

Summer Internship Report 2017

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**Diocese of Central Tanganyika
Dodoma, Tanzania**

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

Originally, the intention was for me to work with the Rev. Mganulwa Masima in the Land Dispute office, going on village excursions and understanding land ownership as a human rights issue, while also helping around with office work such as filing, scanning, and document write-ups. However, my internship shifted to encompass more programs under the DCT's wing, such as the Food Security program, Carpenter's Kids and Msalato Theological College. I visited villages with the Food Security team to help with educational workshops for farmers and to give surveys to help understand the effects of conservative agriculture on villager's food security. I went to a Nzali village for a week with Carpenter's Kids to help an American family that was visiting to teach reading and writing classes. I went to Msalato College to help as an English teacher's assistant, grading papers and helping with English presentations. Read my entire blog at: www.juliabridgforth.com.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

I went to Dodoma with the understanding that I was there to learn, not to teach. And I learned more than I could have ever expected. Things that I was able to give back to the people that were shaping my life was my technological savvy; I was able to scan village deeds in order to make digital copies of important files, and my English; I was able to translate Swahili documents into proper English to help the DCT's communication with Western organizations.

Thus far, throughout my African journey, I have been talking to a lot of adults about tough problems. It's been hard sometimes, seeing mothers that are purposefully starving themselves so their children

can get enough food, and inspiring as well, seeing farmers so committed to learning conservative agriculture and changing their food stability. As much as I have learned, I was so relieved to find out that I could take a break from adults and get to run around with kids for a week. I was the designated Level 7 reading and writing teacher. Now I have to admit, teaching has never been a calling of mine and although my Swahili has taken a somewhat communicative form, I am still far, far away from fluency. So I was confused: a week of disrupting classes with our white-ness did not sound like a productive system for learning. And as I look back, I have no clue if it was helpful to them or not, but here's the switch in the story that I'm sure no one saw coming....!! It was such an amazing experience for me. There was one class that impacted me in particular. We read the book "Planting the Trees" by Wangari Maathai, a badass woman who returned to her native land of Kenya from studying in America to find the lands stripped of their lush green tree cover and replaced with industrial farms. Instead of grumbling, she took initiative and started a movement to plant trees throughout the nation, first teaching mothers and children in villages, then students, then prisoners and then soldiers to plant seeds and tend to the growing saplings. Over 30 million trees have been planted in Kenya because of her. While I was reading, the class of over 60 students was silent and still, hanging on to every word. When I closed the book, hands shot up all around the classroom, ready with questions and comments. It was incredible to learn Waangari's story with such inquisitive students. As an Environmental Arts and Humanities major with an increasing interest in children's literature, it was a perfect encapsulation of inspiring children to think critically about their relationship with the changing environment through art and stories.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

I did more questioning than legitimate problem solving while in Tanzania.

From my blog: "Dear world, I am a silly little earthling with no real concept of time or space or the layers and dimensions that fold into this universe. I will easily admit that. In fact, because of my lack of understanding, I am currently on hour 16 of 21 of waiting to board a plane to Cape Town, South Africa, for a casual weekend trip. That is like saying I am going to L.A. for the weekend when you live in Sewanee, TN. I will now continue a delusional, half-awake rant because I need to occupy my time. I blame Trevor Noah- and by extension my mother- for this trip. If she hadn't told me to read his book *Born A Crime*, I would not have been so intrigued by the nation of South Africa and its historical context. It is a messed-up thing that happened in that nation. Apartheid and the Holocaust are two atrocities that we learned about in high school, although a great deal more assigned reading was about the Holocaust and the only required learning done about African genocides was a screening of *Hotel Rwanda* in the 9th grade. Which leads to me say that I will also easily admit that not only do I not know how to solve social and environmental problems facing our world, but I am often ignorant of all the social and environmental problems that need solving.

