

Emily Averill

Borlaug-Ruan Internship Final Report

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### My Internship Experience

As a senior from Columbus High School in Waterloo, I never thought I would end up spending my summer in a country halfway around the world. But after attending the World Food Prize Symposium in 2001, I took a chance and applied for an internship. I became interested in the internship program after hearing Dr. Pedro Sanchez, Dr. Hans Herren and several others talk about specific environmental and social issues that were being dealt with in order to bring about change. I wanted to learn more about issues other countries deal with and maybe take the opportunity to teach what I know about the environment.

Another reason why I became interested in the WFP Internship Program was the thought of being able to experience firsthand some of the problems the world is facing, beyond the borders of the US. I have often been concerned with issues such as world hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation, so it was very important to me to be able to do my part to help out. I wanted to see what was actually being done to alleviate world hunger and to improve and preserve the environment.

The center I was assigned to work with was the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF). This non-profit organization was established in 1978 after John Bene led a study which stressed the importance of trees on farms. Soon after the study, the International Council for Research in Agroforestry was established in order to promote this concept, and focused on Africa. Then in 1991, the Council joined the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), changing its name from Council to Center. This change allowed ICRAF to continue research on a global scale. The center changed its name once again in 2002 to the World Agroforestry Centre.

Its main goal in its most basic form is to put trees on farms. By using the agroforestry technologies that have been researched by the center, they aim to reduce land degradation and increase soil fertility, and to alleviate tropical deforestation and rural poverty. Other goals are to improve food and nutrition security, and increasing environmental resiliency in the tropics (World Agroforestry Centre Website).

My time with ICRAF was split between Headquarters in Nairobi and ICRAF in Kisumu. While in Nairobi I worked with the Gender and Diversity (G&D) Department. The Gender and Diversity department is a relatively new program that works collectively with the CGIAR. It is hosted by ICRAF and works to involve CGIAR center employees in celebrating diversity in the workplace. It encourages the centers to seek out a diverse environment and to realize the values of it. Through small grants, management consulting, training and technical support, Gender and Diversity provides useful support to the centers (G&D Report of Achievements).

Vicki Wilde is the leader of this program. She has her MA in environmental psychology from the City University of New York. She has worked with the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Programme, and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations developing and leading programs. She has also written several works such as the Socio-economic and gender analysis field book in 1997, and The Responsive Planner: A Framework for Gender-Responsive Agricultural Development Planning in 1999 (World Agroforestry Website). Though Vicki was out of the country during my stay there, she provided the project for me to do. I also worked with her colleague, Pauline Bommet who helped me by explaining what I needed to do and by answering my questions.

The project I worked on was the Comparative Analysis of Human Resource Policies in the CGIAR centers. The objectives of this project were to resolve equity issues, find the best practices and areas of weakness, and to promote a general awareness of how each CGIAR center operates.

My work consisted of sorting through email correspondence and picking out relevant information regarding specific human resource policies. Such policies included separation, shipping allowances, air miles, and Christmas break. Once the information was collected, I organized it into a table. This allowed CGIAR Human Resource managers to easily see each other's policy on a given subject.

During my work, I found many similarities and differences in the CGIAR center policies. For instance, regarding shipping allowances, even though each center is under the same umbrella of the CGIAR, there was great variance in the amount and means of allowances given to employees for relocation. Also, regarding Christmas break, the time allowed for vacation varies from one day to an entire week. I found similarities in the policy of separation. Many centers dealt with this issue by providing the former employee their salary for a certain amount of time based on how long they had been attached to the center. Most centers dealt with this issue the same way with only a few deviating from it.

I learned several things during my attachment with Gender and Diversity. First, I learned that the smaller efforts of many people are what make a research institute function properly on a larger scale. When I first started, it was difficult for me to see how my work was making a difference. Coming directly from a small high school in Iowa, I was used to working on a much smaller scale where progress is much more easily measured and in a much quicker fashion. It wasn't until I was told how valuable my work was that I was able to see how my small part was helping a very large system function. Relating to that, I also learned patience. I became frustrated at times when I thought my work was going nowhere because I couldn't see the end in sight. I learned to remind myself that what I was doing was in fact helping, but on a much smaller scale.

The second month of my internship was spent in a city in western Kenya called Kisumu. On June 27, 2002 an environmental management project was launched in St. Paul's Kanyakwar Primary School. St. Paul's sits at the bottom of the Riat Hills. The land is suffering due to severe

erosion caused by runoff from the hills. This runoff is forming deep gullies all around the school compound. To combat this problem ICRAF, AfricaNow, Wildlife Clubs of Kenya, the Municipal Council and Pabari's Nurseries have formed a partnership to rehabilitate the school compound and implement environmental education and awareness into the school's curriculum. Since farming is such a central part of so many families in Kenya, it is important to take advantage of this opportunity to save the land around the school while using it as a teaching mechanism for future farmers. This project will help the students learn practical and environmentally friendly farming techniques which we hope they will use themselves as well as teach their family and members of their community. Some activities planned for St. Paul's (among others) are to establish a plant nursery and orchard, build a water catchment-system and to fill the gullies.

Before attending the launch of this project, I was briefly informed on the project and its purposes. I had several questions about how the students were reacting to it, how they were being involved and their general attitude towards what was going on in their school. After asking several people and not getting very solid answers, I decided to conduct a small survey to find out about student involvement as well as to measure the effectiveness of the project.

The survey consisted of two questionnaires; a twelve-point questionnaire for teachers and a seventeen-point questionnaire for students. I distributed them to three primary schools around Kisumu (Ogada Primary School, Joel Omino Primary School, and St. Paul's Kanyakwar) to eighteen students and twelve teachers total (the two other schools were ones that had similar land reclamation projects started but which were done independently or with limited outside support). The students were asked to fill them out on the spot with teacher supervision while the teachers were allowed to finish it independently.

