Tanner Hoffman – Summary of Time with UWP

In International Development, there is a certain romanticism that comes with working in the field. For me, there has been no greater satisfaction than waking up to a golden African sunrise, embracing those early morning rays that warm the air, and beholding the beautiful red dirt roads of Uganda coming into focus out of the darkness. To experience life in Ugandan communities, standing shoulder to shoulder with those amazing men, women, and children, opened up a whole new world for me. Even more rewarding than the cultural immersion was being able to actively participate in development activities in Uganda. It shaped who I am, changed my worldview, forced me to re-examine my values. It wasn't always easy, and though I struggled deeply at times, I absolutely loved it.

There is no disputing that fieldwork is critical to creating sustained and meaningful change in international development. It also happens to be the most visible facet of international development. Success in the field is what we strive to achieve as development practitioners in order to show lives are changed by our work. Such success, however, cannot be achieved without critical work on the back end. It is the work that occurs behind the scenes that can often make or break a development effort. Without proper research and planning, the implementation of development interventions often fails. This is the less than glamorous side of development that we do not often hear about. There is no African sunrise and there are no rolling red dirt roads. Photo shoots from the office do not generate donor funding, nor do they elicit an emotional, heart-warming response from friends and family.

While my story from behind the scenes is not likely to change lives, it is a story that I have been asked to share. This story is not one that I tell for personal glorification. I expect no praise, nor do I want it. As a development worker, I do not believe I am the one who deserves the credit. Simply stated, I am nothing more than a facilitator of the larger development process – a process that has been undertaken by local men and women who strive to improve their communities day in and day out. While I have dreamed of working in international development for quite some time now, I lack the lifetime of knowledge and experience that these locals have. Admittedly, I am new to this. I am only seven weeks into my first internship and, while I have participated in development efforts on three continents to date, I fully submit

to the reality that I am naïve college student, born and raised in the suburbs of Kingston, Ontario. Perhaps I will one day be a seasoned professional, but for now, I am an apprentice of the trade, seeking to learn a new skill, maybe two.

At times, my choice to pursue a career in international development terrifies me. People may not like what I have to say next, but in the business of charity, good intentions are not good enough, helping can hurt, and charity can be toxic. I felt much better about my efforts to serve others before I came to fully understand these truths. It is humbling to know that, despite our very best efforts to do a good thing for another, we can be inflicting deep, long lasting harm without even knowing it. Though I have struggled at times, I believe I have reconciled my conflicting emotions, finding a discipline within international development that parallels my desire to promote healthy practices within the global charity industry. For me, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is an essential part of moving beyond good intentions, making sure helping doesn't actually hurt, and ensuring that our charity doesn't become toxic. M&E forces organizations to intently examine their programmatic activities, ensuring that the best services are provided in the most efficient possible way. M&E supports both responsible giving and responsible receiving. It celebrates our best efforts and humbles us before our worst failures. I love this: it fits me, it fits my personality, and it fits my conviction to do no harm.

For all of these reasons, I was beyond elated when James Harrington, Executive Director of the Ugandan Water Project (UWP), expressed his interest to establish an M&E program as a part of his organization's efforts to provide communities in Uganda with access to safe drinking water. Having become aware of my interest to stay involved with UWP, James proposed that I come on board with UWP as a summer intern to lay the groundwork for the M&E effort. It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. Coming out of my second year of undergraduate studies at Houghton College, I was not expecting to be assigned such a paramount position. Interns are supposed to complete the surveys and input data, not design the surveys and develop the workflow and management plans, right? Sure, I had some past experience with M&E as an International Development student at Houghton College; I had completed M&E research for Medical Assistance Programs (MAP) International, and even watched professionals

from MAP Ecuador's office collect data in the field while taking a Health Development class in Ecuador the semester before. Of course, I knew a thing or two about M&E before I started working for UWP, but a little bit of knowledge can be a dangerous thing. By no means was I expecting to be laying the groundwork for an entire M&E program, but James entrusted me with the position and I was more than happy to oblige.

I was a bit overwhelmed early in my internship. Essentially, my task was to research and design an M&E program customized to UWP's needs, and then to propose what I believe UWP should do moving forward. Early on, that meant research, lots of research! I came in to my internship understanding the general M&E process very well - I had completed research on this for MAP International - but taking that general knowledge and creating a custom program to fit UWP required hours of more intensive digging. It isn't hard to find information on the general M&E process; M&E is big business for any serious development organization. However, as I came to discover shortly after starting with UWP, it is quite another thing to find M&E information geared specifically towards the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector and towards smaller organizations, similar in size to UWP. To find the information I needed, I had to go straight to the source, which meant contacting other WASH organizations directly.

