

FINAL REPORT / GLEN INTERNSHIP 2012

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Home organization: INEX-SDA, Czech Republic

Title of the Internship: Training youth in various forms of media

Place and country of the Internship: Nairobi, Kenya

Period: August – October 2012

Host organization: MYSA, Kenya

Summary

GLEN internship titled „Training youth in various forms of media“ took place in Nairobi, Kenya between August and October 2012. GLEN interns worked in Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), which is a local sport and community development organization that was founded in 1987. Nowadays it reach around 25 000 young people in eastern part of the city, most of who lives in areas of local slums. Focus of MYSA is mainly on football, but there are many other educational or talent programmes, including Shootback in which GLEN interns worked and through which are youth gaining skills in visual media.

Primary responsibility of the interns was leading media workshops on various topics – filmmaking, documentary photography or stop-motion animation. Secondary tasks included making PR materials for events of MYSA or Shootback and activities connected with running of the programme. Interns lived near headquarters of the organization in Komarock district, travelling during weekends to held the workshops in various MYSA offices. There was a several outcomes of the internship, including posters for football tournament organized by MYSA, pictures taken through camera obscura technique, short fiction film, stop-motion animation or series of documentary pictures.

Shrnutí

Stáž GLEN nazvaná „Školení mladých lidí v různých formách médií“ se uskutečnila v kenském Nairobi mezi srpnem a říjnem 2012. Stážisté programu GLEN pracovali v Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), místní organizaci založené v roce 1987 a zamerané na sportovní a komunitní rozvoj. MYSA nyní dosahuje na téměř 25 000 mladých lidí žijících především v místních slumech na východe mesta. Organizace se zameruje především na fotbal, ale v jejím rámci fungují mnohé další vzdělávací či umelecké programy. Jedním z nich je program nazvaný „Shootback“ ve kterém pracovali stážisté GLEN a prostřednictvím kterého jsou mladí lidé vzděláváni ve vizuálních médiích.

Hlavní zodpovedností stážistu bylo vedení mediálních dílen na rozličná témata – filmová produkce, dokumentární fotografie či stopmotion animace. Druhotné úkoly zahrnovaly vytváření PR materiálu pro události organizace nebo cinnosti spjaté s chodem programu Shootback. Stážisté bydleli poblíž centrály orgniazce ve čtvrti Komarock a o víkendech dojížděli organizovat dílny do různých poboček organizace. Výstupem stáže byly například plakáty pro fotbalový turnaj, fotografie porízené metodou camera obscura, krátký hraný film, stopmotion animace či série dokumentárních fotografií.

Introduction

In this report I would like to share my view about internship that I underwent between August and October 2012 in Kenyan NGO called Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), in its visual media programme called Shootback. Before I start with this task, I will say a few words about the way I got to know about GLEN and also about my motivation to apply for this programme.

It was 2011 and I was volunteering in a South Korean countryside, in a local high school. It was already late autumn and I was thinking about what I will do during next year and I remembered that INEX-s.d.a., the organization through which I applied for the volunteering project, also offers a chance to apply for internships in a developing countries. I checked on the current offering and I was positively surprised to find out that one of the internships deals with visual media, an area that is very close to me. I used to study documentary filmmaking at journalism school, visual anthropology at faculty of humanities and I dealt with photography and filmmaking since my late childhood.

After some research I decided to apply and I have to admit that I felt quite good about my chances to succeed in a selection procedure. It wasn't out of pride, I just felt that both my professional, academic and volunteering experiences made me a good candidate and prepared me quite well for what would be coming. Now, after the internship ended, I am happy to say – generally speaking – that my initial feelings proved right.

Kenya, MYSA, Shootback

MYSA is based in Nairobi and is very much connected with its eastern part, the part where most of the city's slums are located (all but one: Kibera, one of the biggest slums in Africa, is located in the southern part of the city). And it is like that since foundation of MYSA in 1987. Before I go on talking about what MYSA do, let me say a few words about current situation in Kenya.

Kenya is known to be a politically stable and peaceful country, at least in a context of the region. There is a semi-presidential system of government and thus the role of a president is quite big and influential. Thus the importance of a presidential elections which seems to represent the peaks of tensions in a society in the last decades. In 2007 there was a tensed situation after the elections: Both of the candidates claimed victory and as a result, tribal-based conflicts arose, prominently in a Nairobi slum areas. Since next presidential elections were supposed to be held in August 2012, I was little worried at first and was following the news in media during spring 2012. In the end, the

elections got postponed to spring 2013. Being in contact with people in Kenya, I could feel that there is a tension growing as the elections are getting closer in time. Tribalism which fueled those conflicts in 2007 seems to be still rooted in many parts of Kenyan society. On the other hand, I met many young people who doesn't claim affiliation to any of the tribes and mark themselves as „kenyan“. I do hope that the next elections will be conflict-free.

