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When people ask me about my summer, I am never quite sure what to say. I usually settle for “amazing” or “fantastic”, but these descriptors leave out so much of the richness of opportunity that I had the privilege to experience. I worked with the Foundation for Sustainable Development, which is an organization that unites American interns with Ugandan NGOs. The organization that I was placed with was St. Jude Family Projects.

The support that I received from Foundation for Sustainable Development is one of the reasons that I think my internship was so successful. FSD provided me with an in-country orientation and an in-country support system. There are three FSD staff people in-country, two Ugandans and one American. I found that the presence of these three people helped me to succeed in that they were willing to help me work with my host organization if I ran into problems that I could not resolve. While I never needed to call upon FSD directly, their presence was none the less a comfort to me. Additionally, FSD provided me with a network of other interns, including those who had arrived at the same time as me as well as those who had arrived before me and were doing similar work. I found that these connections were very valuable. For example, if I told you that you needed to build an in-ground rainwater harvesting tank for a household in Uganda, would you have any idea where to start? If you are like me, or most of the American interns that I knew in Uganda, building a rainwater harvesting tank involves a great deal of technical knowledge that we did not have going in. Questions such as “How long does it take to build?”, “How much does it cost?”, “How much water can be collected?”, and “How much water does a household need?” seem daunting and insurmountable. Tools that we have come to rely on in the United States—like Google—are often irrelevant to the problems facing

Uganda. So how can you get the phone number for the guy who digs rainwater harvesting tanks? Well, you need to know someone who knows something about that, and that is where the in-country network comes in. I worked with an NGO that had a demonstration sustainable farm, so I gave other interns tours and information. In return, they taught me about the savings and loans systems of their community groups. We made each other more successful.

In terms of my specific project, I decided to help my NGO in a variety of ways. First, I helped to build the capacity of Saint Jude. I organized a curriculum on nutrition that could be taught to community groups affiliated with Saint Jude and instructed the trainers employed by Saint Jude on how to teach the nutrition curriculum. The community needed this curriculum because although they were successfully growing fruits and vegetables, they did not know enough about nutrition to create a balanced diet. As a result, children who lived on farms and were surrounded with nutritious foods were still suffering from malnutrition because they were eating only the staple carbohydrates of the Ugandan diet. This curriculum has been incorporated into the program that Saint Jude teaches new community groups, and it is in the process of being taught to the community groups with which it has already been working. This is a sustainable project because it is now part of the Saint Jude Program, and it will continue to be taught as new groups affiliate themselves with Saint Jude.

The second way that I helped to build capacity was by creating a website for St. Jude Family Projects and teaching the organization how to maintain it. The organization felt that a website would help to increase the visibility of the projects, as well as be beneficial for international grant applications. In the past, they had not had a website because although they could pay someone to set one up, no one at the organization knew how to update it. I used Microsoft Publisher, user-friendly software to set up the website, and then trained the secretary

and the accountant how to make changes and update it. The trainings to teach the secretary and accountant allow the website to be sustainable and constantly up-to-date.

Thirdly, I facilitated new connections between Saint Jude, community-based trainers, and local clinics. The community had expressed that they felt a lack of accurate health information, and many people were concerned about specific diseases, including malaria, HIV, diabetes and the flu. At the same time, local clinics expressed that they felt that they were unable to adequately engage in preventative health campaigns because they were so over-worked with dealing with the symptoms. I created a group of community based trainers (CBTs) that would meet once a week with a nurse from the clinic. This both facilitates the flow of accurate health information to the community and gives the clinics a low-cost way to engage in preventative health. The meeting is facilitated by Saint Jude, who provides the transport and a small stipend for the nurse. Each meeting, the group discusses a health issue that they have identified as relevant to their lives. The involvement of the clinic as a partner, as well as the investment of the community in teaching their peers gives this group sustainability.

The second approach that I took was to work specifically with one community group located in Kisojjo. This group had received training from St. Jude in the past, but was still suffering from symptoms of malnutrition, despite the growth of fruits and vegetables. I began working with this group as part of the nutrition curriculum, and then moved forward with the group by identifying challenges to nutrition and how to overcome them. The group identified two main challenges, the theft of their food and the inability to grow as well in the dry season. The community brainstormed solutions to each of the problems and decided that in order to reduce theft, they should teach the rest of their community about some of the successful agriculture techniques that Saint Jude had taught them. This would reduce the need of their

neighbors to steal, which creates a sustainable solution to theft while helping the rest of the community to have better food security. The solution that they decided upon in regards to the dry season was to preserve food to be eaten during this season using sun-drying. I helped teach the community how to build a sun-dryer out of local materials and then store dried food. This, in conjunction with the agriculture training that they have already received, gives the community sustainable access to nutritious food during the dry season.

Another problem that the Kisojjo group was facing was that they had a savings program but no way to document the savings or keep them safe. I held a training session to show the group how to use a cashbook and personal passbooks. Using a system of documentation that allows a group copy and a personal copy allows everyone to have confidence that their money is secured. I also equipped the group with passbooks, a cashbox and a cashbook in order to allow the group to have a trusted savings system. A savings group is sustainable because it allows people to have greater security through their own efforts. My project merely served to build on the project that the group already had in place, which makes the intern's project more sustainable.

I am very happy with the projects that I was able to produce over the course of the summer. When I first arrived in Uganda, the task of creating a project seemed almost overwhelming to me, but when I look back, I am proud of the projects I was able to create. Had you asked me at the beginning of the summer, I never would have believed that I could have accomplished this. I surprised myself in many ways. Although coming in I would have classified myself as a person who takes initiative, I often had to venture out of my comfort zone to make things happen. In a similar way, I believe my time in Uganda made me a more focused, patient and adventurous person.

To those of you who are about to go to Masaka, Uganda, be assured that I am insanely jealous. There will be times this summer that will challenge you, that will frustrate you, that will upset you. But most of all, this summer will be rewarding in a way that you never even thought possible. When I worked with my community group, they would often give me gifts as I departed. One day, they gave me a live chicken. Every time that they showered me with gifts, I thought to myself, “No! You need this! I am trying to make your lives better, you cannot be giving *me* your food.” As difficult as it was for me, I would accept their gifts and thank them profusely because not accepting their hospitality would have been offensive. I was always concerned that they were giving me more than I was giving them. And in the end, I learned that this is how the world works. In the situations where you seek to give, you gain more than you could have ever imagined. You try to empty yourself for others, and you find yourself overflowing. That is what I learned this summer.