

Internship Report

GLEN Cycle 2017

Tereza SUCHÁNKOVÁ



Home organization: INEX-SDA, Czech Republic

Internship Number: 1203

Internship Title: Councours „Maisons vertes“

Hosting Organization: CREDI-ONG

Internship Country: Benin

Period of internship: 21 July- 3 November 2017

My name is Tereza Suchánková and I study International Development Studies at Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic. In the time I decided to apply for GLEN internship, I was in the first year of Master program. My great motivation was a desire to spend some time in Sub-Saharan Africa and to try to understand the local context. This desire came from the fact that during my studies, Sub Saharan Africa has been mentioned often in the connection with hunger, droughts, wars and poverty. At the same time, I got to know some people from this macroregion who talked about progress. It got clear to me that without my own experience, I would never be able to understand the reality of life and there would be many connections missing. It was never my ambition to generalize my experience for the whole macroregion of Sub Saharan Africa. Rather, I wanted to make a picture about a particular village and a particular NGO. I was chosen for a project in an organization called CREDI-ONG in the southern part of Benin. From the 3-month internship period, I prolonged my stay to four and half months because I found my work in CREDI-ONG and my stay in Benin to be very contributive for me.

CREDI-ONG

CREDI-ONG is a well-established organization with almost 30 salaried employees. It is located in Zinvié-Kpotomé, Abomey-Calavi Municipality, Benin. It is only about 20 to 30 km from the biggest Beninese city Cotonou. The organization is grown into one part of the village of Zinvié, called Kpotomé.

CREDI-ONG bases its activities on three pillars. These are pisciculture (fish farming), agriculture and protection of the environment. Fish farming is the initial activity, this is how the organization was settled. Agriculture pillars stands for promoting ecological, biological and sustainable ways of cultivating land. In Kpotomé, there is a model farm where many local and other trainees learn how to grow plants and keep animals according to these principles. The third pillar stands for a protected area called Sitatunga Valley (La Vallée de Sitatunga). The whole protected area was initiated and lobbied on by the organization. The emblem of this area is a water antelope called Sitatunga whose population decreased significantly during the last years.

Every year, hundreds of trainees come to CREDI-ONG for an internship or/and for making a research for their thesis. As a consequence, CREDI-ONG is closely linked with an academic sector.

I especially appreciate the innovative approach of the organization. It is always ready to incorporate new methods, new techniques and new ideas. As an example – during our stay, it was about to launch its own currency for the Sitatunga Valley. I also appreciate a participative approach. In practice, it means that the organization devotes a lot of resources to the education of local inhabitants and it supports mostly projects coming as an initiative of local people.

Our life

Me and my tandem partner Ida, we lived in a courtyard shared with Damien's family. Damien is a co-founder of CREDI-ONG, he was a Glennie in 2003. It showed up to be very helpful because whenever we needed a help, we had to whom to turn. I came to Benin 2 weeks before Ida and Damien's family often hosted me for food, took care of me when I was ill and helped me to deal with daily life in the new locality.

We shared our house with a trainee from Togo called Dola. That also showed to be meaningful as she showed us how to prepare local meals, how to negotiate prices and she learned us a lot about local life in general.

In the house next doors, there sometimes lived short-time volunteers from Europe who came only for a week or two to the organization.

Our house was located 20-minute walk from the organization. We walked on food every day.

In case of health problems, there is a Sister Health centre which provides basic healthcare. About one km from the house, there is a big hospital. During our stay, we only had minor health issues.

The main language spoken in the area is Fon. Many people do not speak French, nevertheless, they know numbers in French some basic expressions. I found the French accent difficult to understand first days of my stay, but in time, I got used to it.

Our work

In the organization, we worked in a trinom. It consisted of the two of us from the GLEN program and of a local Beninese trainee called Rinos. Without Rinos, our work would not be effective for sure. He knew the local context and how things work and his advices and contributions were precious. He also showed up to be a good friend. He often visited us and we visited his family in Cotonou many times.

We worked from Monday to Saturday. From Monday to Friday, we worked usually 8-12 and then 15-18. On Saturdays, we worked 8-12.

Our main task was to create an interactive exhibition about a protected area called Sitatunga Valley (La Vallée de Sitatunga). We were soon ready with the proposition and ready to start building. But we could not really start because the organization was waiting for a delayed payment of one European donor. We started building about 2 weeks before the end of our internship. When we were leaving the organization, the exhibition was not finished yet.



Obrázek 1: Návrh designu výstavy

In the meantime, we worked on other different tasks. We participated in the daily routine of feeding animals and cleaning their ubications. For about 3 weeks, we worked on a construction of another exhibition called The Palace of Dumpster (Le palais des ordures).



