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Bridgers Association Cameroon

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Eleveur-Ngouso, Yaounde Cameroon.

INTERNSHIP REPORT



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Acknowledgements

My special thanks and gratitude goes to Azah Jackline Chey and Abai Victor Asondo, the founders and Coordinators of Bridgers Association Cameroon. Before even setting foot on Cameroonian ground, I already felt I was in good and capable hands. They supported me in my search for accommodation and were always available to speak about questions and concerns. They offered to pick me up from the airport, which is a necessity in Cameroon due to safety reasons. Thus, they ensured that I should have the best possible start in Cameroon and would not feel left alone. This support was continuously present. I was relieved and glad to know that I could turn to them with any private concern or issue. They were concerned and extremely supportive when I fell sick, which means a lot to me. They made sure that I had enough time and opportunities to discover the beautiful and vast touristic sites of Cameroon. They included me in different social events and thus, gave me the opportunity to get a better and deeper understanding of the Cameroonian society. Furthermore, both of them did not hesitate to support me in my research for my master-thesis and participated in qualitative interviews with me, which will be very valuable for my research here in Cameroon. They were very flexible and gave me the opportunities and the time I needed to conduct research for my Master-thesis and other obligations I had to fulfil. I am grateful for all the laughter we shared and the good experiences we had together. I am sure that this will be a life-long connection and friendship and I will be happy to welcome them one day in my own country of origin – Germany even for an International Conference.

I equally wish to appreciate the good working contributions of the other volunteers and colleagues I worked with like Che Lambert Che, Meh Augustina, Eric Ogar, Barrister Acha Macleans and Nyam Julius.

Summary of the Internship

Bridgers Association Cameroon is still in its kick-off phase, especially since the head-office of the organisation had to move from Buea, where they were formerly based. Due to the Anglophone crisis, they had to relocate to Yaounde. This allowed me to get interesting insights into how to start an NGO and which steps need to be taken to run it successfully. The Internship started right after I landed on the 6th of March and lasted until the 21st of June. Before I came, I already submitted two project-ideas which were reviewed and corrected by Azah Jackline Chey. Those were the two core-projects I have focused most of my work on during my internship, though I still had to develop and work on other projects. Both projects relate to reproductive health care issues in Cameroon. Unfortunately, only one of the two projects could be realized during my stay due to a lack of funding. The project that was being realized is called: “Reproductive Healthcare and Empowerment: Women, Protect your Health and Future”. Through directives of management, I launched a crowdfunding campaign which allowed us to raise just enough money to initiate the first phase of the project: In total, we covered four different secondary schools in Yaoundé where we combined the project on Reproductive Healthcare with another project about the importance of practical skills and volunteerism. We reached out directly to about 2000 students and indirectly to about 4000 students at least. We sensitized students and discussed with them, the content of our educative

sensitization-campaign will be outlined and explained in more detail in another section of this report. Beside the organisation and execution of projects I was responsible for the daily running and management of the social media-channels (Facebook, twitter) as well as regularly updating the website (researching and developing contents). I was also part of the team responsible for correspondences. Furthermore, other important aspects of my work included project-writing and grant application; as well as writing of letters of collaboration for partnership.

Introduction of the Organisation

Bridgers Association Cameroon is a non-governmental women and youth-led organisation, which was founded in 2013 and got registered in 2016 in Cameroon. The organisation focuses on the empowerment of women, as well as other vulnerable groups in Cameroon. They aim to fight gender-based violence (GBV) as well as other rampant societal issues, such as poverty and climate change and health-issues. Briefly put, Bridgers Association Cameroon is mainstreaming gender. Bridgers envisions a peaceful world in which every women can freely and independently realize their full potentials and self-esteem, a world free of violence and destruction, a world where every individual lives with love and joy in their hearts.

The Sustainable Development Goals play an important role in the work of the organisation. They focus particularly on SDG 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 15,16 and 17.

Areas of intervention contain: Addressing gender Issues and empowering women and girls; Community Development Projects that improve the livelihood of women; Educational promotion and Career Guidance for girls; Sustainable Environmental Education; Capacity Building and sensitization campaigns on issues affecting women.