For instance, one of my good friends that I have come to love while in Tanzania is a major advocate of not just gay or women's rights, but transgender and genderless people's rights. And until discussing the problems facing these communities, I never pictured it as a real problem. Yes, I read articles about the bathroom policy debate, but the biggest deal to me about Caitlyn Jenner was that she purposefully spelt her name with a C instead of a K. I don't know why that affected me more than the whole sex change bit... minds work in funny ways. Anyway, what I am trying to say is that with every problem, there are ten to one million sub-problems that branch from it, making the mess sticky and complicated. I couldn't possibly believe that there was something wrong with being a badass feminist,

but apparently Chimamanda Ngozi, author of *Americanah*, is very problematic for the trans community. Who would have thunk!

Additionally, you can easily look across the deforested Tanzanian landscape and tell villagers to stop chopping down their trees for charcoal. But then mothers can not cook for their children, mothers who now are legally (under a newly passed Tanzanian law) unable to return to school to get an education about why cutting down trees is not “safi sana” (cool). Then maybe foreign-based NGOs can give gas stoves to villages for the uneducated mothers to cook with? That opens the debate about an unhealthy giving/receiving relationship that keeps the poorer nation reliant on foreign help, and therefore unable to find empowerment. But I wanna help!! Ughhhh. Everything is so frustrating!

How can I begin to prioritize anything in this problem-dense world? How do I even know where to stand on issues where it is so easy to see both sides of the fight? I have no earthly idea! I know what I think is important: keeping public lands and fighting for renewable energy. I know that the current government does not give a flip about either of those things. But, luckily businesses do. Outdoor brands like Patagonia and REI are front-lining a petition movement to keep public lands places to gallivant without outlet malls impeding your view of a magnificent waterfall. And even Exxon and Volvo are denouncing coal and gas for renewable energy substitutes. Cool, my problems seem to have some solutions! Not all is lost. But while I am in a nation, interviewing women who gave birth to their first children at age 12 by their 40-year-old husband, I can't help but think my priorities are privileged. But the environment is not just for white college students wearing Chacos. Back to my charcoal example: it reflects social problems as well. While trees are chopped down, mothers have to go further and further to retrieve charcoal, creating extra burden on her and her family. When farmers grow corn in a dry climate, it all shrivels up from the increasingly hectic weather patterns. Therefore, families stop putting aside money for school uniforms and hospital bills so that they can buy the increasing amounts of processed foods appearing in village shops which creates a new kind of malnourished diet and affects the national health. The decline in fish yields on Lake Tanganyika is a combination of overfishing and the warming climate, and therefore livelihoods that rely on fishing are crumbling around the lake.

I am unsure if anything I have said above makes any sense. What I wanted it to all wrap up to is this: Yes, the world is filled with problems and they often seem to be opposing and it may look as though no problems will ever be solved and more problems are connected than it may initially seem. That means two things: while planning to fix a problem, the solution must be looked at from multiple angles to ensure it is not actually just making a problem worse. Inversely, when solving for a problem, there is often a way to hit two birds with one stone, since things are so deeply intertwined."

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

My experience as a team member at the DCT took a dramatic shift, since the language barrier forced me into a position of avid listener, instead of my comfortable leadership role. I was able to learn how to be comfortable without understanding the full picture and do tasks asked of me. Everyday, I was learning more and more Swahili and was able to grasp more and more of the message.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

I am now strongly considering the Peace Corps as a post-college plan. I feel much more confident about living abroad and especially in developing nations.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

I went to Dodoma, Tanzania on my own, without any knowledge of Swahili. As soon as I landed, I realized that every single person in the city was vastly different than me, having grown up in such a poor and dry place with very religious customs. I was able to build strong friendships despite the language barrier and listened to incredible stories of commitment, struggle and resilience from farmers and co-workers. I spent every spare moment trying to improve my Swahili and left Tanzania confident in my ability to communicate and understand the Tanzanian culture.

