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Western Heads East Remote Internship: Canada-Rwanda Partnership

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Western Heads East Remote Internship: Canada-Rwanda Partnership

The Western Heads East program is an initiative that partners students from Western University with host organizations in East African countries promoting sustainable development and health. Western Heads East has made strides in health promotion through probiotic yogurt social enterprises in Tanzania and Kenya. This project partnered with the University of Rwanda and two Rwandan NGOs, Living With Happiness-Icymezo and Rwandan Mothers-Team, to bring the Fiti probiotic yogurt kitchens to the Rwandan context with a goal of improving community health and increasing single mothers' financial independence. This past summer, three Western Heads East interns worked remotely under supervisor Aimee Utuza to assist with the start-up planning and training process for the first Fiti probiotic yogurt kitchen in Rwanda. The project outcomes included a one-year business plan and budget, five-year sales projections, graphics outlining the start-up phase timeline, two virtual training sessions on the health benefits and theory behind probiotics and yogurt production, and translated promotional and educational materials. Interns also produced a final report outlining recommendations for next steps to ensure sustainability and project continuation. This internship was part of the first group of Western Heads East interns working remotely engaging in purely virtual partnerships due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interns and partners had to adapt quickly to work across borders, time zones and cultures in a new virtual environment. This internship was an example of collaborative work that can be done in global health and sustainable development in the midst of a global pandemic. Students and partners were able to establish a program that will lead to achieving shared goals of community wellness and nutrition, the empowerment of women and mutual learning. The interns gained experience in planning, knowledge translation and health promotion. Additionally, this project was an opportunity for interns to develop their teamwork and cross-cultural communication skills, and an introduction to working in global virtual teams, which has led to one of the interns pursuing ongoing research in developing trust in virtual partnerships.

By: Katie Butler and Eva Chang