Course of the Internship

Within the first four weeks of the internship, I was mainly focusing on project-writing. I wrote two projects on reproductive health care rights and launched a crowd-funding campaign on the project: “Reproductive Health Care and Empowerment: Women, protect your health and future!”, which was running for over one months and collected about 230Euros of funding from my own social network. I equally went through other written projects and corrected them. The next weeks were dominated by searching and applying for grants and funds, which is a necessity to start any project at all and keep the organisation running. From here, I then started engaging more in the social media channels, with special focus on Facebook. I ensured that there was a post every day, to make Bridgers Association Cameroon is visible and known by the entire world.

I continued to do so until the end of my internship. This work included researching, writing and editing and demanded a lot of creativity. Abai Victor introduced me on how to work on the website, enhance it and add new content. I focused specifically on improving the content of the website for about two weeks. I continued to work and improve the website also

afterwards, but with less intensity. After about 9 weeks, the practical part of the work began: Within about three weeks we went to four different secondary schools to realize the projects which I developed: “Reproductive Health Care and Empowerment: Women, protect your health and future!” which aimed to encourage young people to use condoms, end the stigmatization that comes along with buying them, and thus shall stop the spread of HIV, other sexually transmissible diseases and early pregnancies. The second project we carried out in schools was called: “The Importance of practical skills: Volunteer and increase your chances to gain a job in the labour-market”. The projects main objective was to create more awareness among young students to the importance of practical experiences and thus working experiences. To do internships and to volunteer in different fields of the labour-market is highly beneficial as it gives work-experiences, which is demanded by employers as well as helps young people to orientate themselves and find out what they like and what they are good at.

Bridgers Team promises to seek diverse form of partnerships/collaboration so as to work on this project for at least five years to see into it that many youths get empowered through volunteerism and internships. For the General Coordinator of Bridgers Madam Azah Jackline Chey, “Volunteerism needs to be made habitual in Cameroon”

Furthermore, we educated the young students on the Sustainable Development Goals, so that they themselves can one day work towards them, knowing that if the SDGs have to be achieved by 2030, then the goals needs to first of all be known and understood by everyone. The students were really excited learning the goals and promised to work towards their attainment. And Bridgers has promised to work on the goals at least in the next couple of years.

Within the last weeks of the internship, I mainly wrote collaboration letters, searched for possible partnerships and communicated with other organisations. Giving that Bridgers is still a small non profit, it depends on donations and grants to survive as such the organisation greatly need institutional support to create great impact within the community. Therefore, meaningful partnerships with corporate bodies and individuals is of high necessity for the greater good of this great grassroots Organisation which is impact creating.

In the last week of the internship, we were invited as guests on CRTV, the Cameroon Radio Television which the state broadcaster. I and the General Coordinator Azah Jackline Chey were guests on the live tv program ‘Cameroon Feeling’ during which the host Journalist interviewed us and we talked about the Organisation as well as the two projects we recently carried out. This was a continuation of our projects as we were able to reach a wider public.

Activities of the Internship

Women's Day 2019: Empowering IDP women

The first activity of the internship was the preparation of the International women's-day celebration on March 8, 2019. We bought sanitary items such as soap, toothpaste, pads, and toothbrushes for ten internally displaced women from the crisis turned Anglophone regions of Cameroon. These women were identified by another local NGO called HaRO, with whom Bridgers started a partnership. The ten selected women were left with almost nothing as they fled from a war-zone and were in need of almost everything. Therefore, Bridgers and HaRO gave them symbolic gifts 'A Bag of Hope,' filled with sanitary articles. After the distribution, the women were promised that this is just the beginning of support. We provided psycho-social support to these women who have been appreciative through their feedbacks.

Project-writing & Crowdfunding

In the course of the internship I wrote and elaborated two Projects: "Reproductive Health Care and Empowerment: Women, protect your health and future!" and "Providing a Sustainable Solution to Menstrual Health Care in Cameroon" for which we equally made videos which explained the importance of the project and made it attractive to the public. For strategic reasons, I distributed just one of the two projects among my own personal network through a crowdfunding campaign ("Reproductive Health Care and Empowerment: Women, protect your health and future!"). We received 230 Euros, which enabled us to start the project in four secondary schools in Yaoundé later on.