From my blog: "Perhaps the biggest difference in my life since the arrival of Katie and Xavier, the Cornell students, is the food that I'm eating. I was starting to get a bit more creative on my own, but a meal for one never seemed like the place for luxuries such as garlic, ginger and masala. But boy, when you crank the number up to three, spices seem necessary suddenly. Neither of the two have a working stove, so we've been cooking all our meals at my house. I pulled the table away from the wall and found an extra chair lying around so we can have family dinners. I had been counteracting my lack of cardio by eating smaller portions, but now that these two have arrived with their superb renditions of the staple "wali na maharagwe" (rice and beans), I know that I'm going to get fat here.

My fancy eating habits have not developed without reflection, however. I am painfully aware, from my interviews of village farmers last Thursday, how the rest of the region is coping to keep their families alive. Nobody we talked to harvested enough food for the year. Although the practices we are implementing through conservative agriculture and food storage are gradually helping, the immediate problems are still affecting these families. Many have scaled back to only one or two meals a day and have been working on the side in order to trade vegetables or traditional salt for millet and corn from other farms. The side business are meant to create revenue for school and health care costs, but it's being spent on food instead. The meals that they are eating are the exact same without variation, breakfast, lunch and dinner. Ugali with mlenda. Ugali is a potato-like mash made with corn or millet. While mlenda is a vegetable that they dry out and later rehydrate with peanuts to create a salty green paste. They are the traditional food of Tanzania, and compared to the meals of "smileys," or fried goat heads, that Trevor Noah discussed eating daily in his book, *Born A Crime*, they seem absolutely divine. There are definitely regions that are doing worse than the one I am living in, but there are many people doing better.

I have been blessed by this universe to not only have had enough food my entire life, but an excess. That is often made clear by the amount of Nutella I am somehow able to consume in one short time frame. When I sit down with a salad I've made from McClurg dining hall, I can take a few bites and realize that I'm actually not in the mood for a salad, now I want a sandwich. So I can carelessly set the salad on a revolving rack and it will mysteriously disappear around the bend, no longer my problem to deal with physically or cognitively. Because I fiend on Netflix food documentaries and have taken two classes that revolve around food (Economics of the Food Industry and Food, Agriculture & Social Justice) I have a more acute awareness than the general population. But that doesn't mean much.

Food distribution is a painful subject to think about because there are so many elements. There's not only quantity but quality. In the United States, obesity and malnourishment are often embodied by the same person. Cheap calories have provided an excess of food without any proper nutrition. Although I have not seen the problem of fast and processed food occurring yet in Dodoma (because the

community is composed of mostly subsistence farmers), there is still a fight for quantity: selling fresh vegetables for something more filling like corn to make ugali.

On Friday, I was able to go with Bill, another new character in my life, to his academic farm in the village of Ibihwa. Bill is an Australian man in his 70s with a torso that bends at a 160 degree angle rather than the normal 180. He is a lively and talkative man despite his hunch and his inability to speak Swahili. He lived here for 20 years and although he moved away in 2005, he makes annual sojourns back to check up and improve his projects. The academic garden has flourished despite his absence. It was such a pleasure to look at the rows of green Chinese Spinach and tall Papaya trees. A Garden of Eden to counteract the dead and dry corn stalks that are ingrained into my vision of the Tanzanian landscape.

Remember, before feasting today, to thank the the universe for providing the sun, soil, bacteria, rain, farmers and assorted workers necessary for producing the bounty. So much energy goes into every morsel of food. "

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

I accepted this opportunity with the understanding that it would make me feel discomfort and force me to grow. I had no clue how much I would enjoy the struggle that I faced. My time in Tanzania has been a definite life highlight so far and I am so grateful for it. Thank you so much for helping me travel to such an extraordinary place and meet so many inspiring people.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?

Emirates Airlines has all eight Harry Potter movies available, 10/10 would recommend. Also, make sure to take time to explore the rest of Tanzania, buses can get you anywhere for extremely cheap. There are great hostels that are backpacker friendly! Journal everyday!