

International Intern Report

Global Conscience Initiative

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Introduction

This report details my four-month internship with Global Conscience Initiative. During this internship, which lasted from August to December 2011, I worked primarily with the Centres for Arbitration and Mediation (CAM's) Project. However, my internship extended beyond the Project, and during my time at GCI, I also worked in the areas of development, website management, fundraising, event planning, and communications. This report not only describes my activities in these areas, but it also includes recommendations for the CAM's Project, GCI's development, the organization's website, and other future activities and endeavors.

Review of Activities

The Centres for Arbitration and Mediation (CAM's) Project

When I arrived at GCI in August, the CAM's Project was at a crossroads. From March to May 2011, the GCI staff and its two international interns carried out the CAM's Grand Project¹ in the village of Mofako Bekondo in the Mbonge Subdivision. The team delivered 5 workshops on the topics of transparency, corruption, mediation, the Cameroonian legal process, and human rights to the village's Traditional Council, vigilante group, and Women's Executive Council. During July and August 2011, GCI conducted follow-up surveys and observations of the Traditional Council in order to ascertain the effects (or lack thereof) of the CAM's workshops conducted over the spring. Due to the mixed results reported by these follow-up surveys and observations², the CAM's Project was unsure of how to proceed forward.

My colleagues and I immediately identified that GCI had to carry out follow-up work in Mofako Bekondo. We thus analyzed the problems uncovered by the surveys and created several new activities and initiatives. Then, GCI sat down with Chief Ekumbe Thompson Itoe of Mofako Bekondo and synthesized its recommendations with the Chief's ideas. From there, I authored a GCI internal document, "Proposed Next Steps," which enumerated the problems, goals, and action plans for each of the problems identified in Mofako Bekondo.³

¹ As laid out in the CAM's Final Project Plan in 2009

² For the details of the survey and observation results, please refer to Andrew Noakes' GCI Intern Report, August 2011.

³ Please refer to "Proposed Next Steps" for the details of my September 2011 proposal for the second phase of the CAM's Project in Mofako Bekondo.

During September, GCI carried out preparations for the implementation of these next steps. My colleagues Egbe Minet and Njume Ewang Ndelle created a refresher workshop and a practical training session to review and reinforce GCI's teachings on corruption, transparency, and mediation. My fellow international intern Tessa Levine met with the vigilante group to begin preparations for a more intensive anti-mob justice campaign. Tessa and Njume created guidelines for administrative improvements for the executive members of the Council. Finally, Chief Ekumbe talked directly to the Traditional Council about its tendencies to rowdily fight and consume palm wine during sessions.

I myself began preparations for my Gender Equality Initiative, a sensitization and action campaign I created to resolve the gender inequality on the Traditional Council. During that month, I visited the Executive Women's Council and the Gentlewomen Social Group with a questionnaire that sought to ascertain the following:

- The current status of women in the village, especially concerning political participation and leadership
- The different problems faced by women in the village, especially concerning political participation and leadership
- Their aspirations and goals for their advancement in the village
- Their proposed solutions and plans to achieve these goals

The Gentlewomen Social Group, which is comprised of both men and women, generally had positive comments about the relationship between men and women in Mofako Bekondo. Their one problem with gender relations and equality concerned the fact that men and women needed to work together more for community development.

On the other hand, the Women's Executive Council presented me with plenty of gender-related problems faced by the village. First and foremost, the women expressed frustration with the lack of gender equality on the Council. They discussed the Chief's failed affirmative action plan and emphasized the fact that the men essentially bullied the women into keeping their silence and eventually leaving the Council. With only one female on a Council of twenty-one, the women felt that their voices were simply not heard. This marginalization was expressed primarily through the discrepancy over the Development Fund: since women didn't have a strong presence on the Council, they lacked a say in the allocation of the funds.

The women also told me how women weren't respected in the village as equals to men. One lady said that the men were secretive and routinely shut women out of any conversation they determined to be "for men only." These women informed me that they wanted to improve their standing in village leadership and decision-making. The women also said that girls didn't express an interest in participating in village activities, both those specific to women and those held throughout the entire

community.

From these needs assessments and discussion sessions, I determined that there were several areas that needed to be addressed in order to improve gender relations and increase gender equality in Mofako Bekondo. These areas included sensitization, empowerment, needs fulfillment, affirmative action, and follow-up work. From October to November, my Gender Equality Initiative thus proceeded to address gender inequality through these steps.