I found conducting the survey to be extremely interesting. Though it was not very representative (as only 6 students per school were surveyed), the results I received taught me a lot about how the project was working and about Kenyan culture in general. All the students seemed to have a good grasp on environmental issues and offered several helpful suggestions on

how to improve the project. I was very impressed with the knowledge of the environment the students displayed, as many (if not most) of the students in my own high school are ignorant to many pressing environmental issues.

Data analysis turned out to be rather difficult for me. I had no idea how much time was needed to analyze what little data I had. Even though I had a total of only eighteen student questionnaires it took me over two entire days to do just a rough analysis. I managed to get done what I needed to, but I am expecting that in the future, ICRAF will redo the survey on a broader scale to be much more inclusive and representative.

There were several areas of my survey that needed improvement. First of all, there was the issue of language barriers. The questionnaire, written in English, may have been difficult for the students to understand and to answer accurately. Many of the answers the children gave were confusing which suggested they did not have a good grasp on the English language. This affected the results of the survey because many of the answers given were irrelevant to the question asked.

A second area of improvement lies in the assistance the supervising teachers provided the students taking the survey. In trying to explain the students' questions, some of the supervising teachers may have influenced the students' answers. There were several instances where teachers gave examples to the students to help them answer the questions, but in doing so, it may have limited their minds to just the examples they gave. Drafting the questionnaire in Kiswahili or their tribal language may have also help prevent this from happening.

I had the opportunity to work with many fascinating and intelligent people on this project. My supervisor, Qureish Noordin, is the Development Facilitator at ICRAF in Maseno. He works with many partners in the surrounding area working to bring the agroforestry technologies to the rural farmers. Before joining ICRAF, he worked with the US Peace Corps, and the Kenya Forestry Research Institute (World Agroforestry Website).

I also worked with Steve Ruigu (ICRAF), Evans Mkala (Wildlife Clubs of Kenya), and Ben Obera (Kisumu Municipal Council). All helped me with drafting my surveys, distributing them, and collecting data.

My work with the land reclamation project helped food security in several ways. First of all, with the integration of environmental education and practical farming skills that are environmentally sound, we are bringing awareness to the issue of protecting the environment while providing information on how to improve a crop yield. If the students absorb the knowledge we are providing them, it can bring about an entire new generation of people who are equipped to battle their countries environmental problems, thus increasing food security.

Secondly, by establishing plant nurseries and possibly fruit orchards in some schools, they are able to bring in income from the sale of high value trees and plants, while at the same time providing fruit for the children to eat while at school.

Along with the sights I was able to see during my work, I met up with some people in Kisumu and together we traveled to different places around the area. A group of my friends and I traveled to Mount Elgon and climbed up to the elephant caves. Though we did not see any elephants we saw some water buffalo and several species of monkeys. Our campsite was also visited by some baboons.

I also visited the town of Naivasha with a friend of mine. We rode matatus (mini-buses) for almost 5 hours from Kisumu to Naivasha and visited Crater Lake Game Reserve and Hell's Gate National Park. While in Naivasha we saw several animals such as zebra, giraffe, and warthogs. We also met a Maasai boy named Josephat who told us all about his tribe and stories about his life.

This experience truly changed my life. There were so many lessons I learned that I will carry with me for a lifetime. I think about everything in my life in terms of how this would be different in Kenya or how it would affect the people there. I have also made many changes in my

life since my experience. After realizing what kind of effort goes into one day of living in Kenya, I decided to sell my car and start walking and biking to get where I need to go. I have begun recycling not only plastics and cardboards, but everything down to buying used tote bags to do my grocery shopping to reduce the number of plastic bags used (which are non-decomposable). Every time I turn on my faucet to wash my dishes or brush my teeth, I think about the woman I met in rural western Kenya who walks almost eight miles a day for her family's daily water. Every time I go to the grocery store and see the produce, I remember seeing the farmers on the side of the roads selling their own produce, which they themselves planted, grew, harvested, and sold without any of the modern mechanical luxuries we have in the US. Then I think about all the produce we have in our supermarkets that are sold by large corporations that take advantage of foreign workers, use harmful chemicals as fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, and how almost none of the profit goes back to the farmer. Because of this I have chosen to seek out locally grown organic produce to encourage and support the family farmer.

Another insight I've gained from my experience concerns the role of the United States acting as a "donor nation." I have grown up with the idea that the noble thing to do is to give money to the less fortunate. I can now see that helping developing countries become self-sufficient is the only true solution to ending poverty and world hunger. I was approached several times by both friends and strangers from Kenya asking me to provide assistance such as a sponsorship, money, or some way to come to the US. Through no fault of their own, they have become dependent on aid from foreigners and have grown to expect it.

At first I didn't know how to react to such a request, but I learned that if I were to give out money, I would only be perpetuating the notion that someone will always be there to support them, thus reducing self-sufficiency. It broke my heart countless times to see small boys approach me asking for "just one shilling," or a mother of three young children asking to be sponsored, but I was told by my co-workers to refuse them. I started to wonder if "donor

nations” might keep other nations poor in spite of their good intentions. Maybe the solution to the problem of world hunger lies in dispensing knowledge rather than dollars.

My two months in Kenya were truly an eye-opening experience. I have a new appreciation for what I have, and a new understanding of what I can live without. I have made many valuable friendships and learned many valuable lessons that I will carry with me for a lifetime. I can only hope that I was able to make an impact, despite my short time and limited experience.

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