according to UPE and USE, free and compulsory, there are areas with no state schools and thus it is impossible to fulfil the acts' meaning. Naming all these there has been an ongoing try to provide education for all children of school age but there is still a long way ahead to make it reality for each and every child in Uganda.

Somero Uganda³

Somero Uganda, the hosting partner organisation, is a community based organisation with its offices and training centre situated directly in Bwaise slum, Kawempe division, the area where Somero's beneficiaries live. Somero Uganda aims to empower slum girls and young women (13-25 years old) to lead a self-determined life.

Why girls and young women? Ugandan girls and young women living in slums belong to the most vulnerable groups of society. They often have been denied school education due to the unfriendly schools environment and family responsibilities. Therefore they have to earn their living in the informal service sector, where they are at risk of being exposed to sexual exploitation and violence.



The main instruments of girls and young women's empowerment of Somero Uganda are education, skills development, and sound health. There are different programs offered to different target groups. To name them: Education Program, Skills Development Program, Behaviour Change Communication, Community Awareness Rising and other Projects. More detailed description of each program can be found easily on <http://somero-uganda.org/our-programs>.

Somero Uganda runs a training centre which is open from Monday to Friday to its beneficiaries who come there to study on daily basis under the guidance and teaching of experienced Somero staff. The centre is run by a team of social workers with relevant related professions and skills. The social workers have grown up in the area which has made it easy for them to reach out even into the hard-to-reach areas.

³ As in previous chapters, some parts are copied from Somero Uganda website (www.somero-uganda.org).

The internship

The internship was set in above mentioned community based organisation Somero Uganda which targets girls and young women (13-25 years old) who dropped out of school for different reasons. Somero Uganda either enables them to continue with education within its own training centre where specific programs are offered, or supports the girls and young women with scholarship to complete their education at higher (university) level.

During my internship there were two main programs held in Somero Centre, the training centre in Bwaise slum. A new pilot program Home Based Schooling program (20 students), and Skills Development program (70 students).

The Home Based Schooling program is tailored for girls and young women who dropped out of school due to pregnancy as in Uganda no school allows a pregnant girl or a mother to continue with schooling. Yet, they can still sit for their final exams to graduate from secondary school. In Somero Centre they study the same subjects following the curriculum to be able to compete with school attending students. After three years of study Somero Uganda will register these girls to sit for their final exams through networking schools.

The Skills Development program is awarded to girls and young women who dropped out of school for various reasons and are involved or at risk of being involved in commercial sex work. The girls are provided computer lessons and financial literacy as well as reproductive health sessions for five months within the Somero Centre and are then offered the possibility of doing one month of internship in a business or an organisation, after which they are graduated with certificate. Completing this they should have better chances to find jobs which do not make them so vulnerable.

Process of my internship

I feel privileged to state the process of my internship as very smooth already from the day one as I felt that Dennis (my tandem partner) and I were treated as equal members of the team. Even before coming to Uganda there had been some communication between us⁴ and Nsubuga Geoffrey Simbwa who is the head of the organisation and happened to be our contact person as well.

Already on the first day of work I went with Geoffrey to an education workshop which was not only interesting but gave me a better insight about what is going on in Uganda concerning education on the national level.

During the internship I worked closely mostly with Dennis as we often worked or cooperated on the same tasks. Yet, I also worked rather closely with Nandawula Sarah Kalungi, Education Programs Coordinator. Thanks to sharing a desk with her we were in closer contact when discussing different issues concerning the Somero students. We also cooperated on some tasks together, especially on social media for Somero Uganda. Sarah was always very open and willing to explain and answer my questions concerning either girl child education or Uganda in general. So was Geoffrey (our contact person) and Akello Betty Flora (Education Program Officer).

⁴ Whenever I refer to „us, our,...“ and do not specify it I refer to Dennis and myself.

Our main job was to create a website for Somero Uganda (www.somero-uganda.org) in order to present the organisation's work. As Dennis knew something (web design) and I knew the other bit (creating websites based on wordpress system and web editing), the cooperation went pretty well and after some weeks during which the power was going on and off we finally had a website to present as the final product of our efforts. In the meantime, Dennis created a new facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/SomeroUganda2009?fref=ts>) for Somero Uganda. Both these being completed we gave a workshop to Somero staff to show how to update and maintain the website. Another workshop conducted by us aimed at the importance of social media in today's world in order to present someone's work.

