Community Informatics in Africa: Executive Summary

Ask:
What does community informatics look when the culture of the community you are helping is different from your own culture? How do we support community engagement projects overseas from here in the United States?

Investigate:
In order to answer these questions, specifically for community engagement in Sao Tome and Kenya, a lot of research was needed. In order to prepare for community engagement activities in both countries, background information about the countries and cultures was necessary. And in the case of the Kenya project, it was also important to collect previous studies as examples. From websites to library databases to interviews, a variety of information about these African countries was gathered in order to prepare for upcoming projects and participatory research in both countries.

Sample Bib/webliography:

Also very comprehensive text on traveling to other cultures. Theory based but with lots of great information on adapting cross-culturally.

Text on traveling to other cultures.


A rather large (and comprehensive!) book on the history of Sao Tome. Available in the UIUC Education and Social Science Library.

Book (available in the UIUC Education and Social Science Library) on the ethnographic history of Kenya.

This article is written within a medical context but still has good information about the stages of culture shock. Available through the UIUC Library online databases.
Create:
The major outcomes of this project included both a student orientation manual for those going to Sao Tome and a bibliography of resources for Ian Brooks at the NCSA.

The orientation manual included various sections of information regarding what students will need to know before going on the trip this coming summer. These sections include: funding resources on campus, information on obtaining visas/passports, information on traveling to a new culture, and a short bibliography of further resources. Additional forms to be filled out will also be attached to the manual.

The bibliography of resources for Ian Brooks are various articles and books related to Kenya. His project involves studying malaria in Kenya; collecting data on the areas that are most likely to be affected by the disease in order for the country to distribute resources (money, medicine, etc.) to the places that need them the most. The bibliography includes studies of how computers are used in that part of the country and also resources on health in Kenya.

Discuss:
I think that one important aspect of community engagement that I learned has to do with the importance of doing background research before starting a community engagement project. As community developers and workers, we cannot simply enter a community and begin a project. We need to understand those we want to help. And in understanding their culture(s) and background we can make the projects more effective. Community engagement projects are most effective when they come from within the community. If we take the time to learn about the community, we will empower those in the community to make a difference for themselves.

Reflect:
The next steps of these projects will be finding ways to see how much this background research influences those that begin community engagement projects in the African countries. Those going to Sao Tome this summer will be the first to use the orientation packet. Getting feedback from them during the preparation process, and after they return, will be important. For example, is the information included helpful? What other pieces of information would they add? After that, it will be important to keep the information updated and current, especially information that is available online. For example, websites may need to be checked/updated. Ultimately, I feel like the bulk of the research is done but I also feel like these documents are simply working drafts. In order to ensure the usefulness of both documents created, it will be important to periodically reevaluate the research and resources gathered.