To use some cliché, „Nairobi is a city of contrasts“. The villa districts of Westlands and Karen, the business districts of downtown, slums of Mathare valley or middleclass estates of Komarock, these all represent quite different reality for a visitor and especially for its inhabitants. I remember one time when we went for a cinema and Peter (our supervisor) drove us from Komarock, a district where we lived and where MYSA have its headquarters, to a shopping mall in Westlands. The journey took approximately 25 minutes but it felt like we passed through two different worlds. At one moment you are in a poorly lit street with shadowy figures passing you by (and Peter is commenting on a murder rate in the area) and before you know it you are arriving to a posh shopping mall that you wouldn't be able to differentiate from other places like this in Europe's most luxurious districts. On the other hand, there are some signs that Kenyan middle class is growing, Komarock district where we lived being one of its localities. So, maybe the contrast colours of Nairobi are going to get more hues in time.

MYSA was founded by Bob Munro, a Canadian worker of UN at the time, and is a sport and community development organization. And youth organization, I should add: Most of its members are children and youth, many of its employees are in their 20's or 30's. From the beginning and up until now, the main tool which MYSA uses is a football which is extremely popular among young people in Kenya. MYSA uses this popularity to address kids and young people in eastern part of the city – to get them together, to let them form football teams and participate in leagues and tournaments, but also to inform them about HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, about family and financial planning or to let them work on their other talents in dancing, singing or – and this is the part where Shootback comes in – in photography and filmmaking. Shootback started in 1997 and was founded by an American photographer Lana Wong who distributed 30 simple photo cameras among local children and taught them how to use them properly. As a result of her activities there was a book called „Shootback“ published and it got a wide acclaim. Until now, this is the most prominent result of Shootback activities and it's fair to say that Shootback is somehow still fueled by this momentum of its start. Peter Ndolo, current supervisor of Shootback, was a part of this, being one of the young people who participated in the first workshops. I think that this is one of MYSA's trademarks, young people getting some education and experiences and later on sharing those in a

position of a facilitator or trainer. I believe there is many examples like this among players/trainers of MYSAs football teams, thus in the very core of the organization.

Our work

Me, Asja and Piotrek, my colleagues during the internship, arrived to Nairobi one week before planned start of our work. We agreed with Peter Ndolo via email and he was kind enough to come and pick us up in the middle of the night when we arrived to Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. As I mentioned already, Peter is a supervisor of Shootback, a photography and filmmaking programme of MYSAs in which we worked. Being in Nairobi one week in advance gave us a chance to accommodate ourselves, to acclimatize and to meet our co-workers in MYSAs.

Our primary task during our internship was to prepare and to lead workshops for kids and youth who were interested in some form of visual media. Secondary tasks included making PR materials for MYSAs and Shootback events and activities connected with running of the programme. After initial meetings with Peter we agreed to do a three series of a monthly workshops and also that it will be us, not the participants, who will travel to get to given place. It is my understanding that in a previous years most of the workshops took place in MYSAs HQ in Komarock district and the participants were traveling there from different parts of eastern Nairobi. The travel costs were covered by Shootback. As I said, it was different this time: Since Shootback is now heavily struggling with a lack of finances, Peter decided that it would be easier if we will be the one traveling (at our own expenses; it was usually approximately 200 ksh per weekend). For me – and I think for none of us - this was not a problem, I was actually happy to see and discover another districts of Nairobi.

In September two Norwegian girls came to Shootback to work mainly on a preparation of second edition of Shootback's own film festival (MYFF – Mathare Youth Film Festival). There was also one guy from Denmark who helped with this task and did some fundraising for the event. We didn't participated in this, the festival took place few weeks after our departure. It's fair to say that MYFF is currently the most significant event hosted by Shootback in a course of the year.

Workshops in August

In August we had two distinct workshops – me and Asja prepared a series about process of filmmaking, Piotrek's workshops dealt with topic of camera obscura. Since our workshops were targeting youth from Komarock and neighboring Kayole district, we held workshops in MYSAs HQ and didn't have to travel much this month. The workshops took place on the weekends when the

participants were not in school, this was true for the following months as well. Since I read internship reports of previous glennies I was not surprised by this fact, but still I was little sad that we didn't have more time to spend with the participants.

In our filmmaking group was around 10 people in the beginning, but not everyone showed up in the following weeks. But it was alright, at least 6 people were active all the time. Since there is not much of a usable technical equipment in Shootback (but there are some microphones, a few compact cameras and a DSLR camera of Peter Ndolo that can be usually used), we had to struggle a bit and improvise in terms of preparation of the workshops that were focused on filmmaking. To give an example, during an exercise for „framing“ of a picture we made a rectangular shaped frames out of carton, let the participants run around with it to find an „image“ (with one eye closed, looking through the frame) and then we were coming to them and letting them show us what they framed.

