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Capstone Portfolio

Exploring International NGOs: A Social Media Journal

Day 1: Introduction to International NGOs

Raise Your Voice Saint Lucia Inc is an NGO founded in 2012. The organization's mission is to advocate for and on behalf of women and children which are victims of rape, physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence and injustice. The organization offers services such as legal assistance, medical aid, safety, and personal development. One of their most recent programs is an Agro Process Facility which will act as a product development laboratory and training center for forty women, girls, and LGBTQI+ community members.

The organization recently held a fundraising gala for Women's History Month which raised funds for the essential programs offering counseling, shelter, legal aid, and educational resources to survivors. It also allowed attendees a forum for networking opportunities, speakers, and performances.

Day 2: Holy Family Children's Home

The Holy Family's Children's Home is one of two of its kind on the island of St. Lucia. It serves abandoned, abused, and orphaned children in the area from birth to 16 years old. The organization is supported by the Archdiocese of Castries and operated by the Dominican Sisters of Our Lady of Delivrande. They strive to provide a secure, loving, and caring home for these children and support them with a family environment. The organization currently has the capacity to accept up to 20 children. While the organization is run by the church, children are

placed there by the state. In speaking with the sisters there, we discovered they are not privy to much information about the children's lives prior to being placed there.

I am unable to share any pictures from this NGO out of respect for the privacy of the children but we had the opportunity to bring some small gifts for children that are currently placed in the home and spend some time reading to and playing with them. It was a humbling and truly rewarding experience and it was easy to see that these children were happy despite the circumstances that brought them there and thankful for even the smallest of gifts.

Day 3: Helen's Daughters

Helen's Daughters is a local NGO which focuses on the economic development of rural women through improved market access, adaptive agricultural techniques, and capacity-building. Ms. Helene walked us through the farm and taught us about the farming process from planting the seeds to harvesting the plants. They irrigate water from the local river and create their own compost to grow the produce. Once produce is harvested, it is sold wholesale to local supermarkets and shared "family-style" amongst the women who work there.

As Ms. Helene pointed out while we were visiting, the agriculture industry is often dominated by men. Helen's Daughters offers agricultural education to girls and women in an apprenticeship like program to help build their skills. This allows the women and girls to learn life skills they might not otherwise have had the opportunity to and to learn about where their food comes from.



Day 4: Pigeon Island National Landmark

Pigeon Island is one of the beautiful sites of ecological or historic importance managed by the Saint Lucia National Trust. As our guide explained, the island was joined to the mainland by a man-made causeway in 1972 and is a 44 acre island reserve which acts as a “living museum” representing the culture and history of Saint Lucia. The island features ruins of military buildings used during the battles between the French and the British for the island, a lookout point on top of Fort Rodney which gives a view of the Northwestern coastline of the island, beaches, and a local restaurant.



Day 5: Comparative Analysis of the SSDF and the NCF

Both the Saint Lucia Social Development Fund (SSDF) and the National Community Foundation (NCF) are local NGOs which provide services to the socio-economically disadvantaged citizens and marginalized communities. Both organizations offer multiple programs to deliver services to these communities through vocational skills training and social assistance programs. Representatives from both organizations discussed the programs they offer

and how they leverage their funding to provide the greatest assistance to these marginalized communities.

Both organizations obtain their clients through referrals from other organizations and direct contact from the potential clients themselves. While these organizations target the same populations, the differences lie in how much funding they receive from the government. The SSDF receives government assistance while the NCF receives very little funding from the government. As a result, the NCF makes all attempts to provide its services to the outliers with the most need due to its limited funding. Both organizations are present on social media platforms. In browsing their social media pages, it was interesting to see just how active the NCF is in comparison to the SSDF. This is likely because they need visibility within the community in order to attract clients. In both cases, the organizations have demonstrated success in servicing their targeted audiences. However, with more funding and by leveraging corporate partnerships, they would be better equipped to help more individuals and families.



Day 6: Exploring Cultural Perspectives

Having the opportunity to visit Saint Lucia provided insight to the differences between small Caribbean Island life and the urban New York/New Jersey existence I live. Upon arrival to the island, the first thing I noticed was how we could walk straight off the plane down steps rather than through a gangway like in the United States. I recently flew to Puerto Rico, but because it is a U.S. territory, its airports are built similar to ours so it was shocking to me to see just how different it was in Saint Lucia, another Caribbean island.

On our way from the airport to the hotel, I noticed the transportation infrastructure is not strongly developed. The buses were just large vans, contrary to the buses I take with NJ Transit. The roads were uneven, and for the most part, single-lane roads with very few street signs. In the U.S., we seem to have street signs on every corner of every road. This showcases just how small the island is as locals can navigate themselves without as many street signs.

Additionally, I found it interesting how in comparison to the United States, or at least my local area, how much influence the church has on the island. While we have a separation of church and state, the island of St. Lucia has many churches and organizations sponsored by religious organizations. A perfect example of this was St. Anne's School which although it is a public school, is a Catholic school, which would be two separate schools in the United States.

While most St. Lucian's speak English, a majority of its citizens speak a Creole dialect. Those were the only two languages I heard from the locals while visiting the island which is different from in the U.S. where I probably hear five languages being spoken on any given week.

I had a preconceived notion that as Americans, we wouldn't feel welcomed considering most of the world does not appreciate American tourists. I was happy that this frame was challenged throughout my time St. Lucia. We were welcomed by locals not only at the resort

where it would be expected we were treated well, but in every location we visited outside of the resort. However, this could largely be due to the economic importance of American tourism for the island and less because the locals actually want us there.

Social media allowed me the opportunity to research Saint Lucia prior to arriving, allowing for at minimum, a base level understanding of the cultural norms. While social media can be a good thing and gives us access to places and people we never would otherwise, there can also be consequences to its use. When looking at hashtags related to Saint Lucia, you see a glorified view of the island and it doesn't really bring to mind the challenges the community may be facing. While the island is beautiful in photos and in person, visiting Saint Lucia in person allowed me to really understand and comprehend the cultural and economic differences between the United States and Saint Lucia.

Day 7: Reflection and Action

Overall, this was an insightful study abroad experience and allowed me the opportunity to understand the nuances of international NGOs in comparison to non profit organizations in the United States. It seems that in the U.S., we have more financial resources available to our organizations in the form of government assistance than other countries do. We also have more community participation and personnel available to support non profit organizations. As such, I will continue to follow these organizations we visited on their social media platforms to engage with their posts and identify opportunities to volunteer or raise awareness about the issues they support.