First, sensitization was necessary for both the women and the men of Mofako Bekondo in order to get everyone on the same page about what women's rights and gender equality actually are. It was also important to teach how female political participation and leadership both protects women's rights and serves as a crucial component to overall community development. To accomplish this goal, I created a Gender Equality Through Political Participation workshop. I delivered this workshop to three groups in the Mofako community: the Women's Executive Council, the Gentlewomen Social Group, and the Traditional Council on October 26, October 30, and November 16, respectively. The workshop addressed the following topics:

- Female Leadership in the Community
- Women's Rights
- Stereotyping and Discrimination as Barriers to Women's Rights
- Female Political Participation
- Equality Through Education

The second step to this initiative was empowerment and leadership development. Since most women had experienced heavy societal and personal discrimination and marginalization, they needed to be instilled with the belief in their own power and leadership potential. So, I held meetings with the Women's Executive Council where we discussed leadership and the ways in which women can exert influence in decision-making. I enlisted the assistance of four female community leaders (including one Quarter Head and the Secretary of the Executive Women's Council) to help me present the workshop to the men on the Traditional Council. In doing so, I trained the women on public speaking and presentation, and I put the women in a position of power where they were educating the men.

Other barriers stood in the way of female political participation and leadership in Mofako Bekondo. These barriers included gender inequality in education, lack of interest in community involvement on behalf of young women, and lack of transparency in the development fund (which excluded women's input and denied them access to information about their local government's proceedings). For the first two barriers, I tried to lay the groundwork for their resolution by educating the village's adults on education equality and youth involvement. I addressed the third barrier by creating a new budgeting system for the Traditional Council in November, as described below.

The fourth and fifth steps have yet to be implemented, but I reached a verbal agreement with Chief Ekumbe where he promised to appoint five new female Councilors at the beginning of 2012. GCI and the Chief will then carry out follow-up.

My work with the CAM's Project also included a push toward greater transparency in the village Development Fund⁴. At the beginning of my tenure with GCI, we had identified the lack of transparency in the Development Fund as a major component in the relationship between the community and the Council. However, when I approached Chief Ekumbe about reforming the budget process in early September, he expressed unease and reluctance to change it. So, I put Development Fund reform on the back burner until the beginning of November, when I created a small community budgeting system, dubbed "Community Sensitive Budgeting," based on the materials from a UN Women conference on Gender Responsive Budgeting that I attended in late October.⁵

With this new system in hand, I approached the Chief once more with the proposal of Development Fund reform. Once he examined this new system, he agreed that its implementation would benefit Mofako Bekondo. So, I presented the system to the Traditional Council through a workshop on November 30. The workshop included a review of the basics of transparency and why it is a crucial component to good governance. Then, the workshop presented CSB as a tool in achieving greater transparency on the Council. After delivering an overview of the process, I fielded questions, proposals, and concerns from the Council and Chief Ekumbe. When the Council goes to set the 2012 Budget in December, it will follow the process of Community Sensitive Budgeting.

Website Development and Management

From August to mid-October 2011, I undertook the project of overhauling Global Conscience's website. At the time of my arrival at the Kumba office, the website domain name had expired and the website could not be accessed. Yet, greater problems lay in the website content, organization, and design. In general, the website not only failed to present an accurate, coherent, and detailed picture of GCI, its accomplishments, and its activities, but the limited and improperly presented information available caused the reader to question the organization's legitimacy.

After meticulously going through the website page-by-page, I came up with a list of improvements necessary for its overhaul under the categories of content,

⁴ In Mofako Bekondo, the Traditional Council collects an annual Development Fund from each adult (5,000CFA from men and 3,000CFA from women). From this fund, they plan and implement development projects in the village, such as building a new well or installing a secondary school.

⁵ For details about this budgeting system, please refer to the document entitled "Community Sensitive Budgeting."

organization, and design. Then, I proceeded to rewrite the majority of the website's content, including the history of Cameroon, the list of human rights issues in Cameroon, and the overview of the CAM's Project. I also reorganized the website's pages to make it more user-friendly and easier to navigate. Finally, I changed the design by switching the layout and the color scheme, streamlining the organization of information, and adding a slew of new pictures.

