

# NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR SHANTI UGANDA'S GARDEN PROGRAM

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My field practicum during Summer 2015 gave me the opportunity to travel to Uganda, more specifically, in the District of Luwero located in the Central region of the country. I worked with the Shanti Uganda Society, a Canadian-based charity involved in addressing development issues related to women and health; through their birthing center, the organization seeks to improve infant and maternal health while supporting the well-being of birthing and lactating women.

The organization offers an internship and learning exchange program to students and professionals who are looking not only to offer their skills and knowledge (in partnership with Shanti Uganda's staff and community partners), but also to provide logistical and program support (under the guidance of Shanti Uganda's staff and community partners). Because of my strong interest in monitoring and evaluation for agricultural programs targeting sustainable development through a gendered lens, I collaborated with the organization as the monitoring and evaluation intern.

The field practicum, which usually expands on a period of 10 to 12 weeks, is

part of the many requirements to obtain a Masters degree in Sustainable Development Practice. My work specifically addressed designing and conducting a needs assessment for the garden program, which is a central component of the Shanti's Birthing Center. There is a lack of nutrition-based educational programs offered to women at the different health facilities of Luwero. This is one of the reasons why the Shanti Uganda Society is focusing on addressing specific health and nutrition-related issues through a complementary practice-based education for their target groups.

I initially thought I would be able to build on ongoing efforts characterizing the existing garden program, however, once I arrived in Luwero, I realized that my plans had to partially change for substantial reasons. One of which is that the organization doesn't run a garden program, however they do own a fairly vast amount of land.

Consequently, insightful discussions with several partners and key stakeholders of the organization informed me that there was a particular need to assess the nutrition workshops run by Shanti Uganda, by looking into the uptake and the barriers to proper integration of safe

nutrition practices at the household level. It is expected that the outcomes of this project will inform the organization on how to define an efficient garden program in the future.

Several methods of data collection were used in a sequential order and each of them was used to inform the next one. I started with my informal interviews on my first week in Luwero; through those informal sessions, I was able to draw a list of key informants to meet before implementing the study. So the key informants I met in that stage represented institutions such as the District Health Office, Shanti Uganda's gardener, the agriculturalist are the head midwife. Our sessions helped me redefine my questions for my focus group discussions and my survey questionnaire (administered to the patients). Another stage of my research consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews to different categories of key informants such as high school students and teachers, health workers from different health centers; representatives of the District Agricultural Office, teachers from the Agricultural College and other garden managers, among others. The idea was to get an in-depth understanding of challenges to transfer knowledge and the average understanding of the meaning of sustaining a healthy diet. Furthermore, I conducted focus group discussions with different stakeholders such as Shanti Uganda's patients, their health staff, Village Health Team members (VHTs), farmers, among others. Finally, I administered a KAP survey to Shanti Uganda's patients, looking into their nutrition-related knowledge, attitude and practice.

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