Throughout the first week of my internship, I looked up as many WASH organizations as I could find. In all, through my conversations with James and by looking into various WASH networking sites such as Blue Planet Network and WASHfunders.org, I probably compiled a list of around one hundred WASH organizations. The list was the easy part. Reaching out to staff members of these organizations was a different story. Scouring through website after website, I was eventually able to piece together a list of contacts from each of the WASH organizations I had previously identified. One by one, I sent emails to these development professionals, asking if they would be willing to share any information regarding their approach to M&E. While I never heard back from the vast majority - and many responded saying that they had no information to share - about thirty-five people responded to me seriously, passing on some valuable insights. From these responses, I was able to compile a list of indicators that other organizations

in our sector are currently using to track outcomes in the field. I was then able to organize these indicators into three indicator levels – process, outcome, and impact – which parallel the Theory of Change outlined in UWP's Logical Framework. I also uncovered information about a wide array of data collection tools, how other organizations determine the frequency of data collection, how they analyzed data, and how they did it all within an affordable budget. Through this process, I gained a great deal of knowledge and had the opportunity to communicate with a number of incredible individuals! I am especially grateful for those select few development professionals who took time away from their own organizations to talk to me on the phone, helping me to better understand the M&E process from a WASH context. From Alex of the Radler Foundation, to Mark with Ryan's Well, to Lindsay with Lifewater, Laura and Sarah from The Water Trust, and Ryan from Healing Waters, I appreciate all that you have done for me and UWP. Thank you.

One thing that became evident was that UWP needed a data analysis system that suited its unique needs and capacities as an organization. Mobile data collection emerged as the best option. Using mobile data collection technology streamlines the collection process, cutting inefficient and time consuming steps out of traditional data collection and analysis procedures. As an organization, we needed a platform we could customize with surveys, deploy those surveys to our staff in Uganda, have our field staff complete them electronically on site visits, and have all of our data upload to a platform through which we could analyse and disseminate our data. We also wanted to be able to tag all of UWP's water points using GPS and have them mapped out in a way that would allow us to display all of our actions as an organization. Furthermore, at UWP, we want to share with others, and we are humble enough to let others share with us. In line with these values, we wanted to work on a platform that promoted collaboration and information sharing between all stakeholders in the sector.

While finding all of these characteristics in a single platform seemed like an unrealistic dream at first, we held onto hope that, with so many organizations possessing similar needs and values to our own, a product similar to what we desired must already exist. We just had to find it. Sure enough, the product already did exist. In fact, we were able to track down many different products that had the potential to suit

our needs. Now, we had to determine which one was best for UWP. In the end, it came down to two products: Akvo and mWater. I first found Akvo, a company that designs data collection and analysis technology geared specifically towards international development organizations. Akvo seemed like a great platform, offering almost all of the services we were looking for. I even discussed Akvo with staff from different development organizations and received nothing but positive feedback. With complete confidence in Akvo's capabilities, I excitedly showed the product to James. While James thought the product was okay, he wasn't sold just yet and told me to keep looking At the time, this frustrated me; I was convinced I had already found what we were looking for. Why did I need to waste more time digging deeper? Despite my frustrations, I listened to James, kept looking, and I'm glad I did. The next morning, we made a huge breakthrough as an organization! I came across the name mWater in a CARE International document and decided to look into their platform a little more. As it turns out, mWater offers the same services as Akvo, but without the hefty annual fee. Amazingly, mWater is also geared specifically towards WASH organizations and comes equipped with a huge data-sharing platform that maps out water points all around the world! James squealed like a little girl when I showed him the platform and its capabilities! Within a week, James and I were on the phone with John, one of the founders of mWater, seriously discussing what mWater could offer UWP. After the call, James and I knew there was no other option. mWater offered the services we were looking for and was founded upon values we share. The decision was made.

At three weeks in, I had determined our indicators, found a great mobile data collection and analysis platform, and I felt very confident in my understanding of the general M&E process. I even knew the types of questions I wanted to ask in our surveys. Numerous organizations graciously sent us their data collection surveys to analyse, and I was able to locate a significant number of WASH data collection surveys made publicly accessible through mWater. To this point, significant progress had been made, but we still had a long way to go. Next, we had to turn these indicators, questions, and our new-found mobile data collection platform into something usable.

