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Working with the Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD) in Jinja, Uganda, was without a doubt the best summer of my life. Not only did I personally learn a tremendous amount from the experience, but I feel like I was able to contribute to my host organization in a tangible way. Certainly there were challenges and difficulties throughout the internship, but through patience, flexibility, and guidance, I was able to maintain focus and have a remarkable experience.

One of the best aspects of my internship was living with a Ugandan host family, the Kadamas. FSD coordinated this arrangement, and through the Kadama family's generosity and kindness I quickly became an essential part of the family. Ceasar, a water engineer, has a wonderful high-pitched laugh and is a force at the local pool hall. Lydia, a school accountant, is incredibly articulate and would often share her analysis on a variety of issues, usually cultural differences between the U.S. and Uganda. She also taught me skills essential to living in Uganda – how to cook matooke, chapatti, and ground nut sauce. In addition I got to spend time with their two children, Ivan (almost 4 years) and Ivy (around 10 months), as well as any other random families member in the area that day. Ivan loved to jabber at me in Lusoga (the local language) while Ivy went from screaming whenever I was within sight (I don't think she had seen a white person before) to waving at me when I went to work each morning. Living with a Ugandan family and forging these deep relationships is something I truly will never forget.

FSD also placed me with a host organization, Skills Plus, where I worked for the duration of my internship. Skills Plus is a small community based organization that currently offers four programs that serve the surrounding Bugembe community. These programs include computer

training, tailoring as an income generating activity, HIV/AIDS counseling training, and HIV/AIDS orphan support with school supplies and fees. During the application process I had expressed an interest in grassroots community development and the work and mission of Skills Plus fit my interests well. Seeing and experiencing firsthand the challenges and struggles of community-based development was enlightening. Like many small non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Skills Plus operates on a shoe-string budget, is nearly always low on money, financial and client records are in disarray, and there is one full-time employee who basically does everything. Yet despite these challenges, they are making a real and positive difference in their community.

My task during these eight weeks was to conduct a “needs assessment” of the organization, figure out a work plan in conjunction with my supervisor, and then proceed to execute our ideas. FSD provides a \$200 ‘seed grant’ to each intern, which I used to construct my project. FSD interns also have the opportunity to apply for additional funding through FSD, which I did and successfully received an extra \$437.50.

But what exactly was my project? It was difficult to find a good sustainable project considering that I was only going to be in Uganda for a limited time and that it would take many weeks for me to begin to truly understand the needs of the community. Knowing this, I decided to focus my efforts on building the capacity of Skills Plus so that as an organization it would be better able to serve its community in the future. Specifically, my project focused on building technical and administrative capacity within the organization. This included creating electronic records of its clients and finances as well as buying plastic covers and voltage protection devices to protect Skills Plus’ computers. With the added funding we were able to purchase an additional computer to replace the computer currently rented by Skills Plus. The monthly rent

money could then be allocated to support the tailoring program, enabling Skills Plus to buy an additional sewing machine every four months.

Patience and flexibility emerged as essential tools for me in Uganda as almost my entire work plan required electricity to be functioning properly, which was rare. I had figured electric power would be worse in Uganda but I didn't really appreciate the obstacle it presents. In particular, during my internship Skills Plus experienced a three-and-a-half week power blackout, in which there wasn't a day when electricity worked. This was probably one of the most frustrating times of my internship, as I struggled to maintain focus and progress with my project. However, even when there was electricity, it was so inconsistent that we would often have power only half the day. Nearly my entire work plan involved computers, so when there was no power I had to find the local computer café and try to work for a few hours. But often power was out there as well. These unexpected delays forced me to reevaluate my work plan, be patient, and actively engage Ugandans in conversations. Through the help of very friendly and talkative co-workers as well as good books, I was able to overcome these frustrations and remain positive (though it wasn't always easy).

Outside of my formal work plan, I also had the opportunity to observe the day-to-day operations of the organization and I met with a variety of local politicians and businessmen who are sympathetic to the work that Skills Plus does. These interactions were both fascinating and very educational for me because nearly everyone I interacted with seemed excited at the opportunity to engage someone from the U.S. in a conversation. Most importantly, I was able to join my supervisor when he went into the community to visit some of the women and children being helped by Skills Plus' tailoring and orphan support programs. These trips were some of the most difficult of the internship. But I will never forget them.

Given the short nature of the internship, I am very pleased with my experiences in Uganda. It was personally challenging in many ways, but I feel like I was a productive member of Skills Plus and the friendships formed during my internship will hopefully continue into the future. Not only did I gain a strong appreciation for Ugandan culture and society, but I feel like my Ugandan friends learned a bit about the U.S. as well. Ultimately, I learned the most by just sitting, talking, and “being” with my Ugandan friends. I hope I am able to return to Uganda in the future but my memories and the profound hope of the Ugandan people continue to motivate me today.