In the beginning of a month Asja gave a lecture about film idea development, writing a treatment and a screenplay, I introduced different stages of a filmmaking process and also basics of cinematography. Our goal for the month was to make a short fiction movie, as we agreed with the participants in the very beginning. It was quite difficult for the participants to come up with a simple story that would follow the „rules“ of drama structure as we introduced it to them, but in the end – and with our supervision — they managed to do that. At that moment they divided themselves in roles for shooting and next weekend we supervised a two day shooting of the film. Unfortunately we'd already been one week behind our schedule so the editing of the movie was up to me and Asja. Although this was a pity, I think this workshop was quite successful and hopefully inspired some of the participants to go on with their interest in filmmaking. I think our cooperation with Asja was fine – both of us have a different expertise in a filmmaking process and thus we could divide responsibilities accordingly. I don't remember having some serious problems during those workshops: There were just some minor troubles with timekeeping (which is important, especially during shooting of a film) on the side of the participants and patience (not any less important) on our side.

In the end of August there was a big football tournament for girl teams organized by MYSA and we helped with some tasks connected with it. I made a poster of the event, Asja made banners that were installed around the pitch during the tournament. Piotrek prepared an exhibition of the photos made during his camera obscura workshops. During the event (that lasted for 3 days) we helped with Shootback exhibition stand installation, I had a responsibility of distributing of photo cameras to youth shootback members that were documenting the event and together with Asja we also made a short documentary video that focused on several people participating in the event.

Workshops in September and October

In September we moved our workshops to Eastleigh office, the very first branch of MYSA that opened in late 80s and that is located right next to Mathare slum. It took us approximately 30 minutes to get there using matatu, local transport van. During a week we mostly stayed in Komarock, preparing workshops from there or helping with another Shootback tasks and activities. In September and October all of us had different workshops: Piotrek did a stop-motion animation, Asja documentary filmmaking in September and musical video in October. However, we supported each other in the efforts and shared our experiences during discussions. As for myself, I decided to do a series of workshops dedicated to documentary photography: My monthly aim was to guide the participants to make a series of related pictures that would tell some story. Since I was quite satisfied with the results after one month, I chose to make the same workshop in October with new participants. In retrospect it was maybe a mistake, but it seemed like a good idea at the time.

During these workshops I was shortly introducing history of documentary photography genre, technical side of using a photo camera and, most importantly, essentials of taking pictures. All of the participants focused in their photo-stories primarily on the topic of environment, the living and working conditions of people – and animals – from Mathare and Eastleigh. One boy for example decided to compare environment of Mathare slum with more developed neighbouring district of Eastleigh, another one chose to tell a story about challenges that a vegetable seller have to face in the slum. As an instructor of the workshop, I was very glad to see that the participants proved to be very sensitive towards issues that affects life of people living around them and that they were able to tell their stories visually, using a simple photo cameras. Not everyone of the participants was so passionate about it, but I was happy about the few that proved to be interested in the media. Sometimes the participants started to discuss some issue (e.g. interpreting meaning of some particular picture) and I was glad that the pictures elicited different ideas and viewpoints. After all, the documentary photography is based on showing some viewpoint on reality around us so these discussion were vital parts of the workshops. Unfortunately, there was a lot of problems with attendance of participants in October, so the last workshops were not so successful. There were also security problems in the area of Eastleigh during one of the October's weekends (people were rioting against police after some incident) and that caused cancellation of two of the workshops.

Beside managing the workshops we did also some other small projects in October: For example, me and Piotrek shot a music video for a local hip-hop group and I also conducted a photography project in which I gave out analogue photo cameras to seven kids aged 11 to 14 who lives in Mathare slum. I gave them a task to document „places and things that you like and that you don't like where you

live". I did the same thing during my anthropological research in one slovakian gypsy colony back in 2010 and I am planning to do it several more times at several different places. In the end I want to make an exhibition out of the pictures. This project was not part of my Shootback activities, the goal was not in teaching photography skills, but in finding out how these kids perceive their lived space.

Challenges of our work

During our internship we had to face several challenges. First of all, we had to improvise and make use of a limited sources of Shootback. As I mentioned, there is not much technical equipment and at the moment Shootback lacks financial support from MYSA, in fact we learned in October that it is being „suspended“ formally at the moment (this affects initiation of new projects of Shootback). At the time of our internship, MYSA was in a process of restructuring, trying to find new sponsors after loosing some old ones and trying to make the run of the organization more smooth and effective. We were not really part of this, as Shootback interns we were just noticing the frequent meeting sessions and were informed about the results afterwards. But we could clearly see that Shootback is on the edge of MYSA and it manifested even spatially: During time of our internship, Shootback lost its lobby (which was used as a meeting and workshop room) to a database workers and one part of a dark room was transformed into a security room with monitors of CCTV. Even though there are other places in MYSA HQ that Shootback can use, it was a clear sign of Shootback's position in MYSA hierarchy. It seemed to me that Peter Ndolo doesn't really have strong word in MYSA's decision making and probably not even an ambition to change that. What was a fact, but for me not really a problem, was result of this described state of affairs: Since Shootback lacks support of MYSA in many ways, it is a bit detached from it (but on the other hand all of its programmes have its own agenda and events). For us that meant that we were in close contact with Peter (and Francis who shares office with him), but in a very rare contact with other MYSA personnel.

