

Reflecting

Overall my expertise in Uganda is, at its core, incomparable to any other experience I have had. I have spent time abroad before and had conducted somewhat similar data collection, but the combination of the new atmosphere and assignment became one of the most unique experiences that I could have ever possibly had. The term cultural empathy is thrown around often nowadays (an unrelated topic, the phrase was coined by a UC Davis affiliate) but I would like to challenge its significance. Cultural empathy is an absolute necessity in any cross-cultural venture, however in a situation such as mine and, most likely, the rest of the PATA grantees, it was simply the hinge that allowed the door of cultural immersion to open fully. I feel that it is through this framework that I was able to have such a transformative experience, not only for myself but hopefully for my clients, coworkers, and friends as well. During the weeks we spent conducting interviews and travelling to villages we spent much time in transit where my companion and I would often just make small talk about our cultural differences and analyzed the different yet somewhat reflective political climates between our two countries. I believe that one of the most important takeaways from this project is the idea that sustainability is not always a tangible, measurable metric, instead it can exist in the grey areas and side projects. For example, my project led to the attainment of new data regarding the slow adaptation of an incredible technology but in doing so I worked with the CEO to try and analyze their current incredibly diverse market approach and brought some knowledge regarding the business practices of startups that I have had at least some awareness of. Through days of side conversations and small projects we were also able to develop some targets for the future that would work to allow the NGO to become more self-sufficient (currently they are in debt and rely heavily on grants to continue their low-cost sales model) and hopefully lead to dramatic expansion in the next few years. Such long-term improvements were not something we had planned to work on but through something as simple as a conversation in a taxi it became apparent that I could bring unique ideas due to exposure in the United States, especially from my upbringing in the Bay Area where such conversations are commonplace. I went into Uganda with a linear, direct project in mind and although that was completed, so much more was done as well. For example, we worked to create a script to be used for an online pitch to try to raise funding, began developing the framework for an exploded crowdfunding effort, and discussed the idea of expanding the product line to allow for some consumer choice and higher profit margins. This experience was far from what I would have imagined I would have been spending my summer a year ago, or even what I envisioned the day I received the grant but I am more than grateful for that. Through being open to experiences, ideas, and opportunities we are able to become the best versions of ourselves and pass on that growth to others and put our full effort into these important projects.