

Report #1

After months of planning, my plane was finally descending toward the dry, desert landscape of central Namibia. As I got closer to my destination, a place that would become my home for the next few months, feelings of excitement and anxiety rushed through my mind. Professors, friends, frequent travelers, and my parents had all given me advice and guidance before I left but, at the moment my plane landed, I knew that it was up to me to generate the impact that I hoped to see.

When I first arrived in Windhoek a month ago, I felt as though I had been accidentally dropped off in a city in Europe rather than Africa. Walking around the city one sees immaculate streets, shopping malls, trees landscaped to perfection and overall order. Independence Avenue, the main street in Windhoek, resonates with the soft humming of German and Afrikaans with an occasional American tourist thrown into the mix. During my first days, what I was seeing on the ground was nothing like what veteran Africa travelers had told me to expect. *Only after a few weeks of listening, traveling and learning have I gained a more holistic understanding of a very complex country.*

On account of plentiful uranium and diamond mines, Namibia is considered the 4th wealthiest country in Africa and is often compared with countries such as Singapore. This wealth, however, lies within only 10% of the population leaving the other 90% in poverty, earning approximately 1000 Namibian dollars a month to sustain an entire family (equivalent to \$140USD). The current economic situation, unemployment and HIV rates coupled with its colonial and apartheid history, has manifest in deeply complex social issues that are evident once you scratch below the surface.

The "Real" Namibia

Windhoek has a population of 200,000 people yet after walking around, one would guess that number is significantly lower. As a result of an extremely high unemployment rate, there has been a great movement of people from the north and south into Windhoek. The majority of people who live in Windhoek do not live in "Windhoek proper" but instead have been pushed into Katatura, an informal settlement spanning the city's northern rim. During my second week of work, my boss at the Legal Assistance Centre took me for a drive through a very small portion of Katatura. He insisted, "It is important that you see the *real* Namibia, the Namibia that is reality for more than 75% of the population". The differences between Windhoek proper and the informal settlement are astronomical. The unpaved streets of Katatura are lined with small homes built out of sheet metal and other recycled supplies. Electricity and running water are a rarity and open sewers are evidence of the lack of development of the area. As I drove through the settlement, my boss told me about cases he had worked there. He spoke



of situations involving the city bulldozing homes and business for no reason, 15 women being sterilized without consent because they were HIV positive, and constant police corruption and abuse. The poverty of the area is so prominent that one wonders how it is so easily ignored in a country with so much money and such a small population.

Amidst all of the poverty, one thing that truly struck me was a very visible sense of community. In front of every shack and on every street corner there were people; people were playing cards, talking, laughing, and spending time with one another. Unlike in the city center where people intentionally avoid eye contact, people were waving at my boss and I as we drove by.

Field Visit to the North June 12-18: A learning experience

The “Red Line” is an informal boarder that separates northern Namibia from the central and southern regions. The line represents the area in which the struggle for independence from apartheid rule was rife. Today, 70% of Namibia’s entire population lives above this line. The living conditions and social issues that plague Katutura are visible and widespread in this portion of the country. Being a first time traveler to a developing country, seeing the differences between Windhoek and the north was abrupt and at times, difficult to reconcile.

The project that I am working with employs 6 monitors based in Northern Namibia responsible for identifying children in, or in risk of, falling into child labor and taking the appropriate action. The target group of beneficiaries is orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs), a group understood as being the most at risk population. *The purpose of this field visit was for me to listen and learn- to see first hand the conditions the monitors work in, the challenges they face, and the children we are trying to help.*

The primary activities of the visit included:

- Individual presentations to each monitor about Frontline SMS followed by in depth conversations about challenges they face and questions about the new system
- 4 Trips to open air markets where I was able to see one of the venues that monitors use to seek out child labor
- Meetings with school administrators in four different regions addressing the issue of child labor, measures that have been take, and next steps
- Attended 2 information sessions provided by monitors to OVCs. Here I was able to witness first hand children’s reaction to such material.
- Stakeholder analysis of different groups in the north that can be potential points of collaboration
- Meeting with a Ministry of Labor social worker to discuss challenges their office faces

This visit was extremely important to both my evaluation of the current program as well as my design for the implementation of a Frontline SMS system. Through observation and discussion, I have identified a number of common points that were reoccurring and will be pertinent to implementing the Frontline SMS system:

- Monitors reported that the forms are discouragingly lengthy. Some parts of the forms are confusing and the monitors are often unsure what they are supposed to fill in. They also noted the redundancies in the paper-based form.
- Monitors told us that many people in the north (particularly in open-air markets) suffer from “form fatigue.” They are approached on a regular basis by NGO staff with clipboards and are asked to complete interviews or surveys. The people are promised more access, better materials, etc., but rarely see any improvement. Children often will avoid the monitors because they have clipboards.
- The government has tried to address the disadvantages faced by OVC by providing social grants to help cover the cost of school development fund fees, uniform fees, etc., but in reality students are still not able to access these grants. This is because they cannot afford to travel the distances required to apply or because they do not have proper identification documents. OVC are, in many situations, required to pay for the school development fund even though they should be exempted from this fee

During this trip, I learned that the monitors primarily work with schools to identify children that are in, or at risk of, participating in child labor. Below are some points of interest from my time at the schools:

- The secretary at each school keeps a register of OVC, whose names are provided by the teacher on a class-by-class basis. Many schools indicated that they do not keep current records. Although granted access by the Ministry of Education, monitors have experienced difficulty in obtaining copies of OVC registers.
- In an attempt to educate schools about issues surrounding child labor, the LAC (in collaboration with the monitors) has conducted trainings at each school participating in the program. On account of time availability, only principals and administrators participate in the trainings. Following the training, they are responsible for debriefing the teachers to ensure they too are able to identify and report instances of child labor. Unfortunately, at all but one school we visited, the teachers had not been briefed on the trainings.

The teachers appear to overall be uninformed about the matter and this is evident in the lack of reports that they have submitted to monitors.

- When monitors conduct information sessions at schools, OVCs are singled out. This may have social implications as well as discourage students from approaching monitors or teachers when they experience child labor.

Since returning from my field visit, I have visually mapped out everything that I learned (i.e. challenges to monitors, education system, OVC forums) and have begun to design the Frontline SMS intervention. I have also met with the ILO country representative and a number of government ministry personnel (Labor, Education, Gender). This past week I have been working on creating a “wheel” system that monitors can use to collect all of the necessary information without needing to fill out a cumbersome form. I am currently in the prototyping phase and plan to have a completed model by the end of next week.

Next steps:

- Complete prototype for wheel
- Field visit to the north to train monitors on how to use the wheel and Frontline SMS forms. This visit will include a number of workshops where monitors will not only learn how to use the technology but also gain first hand experience.
- Run a three-week intensive pilot with the monitors using the new technology. During this period I will be a resource for the monitors for technical troubles etc.
- After the completion of the 3 week pilot, I will collect and analyze the data as well as meet with the monitors to discuss challenges they may have encountered. During this period I will make any necessary changes to the system to improve its functionality and impact.
- During the month of August, the LAC will be holding a Frontline SMS launch workshop that I will be facilitating. This will be an opportunity to present on the success and challenges of the system to the: Ministry of Gender and Education, Ministry of Labor, ILO representatives, and local and international NGOs.

My experience so far has been so amazing and I cannot wait for the next steps! I greatly appreciate the support from JCCF, it has truly made my community service possible!

Stay Tuned! 😊