

Midpoint with the Kasiisi Project

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So far, I am most proud of the women's empowerment workshop I developed with Eve, the Ugandan community health nurse here at the Kasiisi Project. For the other talks, such as STDs and early pregnancy, we had the information there in front of us, so we just needed to come up with a culturally sound way of presenting it to the students. For the women's empowerment talk, we were starting from scratch. This talk was very important because it took the other lessons we had worked on and applied them to the real world. Our goal was for these girls to understand why their

own health and education is so valuable. First, I ran an activity in which the girls each started by introducing themselves and saying what they wanted to be when they grew up. Then we discussed the challenges that young girls face in reaching these goals, challenges that boys might not face. Their answers included “if you don’t have enough money to pay for basic needs and school fees you can’t go to school”, “a girl might play sex with a man for him to pay for her school fees, but then she can get HIV/AIDS and have to leave”, “girls may be stuck in child-headed homes”, and “a girl might get pregnant and then get chased out of her school and her home”. These girls are only 12-15 years old, and even though I knew these were realities of this region, it was harder to hear it from them than from an article. But discussing ways to avoid or overcome these challenges gave me a lot of hope. Eve has taught them so much and I think they have gotten something out of my lessons as well, and even though it was a tough lesson it was also a very valuable discussion.

I had also prepared a section on powerful women in Uganda. I did a lot of research on important and powerful women across the country, and I this lesson was educational for me, as well as the girls. Each district of Uganda has 2 Members of Parliament, one man and one woman. Because of this structure, there are many more women in high governmental positions in Uganda than in many other East African countries. Just last year Rebecca Kadaga was appointed as the first female Speaker of Parliament. I also discussed a few female writers, professors and engineers with the girls, and had them share some of their own examples of powerful females. Overall, I was really proud of the women’s empowerment talk because I addressed a challenging topic in a culturally sensitive way by developing the talk with Eve, I got the girls to actively participate, and I learned quite a bit myself in the process.

I had a wide range of learning goals before coming here, but the main thing I’ve learned so far is that this NGO runs very differently on the Ugandan side than I expected. I’ve fundraised for the Kasiisi Project in the past, and I’ve even been here and seen the schools and the organization headquarters before. But last time I was in Kasiisi, I was only 15 and only here for 3 weeks, meaning I did not get a very deep understanding of how the organization actually runs. Being an intern here has taught me so much about the Ugandan side of this international organization which I think can apply to working in international NGOs in general.

One thing I've learned is that things run much more slowly on this side. In some ways it is a cultural difference. In board meetings, for example, there's a certain expectation that each person there shares their opinion, even if it means the meeting gets very repetitive. However, things also move much slower because in the developing world, simple tasks often take much longer to get done. For example, we needed to rent tents for a big event we have coming up. In the US, we would probably start by googling tent rentals in the area, call a few different places to compare prices and then make a reservation and pay by credit card over the phone. Here, we started by finding someone in the organization who has heard of a friend of a friend who has a couple tents he might rent us. No one had his phone number (unfortunately, you can't just look that up here) so someone had to walk to his house to talk to him about it and get a price estimate. Then we had to have a separate meeting to discuss the price and whether we could afford the tents, and then get someone to go back and confirm that we want them. We have to wait until someone goes into town so they can get cash to pay him, and then someone has to walk over to his house a third time to give him the money. We haven't even figured out how the tents are actually getting to the event. The point of all this is that simple logistical details are much less simple when you don't have access to all the western resources we are so accustomed to. Working on this side of an international NGO doesn't just mean working for the developing world, it means working in it.

One of the best things I am getting out of this internship is learning how to work in a very different environment with very different people. Working in an NGO in the developing world requires a completely different skill set than working in the US, even if you're working for the same organization. Everything is much more challenging here, from organizing meetings, to working in classrooms, to managing logistics for big events, to keeping budget, to just about everything else. I'm learning to tackle these challenges one by one, with patience, attention to detail and cultural sensitivity.

At Tulane, I work for the Center for Global Education and serve as president of Tulane International Society. Both positions involve working with and serving groups of people from many different cultural backgrounds. The experience I am gaining here and the skills I am developing will definitely help me be an effective leader in Tulane's international community.

*Note: I typed up this post last week but the person I whose internet modem I was borrowing left, so it took a while to get it online again. Trying to get used to very

limited internet access.