Other work at Somero Uganda we were even asked to do, such as reviewing teaching manuals, writing teaching manuals, reviewing proposals, correcting homework, etc., or came up with our own ideas concerning our professional background.

For the students of Skills Development program I prepared a workshop on journalism during which I gave some hints on how to write a reportage which followed by their own work which I read and gave feedback to it. Also after another GLEN participant, Ondřej Šálek, who came to visit from Kenya to give the students of Skills Development program a workshop on photography, I followed up on it with a one-month photo project where students were asked to document their daily life using photography as a means of expression and presentation.



During our internship the Somero students knew that they could come at any time and ask us questions or write them on a piece of paper on whatever issues they would like to know the answers to or discuss them with us. We collected the questions and either talked to the girls personally if intimate questions were raised, or presented them to all interested during their free time. Thanks to our openness we developed very nice friendship with some of the girls from which both sides benefited a lot. These moments spent together with the girls belong to the most precious ones and I will try to never forget them.

Another part of the job was to take part in home visits at the young mothers' homes to find out more about the environment they come from. It served for both, for Somero Uganda to understand better the girls' needs and also for their parents/guardians to be sensitised about the importance of education for their children. To us, as interns from Europe, it meant a lot to imagine and understand better the living conditions in slums.

To name all the jobs it would be a lot longer list but I tried to mention these that I find essential either for its result for the organisation or as an unforgettable experience for myself.

Cooperation with a tandem partner

As already mentioned, my tandem partner was Dennis Michels, from Köln, Germany. Being chosen by a computer program following some common features, I must admit that the modern technology did a pretty good job.

With Dennis we had met already during two seminars on global education held for GLEN participants before the internship in global south. Thus, we had a chance to meet a bit, even though most of the time we spent time together with other GLEN participants. As the second seminar was held in the Czech Republic, during working week Dennis had come already at the weekend before the seminar and stayed at our place also the weekend after the seminar. Thanks to this we had some more time to spend together and meet better before flying down south.

Being an individualist I have to admit that my biggest worry before going to Uganda was not about working or living in foreign country but about cooperating with Dennis. Luckily, they were all just worries which never became reality.

In fact, Dennis and I developed a very nice friendship and spent most of the time together not just at work but also outside work. We lived at the same place, had most of our meals together, went to work and out of work together, went swimming together, played games with children in slum after work, explored the country together and spent a lot of evenings discussing things together. Even though a stay in Uganda lasted just 3 months it was a very intense time which I refer to as one of the best in my life and am happy that it was Dennis I was privileged to share it with.

Problems and challenges

Here again I have to mention Dennis and Somero students. Even though there were some problems and challenges from time to time it always was mostly Dennis or something nice that happened in Somero Centre with the girls that made me continue working. Or a phone call with my husband who reminded me that it was my decision to come to Uganda and it's up to me to live my experience as best as I can.

One of the problems that occurred very often was power cuts during the day which can be a challenge when computer is the main working device. Most of the computers in Somero Centre have non-functional batteries so electricity is a must. The only solution to this is the usage of a power generator (an extra expense, thus used just in cases of emergency) or patience.

Another challenge occurred during the photo project that I did with the girls. For 70 girls there were just 2 cameras so not all of them were able to finish the project even if they wanted to take part in it. I offered also my camera to be used for the project which helped a bit but not as a long term solution.

