

The philosophy behind the manner in which the Ford Family Program operates is unique in that development is seen as a partnership between the community and the university as opposed to a one sided effort to impose western ideas and beliefs on the people of Uganda.

The villagers of Nnindyé decide which projects they want to focus on. Ford helps them plan, organize, and mobilize, offering various forms of consultation, but the primary burden and work falls upon the shoulders of the Ugandans. Often, when working in the development field, the community will be dependent upon the NGO or organization to provide funding, labor, and strategy, but Ford strives to find sustainable methods to improve the lives of the people of Nnindyé. We saw several examples in Uganda of NGOs that build wells, start groups, etc. without any management or responsibility from the community. This strategy results in broken wells or other mismanaged projects after a short period of time, and when the NGO leaves, the village is left with no skills or tools to fix these problems. But because Ford allows for ownership over their wells, springs, and other projects, there is a greater likelihood that success will result from the work done in Nnindyé.

However, in many ways this belief in mutual responsibility is as frustrating and exasperating, as it is revolutionary and innovative. It is a tall order to implement these values in the minds of a community that has for so long, had these same ventures completed in their villages with no work or planning on their part. My main challenge this summer was learning how to listen to the wishes of the villagers, while simultaneously trying to avoid the imposition of my own thoughts on the direction of Nnindyé's development – leaving the planning, ultimately in the hands of the Ugandans. There were certain instances where I just wanted to scream and force things to be done my way or suggest ulterior approaches because they would

have been faster. I wanted to see results in my brief eight-week stint, and it was difficult to come to terms with the fact that I would not see much progress during my internship. Ford has been present in Nkozi for a long time, and I suppose it was naïve of me to think I would see growth in such a short period of time. But once I came to this realization, I was able to fully immerse myself in the culture and become more involved and excited about the work I was going to be doing.

But before these epiphanies sank in my head, I had to figure out exactly what I was to be doing. As I was soaring thirty-five thousand feet above the sea, speaking with my neighbor on the fifteen-hour plane ride to Dubai, I still had trouble describing, precisely what my summer abroad would entail. I knew that Ford worked, specifically in three areas of development – health, agriculture, and water. Going into the internship, I had mentioned doing work in microfinance. Therefore, it looked as if agriculture would be my field of choice.

However, upon our arrival I quickly discovered that my work would be different than expected. Our program director did not need anyone working in microfinance, as Uganda Martyrs University had an endless supply of microfinance master's students, who were better versed in those matters than I would ever be. But we were able to compromise, and the Ford program needed a student to go out into the field and work with the groups and individuals beginning collective farming cooperatives.

My work was done mainly with villagers involved in the group farming efforts. I spoke with local leaders and members of the village agriculture committees, attempting to gather as much information for the outreach program as possible. For a long time the villagers wanted these programs in place, and there was much discussion and debate as to the proper mobilization of these groups. The main purpose of my research was to find any discrepancies between the UMU outreach program's knowledge of the collective farms and the villagers' beliefs about Ford's involvement.

Going into this work, I was expecting each of the twelve villages to be progressing at a similar pace. However, I soon found out that there were tremendous disparities among the villages. Some Ugandans believed all villagers should be involved, while some thought that only those interested in group farming efforts should participate. I also found out that there were significant problems in communication between the villagers and the UMU outreach office because neither party seemed aware of the other's involvement or progress. Several times when we went to the field, the villagers thought we were there to fund their operations, and no matter what we told them, we could not shake them of this notion. However, we were always able to collect our data, no matter what obstacles we faced. The collective farming, in some of the villages, was beginning in August, and hopefully my interviews and findings will contribute to the progression of these projects as they begin to take shape.

We had a number of other assignments throughout the summer as well. The SIEBEN grant – a government sponsored grant focusing on nutrition in schools – required all the interns to travel around the Nkozi sub-county and speak with faculty members at the primary schools. We inquired about enrollment statistics, grade progression, various student illnesses, food intake, and agriculture. I thought the schools would have similar answers and explanations regarding their students' health, but many of the schools had contrasting responses to our questionnaires.

Because this internship and program are so new, it is difficult to gauge the success of our work. We were mostly collecting data, conducting interviews, meeting people, and speaking with villagers. I think our job was essentially to be fresh pairs of eyes on the ground in Uganda and wander into the villages to find any disconnects between the faculty and the actual on-the-ground work taking place in Nnindy.

The Ford Program fosters creativity among interns, allowing us to explore the different areas of development, using our own talents and skills to make an impact on the community. I worked alongside engineering, science-business, and pre-professional students this summer.

Each of us was able to work in a different field related to our major, and I believe that this flexibility in the program allowed each of us to walk away with a unique experience tailored to our own interests.

I think that Ford received four very different perspectives from four novice development interns. Never having been in the developing world before, I was able to share my observations, remaining sensitive to each and every new experience, while many of the Ford directors are probably numb to many facets of Ugandan culture. Because the internship is relatively new, we were in many ways testing the waters for new directions and paths that could evolve out of this program. Each successive summer offers new learning opportunities for the students and the Ford program.

My summer abroad taught me a number of things about development and myself in general. The biggest lesson I learned is that development is a bitterly slow process. Everyone, especially newcomers, go into their experiences thinking that they can make tremendous differences in the areas they are working. I mentioned in my application for this internship that I would try to avoid these overly optimistic notions. However, it is difficult to enter into this field of work for the first time without thinking you can change the world, and it is painful once this reality sinks in. But in many ways, this realization that development is an arduous process in which you may not see results in eight weeks, is liberating. You become open to everything that the developing world offers you – mainly, the relationships that you build with the people you are working with – and you are more equipped to understand the subtle nuances of the problems they face.