

Kaitlyn Maloney
Women in Progress
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Having just returned to the United States after nine weeks in Ghana, the most frequent question I have been receiving (after, of course, “How was it?!”) is “Was it what you expected?” This is a hard question for me to answer because despite all the articles I read and people I spoke to about Ghana, when I boarded the plane on the night of May 10th, I had no idea what to expect. I was only sure of two things: one, that it would be hot, and two, that there would be mosquitoes. In this regard, Ghana did meet my expectations—I have never sweated more in my life, and bug spray became such an integral part of my routine that I still apply it compulsively here in the States! But it was the unexpected aspects of Ghana that have made the most powerful marks on my life: the internship that was more than just a summer job, the landscapes that took my breath away, the friendships formed with both Ghanaians and people from all over the world, and the beautiful culture that I was fortunate enough to experience.

I went to Ghana with the hopes of improving my business skills through interning in an international environment. My internship assignment was to spend nine weeks working with the non-governmental organization Women in Progress. Women in Progress was founded by two former Peace Corps volunteers who had been stationed in Ghana in the early nineties. While in Ghana, they realized that while there were many non-profits working to educate Ghanaians, not enough foreign aid was focusing on giving Ghanaian people the opportunity to use and profit from their educations. Thus, they developed Women in Progress with the mission of helping achieve sustainable growth among small businesses and promote economic development in southern Ghana. They chose the name Women in Progress because they intended to primarily help struggling women entrepreneurs.

Closely associated with Women in Progress is the NGO Global Mamas. Global Mamas is a fair trade organization offering Ghanaian seamstresses and batikers the opportunity to develop their businesses through education, fair wages, and the opportunity to export their products abroad. (Batiking

is an ancient method of stamping and dying cloth.) This was my first surprise: though I was an intern for Women in Progress, I worked in the Global Mamas office in Cape Coast, Ghana, and most of my responsibilities were directly associated with Global Mamas.

I was assigned four major projects to complete over the course of my internship. My main assignment was to teach computer skills to the women of Global Mamas. *How hard could that possibly be?* I thought. *I use computers every day.* However, this project quickly taught me two major truths about life in Ghana: nothing is straightforward, and often things do not go as planned. Before I could teach computer classes, I needed a curriculum. Since the old Global Mamas curriculum was entirely outdated, I had to essentially create a computer textbook from scratch before I could begin giving lessons.

The textbook was a ton of work, but it turned out great. Creating it helped me improve my computer skills as well. Once finished, I taught one-on-one lessons to the Ghanaian women, which also proved to be more challenging than I had expected. I suppose I underestimated how difficult seemingly second-nature actions such as moving and controlling a mouse were to women who may never have even seen, let alone operated, a computer before. The lessons turned out to be highly beneficial, and I received the wonderful opportunity to speak with the women and learn about their lives, as well as witness their excitement in mastering even the most basic of computer functions.

The other large project I tackled as an intern was the revamping of a fishing village tourist excursion offered by Global Mamas. Global Mamas hosts tourist workshops in Ghanaian cooking, drumming and dancing, batiking, and head-wrapping as a means of stimulating the local economy. Several years ago, the organization also offered a popular tour of a traditional fishing village, but the tour had been discontinued due to a corrupt tour guide and poor village support. Another intern and I were given the task of getting the village excursion up and running again. This involved visiting Ahwiado, the fishing village, and working closely with the chief, elders, and other villagers.

Working with Ahwiado was one of the most memorable experiences of my stay. Unlike Cape

Coast, which is large and urban by Ghanaian standards, Ahwiado is small and remote. The village, sandwiched between the ocean and a large fishing lagoon, is beautiful, but it lacks running water, electricity, roads, and regular contact with outsiders. It was hard for me to believe it was real! The villagers, however, were excited about the prospects of bringing visitors to the village, especially since visitors (particularly whites), they explained, enhanced the reputation of the village with the chiefs of the region. The villagers were very hospitable to the other intern and me. On our first visit they climbed coconut trees to offer us refreshments—a very cool sight! With their help we were able to put together a tour itinerary and promotional materials, as well as determine a cost breakdown that would help the village achieve its goal of installing a greatly needed public latrine.

While these two tasks took up much of my time, I also worked on several smaller, but equally as beneficial projects while at Global Mamas. I developed a PowerPoint instructing the Global Mamas on healthy living practices; I researched and compiled a strategy for marketing Global Mamas soaps and shea butters in the United States and Europe; I aided with the interviewing of new Global Mamas; and I assembled a public relations kit for Women in Progress interns and volunteers to use to promote the organization's missions back at home. I put much effort into each project, as I was so proud of and motivated by Women in Progress/Global Mamas' mission. Additionally, as a business student, each day in the office provided new lessons on how a business, particularly an international non-for-profit, is run.

My supervisors at Global Mamas were wonderful. Realizing the benefits of an experience abroad, they encouraged my fellow volunteers and me to travel and see as much of the country as possible. I never expected that in Ghana I would stand ten feet from an elephant, cross a canopy walk hundreds of feet high in the rainforest, hike up mountains, or swim in waterfalls, but I did all these and more during my stay. In my travels I met volunteers from all over the world, further expanding my network and worldview. Additionally, I worked with a diverse group of volunteers at Global Mamas, some of whom I became great friends with and still keep in touch with. I feel blessed to have been able

to develop such an extensive network of people who care about me around the globe!

I am proud of my work with Women in Progress/Global Mamas, and I am excited to hear about all the wonderful things the organizations will do in the future. Perhaps the best examples of the good the organization is doing are the successes of the women it serves. For instance, I had the privilege of befriending a Global Mama named Esther, who, after expanding her seamstressing business greatly, is now working on starting her own NGO teaching young women to sew. Esther's story is a model of "pay it forward" in action, an encouraging reminder of the powers of kindness and perseverance.

Friends of mine joke that I went to Africa to "save the world." While that would be a wonderful accomplishment, it is not true. I feel as though my stay in Ghana did more for me than I did for it—while the Ghana I left was essentially the same as the Ghana I met initially, I left markedly changed. My future ambitions are now much clearer, as I have a new-found passion for international business and global development. Whereas I used to worry about which city I will end up in, I now anxiously dream about which country I will work in next. Perhaps someday I will change the world. For now, it is encouraging to know that there are people like those at Women in Progress/Global Mamas that are doing just that.