Obrázek 2: Budování interaktivní výstavy

We participated in several terrain excursions. Most often, we went to the terrain to do bird observations. Once, we took boats to catch some fish and see the biodiversity under water (but we did not catch much fish). And we were hunting for butterflies and looking for new undocumented species.

We also helped to plant new trees, which was a project financed and supported by the Rotary Club. In the Panther Forest, we took care of little tree seedlings which were planted there before.

**REBOISEMENT
DE LA VALLÉE
DE SITATUNGA**

Mise en terre de 2.500 plants d'arbres
dans le Village de Dangbodji
dans l'arrondissement de Zuvie

SAMEDI 23 SEPTEMBRE 2017

ENSEMBLE, PARTICIPONS À LA PROTECTION
DE LA FAUNE DE LA VALLÉE DE SITATUNGA !

info@rcnautile.org / Tél. 95 95 76 65

Une action du
Rotary
Club de Cotonou Le Nautile

en association avec
CREDI-ONG

CHALLENGE 1,2 MILLIONS D'ABRES PLANTÉS

Obrázek 3: Informační leták ohledně výsadby stromů

I got interested by women self-help groups that were initiated by CREDI. I spoke about it and decided to make a research about them. The organization provided me with people who translated for me and helped me with the research. I am now in the process of writing thesis out of the data and the data will be provided to the organization who may use them to strengthen the initiative.



Obrázek 4: Návštěva ženské svépomocné spořicí skupiny

We tried to make some PR videos, but it was not a priority of the organization to do that.

Sometimes, there were days when we had not much to do and we were rather ‘inventing’ some tasks to employ ourselves. There were some things in the organization that were surprising and challenging for me. I would name the hierarchic structure in the organization, the speed of work and the communication among personnel.

Continuation & GEA

During my research of self-help groups, I developed a friendship with some women in the village of Anagbo. They mentioned many times that they would be grateful for a pressing machine to produce red oil. When coming back, I talked to my friends about this need of women and my wish to help them as the pressing machine is expensive and it would take them ages to save enough money to buy it. Out of discussions with my friends, an idea came

out to organize “Beninese evening”. It consisted of a lecture about my experience in Benin and of performances of various artists who agreed to perform for free.

The event lasted 3 hours and we could see more than 30 people present. As I wanted this event to be GEA at the same time, I included some topics we discussed on the preparatory seminars and I made my lecture interactive. We spoke about the image of Africa and how it is presented in media, about stereotypes connected with Africa and about privileges. The next part was about GLEN program and about my personal experience in CREDI-ONG.

Collected money will be send to CREDI-ONG who will help women to choose the right pressing machine and transport it to their village.

Tips for future GLENNies

- The big market of Zinvié is every 4 days (they say every 5 days because they count in also the present day)
- Gari is a perfect dish – it may be ready in a minute
- It is worth learning some Fon language, people appreciate it a lot. I recommend this link: <https://www.livelingua.com/peace-corps/Fon/Guide%20d%27apprentissage%20en%20Fon.pdf>
- When you hear “YOVO”, that’s you. People will call you Yovo a lot. They often say Yovo yovo bonsoir
- Before midday, people say “Bonjour”. After midday, people say “Bonsoir”.
- I wrote a blog: <https://stripkyzbeninu.blogspot.com/>
- Cotonou:
 - o The biggest supermarket is called Jerevan
 - o You can bath in the sea on Eldorado beach (it is protected, there are no waves), there is a little entry fee
 - o It’s worth visiting the Centre Artisanat (but to get the real price, you need to divide by 5)
- Travel tips
 - o Ganvié – it’s not far at all and it’s worth seeing
 - o Grand-Popo – I recommend Lion’s Bar. It was a pleasant place to stay.

- Adjara – there is a great market with musical instruments (no touristy stuff) and black river where you can go on boat
- North of Benin – we visited Gnanando’s organization in Papatia who hosts Glenies too. It was really special experience.
- VISA to other countries – it’s super easy to get visa for Togo. You can buy them on the frontier and it’s not expensive at all. BUT, it’s super difficult to get visa for Ghana if you apply for them in Benin.

Conclusion

As I study international development studies, working in the terrain in an organization of the global South was absolutely necessary for me to make more holistic picture about development assistance and development in general. Through this internship, I could work in an organization that is at the end of development assistance chain. I realized what are the obstacles for implementing projects in terrain and the importance of knowing local context. I changed my attitude towards certain issues and it made me think about my future steps and their meaningfulness.

From a time distance, I would say that GLEN as a whole was eye-opening for me. I learned to use critical thinking more, to look at issues from different perspectives, to realize inequalities and my own privileges.

To sum it up, the whole cycle was enriching for me and I am grateful I could participate. I am sure that the skills I acquired will be useful for me in the future. And I would like to continue in the GLEN program as a tutor.