The Implementation of three Projects in four secondary schools: Educating, Sensitizing & Empowering

Within three weeks we carried out our programme in the following secondary schools, all of them are located in Yaoundé: Ayungha Bilingual College, Christian Comprehensive Secondary School (CCSS) Nkolmbong, Champignon High School, Mada International College. In total, we reached out to more than 2000 students directly and about 4000 students indirectly. We carried out two to three different projects in each school in which we educated, sensitized, empowered and discussed pertinent issues relating to our projects with the students.

1. Project: "Reproductive Health Care and Empowerment: Women, protect your health and future!"

The first one, called "Reproductive Health Care and Empowerment: Women, protect your health and future!", aimed to educate young people on HIV/AIDS and sensitize young people on the importance of safer sex. I started by introducing Bridgers Association Cameroon to the students and continued with a small educative lecture about HIV/AIDS in which I covered questions like: What is HIV/AIDS, what happens in the body, how does it spread and how can it be prevented from spreading. The lecture was always followed by a discussion with the students. The students were curious and asked a lot of questions, which clearly showed us that there is a lack of knowledge concerning sex education and reproductive health rights. Questions that were posed were for example: "We were taught condoms can cause cancer. Is

that true?” “How often does one need to change the condom while having intercourse?” “Can I use a condom more than once?” Equally, many students were not aware, that the HIV virus was not only transmissible through blood, but also through sperms, vaginal and anal fluids as well as breast milk. We thus consider the project a success having clarified all these issues and from the reactions and feedback from the students.

2. Project: “The Importance of practical skills: Volunteer and increase your chances to gain a job in the labour-market”.

The second project we carried out was called “The Importance of practical skills: Volunteer and increase your chances to gain a job in the labour-market”. One of our board-members of Bridgers gave a small interactive lecture on the importance of practical skills and how it can increase every bodies chances to find a job in the highly competitive job-market, where not only certificates matter, but also practical experiences and skills. This lecture was equally followed by a discussion as well as a small survey, which revealed that only 17% of the students had done an internship or have volunteered already. This indicates that more work on the ground needs to be done to create awareness among the students.

3. Project: “The Sustainable Development Goals”

The third project was only carried out in the last two schools: It was an educative lecture about the Sustainable Development Goals, which constitute a key-element in the work of Bridgers Association Cameroon. All the 17 Goals were explained individually, but it was also emphasized that they are all deeply interconnected with each other. The aim of this project was to introduce students to the SDGs from a tender age, so that they know about them and have them in mind when approaching their future and possibly become actors of change themselves. Bridgers considers that if the Goals have to be achieved through Agenda 2030, then they must be known and understood by all and sundry.

Searching and applying for Grants and Funding opportunities

Furthermore, I was writing and correcting other projects as well as searched possible funders and grants to realize other projects. This included the developing of projects that would fit within the framework of the institution and funding-bodies, as well as plan a budget for such projects, with the help of Azah Jackline Chey the General Coordinator.

Managing Social Media Channels

I was engaging very actively in taking care of the social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter with a special focus on Facebook. I was creating and planning Facebook-posts for every day of the week with the aim to make Bridgers Association Cameroon well known and visible within Cameroon and all over the world. The posts content was educative, entertaining and reflected Projects, background information as well as the organisations areas of interventions and vision and mission. The results were extremely positive as the number of followers increased extensively.

For example, One of our post reached up to 9726 people and was shared 44 times. The posts made the organisation visible within and beyond national borders, as the organisation got contacted various times by different individuals as well as organisations. Bridgers Association Cameroon currently has an established partnership with a renowned organisation in Rwanda working on Peace and Reconciliation since after the Post-Genocide Rwanda.

I also initiated and ran a one week social-media campaign, inspired by Abai Victor Asondo, who gave me the idea. The Campaign was educating on different forms of Gender-Based Violence, such as economic violence, psychological violence, physical violence as well as sexual violence. The campaign aimed to create more awareness in the society and the importance to identify such inequalities, eliminate and prevent them. It was received very positively, as comments of followers indicated.

