Sustainable Livelihoods: Burundi

Exchange Summary, Acknowledgement, and Reflection for the internship of Emily Ambrose in conjunction with the partnerships of PEAB, ERD, and Cornell University

October-December 2014

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SUMMARY:

The following is my reflection of the field visits and work completed during the time of September 30th-December 22nd, 2014. The work reflects the efforts of myself as a student from Cornell University in collaboration with Beinvenue Ingabica Carelle from University of Burundi and the staff of the Provincial Anglican Church of Burundi (PEAB), under the direction of Leonidas NIYONGABO. Objectives and tasks completed during this time relate to the current agriculture program of PEAB to target food security through the use of kitchen gardens; Further, many sustainable, modern agriculture practices have been introduced to farmers through PEAB’s projects to increase soil fertility, and fight erosion. This brief summary, acknowledgement, and reflection are written for and directed to the most reverend Archbishop Bernard NTAHOTURI and Reverend Cannon Seth NDAYIRUKIYE Provincial Secretary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Many partner organizations and individuals need to be thanked and referenced for their help to coordinate the internship opportunity I have been fortunate to have in the past three months.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the openness, friendliness, and willingness of all staff at PEAB; the many people I have met have allowed me to acclimate to the culture of Burundi and feel more confident when communicating in Kirundi. Without the collaborative efforts of PEAB staff I would have not been as productive as I believe that I had been in my time there.

Secondly, my sincerest acknowledgement to Archbishop Bernard NTAHOTURI, Reverend Cannon Seth NDAYIRUKIYE Provincial Secretary, and Leonidas NIYONGABO for facilitating and allowing for the collaboration with University of Burundi student Beinvenue Ingabica Carelle. By accepting Beinvenue Ingabica Carelle as an intern with PEAB, I have been able to communicate many things when working with farmers and have also acquired a life-long friend and extended Burundian family.

Thirdly, as a colleague and friend I’d like to thank Beinvenue Ingabica Carelle for her work and shared knowledge. Her communication skills, translation services, and incredible friendship have been paramount to our shared work and collaboration; I am thankful for all of her skills and life she has shared with me.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the partnership and open communication between Sara Delaney, program officer for Episcopal Relief and Development, PEAB, and Cornell University. This partnership took off with the work of Ms. Angela Siele; as a follow up student for her work I would like to thank all parties involved who have believed in a student like myself with limited international experience.
REFLECTION:

Although I know that my past does not direct the present or the future, I’d like to start by recognizing that from the past experiences I would have not made it to see Burundi for the wonderful, yet developing country that it is. My love for gardening and growing my own food has always been a part of who I am but I had not understood how I could use that passion to help others; especially when I was younger, unaware of the lives people, in countries like Burundi, live; lives that are so agriculturally based.

I can understand the concerns and doubts people have had about this internship opportunity and its questionable success; however, I’d like to establish that it is the individual, when given trust and encouragement, that can accomplish many things. My success for this internship has come from the positivity of the staff of PEAB, coordinators at ERD, professors at Cornell University, and collaboration with University of Burundi student Beinvenue Ingabica Carelle.

I’d like to briefly reflect on some of these successes below:

_Farmer connectedness and empowerment:_ By being given the opportunity to work directly with farmers, I have been able to understand their thoughts on agriculture, the lives that they live, the challenges they face, and the needs that they have. In return, I have been able to share with them knowledge to improve their lives through improving the means that farmers use to grow their food. Such ways include mulching, compost, and proper spacing of various crops.

_Hunger, Food Security:_ We know that hunger is an issue and is something that can be alleviated; however, the way that we most often approach hungry populations and people (i.e. food aid or “food for work”) can often be ineffective because these methods don’t empower farmers to improve their health as well as socio-economic status’. The programs I have worked with, as initiated by PEAB, focus on the lives of farmers as a whole and not just the hunger that is a part of their problems in life. The kitchen garden project could not be a better example of how PEAB is improving the lives of the farmers they work with.

