

GLEN Internship Report

Female Empowerment in Kampala



Vendula Brtníková

INEX Czech Republic

Internship number: 5000400630

Location: Kampala, Uganda

Period of Internship: July 2014 – September 2014

Host Organization: Somero Uganda

Summary

English

This internship took place in the capital city of Uganda, Kampala, located in the Central region of the country, and was held from July to September 2014. Two participants from the Czech Republic and Germany worked in a regional organization Somero Uganda situated in the slum area of Kawempe division. Somero Uganda aims to empower local girls and young women to lead a self-determined life through providing education, skills development and psychosocial support. At the same time, this organization influences everyday life of the community, making a positive impact on local development and raising awareness of women's education.

While actively contributing to the daily life of the organization, such as taking part in administration, grant applications, publicity, monitoring and evaluation of projects, carrying out educational activities, workshops and working closely with the girls of Somero, the interns had two main tasks. One was concerned with business administration and financial plan of the organization and the other worked with the girls in the area of psychosocial support of the girls.

Česky

Tato stáž byla uskutečněna v Kampale, hlavním městě Ugandy, které se nachází v Centrální oblasti země, v době od července do září 2014. Účastníci z České republiky a Německa pracovali v hostitelské organizaci Somero Uganda, která se nachází ve slumové oblasti Kawempe a jejímž cílem je podpora dívek a mladých žen v možnosti vést samostatný život skrze zprostředkování vzdělávání, rozvoj dovedností a psychosociální podporu. Tato organizace také současně pozitivně ovlivňuje rozvoj místní komunity a zvyšuje povědomí o nutnosti vzdělání žen.

Stážisti se podíleli na běžných aktivitách organizace, jako je administrativa, grantové žádosti, propagace, monitoring a evaluace, výpomoc při vzdělávacích aktivitách a workshopech a přímé práci s dívkami ze Somera. Mimo to měli účastníci také dva hlavní úkoly, sestavení finančního plánu a obchodní administrativu organizace a zprostředkování psychosociální podpory dívkám.

My story

When I decided to apply for GLEN internship in 2014 I was sure that proposed project in Uganda would be a perfect suit for me. First of all, the local organization works with young women which I have also been doing for the past 4 years. During this job, I gained experience in working closely with teenagers and young adults who are on the path of taking decision which may influence their life in a long term. Due to this fact, I am absolutely passionate in working with such age group. They need positive role models in their lives and they are eager for attention and leadership. Second of all, the project which Somero proposed had two main tasks, where one of them was focused on work in the area of health, psycho-social support and career guidance. I thought that I have good personal skills for this particular project, because I study health care specialty in addiction treatment which is a program with basics in psychology and counseling. Apart from my interest in taking part in GLEN cycle, I have always wanted to visit Sub-Saharan Africa and experience the life there. In this sense, the internship was a dream-come-true for me.

Interns

This project was proposed for two interns from the Czech Republic and Germany with different main tasks. Therefore the participants had absolutely unlike background, both personal and professional. This already was a presumption for misunderstandings, but I think I was dedicated to put into the tandem relationship much energy in order to make our time in Uganda worth it. Honestly, I must admit that I did not feel the same dedication from my tandem partner and later I even realized that our overall motivation for this project was different, so we ended up working completely separately. Luckily, our relationship had during the internship a positive progress, but for me it was still the biggest obstacle in this whole experience.

Host organization

Somero Uganda is a young organization which started off as cooperation with a sister organization in Germany. Its aim is to empower slum girls and young women of ages 15 to 25 to lead a self-determined life through skills development, education and health promotion.

Geoffrey Nsubuga is the National coordinator and he has been working with the organization since its birth. Geoffrey himself grew up in the slum area and he makes a great contribution to the community which acknowledges him as a hardworking and successful person. He clearly draws attention to Somero and provides resources for its function.

Somero's pilot program is named ICT classes and its aim is to provide practical skills to the participants when it comes to working with computers, cameras and other technology. Unfortunately, the area where Somero is located is quite limited when it comes to sources of electricity which makes the realization of this project quite difficult. Throughout the time of our internship we have had troubles with this due to a broken generator and therefore most of the times we only had electricity twice a week. I found this unfortunate, because most of the times there was no power, the girls just hung out in the classroom on their own without continuing with the aim of the project. Even within this problem I saw a potential for carrying out theoretical classes or organizing different learning or interactive activities.

