

## MDP Summer Practicum in Botswana

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The Master's in Development Practice program is a new degree program focused on training future development practitioners. An overseas practical experience is required to gather experience working across disciplines and with diverse stakeholders in development. In summer 2011, a group of 4 MDP students conducted a team field practicum in Botswana. The first week was spent in Gaborone, attending classes with MDP students from the University of Botswana, establishing a positive relationship within the global MDP network. We participated in their agriculture module and traveled to farms to learn about dryland farming and the challenges and opportunities of agriculture in southern Africa.

Our team then partnered with Sankuyo Tshwaragano Management Trust (STMT), the USAID Southern African Regional Environmental Program (SAREP), and the community of Sankuyo to design a sustainable development management plan for the community. This management plan is a prerequisite for the community to renew their 15-year head lease from the Government of Botswana. UF faculty agreed to supervise completion of the management plan as a means of providing a learning opportunity for MDP students.

The main objective of writing this management plan was to explore commercial sustainable use of natural resources to increase economic value and reduce poverty at the local level. Past management plans for this area focused on natural resource availability and use, with little attention given to the well-being and livelihood of the local people. As MDP students, we know



that development is multi-dimensional and sustainable initiatives require the active participation of the people who will be impacted by the management plan. Analysis of previous livelihood data, online research, meetings with stakeholders in the district capital of Maun, and community meetings provided us with valuable information on the human dimensions of the new management plan.

As part of the process of developing the management plan, we made extensive use of participatory methods. Through this approach we aimed to build capacity for future decision-making regarding Trust activities and natural resource management. We held weekly meetings in the community updating them on our progress and asking for their opinions about preferred commercial strategies and their long-term goals for their community. In one meeting, we conducted a visioning exercise by asking community members to draw/describe what they would like their community to look like in 15 years. This participation process was important for fostering a sense of ownership and understanding of this management plan amongst the community members. In our final presentation of the plan the Chief and community expressed their appreciation and commented favorably on the participatory fashion

of the project.

After the management plan was presented and turned into the government's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), we worked with the neighboring community, Shorobe. Our particular interest was how livelihoods differ between Sankuyo and Shorobe which lie on opposite sides of the Veterinary Cordon Fence. Sankuyo is located inside the fence which restricts their livelihood options to wildlife tourism, while Shorobe which lies outside the fence and is allowed to have livestock. We conducted livelihood surveys and explored the impact of environmental shocks on livelihoods in this community by asking the community to share their perceived biggest threats to livelihoods during a community meeting. Shorobe community was very welcoming and enthusiastic about potential future partnerships with UF MDP.

Our experience in Botswana taught us about the challenges of working in marginalized rural communities, but also made us aware of the many rewards of development practice. The Management Plan was approved in October 2011 and we hope that our efforts will contribute substantially to the long-term economic development and natural resource management in Sankuyo and also serve as a model for other management plans in the area.

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