NOHA Internship Report
Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Kigali, Rwanda

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1. Introduction

In January 2015, a vacancy was posted on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands for an internship at the embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Kigali, Rwanda. The vacancy described an internship to assist in developing and implementing the policy and multi-annual stabilization strategy of the Netherlands in the Great Lakes region comprising Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), that is being coordinated from the embassy in Kigali.

As I was interested in the internship, I contacted the embassy in Kigali. However, in January 2015 I was about to start the second NOHA semester in Bochum, Germany. So I asked the embassy whether the internship would be available again up from around September, as that was the time I would need an internship, which they confirmed.

Towards the end of the second semester in Bochum, I started looking again for internships. I replied to quite some vacancies of Ministries of the Dutch government, the United Nations and NGOs. Although I did not have a very clear picture in mind about with which organisation I wanted to do my internship, I did have some preferences. I was looking for an internship that was interesting content wise, either humanitarian or more development oriented. Also, I wanted to be close to the field, preferably on the African continent. With a bachelor in International Relations, an embassy as internship organisation had always interested me for its political and diplomatic character. I was however open to different organisations, as I was willing to gain experiences with different actors in the humanitarian/development field. After a while, I remembered the embassy in Rwanda with the internship vacancy for the Great Lakes region. It had not been posted again, so I contacted the contact person I had been in touch with before directly, asking whether they would still need someone. My question came exactly at the right time, as they were just internally discussing to post a new vacancy. As I had shown my interest in the internship twice, they had my CV already and I had the right background, they invited me directly for an internship interview via Skype. The day after they came back to me saying that I could start in September.

I was very happy with the internship. It would be close to the field in Kigali, Rwanda. As I had done quite some voluntary work with refugees from East-Africa, and also the countries of the Great Lakes region, I was looking forward to work in that region. The fact that the internship had a regional focus (rather than dealing with only one country) seemed interesting to me, as I would need to keep in contact with the embassies, but also with organisations working in the region. I expected to join the regional team in their activities and was expecting several field visits to be part of the internship as well.

2. The Internship Organisation

Around 25 people are working at the embassy in Kigali, of which approximately half are Dutch and half are Rwandan. Next to economic diplomacy and consular affairs, the embassy hosts a large programme for development cooperation, focusing on justice, food security and water. In addition to development cooperation in Rwanda itself, the embassy in Kigali is responsible for the Great Lakes regional
programme consisting of Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The overall goal of the regional programme is to contribute to stability in the region through the enhancement of human security and inclusive growth. There are four thematic areas: Security and Rule of Law, Food Security, Water Management, and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. The embassy supports several projects falling under these different thematic areas. The regional programme is implemented by all four embassies in the region, but is coordinated and managed by the embassy in Kigali. The Great Lakes regional team in the embassy in Kigali consists of three people.

3. Tasks and Activities of the Internship

The overall task of the internship at the embassy was to support the regional programme of the Great Lakes region. This meant in practice that I needed to cooperate closely with the regional team at the embassy itself (which was headed by my supervisor), but also with colleagues from embassies in the region. In the beginning of the internship, I indicated that I wanted to assist the team in their daily activities, in order for me to get a good indication of the work at the embassy. I was therefore involved in a range of different activities: assisting in the appraisal of project proposals and other annual/evaluation reports, the monitoring of projects, extension of projects that needed more time than the original deadline for carrying out their activities, keeping in contact with organisations that work in the region. In addition, I was responsible for creating a weekly update overview on developments in the Great Lakes region. For this I needed to gather input from different colleagues in the region, after which I would send it around to the colleagues in the embassy of Kigali, embassies in the region and to headquarters (Ministry in The Hague). Several administrative tasks as taking minutes at internal and external meetings and their follow-up were also among my activities.

Moreover, I carried out my own research as I indicated that I would like to analyse the humanitarian assistance given to the recent influx of Burundian refugees in Rwanda. This subsequently became one of the tasks assigned to me. I monitored the situation by keeping an eye on the statistics and reports of UNHCR, which was coordinating the response together with the Rwandan government. In addition, I interviewed 13 organisations that were providing humanitarian assistance to the recent influx of refugees from Burundi. I asked the organisations a couple of questions about the role they were playing in providing humanitarian aid, the successes and challenges of the response, the coordination among humanitarian organisations, the relation between refugees and host communities in Rwanda and the organisations’ expectations for the future (sustainability of the situation). I carried out most of this research in the month of January 2016. This turned out to be a good time to interview the organisations as most of them had provided assistance for at least a couple of months (since April 2015), and a new year began and new activities been planned. After my research, I presented my findings to my colleagues at the embassy and I wrote a small report on my findings, which I distributed to the embassy, my colleagues in Burundi, and to the Ministry in The Hague.
4. Supervision of the Internship

There was a clear structure of supervision. My supervisor headed the regional team for the Great Lakes within the embassy in Kigali, and coordinated the colleagues working on the regional programme at embassies in the region. She assigned me most of the tasks that I could carry out, but I could also be asked to help out other team members. Concerning the tasks that I did for her directly, I always needed to send it to her for feedback before I would send it around in the region or I would ask for approval within the embassy itself. In the beginning it was a bit difficult to find out on what level of detail I needed to check with her the things that I did or wrote. As she was very busy, I also did not want to disturb her too much. As time passed by, I had a better feeling of what I could do independently and what I really needed to check with her. Despite the fact that she was very busy, she always made time to give me feedback. I could also easily remind her in case she forgot. As there was a lot to do, she kept me quite busy with different tasks which I liked. She told me when I did things right, as well as when I needed to improve. At the last day at work, we had a final talk in which she gave feedback on my performance during the internship period.

