Global Team for Local Initiatives – Hamar Tribe, Ethiopia

Field Work

Lauren Linde ’14 (Atlanta, Ga.) and Amelia Piazza ’14 (Arlington, Mass.) learned firsthand that much can be lost in translation. The pair surveyed the Hamar tribe in southwest Ethiopia last summer as part of a six-week internship with Global Team for Local Initiatives (GTLI), a small nongovernmental organization.

During their stay, Linde and Piazza worked with a translator to collect socioeconomic and demographic data about area villages and individual households. They had prepared survey questions in advance, but hit some snags when conducting their interviews.

“The Hamar economy is livestock based, so we asked how many cows or goats they have,” says Linde. “When we learned the Hamar believe counting animals curses them, we began asking instead, ‘Do you have enough cows or goats?’” “That got tricky, too,” says Piazza, “because some people would say no, and then our translator would say, ‘Oh, I know this woman. She has enough cows!’” Through trial and error, they honed their survey.

Since the 1970s, the tribal community has struggled with the effects of political instability, frequent drought, disease, and malnutrition. However, due in large part to the efforts of Lori Pappas, a retired software entrepreneur who founded GTLI in 2007, the Hamar are achieving a better life through education, health, and sustainable development—a model focused on behavior change rather than simply delivering goods and services.

Pappas, who resides in Northfield when she isn’t in Ethiopia, began partnering with Carleton in 2012 to document GTLI’s current operations and the impact it has had on the Hamar. As part of a program funded by the college’s Initiative for Service Internships in International Development, two Carleton students will travel to Ethiopia for a total of three summers.

Linde, a mathematics major with a concentration in political economy, and Piazza, a sociology and anthropology major, were the first students to make the trip. During winter term, they worked with Carleton economics professor Faress Bhuiyan to analyze the data they collected. They also will help prepare the two students who will serve as GTLI interns this summer.

“Analyzing the data Carleton students collect will be useful in several ways,” notes Bhuiyan, who visited GTLI’s Ethiopian operations in 2012 to talk about future collaborations between the organization and Carleton College. “It will inform GTLI’s management about the success or failure of their projects, provide concrete evidence of effective projects, identify villages that require immediate attention, help successfully replicate current projects in new areas, and provide other development organizations with lessons learned.”

In addition to the internships, other Carleton students have become involved in GTLI’s efforts. Megan Morrison ’13 developed a curriculum unit on Africa and African development with the Hamar tribe as a case study to be used by Northfield middle school students. Last year, Bakhtawar Chaudhary ’15 (Bloomington, Minn.), who heads the Carleton Hamar Alliance (CHA), did a project in her “Ethics of Civic Engagement” class on microindustry, and to help fund GTLI’s efforts, the CHA sold beaded bracelets made by Hamar women. And linguistics major Kristin Spiak ’12 did her comps project on the Hamar language.

“I’m grateful that Lauren and Amelia could have this hands-on experience in the field—a rare thing for undergraduates,” says economics professor Martha Paas, who was Linde’s adviser her freshman year and introduced her to Pappas.

“Lori will use our findings to develop future projects and make funding proposals,” says Piazza. “Plus, we were able to tell her what we observed while in the villages. For example, GTLI gave chickens to 40 families who agreed to use pit latrines and attended workshops on how to care for chickens. We learned that they had shared their chickens and eggs with others in the community—evidence that the project worked well.”