Along with Tessa, I made the push to get GCI represented through social media sites, namely Facebook, Twitter, and the website's blog. Tessa was responsible for setting up the Facebook and Twitter accounts while I reorganized the blog by combining old GCI blogs onto one site. Once a week, I updated the blog on topics such as the 2011 Presidential Elections, the CAM's Project, and Human Rights Hour. Tessa and I jointly updated the Twitter account while she alone managed the Facebook page.

Organization Development

In light of previous mismanagement and the untimely death of co-founder Samba Churchill, GCI's activities came to a near-halt during 2010. The year of 2011 was somewhat of a rebirth for the organization with the official reinstatement of the CAM's Project. However, when I joined GCI in August, I knew that its growth shouldn't be limited to CAM's and that it needed to start reinstating its other programs as soon as possible.

So, I sat down with Ntebo Ebenezer, Barrister Pende E. Nelson, Minet, and Tessa to create a plan for bringing GCI back to its full strength. We decided that the Prisoners' Rights Project should be reinstated when GCI hires an international or national intern qualified to restart and run the project, ideally in early 2012. The reinstatement of the Human Rights Clubs depended on the presence of a Cameroonian national intern who could commit to serving a full year with the Project. Finally, the Environmental Project would continue to remain inactive until the other projects were successfully restarted.

Since it was a small project, we determined that the GCI radio show, Human Rights Hour, could be reinstated immediately during the fall. So, Ebenezer met with the manager of Ocean City Radio and by November, GCI was back on the airwaves. GCI delivered four shows before the close of the year, covering topics like women's rights, personal mediation⁶, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Fundraising and Event-Planning

Due to its suspension of activity during 2010, Global Conscience suffered from a decrease in public attention. As such, the GCI staff and I determined that it would be important to start planning GCI events that would raise awareness of both Global

⁶ The process of peacefully resolving conflicts one-on-one without the intervention of a third party.

Conscience's activities as well as human rights issues in Cameroon. We identified that the international celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, held on December 10, would be a perfect opportunity to hold human rights-themed events under the banner of "Human Rights Week."

Although the entire office participated in brainstorming activities for UDHR Day, Ebenezer and I took up the task of organizing, publicizing, fundraising, and carrying out the events themselves. We devised a program that included a movie night, a football tournament, a formal celebration in Kumba, and a formal celebration in Mofako Bekondo.⁷ Then, Ebenezer and I distributed appeal letters to small businesses, large corporations, organization partners, and other individuals to collect enough funds for Human Rights Week. In total, we succeeded in raising 57,000 CFA for the week's activities.

From December 4 to December 10, GCI carried out the planned activities for Human Rights Week. The events were a big success: GCI noted substantial community turnout for each event and was pleased at the level of participation during each activity.

Evaluation of Activities

The Centres for Arbitration and Mediation (CAM's)

Fall 2011 saw a marked expansion and improvement of the CAM's Project. Not only did it enhance its previous programs and workshops, such as mediation and anti-corruption, but it also added new tools and initiatives to its repertoire, including the Gender Equality Initiative and the Community Sensitive Budgeting System.

The greatest success of the CAM's Project during this time was its ability to effectively adapt to the feedback given by and collected from Mofako Bekondo. The Project pursued creative solutions to the shortcomings of the Project and received overwhelmingly positive reception and support from its target groups. Of course, observations and surveys in early 2012 will either confirm or deny this assertion, but from my personal observations and conversations with community members, I prematurely conclude that we have been successful in our endeavors.

The CAM's Project was also successful in revolutionizing its method of interacting with its partner community. Before Fall 2011, the Project employed a banking-style, one-sided education strategy where it delivered workshops to a group of individuals without sufficiently opening the seminars up for group participation, input, and self-education. One of the most important developments of the CAM's Project was the innovation of having community members present in our workshops and teach their peers about mediation, human rights, and the like. The positive effects of this

⁷ For the full schedule of Human Rights Week activities, please see the UDHR Celebration Program.

innovation are threefold. First, audience members are more likely to understand and absorb information as delivered by their peers. Second, the facilitators themselves are more likely to remember and apply the information. Third, all participants—presenters and audience members alike—come to feel as though they “own” the change taking place in their village: the sensitization is organic and internal instead of externally imposed.

