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## Volunteer placement report - No Woman Left Behind, The Gambia

### Volunteer: Ellie Rhodes

Placement dates: 11.11 - 06.12.2022 (slightly shorter than planned due to flight complications)

- My motivation for volunteering: I am very interested in world politics and current events and I feel passionate about the world changing for the better, whether that be to help curb global warming or to increase women's rights. Earlier in the year, I decided that I wanted a change from my career in E-Commerce and to devote my time to do something to help people or the planet. So I quit work and looked for a volunteer scheme. No Woman Left Behind was perfect because I could put my business skills to good use and support women in The Gambia.
- Pre-departure prep: I found the comprehensive information about The Gambia provided by People & Places to be useful to have some background knowledge about the country's culture and history. Especially useful to know what kind of clothes to bring with me, so as to be respectful and fit in. Additionally, it was clear beforehand what my tasks would be, so I could prepare in advance and had saved a business plan template to my laptop as well as some other resources.
- Orientation: Fatou met me at the airport, which made me feel a lot more comfortable, arriving alone at night to a strange place. Then the next day she kindly showed me how to get to work from where I lived, where to buy food and how to get around; as well as helping me to exchange money. (Note from people and places: Fatou is part of the local partner team in the Gambia as well as being President of No Woman Left Behind)
- My tasks at work:
  1. Continuing on from the work already done by Linda (a previous people and places volunteer) with accounting, I showed Fatou (then later also Bintou & Musu) how to create cost/pricing sheets in Excel. We created a template for the daily and weekly sales, where the costs of each portion sold were calculated and used to check the sales price and profit. The formulas & format in the excel sheets we made can easily be copied for future excel sheets. (Fatou, Bintou and Musu are all on the Executive of No Woman Left Behind)
  2. Together with Fatou we wrote a business plan and included NWLB's core values & assets, market research, competition analysis and strategic future planning. This could be used to send to the government and apply for funding.
  3. I helped Fatou fill out the application for a young African leaders' programme, which in the end she did not apply for due to age restrictions. But the exercise pushed her to think about her personal strengths and weaknesses, her motivation and aspirations for work.
  4. We visited multiple farms and community projects all around The Gambia to explore working with some of them and buying vegetables for the shop that NWLB plan to open in January 2023. We gathered information about the types of produce they could supply us with, the prices they could offer, as well as finding out

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about their community projects in more detail. The collaboration with NWLB could be beneficial for both parties.

5. I helped Fatou, Bintou & Musu define their roles for the future at NWLB and think about their personal strengths and goals.

**Fatou and I in the office:**



**Donut making!**



- Successes/challenges of the placement: Fatou and I worked together very well and were able to achieve everything we planned to and more, in a short space of time! I was successful in taking Fatou's great ideas and just helping to structure them into a business plan. She was able to pick up things in Excel very quickly too, which was great. It was a bit of a challenge to get the women to reflect about their own strengths and goals (regarding work), because they weren't used to thinking about that. But we managed and it helped build their confidence.

Outside of work, I found all the male attention quite stressful at first, being one of the only young white women around and not being able anywhere alone without being spoken to by every man you pass. It is a big change! At least they are usually all friendly and I even made some friends through it, just draining at times to not have a moment to yourself. (Note from people and places: the 'bumsters' are a feature of life in The Gambia! As Ellie says they are friendly and well-meaning – our partners will give volunteers some tips as to how to deal with unwanted attention from them in a friendly way)

- My personal highlight: For me the highlight was meeting people who really give their all to improve things for their country and help other people, despite coming up against many challenges. They have inspired me to push myself to do more to change things for the better too. I also really enjoyed the opportunity to visit the farms all around the country and speak to the women working there. I found out so much about life in The Gambia.



- Would I recommend volunteering to others? Yes! Volunteering joins people around the world who can exchange their skills and experience to help each other learn and grow. If you can afford to offer your services to people in need, it is a great thing to do.
- Leisure time: I spent my free time after work going for walks on the beach at sunset with my friendly neighbours and meeting up with people from work to watch live music or the football, then exploring the area and some tourist sights on the weekends. Highlights: a moonlight reggae party on the beach; Gambian drummers in the Poco Loco bar & watching locals play football all along the beach in the evenings.
- Accommodation: I had a flat to myself with a nice kitchen/ living room area, bedroom and bathroom. The courtyard in the compound was lovely, with a bench for people to sit and chat under the beautiful trees. It was about a 25 min walk to work and a 15 min walk to the gorgeous beach. Away from the main tourist area of Senegambia, the location was perfect.

**Fatou & I at the UNESCO stone circle site:**



**Fatou, Musu, Bintou, myself and 2 other friends out for dinner:**



**Sunset walks on the beach:**



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