With a team embarking to Uganda in the coming days to complete fieldwork, James and I knew we had to capitalize on the opportunity to test drive some of our questions on the ground in Uganda. In only a day, I made quick work to develop a rough data collection form that I could send with the team. By employing this draft, we were looking to test some things out: we wanted to know what would work and what wouldn't hold up in the field. Within a matter of days, as our team in Uganda completed our test surveys on their daily field visits, results began to trickle back to our Rochester office. It was extremely rewarding to receive real time feedback on the questions we were asking. As expected, certain aspects of our survey did not work. While language and culture barriers obscured the meaning of some questions, other questions turned out to be far too ambiguous to be asked in the field, often leading to indefinite and unusable results. While I was disappointed to see our survey fall apart in the midst of testing, it was exactly what we needed to see. Now, we had a better idea of what worked and more importantly, what didn't work. It was time to analyze, time to learn, and time to improve.

After analyzing the results of our initial survey, changes to our approach were needed. I was able to formulate clearer and more concise questions to solve problems identified in the field. I was then able to translate our original paper survey into the mWater portal. As a data collection platform, mWater made the creation and use of forms simpler than our previous paper copies as the technology allowed for skip logic to be employed automatically. Now, using our mWater surveys, certain questions will only appear in response to the answers of previous question, bringing more clarity to both the surveyor and the interviewee. Furthermore, numeric responses, textual responses, checklists, radio button responses, and photographs can all be collected in a single form, using a single mobile device. Best of all, by using the mWater mobile app, data we collect on site uploads straight to the online portal where it can be approved and analysed by our staff with ease. Now all of our site data can be stored in a central platform where we are able to track changes in our process, outcome, and impact indicators over time and across different UWP sites.

In the weeks since our team returned from Uganda, we have been able to test drive three new drafts of our data collection survey with our Ugandan field staff. To date, we are still using paper copies

of our forms. We are taking things slow, one step at a time, to ensure our Ugandan staff has a comprehensive understanding of the process and the questions being asked before we bring mobile data collection technology into the mix. In preparing for this transition, the paper forms have been composed using screenshots of the mWater portal whenever possible. Finding an appropriate survey length, determining the wording and sentence structure that Ugandans respond best to, and removing questions that are culturally inappropriate have been noteworthy aspects of our learning process. Input from our entire staff has afforded me the opportunity refine our data collection forms time and time again. Every UWP staff member has contributed to the learning process in some capacity. In particular, I know I could not have made progress without the feedback, guidance, encouragement, and support of our Ugandan staff. These amazing Ugandan men and women understand the cultural dynamics of Uganda better than I ever could. I have been humbled by how much I simply don't know in this domain and I am especially grateful that our Ugandan nationals have walked this path with me. This is a program that Ugandan nationals will be employing in the field; thus, their participation in the design process has meant the world to me.

In my last couple of weeks with UWP, I have had the time to tie many big picture M&E ideas together. Recognizing that my time with UWP is coming to an end, I have slowly been preparing to hand my body of work off to James and the rest of our staff. I have been able to compose a number of M&E documents and management materials that will contribute to the smooth implementation of UWP's M&E program after my internship ends. I developed a Causal Analysis Framework, offered a set of revisions to UWP's Logical Framework, and – my proudest accomplishment – designed an Indicator Matrix for M&E system management. I designed the workflow for UWP's data collection, approval, and analysis process. In addition to these skeletal M&E documents, I was also able to compose protocol specific to UWP for various components of the M&E system. I compiled documentation for conducting focus groups using the Ten Seed Technique and for tracking empowerment through personal and community stories. All of the crazy ideas that have been evolving in my head for the last seven weeks, all of the basic knowledge and understanding of M&E are now in a format that can be referenced and used.

As this journey has come to an end, I have found myself reflecting a lot on my time with UWP. I have never poured myself into a single project like I have done in these seven weeks here. It has truly been a blessing to have the chance to fully commit myself to the design of this program – a task that I have grown to love. It isn't easy knowing that my time has come to step away from this effort. I have done all I can to shape this system in my time here, and now it is time to let it go. While I am confident in the hands this program will be entrusted to, I will always be at a loss knowing that I could see this task through to completion. I have lived a dream this summer; I got to design an M&E program for an organization doing international development work within the WASH sector in East Africa. Somehow, I was able to do it all as intern! My time here has been short, far too short, but the impact has been lasting. I have found clarity; a spark has been fuelled to a flame, and a budding passion has become ingrained as a steadfast conviction. I have become a part of the Ugandan Water Project and the Ugandan Water Project has become a part of me. The relationships made will not fade away.