

Jeannie Weber
Women In Progress/Global Mamas
Cape Coast, Ghana
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I have always been interested in international relations and love learning about different cultures. This is why I chose to pick up a peace studies minor in addition to my business major. In a few of my classes I did research on women's empowerment in Africa in relation to economic development and business. When I looked into the Kellogg summer internships, I thought Global Mamas perfectly fit my academic and personal interests. I learned so much this summer and am so grateful for the opportunity I was given to go to Ghana and work for this company.

After studying abroad in Ireland I felt confident in my ability to adapt to different cultures. It wasn't as easy as I expected and of course I experienced some culture shock when I first arrived in Ghana. I lived in a house in a small town with all of the other volunteers. It was comfortable and I made some great friends from all around the US. It definitely helped to have someone there who was dealing with the same cultural adjustments that I was.

We worked in an office in Cape Coast about a ten minute taxi ride from our house. Everyone at the office was really friendly and hard-working. Our general manager Melanie also lived with us and was a great resource the entire summer. I was given a few projects before I arrived which I successfully completed. The first was to create an inventory system to keep track of the zippers they use for women's apparel. The current system literally used cardboard pieces on which they wrote down the numbers. I updated this to a binder and an Excel spreadsheet. Another one of my projects was to design a web page to market the company's new offering of custom orders. I worked alongside another volunteer to choose images and write up an advertisement for the site. Another one of my projects also involved web design. One of the

“Mamas,” a seamstress named Esther, has started her own NGO. She struggled to start her own business and Global Mamas really helped her succeed. She wanted to give back and help young girls achieve their goals by giving them free vocational training. I helped Esther create a web site for the Firm Grace Foundation. I spent a lot of time with her gathering information for the page, and really got to know her well. She taught me a lot about determination and selflessness and was really inspiring to be around. I miss her already!

Forming a relationship with the women was my favorite part of my internship. Luckily, in addition to Esther, I was able to work with three other seamstresses, Betty, Comfort, and Debra. I did a management-consulting project which was really exciting. The ultimate goal of Global Mamas is for the women to be independent in their businesses and not rely on the company for orders. These three women received their first independent international export order from an American designer named Liz Alig who makes clothes from recycled fabrics. My job was to make sure they stayed on track, shipped on time, and understood the expectations for quality. I also helped with communication and assisted Betty in determining her costs and coming up with a reasonable asking price for her products.

Global Mamas is very flexible and accommodating when it comes to projects. They want you to be working on whatever interests you. Although it is slightly outside of my knowledge I was also able to work on some product development for the jewelry line. It was really fun to be creative and play around with the handmade beads to make different designs for the new catalogue. Overall, I felt like I was able to accomplish a lot this summer. You do have to get used to a slower pace of work and life, however. It can be frustrating when the internet goes out in the middle of working on a project, or the person you are trying to meet with won't answer their phone. You do adjust, and I found I really enjoyed this easy-going and laidback attitude.

I really believe in this company's mission of empowering women to be economically independent and was able to see firsthand the good work they are doing. Many of the Mamas have opened bank accounts and have been able to send their children to school, both huge achievements. They love the organization and are dedicated to it as well. In the middle of the summer we had a "Global Mamas Gives Back" service day in which we went to clean up the local market where many of the women buy their supplies. It was so great to see how passionate they were about giving back. I learned a lot from the women I worked with this summer, and I think I was able to teach them something as well.

In addition to my work, I enjoyed travelling throughout Ghana and experiencing the culture. Eli, whose restaurant was down the street from the house, makes the best Ghanaian food ever. I would say *palava* is now one of my favorite foods. Some of my favorite trips included spending the night in a tree house in the rainforest and going to the Northern region to Mole National Park where we saw a herd of wild elephants. These are experiences I will never forget, along with all of the good friends I made while in Ghana. I hope to remain involved with the company in the future, even if this simply means doing some online shopping for their cute clothing.