

SUSTAIN MICRO ENTERPRISE TEAM BLOG

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Date: January 12, 2021
Topic: First Week of Work

The first week of work with Sustain Micro Enterprise (SME) and Foundation for Community-Based Sustainable Development (FSD) is over and we have definitely learned a lot. Much of what we have learned has been focused on sustainable development and designing a sustainable, impactful project based on the community's needs. With Sustain Micro Enterprise, and our host Samuel, we met with the Tweekembe Women's Group in Konko, Uganda. Through discussions with the women and Samuel we decided to help SME implement a savings program using the VSLA methodology (Village Savings and Loans Associations). We worked outside of our meetings with FSD and Samuel to research VSLA and plan our project. For FSD we submitted a work plan and a budget, detailing how we would spend our time and funding. I think this savings program can have a serious impact on the Tweekembe group. During our community assessment they described how the pandemic has slowed their incomes. Hopefully, through group savings, the women will empower each other through this crisis.



Date: January 13, 2021
Topic: First Day of Project Implementation

Today was the first day we spent working with Tweekembe Women's Group on VSLA. We used part of our budget to hire a VSLA trainer, and she ran the first workshop today since she's most experienced with the model. We've been preparing for the next three days of workshops, when we will be responsible for contributing to the session material. It's been an interesting challenge to create workshops that are engaging and informative for the women, especially keeping in mind that most lack formal business training and are illiterate. Instead of a pure lecture, we've adapted to use stories, visuals, and interactive questions to teach topics. Most of the women do not speak English (one of Uganda's national languages and spoken by educated Ugandans), and instead speak an ethnic language, Luganda. Because of this language barrier, we also used a translator to communicate with the group. Creating materials for teaching Tweekembe Women's Group about VSLA has been an exciting and educational challenge, and we're looking forward to the coming days of implementation when we will take a more active role.



Date: January 22, 2021
Topic: Cultural Immersion

One of the best parts of the internship so far has been our cultural immersions. Even though we weren't able to travel in person to Uganda, we got to engage with many different locals, learn about different aspects of the culture, and even learn some Luganda phrases. Earlier in the internship we took language lessons to prepare to engage with our community and we learned some common Luganda sentences like "wasuze otya", "sitoole ki", and "weebela nyo" which mean "how are you," "what's up," and "thank you very much." This week we had several cultural workshops and buddy chats which allowed us to learn more about life in Uganda. We discussed the COVID-19 pandemic and one of our favorite topics - FOOD! With our buddy Rodgers, we talked a lot about how the pandemic has affected our lives as college students. For him, he hasn't been in school since last march and so will miss out on an entire year of college. This week, he traveled back to Kampala to take his exams from last spring. He was a little jealous that we all got to be back in school full time and in person. In addition to discussion of the pandemic, we had a cultural workshop on traditional Ugandan foods and all different produce that grows there. One food we heard all about from Maggie (the leader of the cultural workshop) and Rodgers was chapati. Chapati is a traditional Ugandan flatbread most comparable to naan. Every Ugandan we spoke to shared how much they loved chapati or a Rolex - a chapati and egg roll up. Since we weren't able to travel to Uganda and try this fan favorite ourselves, we did our best to follow a recipe we found online and make our very own chapati. And it was delicious!



Date: January 26, 2021
Topic: Last Day of Project Implementation

We just finished our last day of project implementation with SME! Working with Samuel and the Tweekembe Women's Group has been such a great experience. Throughout the process, they were all so excited by the idea of beginning their own sustainable savings group, and it was great to see how engaged they were during each session. We even saw the number of participants increase - at the beginning of the training, there were 28 women participating, and by the end there were over 40! Today, we helped the women to create the constitution for their VSLA group. They were able to put together all the different pieces of what we had talked about (savings, borrowing, how to buy shares in the group, the Welfare Fund, interest, and record-keeping) to form the rules for their own group as well as elect a chairwoman and vice chairwoman, a secretary and vice secretary, a treasurer, two cashiers, a fund manager, and four key holders. Each of us in the group feel like we were really able to make an impact on the group and are looking forward to hearing from Samuel how it goes when the group starts saving. We're also excited to hear from him how the Business Plan Training goes since we left him with a guide on how to help the women set up a business plan. Between the Business Planning Workshop and the VSLA Training and Group Formation, we're hoping that the project will also help the women to recover from COVID-19, as many of them mentioned that this has severely impacted their businesses. While we're sad that it's over, we're so happy to have had the experience!

