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Uganda, ETW
Summer 2011

This past summer I spent two months in rural northern Uganda. As an ETW fellowship recipient, I undertook a project in partnership with a non-governmental organization (NGO) called the BOSCO (Battery Operated Systems for Community Outreach) Uganda Project and UNICEF Uganda. My initial goal was to launch a collaborative educational project that connected two classrooms in Uganda via the Internet. The two classrooms were to write articles about the progress of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals in their respective districts. The students would then share their articles with each other via a blog. The project was designed to teach students computer skills and writing skills, as well as teamwork with students from different tribes in other regions of Uganda. BOSCO works diligently to bring the benefits of the Internet to northern Uganda. I wanted to experiment with educational benefits that the web could bring rural classrooms that lacked basic educational supplies such as textbooks. In the process of launching this educational project, I wanted to experience how an international NGO works on the ground. Upon arrival I was pulled aside by the operations manager of BOSCO. She asked me what I had planned for my pilot project in the upcoming months. I had been under the impression that BOSCO and UNICEF were going to provide support staff to give a helping hand. It was at that moment that I realized that I was not going to be supervised. BOSCO was there to fund the project, but I was going to plan and carry it out solo.

My first classroom in the project was located in an outlying trading center called Lacor. I had twelve teachers and fifteen students in the class. I quickly realized that BOSCO had a shortage of computers at this remote classroom. There was solar-powered wireless Internet,

however it was difficult for almost thirty people to use two computers plus my MacBook. I quickly put in a request for additional funding from BOSCO. Within one day they had approved the purchase of four additional laptop computers for Lacor. However, the order of those computers took almost seven weeks to arrive. The BOSCO board had approved the purchase, but the NGO staff on the ground took several weeks to get quotes for the computers. It then took another three weeks for the computers to ship from Nairobi, Kenya. The laptops arrived a few days before I flew back to the United States. This experience taught me that the pace of business simply does not move as fast in the developing world. My excitement to help the students at Lacor primary school collided head-on with a fact of international development: It moves slowly, be patient.

The lack of resources in Lacor turned out to be a blessing in that it showed how resourceful the Acholi people are when the situation demands it. Brian, a student of mine, rigged a projector up to the battery that powers the wireless Internet. Using the projector, I was able to walk the entire class through setting up Gmail accounts, using word processing, posting on a blog, etc. After these walkthrough lessons the students and teachers would take turns on the three computers.

After five weeks of lessons in Lacor, I moved to central Uganda for two weeks. Notre Dame has a strong presence at Uganda Martyr's University in Nkozi, Uganda. I decided to use UMU as a home base for the second phase of my project. Thanks to the help of Lacey Haussamen, from the Ford Family Program at Notre Dame, I was able to connect with St. Mary's Nkozi secondary school. The school in Nkozi turned out to be a well-to-do boarding school. It was light-years ahead of Lacor in terms of the students English speaking abilities and computer skills. St. Mary's had the opposite problem of Lacor. They had a computer lab,

however they did not have Internet connection when I arrived. They were several hundred miles outside of BOSCO's wireless network zone. I quickly consulted with their Director of Studies and we purchased wireless modems. This kind of on-the-spot changing of plans was a theme of the summer.

In about two weeks, I was able to train thirty students at St. Mary's Nkozi. The students in grades Senior 1 through Senior 6 wrote articles about various issues surrounding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in their community. The students used the Internet to research particular MDGs and then interview community members to collect information from around their villages. The students wrote on topics raging from HIV/ADIS, primary school education, lack of clean drinking water, maternal health, etc. They then posted their articles on a blog, which is being shared between the class in Lacor and the class in Nkozi.

My initial goals of launching the project were successfully completed. Both classes are interacting on the blog and through email. I handed the project off to BOSCO Uganda at the end of the summer. It will be fascinating to see if the project develops further. UNICEF Uganda and UNICEF Finland officials inspected the pilot project towards the end of the summer and appeared to be impressed with its progress. UNCIEF has recently partnered with BOSCO. They are interested in expanding BOSCO's educative initiatives in the future.

The initial success of this pilot project suggests that access to the Internet can be a highly valuable tool in educating Ugandans from poor rural areas. The collaborative student journalism project taught these young Ugandans valuable computer, writing, and research skills. It allowed students to become active participants in researching problems within their communities. They were excited to access the vast information resources that the web offers. In the future, I can see

the web empowering many Ugandans with information and communication abilities that they never before had access to.

This being said, there are enormous logistical difficulties in bringing technology to rural Ugandan classrooms. Progress was extremely slow going and without the support of BOSCO, would have been cost-prohibitive. Integrating technology into rural classrooms will take years before it truly becomes efficient enough to implement on a widespread basis.