

The People of Madagascar

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Anosy Region, Madagascar

My Global Special Studies project took me to the small, South East, Anosy Region, of Madagascar. The island is most famous for its endemic wildlife which consist of more than 80% of the islands flora and fauna. What is rarely talked about though are the Malagasy people. They are a multicultural and diverse group of both Indonesian and African decent that settled the island no more than 2000 years ago. In recent years the Malagasy people have been facing many challenges.

Statistics

- Madagascar is ranked 154 out of 185 in the United Nations Human Development Index (2015).
- As of 2012, 70% of Madagascar's people were living below the poverty line (United Nations, 2016).
- The Anosy region is one of the most impoverished in the country.

Global Field Opportunity

I worked with SEED UK and Azafady Madagascar to craft a participatory internship within their joint organizations. Through participant-observation, as a volunteer with their Pioneer Program, I was able to contribute to and learn about projects in school development, health education, women's empowerment, and economic and environmental sustainability. This intern taught me valuable lessons in cross-cultural collaboration and community engagement.

Outcomes

- New online media for the development and sustainability of STITCH Sainte Luce (a local woman's cooperative) was created.
- School bathrooms in Fort Dauphain were painted with colorful messages reminding children to wash their hands.
- An abandoned school in Mahatalaky was repaired and refurbished and will provide education space for up to 400 youth in the region.
- A bat blind was constructed for research. This project will both promote economic development and protect the local environment and ecosystem.
- Support was provided to the Orbatsimba project that promotes lobster conservation and economic sustainability through the development of a "No Take Zone."

Skills Utilized & Developed

- Working on women's cooperatives and economic sustainability.
- Advancing human rights and social justice via support of various projects.
- Conducting research on international community development.
- Learning about community engagement through cross-cultural agency collaboration.

Lessons Learned

- A project must have the passion of community members to succeed.
- While I may be passionate about international social work. I need to consider the cultural boundaries and whether I am the best person for a particular roll.
- Overwhelming yourself with work will not help anyone.

Advice

- Be flexible. Entering a new community and/or culture with an open mind and no expectations leaves room to explore wonderful opportunities that you may not have even considered.
- Research culture shock and self care techniques prior to departure.

Classroom Connections

648 Issues in Global Social Work Practice

This course helped prepare me for the challenges I would face when entering an international community. I was also able to unpack my past international experiences which helped prepare me for a new global experience.

SW652 Organizing for Social and Political Action

This course introduced me to community engagement and international community development. It helped inspire my decision to pursue a Global Special Studies project and offered a foundation to which I could expand my knowledge.

Career Connections

This opportunity helped to develop my skills and understanding of international social work organizations. It also provided hands on experience in alternative forms of community engagement. Overall, it has helped to shape my views on community organizing and the direction I hope to pursue in the future.



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