Concerning the Gender Equality Initiative, I believe it was very successful in its objectives to understand and integrate the concerns and ideas of community members, especially women, into the formulation of its activities. Additionally, the Initiative was successful in reaching and empowering female leaders in the village, who then in turn assisted with the sensitization of male leaders on topics of women’s rights and gender equality. Although some community members (males in particular) didn’t initially understand or agree with some gender equality concepts, by December, most understood and supported the need for gender equality in politics and specifically in village leadership. Finally, while the Initiative accomplished its objectives to sensitize community members, empower female leaders, and pave the way for another attempt at affirmative action on the Traditional Council, it also successfully laid the groundwork for long-term gender education and needs fulfillment.

Another success in the CAM’s Project during my tenure as an international intern was the creation of the Community Sensitive Budgeting System to resolve transparency issues on the Council and in the community. Instead of just educating our target audience on the concepts of transparency, the CAM’s team experimented with and found success in using practical tools to achieve its governance objectives on the Traditional Council. CSB was a multi-faceted system that aimed not just to improve the Council’s transparency, but also to improve the relationship and the trust between the Council and the community. Its steps and provisions were understood and supported by the Chief and all members of the Council, and I am confident that the system will be implemented successfully in the coming year.

Even though I was not as directly involved with the completion of the other activities in this second phase of the CAM’s Project, I found that our work in the areas of mediation, corruption, human rights, executive/administrative functions, and Councilor conduct achieved considerable success. The Council was extremely receptive to our refresher workshops, including the new interactive activities. Both the Secretary and the Chairman understood and agreed to our suggestions for their executive roles. Finally, upon a directive from Chief Ekumbe, Councilor conduct improved drastically (minimal fighting and aggression), and the consumption of alcohol before and during sessions stopped altogether.

The one area where GCI fell short of its goals as described in its Proposed Next Steps was that of mob justice. In spite of the productive and promising initial work session between GCI and the vigilante group, the vigilante group spurned our subsequent efforts to address the concerns and implement the ideas brought forward during the

initial session. This made our work with mob justice in Mofako Bekondo impossible to accomplish because the vigilante group was crucial in achieving our goals.⁸

Website Management

As I previously stated, the old GCI website was ineffective and insufficient at representing this organization and its events. Despite the slow Internet and the at-times cumbersome web publishing site, I was able to completely overhaul GCI's website. I rewrote 75% of the content (including detailed descriptions of Cameroonian history, the country's human rights problems, and GCI's individual projects), I reorganized the content, and I redesigned the main aspects of the site (layout, photos, logos, etc.). The overall result is a more stylish and informative website that both lays out the political, legal, and historical context for our work and attractively and honestly sells GCI's projects and programs. Due to this overhaul, GCI now has far more international credibility than before.

Our endeavors to engage GCI with social networking met with mixed success. On one hand, we were able to maintain a consistent Twitter feed and a regularly updated Facebook page. Furthermore, I posted blogs once a week, giving substantial detail about GCI's work and current human rights events in Cameroon. On the other hand, we didn't have the high speed internet to mobilize an international following and promote GCI on a global scale. As a result, we don't have many followers on our Twitter feed and Facebook page.

My worry for the future of the website is that it may encounter sustainability problems. Due to the slow Internet, it's time consuming and hence extremely difficult to update the website consistently and efficiently. This problem can be seen in the challenges we encountered to merely post an update on Twitter. Furthermore, the web design tools can be confusing at times, and this might present a problem to professionals who are less experienced in web publishing.

Organizational Development

So far, the organizational development that we accomplished has been on par with the goals we set in October, with the exception of the Human Rights Clubs. We restarted Human Rights Hour in November, and we have posted for interns to help revive the Prisoners' Rights Project. Concerning the Human Rights Clubs, we had projected to begin the project in November, but we agreed that a Cameroonian intern was best equipped to run the program, due both to his/her personal experience/knowledge with local education as well as the fact that he/she would be based in Cameroon for an extended period of time.⁹ As of now, no such intern has been found, so the project remains inactive.

⁸ For more information, refer to Tessa Levine's Intern Report.

⁹ As opposed to an international intern, who normally stays in Kumba for 3-6 months.

