Establishing a Kitchen with JKUAT, Kenya [2015]

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Final Report

Internship Goal and Objectives

From May to August, 2015 a group of four interns, from Western University were in a placement at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), doing an internship with Western Heads East. The interns were working on Fiti Project for the production of Probiotic Yoghurt. The team of interns was multidisciplinary with the four students taking different programs at Western: Medical Sciences, finance, political sciences and health-geography. This was an asset for the project, helping to have a strong approach on how to make it a success, everyone bringing in her own expertise.

Our overall goal for the project was to establish a probiotic kitchen at JKUAT, and that kitchen would serve as a hub, for other kitchens to be established in the surrounding communities and the rest of the country.

Having this as our main goal, everyone had set her own objectives, related to her specific field of study. In my case, being a health geographer, my objective was to make awareness of health benefits of Fiti yoghurt in the communities of Juja and its surrounding areas. Additionally, using the probiotic project, I had an objective to conduct community health education in the fields of nutrition, hygiene, malaria, HIV/AIDS, immunization and the fight against child marriage.
Education sessions would also include the importance of schooling especially for young girls who tend to drop out of school, and high school students who do not go to universities. Finally, community education would include discussions related to women empowerment, which is one of the main goals of Fiti project, where women are involved in running probiotic yoghurt community kitchens, helping them to be financially dependent while improving the health of community members.

**Internship Activities**

Our main activities included:

- Making Fiti probiotic yoghurt at JKUAT: Using the existing kitchen of the Department of Food Sciences, we were able to conduct some sessions of yoghurt making. The yoghurt we made was mainly sold in Migori (one of the counties in Kenya, where our supervisor had easy access and connection for potential market for the Fiti yoghurt).

- Visiting schools in Migori, with a goal to explore the possibility of supplying the schools with the yoghurt and conducting community health education. For this trip, we went with a group of JKUAT students who were part of the Kenya-Western Heads East Club. Since we were visiting the high schools, having the university students with us was an asset in order to encourage the high school students to study hard and continue their studies at the university level. In most cases, high school students in Migori and in other rural regions of Kenya tend to drop out of school. This is the case especially for girls who usually get married at a younger age.
In addition, most students don’t continue studies after high school to go to universities. Hence, Migori County is one of the counties with lower rate of university students across the country. This is one of the factors that make some parts of the country less developed than others, since their representation among decision makers would be small.

As part of my own objectives, in the field of health geography I was involved in community outreach activities including:

- Visiting orphanages and children institutions in Juja, Ruiru and Thika: this was done in order to explore potential market for supplying probiotic yoghurt. Options of training individuals at the orphanages and children institutions were also explored. This was suggested by the administrators of the institutions that were visited, because they would
use Fiti yoghurt for its health benefit when given to the children but also the project would sell probiotic the yoghurt in the communities, generating income for the institutions. This could also be a community project for young adults who were living in such institutions but are now living in the communities and don’t have sustainable source of income.

- Visiting women associations, to explore whether they would be interested in opening their own community kitchens, once they are provided with training. Women in different communities have associations and in most cases they do income generating activities. They always welcome new ideas and new projects that would help to promote their communities while improving their economic status.

**Internship challenges**

- The goal was partially met, we were not able to fully equip the kitchen, due to the lack of enough funds.

- Since we did not have our own kitchen, we had to use the existing kitchen and work with the existing staff. It was challenging because they were not paid for working on our project and they were less motivated

- Growing competition: There is another company making probiotic yoghurt, in addition to the existing yoghurt made on campus. It is important to note that it is growing fast, which might be a challenge for Fiti project to be a success.
The main challenge during the placement at JKUAT was poor coordination and communication between interns, the host institution and WHE, to have a common understanding on the implementation of project activities.

Due to the cost of milk, the yoghurt might be expensive to afford for the targeted market in rural areas and schools. This was observed especially in children institutions as well as schools in Migori. This was a challenge in terms of locating the target market for probiotic yoghurt.

**Lessons learned**

- Money and human resources are important for running a project but good organization, management and communication among others are important for the success and sustainability of the project.

- Time management: During the internship, we had to set daily activities on our own and this increased my ability to manage the time I had, knowing what activities I would be involved in and when and how to use the rest of the time I had.
Recommendations

- Set clear guidance related to the project interns will be working on during pre-departure sessions

- Improve communication between interns, WHE and the host institutions to have a common understanding of activities involved in the project

- Get the clubs involved in the project activities: There is a students’ club but the members are not involved in any implementation or organization activities

- There is a need to hire someone to work on the project on a full time basis and have other people working on a part time basis, for the sustainability of the project as well as community ownership.

Kids from Zaidi ya Dreams (More than Dreams), a home for abandoned babies, Ruiru, Kenya