5. Living Conditions

Living in Kigali is very easy. It is a small city, and easy to meet people. The (sometimes outdated) website livinginkigali.com is very useful, as they have an event calendar, a forum on which many topics are discussed (including housing) and reviews of bars/restaurants, trips, etc. I found my room quickly through this website, and it turned out it was the room of another Dutch intern at the embassy.

As Rwanda is a landlocked country, it needs to import a lot of goods. This makes pasta sauces, cereals, chocolate, shampoo, etc. rather expensive. The large supermarkets in which many expats go for shopping are therefore expensive. It is however possible make it much cheaper by buying vegetables and fruits on the market, and buying local goods and products as rice, beans and homemade cookie for instance. Also the expenses of eating and going out in restaurants, bars and nightclubs differs per location. The more local and smaller, the cheaper.

What I really appreciated of living in Kigali, is the safety which facilitated moving around at any time of the day easily. The main means of transportation are moto taxi’s, and it was possible to take them at any time of day and night to return back home. Prices are negotiable, but after a while you know the approximate prices per distance. Throughout the week and in the weekends there are quite some events to attend, as a pub quiz, documentary, live music. In addition, during the weekends it is easily arranged to rent a car and discover the countryside of Rwanda. All in all, life is safe and easy in Kigali and I enjoyed it a lot.
6. Conclusion
   a. Intrinsic and personal learning effects

The internship at the embassy was my first internship so I had a lot to learn from the practical side of humanitarian/development work, next to having studied it extensively. I can observe several personal learning effects that I acquired throughout the internship. First of all, that after studying about humanitarian and development work, I really enjoyed to see things happen in practice. I think that I am ready to start working. I realized in addition that I enjoyed working and living in an African country, and working with different nationalities. Also, I like to contribute to things happening fast, rather than them getting stuck in bureaucracy and taking more time than necessary. Moreover, I realized that I work quite individually and independently: I like to figure things out by myself rather than bothering someone with questions while I can find it myself. However, as my supervisor also indicated in our final talk, in some instances I could have asked for more guidance/supervision and was a bit too independent. I completely agree with this as I realized afterwards in some cases that it would have been quicker in the end to have asked something to my supervisor or other colleagues. This I plan on taking into consideration for a following internship and/or job.

b. Fulfilment of expectations

Before I started the internship I had several expectations that I realised myself, as well as several which were more underlying and I had not really realised beforehand. After the five months, most of them have been met, while some not completely. My biggest expectation was that I would be able to join the regional team and to support them in several tasks that they had, part of which I expected to be focused on real content (rather than administrative). This expectation has been met for a large part. Rather than just “an intern”, I became a real part of the team, and could carry out quite some tasks that were dealing with content of projects, which was the more interesting side of the work. My expectation that I could join several field visits and other field related activities has not really been met, as I only went on one field visit during my internship. Exactly during my internship period, there were not many field visits scheduled that were relevant for me. A difficulty for me during the internship was to what extent I could be pro-active and independent by asking colleagues to join them on meetings or field visits (which were maybe less relevant for me). Getting an idea of what level of pro-activity would be appreciated as I also needed to fit in the hierarchy of an embassy, was quite an issue throughout the internship. After all, I slightly regret that I did not try more often to ask whether I could join to a meeting or visit with one of my colleagues. The more underlying expectations of good cooperation with a team, as well as with Rwandan colleagues were met and I did not come across difficulties concerning this.

c. SWOT analysis of internship and organization
d. Internship and NOHA Master

Although the internship was more development oriented than humanitarian, the NOHA Master has helped me quite a lot in preparing me for the internship. The theoretical knowledge of how to develop project and programme proposals, the influence of geopolitics and especially the multidisciplinary background were very useful. It was nice to recognize several aspects from the Master happening in real life. As I needed to read and appraise project proposals from different organisations for diverse projects and subjects, I really appreciated the fact that I had developed them myself throughout the NOHA Master as it made reading through them and knowing where to focus on a lot easier. I especially came to realise the value of the interdisciplinary NOHA Master while carrying out my small research on humanitarian assistance provided to Burundian refugees in Rwanda (see supplement). First of all, I could easily understand the UNHCR reports and statistics, as well as NGO reports as I came across them throughout the Master as well. Furthermore, I interviewed 13 organisations, working in totally different clusters (WASH, nutrition, shelter, protection, etc.). I felt capable of asking the right questions and understanding where they were talking about for all the different clusters. For instance, while talking to Oxfam who was providing WASH infrastructure in the refugee camp, I remembered the project proposal on WASH infrastructure that I developed myself and could ask about water storage and
water pressure. While talking to Concern about nutrition issues, I remembered what I learned in classes on public health and ask them about their approach to fight malnutrition in the refugee camp. The combination of classes on more general issues (geopolitics, international and refugee law) and the more specific project cycle management on different subjects turned out to be very useful.

e. Internship and job market

The internship has definitely provided me with input for my positioning on the job market as it gave me an insight in the work of and at an embassy. Throughout the internship period, I talked to several colleagues about the work and about their advice and points of attention for a future job. I really enjoyed working at the embassy, especially also in this region of Africa and focusing on the themes. I could imagine myself doing this work for a couple of years. However, there are also some other parts to it that I will take into consideration. To become a Dutch diplomat is a whole process in which generalisation (as opposed to specialisation) is quite important. I realised that at this moment I want to really focus on humanitarian and/or development work, so rather specialise than generalise. Also, I wonder whether representing the Dutch policy even if I disagree would be something for me. As for now, I hope to gain more experiences in the real humanitarian field, with the UN as well as with NGOs. I am however keeping my options open, and working at an embassy while focusing on development/humanitarian work is definitely among the options.

7. Supplements
- Report as result of research on humanitarian assistance provided to Burundian refugees in Rwanda. See next page.