Fundraising and Event Planning

During my internship tenure, our fundraising and event planning was concentrated in Human Rights Week. The activities that took place—both the fundraising and planning that preceded them as well as their implementation—saw mixed success.

For the minimal time spent planning and preparing for this week, GCI was successful at holding exciting events that generated awareness and conversation over human rights issues in Cameroon. For example, attendants of Movie Night on Monday, December 5 at Azi Motel were moved and inspired by the movie *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. Another event, Drinks 'n' Dialogue saw excited and constructive conversation between participants on the subject of corruption in Cameroon. The events also served as a platform for GCI programs and a networking opportunity for human rights activists in the Kumba area.

The two areas in which GCI met with difficulties were turnout and funds. In other words, the majority of the events during Human Rights Week were underfunded and suffered from minimal attendance. This can be partially attributed to the lack of enthusiasm on behalf of Kumba residents, both in donating money and attending the events. However, the fundraising and marketing of Human Rights Week was indeed done at the last minute (e.g. appeal letters were distributed the week before the celebrations took place). This did not give the staff ample time to effectively appeal for donations and publicize the events; it also did not give the Kumba population enough time to digest the information and plan ahead.

Recommendations

Centres for Arbitration and Mediation

- GCI should rewrite the initial stage of the CAM's Project to provide for more participatory and effective education and a more integrated presentation of topics.
- GCI should continue to build upon its move from one-sided education to multilateral, interactive, problem-solving initiatives. It should look to create long-term partnerships and programs that ensure practical application of the CAM's principles and objectives.
- GCI should continue to apply for funding for the Project and look to implement it in the four remaining villages, while planning to expand into other villages in the Mbonge Subdivision.
- GCI should consider creating a separate Gender Equality Program sometime in the future. Since gender equality is a major human rights issue in Cameroon, GCI should devote itself to a separate Project that addresses this problem.

Website Management

- GCI staff needs to regularly update the website with new pictures, program updates, internship postings, etc.
- GCI needs to post blogs each week, detailing its programs and events and analyzing current human rights issues in Cameroon.
- GCI should brainstorm strategies for web campaigning and publicizing the organization's work to an international audience.

Organizational Development

- GCI should work toward building partnerships with other local NGO's and human rights organizations. Cameroon suffers from such widespread and entrenched human rights problems; it is impossible for GCI to resolve these issues alone. Uniting with other NGO's not only eases the burdens of workload and logistics, but it also increases the scope and effectiveness of our work.
- One of the things I noticed at GCI that seemed to hinder the organization's functions and development was the utilization of human resources. This especially concerns Cameroonian interns and volunteers. I understand that, due to a lack of resources, there is only so much work to be done in the office. However, GCI should strive to make use of the young Cameroonian volunteers and interns as much as possible. Some of these people might be under-qualified to do certain types of work, like human rights reporting, fundraising, or advocacy. In that case, GCI should train the national interns and volunteers in whichever capacity is necessary. The more local involvement GCI receives in the form of interns and volunteers, the more effective its work becomes. Likewise, better on-the-job training and more challenging assignments will help further the jobs skills of any Cameroonian that comes to work for GCI.

Fundraising and Event Planning

- GCI should plan and hold small human rights-related social events on a regular basis. The goals for this are three-fold: first, doing so allows those interested in/working for human rights to network and unite in causes. Second, it circulates human rights information, breeds awareness, and sows the seeds for activism amongst the public. Third, it helps GCI publicize its activities. These events would, again, be small yet open to the public. They should make human rights accessible to anybody, and they should be informal and focused on creating easy, frank conversation and learning.
- GCI staff and—if possible—former interns with grant writing experience and free time should devote time to applying for international grants and donations. As of now, GCI barely survives with the money earned from international internship fees. Such an undependable and meager subsistence is not enough to provide GCI with the money it needs to sustain its current programs and restart its inactive projects. In addition, GCI has enormous potential for growth and success in Kumba, throughout the Southwest, and

around Cameroon. Simply put, GCI needs a larger income to meet its potential in improving human rights in Cameroon.

- When moving forward with event planning, the GCI staff should take care to plan ahead and give itself ample time to fundraise and market that particular event. Of course, GCI can never completely control for things like a reluctance to donate money or an apathetic attitude towards attendance. But, certainly, allowing more time to persuade people to donate or attend will be beneficial.