

**Kellogg-Kroc Undergraduate Research Grant
Project Report**

Human Capital as an Approach to Sustainable Development in Uganda
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I returned to Uganda this summer for the second time to do research for my senior honors thesis. In June of 2006 I arrived in Kampala, the capital city, without contacts or any understanding of the country save what I had read in books and scholarly articles. This initial exposure to Uganda was difficult. It taught me that any strategies for development must be informed by the immediate community that is meant to benefit from them; an outside party cannot expect to fully understand the complex relationship between Ugandans and the poverty from which they suffer. As a researcher, I had to learn to listen.

My introduction to Uganda also left me with a deep respect and gratitude for the Ugandan people. Because I lacked formal outlets for my research, I turned to the people I encountered by chance throughout my stay. I made an effort to ask taxi drivers or waitresses about their lives and most were insightful and dignified in their responses. These experiences imbued me with a confidence in individuals that caused my research to follow in the direction of investigating the potential of human capital as a means for sustainable development. This summer, I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to interview individual villagers in the rural parish of Nnindye in central Uganda.

My research partner and fellow Kellogg scholar, Shawn Finlen, and I interviewed ninety-two villagers who we randomly selected from the close to four thousand residents of Nnindye, which is divided into twelve villages. We spent the initial part of our stay visiting schools, health centers, trading posts and church services so that members of the

community would know who we were and why we were there. This introduction also gave us some context for the interviews we would soon perform. Although we had the support of Uganda Martyrs University and their community outreach program as well as the community chairpersons, I was skeptical as to how Shawn and I would be received by the villagers.

At the same time that we familiarized ourselves with the community, we revised a seventy-two-question survey with the help of the professors at Uganda Martyrs University and our translators. We also administered a test version of the survey to ten villagers before we were able to draft the final copy. It was important that we checked our wording for cultural sensitivity and ensured that both translators interpreted each question in the same way. Our interview questions had to be simple enough for the average rural villager to contemplate but probing enough to elicit an insightful narrative about the life of each respondent. We asked questions that covered issues in health care, water availability and sanitation, livelihood, education and community involvement. I wanted villagers to share their aspirations and struggles with me. I also aimed to determine which aspects of the insufficient rural infrastructure placed the biggest strain on the available human capital of Nnindy.

My hypothesis is that, if certain activities (i.e. collecting water, sanitizing water and manual farm work) were made more efficient from improvements in the development of the parish, then disposable human capital would increase and the resulting surplus in time and energy could be directed towards income generating activities. This additional income would initially cover basic needs but could ultimately be reinvested in further developments so as to liberate additional human capital and move beyond subsistence

agriculture to value added endeavors. I could not determine which activities absorb the most human capital in Nnindy; I needed to ask the villagers themselves.

I expected some percentage of the villagers we approached to refuse to be interviewed. No one did. I was even more surprised by how graciously I was welcomed onto people's farms and into their homes, where we performed all of our interviews. This physical setting was ideal and allowed me to see the way villagers lived in addition to hearing about their lives. Once again, I felt unmatched gratitude for how much people were willing to give, in terms of time, personal stories, and sometimes even the little they owned.

On one occasion, I was invited back to the home of Mr. Ssemanda, a representative of the Buganda King who was appointed to show my translator and me around the village where he lived. Mr. Ssemanda insisted that we share some of his sugar cane and told me about his nine children who he is trying to put through school. Despite his connection to the king, Mr. Ssemanda is not a wealthy man and was struggling to collect enough funds so that one of his older daughters could return to secondary school. She had had to leave the previous week due to lack of school fees. I politely declined his repeated request that he serve me a full lunch out of the desire not to impose but he insisted that we stay and eat with him in his garden. Four of Mr. Ssemanda's daughters served us all heaping plates of matooke, a staple Ugandan meal, and I wondered whether their family would have enough food to eat supper that evening. Most of the respondents I interviewed eat only one or two meals a day between working long hours on their farms and collecting water and firewood.

Although time restraints prevented Shawn and me from performing enough interviews to make our data statistically significant, we left Nnindye with a collection of poignant narratives representing life in rural Uganda. I learned that poor water availability and sanitation as well as inefficient farming practices absorb the majority of human capital in the village. Some respondents lived up to three kilometers away from the nearest water source, which was rarely clean enough to drink, and needed to fetch water at least once a day by foot or bicycle. None of my respondents used farming equipment more advanced than a wooden hoe or a metal rake to prepare acres of farmland. These activities are so time and energy intensive that there is little for the villagers to devote to anything other than providing food and water to their immediate families. There is only a small agricultural surplus to sell and the income generated from these sales is almost never sufficient enough to reinvest a portion in developments that might break the cycle of subsistence agriculture in which Nnindye is trapped.

I will be providing a full analysis of the data I collected in Nnindye in my senior honors thesis for political science. I am also applying for post-graduate research fellowships to continue my investigations in Nnindye. In future stages of my research I hope to determine whether the ways in which women are treated in a rural community have any bearing on agricultural productivity. I feel honored to have forged a meaningful connection with the people of Nnindye, and I cannot wait to return.