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Tonya Public Affairs Internship Report

For the 2016 summer, I interned at the women's environmental non-governmental organization, Gulu Women's Economic Development and Globalization (GWED-G). Gulu Women's Economic Development and Globalization is a grassroots women's organization working in the post conflict area of Northern Uganda on the promotion of women and girl rights by combating sexual gender based violence, land grabbing, improvement of livelihood, and promotion of gender equality. The organization works on multiple projects to promote women's rights and empowerment. Projects are funded by international organizations such as the Independent Development Fund and others. The main objective of these projects is to ensure the promotion of gender equality through workshops, trainings, dialogues, meetings, sensitization, and dissemination of information. The target audiences for the projects are rural Acholi men, women, and girls. This NGO has earned recognition from multiple international NGOs and colleges. It is sponsored by the United Nations and United Nations Women in achieving the Millennium Development Goals as well as other NGOs based in the United States and United Kingdom. In the academic realm, it partners with Columbia University on HIV/AIDs advocacy and prevention and School for International Training on assisting students with their field based research project.

As a GWED-G intern, I worked in multiple projects where my responsibilities were subject to change dependent on the project. My main focus was on land conflict mediation and sexual gender based violence. When I was working in land conflict mediation, I was responsible for writing concept notes on the projects the organization was going to implement. These reports included what the objective of the program was, who was the target audience, what the processes were going to be, and a proposal budget. These concept notes were sent to the head project

fundings. I also wrote an activities report on what my field visits entailed; I was the designated rapporteur. My time was split between going to the field and writing reports in the office. When I was in the field for land conflict, I would sit in on mediation meetings between two parties and assist in facilitating their meeting. Going into the field consisted of a variety of things. It could have been as close and as easy as GWED-G hosting a conference in Gulu town while participants from the surrounding districts would come and attend with all their room and board paid. Most of the times, field work entailed driving 20 to 30 kilometers to surrounding sub-districts going deep into rural areas where dirt paths were common and impassable during the rainy season. I also did home visits; these were interviews with family members that participated in a program titled “Role Model Man”. In Acholi culture (culture in Northern Uganda), men are seen as the head of the household and a woman/wife/partner/ is seen as property and expected to be submissive and reticent to the man. Especially in the rural areas, many of the women were emotionally and physically abused. The Role Model Man project was created by GWED-G to tackle the degenerative Acholi practices that harmed women and instead emphasized the positive aspects of Acholi culture. It targeted men and taught them how to view their wife as a person and not property through the means as looking at a person with basic human rights. When I conducted home interviews of participants of the project, I would verify if the man had made a change to be a “Role Model Man” and viewed his wife as an equal. The women would also testify and give their accounts on their husbands/partners progress in the program. Often times, the projects of land conflict and sexual gender based violence overlapped.

One of the projects I found most interesting to work on and what I participated in my final week at my internship was working under a project titled Trust Fund for Victims. This area of Uganda was ravaged by conflict and civil war that lasted for 30 years. The infamous Joseph

Kony campaign rampaged through these parts and affected everyone in the area. When working under the Trust Fund for Victims project, I would go out into the field and host meetings explaining the benefits of utilizing the project. TFV provided free medical care for anyone injured during the conflict from 2002 and on. Many of the villages I went to had victims that still retained bullets in their bodies from the conflict or other sustaining physical injuries that inhibited them from living a completely healthy life.

Due to at least half of my work being in the field, I learned how difficult facilitating meetings could be even when there were translators. Translating from English to Acholi is very difficult and takes time and expertise to translate things correctly. I not only had that problem, but other colleagues of mine who were from different parts of Uganda and working with GWED-G had difficult times conducting meetings in the local language. I learned that developmental NGO work takes a considerable amount of time. At times, I had to switch onto different projects because the original project I was assigned to could not move forward without approval for funding by the head donor. Funding for projects could be delayed from one to fourteen days. NGO work can also be very disheartening at times. In the sexual gender based violence cases, my supervisors would take accounts of women that had been sexually assaulted; those meetings were very harsh and emotional for both parties. It requires a long time for certain cultural practices to pass and that change does not occur over night. GWED-G's work will be relevant and needed for another decade or so.

This internship provided me more depth to how I approached and viewed international development NGO work. I think even with all the adversities there are to development work, there is still hope in it. I realized that I would rather work for a grassroots organization that had

international backing rather than a Western based organization that had sub offices around the globe.



One of the meetings for Trust Fund for Victims project.



A staff photo of GWED-G.