At least once per week, but usually more often, there was a blackout in MYSA which made it hard to work on workshop preparation, in a dark room or on video editing computer. Fortunately our house was usually not affected by blackouts and thus we could at least work from there at those times.

As a challenge I definitely have to mention the work with youth, the workshop participants. Sometimes it felt really difficult to make them interested during the workshops and to balance „fun“ part of it with some learning. Moreover, there was also on times quite significant age and knowledge difference among the participants, so it was difficult to set a level of speech and requirements. I have

to admit that after some of the workshops I was not satisfied with the execution, I can even say that I was frustrated. On other times I had a good feeling about it and hopefully so did the participants.

Piotrek tried hard to make us of a Shootback's well equipped dark room which was probably not used for couple of years. He cleaned the space and bought or repaired some parts of lamps and enlarger. In September me and him started a analogue photography workshop for 3 most active and talented young people who participated in our other workshops, but we didn't really succeed with it. We met with them several times, gave them analogue cameras, but in the end we were able to develop just couple of their films and I think only one of the pictures. I guess we would need much more time with them, since work in a dark room is very time consuming. Even though this was definitely a failure, I am glad we did try.

Our life in Komarock

I've already mentioned that we lived in Komarock district. We stayed at a house of Peter Ndolo's mother, where she stays with her youngest son. The house is located in one of the district's estates, a fenced, secured area. We had two rooms for ourselves, one was Asja's, the second one I shared with Piotrek. It took me a while to get use to small space of the room (the bunk bed occupied almost half of its space), but in the end I was fine with it – I made an „office“ of mine in the closet, placing my notebook in one of the shelves and sitting in an spacious armchair. Piotrek's improvised office contained of a wooden board placed on a strung cord. In front of our rooms there was a small yard where we used to sit, eat and talk. I think we were quite diverse team, each of us being quite specific and different from the others, but it somehow all worked out fine. We found some common ground in humour, some core intellectual values and I'd say also enthusiasm about our stay and the project.

We were going for a lunch to a local restaurant, eating usually beans or lentils with chapati. Dinners were usually prepared at the house from bought ingredients, sometimes by Tony, Peter Ndolo's brother and qualified cook, or by one of us, most frequently Asja.

It took around 15 minutes to walk to MYSA HQ. We were obviously being looked at on the streets of Komarock, with kids screaming „how are you?“ even from a distance and some people labeling us as „mzungu“ (white man in swahili), but we never had any major incidents and I felt quite safe in our district. But I have to admit that it took me couple of weeks to get use to walking around and I still tried to follow some basic rules of common sense for security (using primarily main crowded streets, for one). In and around slum areas we walked only with some locals – I visited some people living in slums several times and was always welcomed in a very nice way.

Conclusion

I hope that it is clear from the text that I was satisfied with the course and outcomes of the internship. I think we did a good job with our workshops and had fun doing it. The fact that most of the participants are attending school made it impossible to make the workshops on other times than weekends, sometimes – due to Saturday school courses or church mass services – even only weekend afternoons. We found a way of spending more time with youth by focusing on individuals who did have a time: Young MYSA volunteers who already graduated from school or people studying in a MYSA library.

We made some friends among young people and got a chance to see how it is to live in slums of Nairobi. Way of thinking and activities of some of the young people were very inspiring for me and this was the reason why I chose to document their lives photographically and exhibit these pictures later on in my home country as my global education activity. I will also include pictures taken by students. Together with a short texts introducing the people and their viewpoints I hope that this exhibition will give a specific insight into life of those whose „voice“ is usually too weak and distant to be heard here in Czech republic.

During time of the internship, I slightly re-evaluated some of my viewpoints and realized how truly privileged I am in terms of education, work opportunities or my living environment. The internship and the schooling seminars that preceded it also gave me a lot of time to think about course of my professional career. I strengthened my conviction that I should go on working with visual media, both in photography and filmmaking, focusing my attention on different aspects of contemporary society. I also realized that I would really like to continue working with young people. I could see that I have a long way in front of me in terms of approaching them successfully, being a really good mentor or a lecturer, but I do want to go on and try to improve my skills in this field.