Website-Management: Update, maintain and edit content on the Website

Abai Victor A. introduced me on how to work on the website and showed me the necessary steps and tools as well as supervised my actions concerning web-site management. I researched, wrote articles and corrected and improved existing ones, as well as improved the general appearance of the website.

Collaborations

Another important aspect of my work was searching possible institutions, and foundations for a collaboration that can help Bridgers Association in many ways. Therefore, I formulated a general collaboration letter in German, which I sent to 13 different foundations in Germany. Unfortunately, those who already replied said that there is no capacity for any collaboration or material/financial support, but they praised the organisation and encouraged us and recommended other possible funders. However, the search and submission of collaboration and partnership letters is a continuous activity.

Reaching out to a wider public

During my last week, Azah Jackline Chey and I had an appointment on CRTV, the nations tv-channel. We were scheduled at 7.30am for the show “Cameroon feeling” to introduce Bridgers Association Cameroon. We talked about the projects we have carried out in the secondary schools, the mission of the organisation, as well as other projects which the organisation is now planning to launch. It was an excited program that we had as the program was a live broadcast. I was also asked on how I have been enjoying the country Cameroon in terms of the food and which places I have visited and travelled to within my stay. I was happy talking about the type of foods I have been enjoying.

Reflection

Bridgers Association is still in its pilot phase and is establishing itself, especially since the organisation had to move its main office to Yaoundé just recently given the crisis in the Anglophone Regions. This allowed me to learn which steps need to be taken in order to start

and run a non-profit organisation. I learned that it is not easy for relatively new organisations to receive funding, because funds and grants are mostly rather given to bigger, already well-established organisations, which have a big budget already. But resistance, hard work, and a serious and dedicated commitment will pay off eventually. I was impressed by Jackline's and Victor's optimism and endurance. I observed that they are very committed to their work and thus grab any opportunity that can possibly lead to a growth of the organisation. They are well aware of the importance of networking. I was happy to be able to connect them to two friends of mine in Yaoundé, who are quite successful in certain domains of development work and "women in leadership". I equally learned from them that one has to be willing to sacrifice a lot in the beginning, meaning to use one's own capital to realize smaller projects and to always remain active. Collaboration with other organisations as well as with government ministries is a continuously an important part of the organisation. A good online performance and a certain degree of professionalisation is equally necessary. Motivating volunteers and supervising them well is very beneficial. Conference and workshop participations is extremely necessary as build the organisations capacity through training of personnel. I have learned that a large part of the work of an NGO does take place in the preparation and thus in the office. Practical work in the field is still the heart of the organisation. It is what drives one and it is where an organisation can finally make an impact on a societal level and lastly in the world. Once an organisation is well established and has grown a certain degree of professionalisation, those opportunities will come more frequently. Creativity, Endurance, diplomacy and passion are key-qualities in the realm of NGO-work.

Conclusion

During my four months internship at Bridgers Association Cameroon, I gained very interesting insights into the realm of NGO-work here in Cameroon and learned much about the management of and NGO. I learned the most important features concerning project design and writing, how to plan it, execute it and monitor it successfully. I have learned how to edit and maintain a website as well as was able to become creative concerning developing posts on the social media channels (especially facebook). I equally enjoyed the teamwork and the great working-atmosphere at the Bridgers office. Together, we would discuss certain topics and develop new ideas together. I had some interesting insights in public relations work, which is an important part of the work concerning collaborations, partnership, as well as making the organisation visible and well-known. The practical experiences I made in the field were extremely enriching and satisfying. It demonstrated to me that the work we are doing is necessary and valuable. Furthermore, I could gain more practice and skills in public speeches and thus become more confident. I discovered the benefits and challenges of the work in a local NGO and came to the conclusion, that it is a multifaceted, interesting and challenging job, which demands a lot of social skills and can constitute a wonderful and satisfactory career trajectory. I am indeed honoured to have learned and to have served in these many capacities at Bridgers Association Cameroon.