_Objectives Accomplished:_ During my internship, as recorded in the reports, I have worked with farmers to improve the sustainability, yield, and function of the kitchen gardens initiated throughout, now, four diocese of PEAB; although there has been additional time spent in Nyanza-Lac with the reasoning that it was the initial “pilot” area where kitchen gardens were started by Ms. Angela Siele.

_Highlights of the work completed:_

- Data collection and tracking of the progression of the kitchen gardens
- Opportunities for farmers to collaborate together
- Introduction of new vegetable and fruit varieties
- Introduction of seed saving technologies to provide long-term cultivation
- Demonstrations with the new vegetable crops, providing new ways to cook and combine food to improve the nutritive value of food consumed.
- Introduction of cover cropping to improve soil fertility in areas where staple crops, and also vegetables are growing.
- Improvements in farming technique with mulching and composting to prevent erosion, retain water, and increase soil fertility; the effects of these techniques lead to higher yields.
- Empowering farmers and sharing stories amongst cross-cultural barriers through the use of conversation and photography.
- Formation of a handbook manual for the animators
- Networking with other NGOs and organizations in Burundi (ISABU, IITA) to further our resource and knowledge base, and serve as a representative voice of PEAB.

It is important to note that this brief summary of activities is not limited to this list; further, the work is not something that ends at the end of my preliminary and short time in Burundi. There is no question that this life-changing experience has provided me insights on culture, and what it means to live. I could not have a greater dedication than that to serving the individuals and farmers I have met.

**Partnerships:** As I see the connectedness between PEAB, ERD, Cornell University, and University of Burundi grow, I can only hope that all involved are as positively impacted by the work we are doing. Moreover, I hope for more interaction and participation between students of University of Burundi and Cornell University. As I have grown and become acclimated to the Burundian culture through the help of my colleague and fellow student Beinvenue Ingabica Carelle, I have nothing but positive things to say about the importance of developing that relationship; even amongst future students who may have more experience in languages and, or international experience.

**Present and Future Thoughts:** One day soon I will return to Burundi with a greater knowledge than I have now; I will grow and learn more to return to be with others, better able to provide to them knowledge, resource, and friendship; likewise they will continue to provide for the culture, and moments of happiness in the lives that they lead. I am most grateful for all I have learned to date and everyday recognize how fortunate I am to have life on this earth. Miles apart, I know we will one day realize that we are one people, all living for common goals as basic as a satisfactory, happy life serving greater purposes.

**Religion:** I’d briefly like to reflect on the religious and spiritual component that shaped my experience in Burundi. Working under the Anglican Church of Burundi, I’ve learned a lot about how Burundians envision their religions and devotion to God. Coming into Burundi with very little expectations and understanding, I wasn’t sure what to expect in this regard. But, I wanted to learn the culture (which I now know is very tied to God), participation with morning prayers, weddings, and masses that heavily involved song and rhythms of passion was almost immediate amongst arriving; within a week, I was already attending a traditional Burundian wedding (which is a multi-day experience). Accepting amongst all peoples, the faith, devotion, and love for God is something that resounds through all of the devastation and turmoil that continues in this conflicted country. There’s something remarkable I’ve learned from experiencing a true faith as pure as Burundians, and especially from my dear colleague and friend Carelle.
One day, I asked Carelle once what would her life be like without the presence of her faith; she said to me “Mimi (as she called me), could I go a day without remembering all I have been given from God? Days will be good and days will be bad. But for all the good God brings, the bad subsides, slowly. It is in things like knowing you that I see the love of God come to me. Think of how we have been brought together? Could I not have know you if I did not believe in God and sought to be with the works of the Anglican Church? And you, also, coming to Burundi you’ve been brought somehow, yes? Acknowledging everything that happens to you isn’t easy, but recognition is something greater is.” These words stick with me today, in that no matter what faith or spirituality we may or may not identify with, there’s something within us that places faith and devotion into something. Were it not for this, we would surely lose determination. Further to this, one should not be discouraged in that being unsure of a religious position, etc doesn’t mean one cannot connect with another, for we are all one on this Earth.