Second project run by Somero was called "Young mothers" and its aim was to provide the possibility to finish high school education to girls who were not able to finish it due to different reasons – finances, pregnancy, difficult home environment, etc. A group of girls was educated in the Somero center, where they were attending classes for 1 year. After this period of time, they started their preparation for national exams, which was in the first half of our internship. In this time I was able to connect more with these girls and help them with certain tasks in European history class or with English. It was really important for me, because I was able to build personal relationships with these vulnerable young women, which gave us space to discuss their struggles and difficulties. Towards the examination period, they started to attend classes in a school with other pupils and intensively studied before they took their exams. I think that working with these girls was the highlight of my internship. I see this program as a good potential for young women who wish to have completed their advanced level of education, but did not have the chance to do so. Unfortunately, this program will not be able to run in the following years, due to financial reasons.

Another program run by Somero Uganda is called Behavior Change Communication and is based on interactive workshops and lectures run by either a staff member or a professional. Topics are oriented mostly on health education, such as reproductive health and drug abuse, but also on self awareness, personality skills and communication.

Project content

The overall content fulfilled during the period of my stay was helping out with current tasks in the organization. Apart from administration processes, such as project evaluations and creating reports, I tried to help out with project proposals and grant applications. I was also actively involved in the creation of monitoring and evaluation system for Somero Uganda.

On Fridays the organization runs its program on Behavior Change Communication, where I took part in leading several workshops on alcohol and drug abuse and personal development. It was very interesting interacting with the girls and learning from them different perspectives on such topics. The same was for me, when I was helping the “Young mothers” with revising some chapters in world history for their national exam.

Somero cares for its beneficiaries and their families. They organize visits, to interact with the family in their home environment and I was able to participate in some of them. Apart from working with families of the beneficiaries, Somero Uganda is active in its community. Therefore the staff members are often invited to school to conduct different workshops. In the beginning of our internship the organization took part in facilitating workshops for several high schools and their class leaders on the topic of leadership skills in which I was also active. During our internship in Kampala, Glen had another project going on in Nairobi, Kenya, which interns came to cooperate with Somero by carrying out workshops on photography and video making. This was a positive experience, but also a place for further improvement. Glen interns come to both Somero Uganda and Mathare Youth Sport Association in Kenya every year and it would be useful and interesting to develop a continuous cooperation.

Initial challenges

Apart from previously mentioned challenges, looking back I see the main obstacle with the project description which lead to different expectations. After my time spent in Kampala I see everything much more clearly, considering cultural differences and contrasts in communication. The problem is that the organization requests for certain interns, but they are selected within a year of time and later when they actually come to the organization, where there is no more place for mentioned project or the organization is not prepared for them.

In Somero, it is mainly the National coordinator Geoffrey, who takes part in the cooperation with Glen, so the rest of the staff does not really know who the interns are, why did they come and what are their skills. Due to this fact, I was not sure in which areas of work I can take part and with whom I can cooperate. Partly I felt left out and on the other hand some staff members felt that they did not want to overwhelm us with work. This was a misunderstanding, maybe organizational, maybe cultural, which lead to some working obstacles. Since our home organization selects interns who would fit for the project considering their skills, experience and education, later, if the local organization and its staff members are not sure who the interns really are, they end up not using their skills efficiently and even the interns feel that they did not use up the potential which they actually have.

I must admit that I expected to participate more within the field of psychosocial work and direct work with the girls as the project proposal presented. Unfortunately this area was not really structured in a way that the organization would provide real psychosocial services in which I could take part. I see this as a place for initial work with much potential, but unfortunately the 3 months which I spent working with the organization was not enough time for me to develop such approach. Somero is working with vulnerable groups of women, who have not just a difficult past behind, but until this day and to the future they are going to struggle with life affecting decision. Somero beneficiaries are girls, who are looking for their life role models; therefore the staff members have quite a lot of power in affecting them in a positive way.

Besides work

Naturally, apart from our work in Somero Uganda we yearned to get to know the country more and experience its culture. Most weekends we were able to travel and take trips into different parts of Uganda and see its beautiful nature. Ugandan people are very nice, hostile and generous and I am thankful for the friends we had there, who included us in their family celebrations and events. I think that was the most interesting way how to get to know the local culture and the way how people live.

Personal benefit

Looking back at my time spent in Uganda, I know that it was not just a dream come true, but also an unforgettable working experience from which I benefited in many ways. By spending

several months in quite a different environment, I was pushed to learn how to be more flexible and open. When it comes to Somero Uganda, I hope that the organization also benefited from this time in a positive way and that we made an interesting exchange for next ideas and inputs.