What was also new to us and caused confusion and sometimes even frustration was the different working attitude of Somero staff. Sometimes we could see staff members stop working for several hours, using their computers for private purposes, resting with heads on their desks or leaving the office for several hours without explaining whether they were leaving for working or personal issues. Coming from different environment we were sometimes irritated as we saw this as a lack of ambition and commitment even working on a very important topic. In a country with a high percentage of unemployed people we were often thinking how this was possible not to be grateful for the opportunity to work and to make things better. To understand this and to prevent us from losing motivation, we suggested a meeting with our contact person. We presented to him the evaluation we had done after the half of our internship: the pros, cons and expectations/work that can still be done until the end of the internship. Geoffrey was very nice

and open with us and mentioned that yes, something had to be done about the working attitude as he also saw it as a problem. Nevertheless, he himself likes watching films during his time at work which he sometimes does and thus it is rather difficult to explain to the others something about the working attitude as Dennis and I might like to see it. Moreover, we were just *muzungus* (strangers) who didn't come to the organisation to make big changes as we both believe it's Ugandans who know a lot better than us how to help their own country. Still we were given a space to comment on things which was very nice from Geoffrey to let us do so.

Even though there has been some problems and challenges not concerning just the technical issues but also the different working environment from what we are used to. Still, I believe in the organisation's good work and hope it will continue in its effort to build Uganda on the knowledgeable people both men and women.

Free time

As already mentioned, during my internship I spent a lot of time at work and outside of work with my tandem partner and friend Dennis. We developed this nice friendship that even when I had something after work and came back home late in the evening Dennis waited for me with dinner and the other way round. Thanks to this and to the relationship we developed with people from whom we bought ingredients on our street on daily basis, not just the hostel where we lived but the whole street felt like home environment which I highly appreciated. There were always people whom to say or wave hello.



To meet also other Ugandans I started volunteering every Saturday at the USPCA dog and cat shelter. Being an animal lover, I fitted there very quickly and spent wonderful moments not just with animals but also with shelter's employees. Truly, this was the only place where I forgot of being *muzungu* and felt to be a "normal person" with a skin of colour that does not matter. Even at the Somero Centre I had moments when I felt the gap between us caused by our skin colour (and of course the origin). In the shelter it never happened which felt amazingly relaxing.

During my stay in Uganda I wrote a blog (www.klaravackova.cz) which focused not only on daily life of *muzungu* in Uganda but I conducted quite deep research into Ugandan education system about which I wrote an article published on my blog and also under analysis (<http://www.rozvojovka.cz/analyzy/167-vzdelej-divku-vybuduj-narod.htm>) on the website of informative educational section of People in Need (NGO). Being interested in education I contacted other schools in Uganda where I came to visit to get a better insight in the education system in Uganda.

Having in mind that Uganda is not just Kampala, I tried to travel whenever I could to see different parts of the country and to get a better picture of it.

Conclusion and perspective

The internship and whole stay in Uganda was incredibly intense and truly one of the best times in my life as dreams don't come true every now and then.

In Uganda I didn't see just pitiful images often presented in Europe by mass media when talking about Africa. I saw a colourful country which didn't seem so different from the countries I've visited until then.

Being aware of stereotypes often carried by Europeans, it was very interesting to listen to stereotypes Africans have about the countries of global north, specifically Europe. Taking Somero Uganda as an example which is financially sponsored by Somero Germany (based in Germany), for many Ugandans Germany=Europe which "is very rich and everybody lives a happy life". On one hand, I appreciate a lot the work Somero Germany does as without it Somero Uganda could hardly survive. On the other hand, it doesn't encourage Somero Uganda to be financially independent as there seems to be this feeling and trust that "our richer and dear friends will help us". I would like to stress out that this is not a statement but my point of view. Sometimes in Uganda when I came somewhere I had this feeling that I was put into a position of a saviour, only because being European. It even felt unpleasant when I came without presents as this is what Europeans "ought to do". Looking back into history it's difficult to judge either side as I feel like it's an ongoing process of learning on both sides how to approach the other side without causing more harm than good.

Thanks to living my experience in a wonderful country of global south I can think about different attitudes from both sides and keep my mind and eyes open to understand that the world is not just black and white but that there are always two sides of a coin.

My internship in Uganda enriched me not just personally but brought a practical experience for my job which is a Global Education Coordinator for ADRA Czech Republic. Giving lectures on global issues through non-formal learning activities throughout the range of children from pre-school up to university students, I feel the benefit of my experience almost on daily basis.

As for other Global Education activities I have held some presentations for public and more are still to come, I want to write more articles on my blog or elsewhere as there are still topics I feel the importance to focus on, and I am open to take part in more activities concerning global education.