

PROMOS Experience Report

Internship at MENTION Survey in Zanzibar



November 2021

Internship in Zanzibar



In General

Since many years the international social and health disparities are my points of interest. The privilege that surrounds us white people in industrialized countries gives us many opportunities, but allows the gap between social and health inequalities to widen further. While the diverse health promotion programs and research projects in industrialized countries such as Germany are being further developed, studies and projects in developing countries are often left behind due to a lack of funds and opportunities. For me personally, the improvement of international equality of opportunity and justice is the top priority, which is why I want to be part of this in my future profession. As a first step towards international and intercultural competences, which help me to understand and

reflect on various processes, I would like to gain work experience on an international level. The diverse continent of Africa was my field of interest and I talked to an epidemiologist from Bremen who runs a nutrition survey in Zanzibar. After some months, the pandemic situation of Covid-19 allowed the MENTION project to start a new survey this year and I got informed that I could take part as an intern, which I accepted immediately. Within a few weeks I took part in preparative evaluation seminars at the University of Bremen, organized the remaining vaccinations, applied for the scholarship, booked a flight and started my first adventure on African soil.



MENTION

In 2013 the BIPS in Bremen conducted a population based study regarding health and nutrition in Zanzibar called ZUTAS. After presenting the results in 2018, they decided to work in cooperation with the State University of Zanzibar, the BIPS and the University of Bremen on long-term solutions to improve the health education in the form of the MENTION (Increased

competencies for nutrition in Zanzibari health care) project which deals with the aspects of the Pagel program of the German Academic Exchange Service. Based on comprehensive needs analyzes, the MENTION project aims to train experts from the entire health sector in relevant nutrition and health aspects, to integrate nutrition and health conservation issues into the curriculum of medical education and to provide up-to-date data that provide information about the state of health of the people in Zanzibar.

The Zanzibar Nutrition and Health Survey studied the prevalence of diet-related diseases and their risk factors, including socio-economic factors that affect the health of populations in tropical coastal ecosystems. Due to tourism and environmental changes, on a local and global level, the ecosystem functions and services are changing. Zanzibar's wide coastline as well as the landscape conditions enable the comparison and evaluation of heavily influenced and unaffected areas. Later on, the influences and changes of the human health got evaluated.

MENTION relates to sustainability goals 2 (no hunger), 3 (health and well-being) and 4 (high-quality education) and aims to transfer research from research to society through direct reference to the community.

In my opinion, the fact that this project is not in the hands of an industrialized country, which comes into a development country, evaluates the data and goes back to its home country without any exchange and profit for the evaluated country, convinces me very much.

My life in stone town

Stone town is one part of the capital city of Zanzibar. It is famous for its small streets, houses made out of coral stones, different street lamps, the different smells of spices, the food market on the waterside and the diverse concentration of different cultures due to the ending of slavery. Zanzibar was the trading point for slaves from Sub-Saharan Africa. In the beginning of the 20th century, slavery ended and the slaves were able to buy themselves free from their slave owners. After that, the slaves from different countries and tribes settled in stone town which is why the area is shaped very multicultural. Even though the



majority of the population of Zanzibar is muslim, the influences of the various cultures are present in the everyday life. The different tribes express their origin in form of special jewelry, hairstyles, scars on the face, clothing, religions and fabrics. I had the feeling that the different tribes, cultures and religions were living peacefully and accepted by each other. That was a very nice impression to get though.

My flat was in the middle of stone town and I had many shops and restaurants around. In the evening, I often met some local friends for dinner and had some shops especially photocopy and stationary shops where the owners knew me and my demands after a while already when I entered the shops. That was a very nice feeling of acceptance and arrival being used to this kind of everyday life and knowing those people in my neighborhood. After a while I learned some Swahili which facilitated the contact to the locals and the held conversations. It felt very nice seeing people pleased and happy to hear me trying to speak their local language.

My work in stone town

In the first days, we did some workshops on how to collect data on a scientific basis and guideline in the fieldwork. I had the task of showing the teams how to carry out the anthropometric tests with the scientific standardizations, as I learned this before I left Germany.

In general, my working schedule was not like a normal day at work in Germany. Every day except on Fridays, I started in the morning around 4 am with giving the anthropometric and the bio-sample boxes to our teams from the State University of Zanzibar, formed by health professionals for the fieldwork of our study. The following charts show the contents of the boxes:

Antopometry-Box	Biobox
- Paperform for Balance	- Cooling box & Ice tubes
- Balance	- Vacutainer for adults and for kids (amount depends on participants) -> grey and PAX for adults and kids -> red, violet for adults (big) -> red, violet for kids <6 (small)
- Balance mat	- Butterflies green (for adults) - Butterflies light blue (for children) - Butterflies blue (for babies)
- Cables (in mat)	- Plasters
- Blood pressure measurement device	- Cotton
- Blood pressure cuff (big)	- Desinfectant spray
- Blood pressure cuff (small)	- Tissues
- Height measuring benchmark (platform to stand, 3x benchmark pieces, 1x headboard)	- Soap
- Hight measuring benchmark for babies (1x foldable benchmark, 1x measuring piece)	- Throat wash (amount depends on participants)
- Soap	- Glucose measuring device (Device, needles and stripes)
- Soap	- Urine stripes
- Tissues	- Some markers
- Tape measure (2x)	- Gloves
	- Safety box

Each team had a team leader, who received their backpack every day. In the afternoon I prepared the backpacks with its files (interviews, consent forms, ID-forms and test sheets), the tubes and lids for the urine samples, the tubes for the drinking water samples, the GPS devices, as well as the writing materials.

Around noon, the teams came back to my house for bringing back the boxes. After that I had to follow up and clean the boxes, sort all the questionnaires and prepare the boxes for the next days, as well as for doing all the errands of materials and copies. Sometimes I worked until midnight in the beginning of the survey because of some Ambiguities and rearrangements of the diagnostic methods and devices. These were very long days but they made be realize how easy and comfortable the research conditions in the German research center where I work are and it was a very exciting and enlightening experience. After a while, I was able to finish the work in the early evening, so that I could take a better rest before waking up so early. The professor/ colleagues went to Germany after some days and stayed there for some weeks. During this time, we had some positive Covid-19 rapid tests in our teams. I had to organize a system in which all our members needed to test themselves at home and also do social distancing after I tested some of the members positive in my house in stonetown. It was a better feeling for me not being confronted to the virusmaterial after they started testing themselves. I taught them how to do it in form of a video and I checked and collected the results of all tests regularly. After five days of pausing the Survey we were able to continue again. This event showed us to take the pandemic situation serious even though the government does not do anything regarded to Corona-restrictions and tests and we became aware to be careful during the fieldwork in the families.

It was a very friendly and appreciative working climate in our teams. I am very thankful for that.

My reflection

I am very thankful that I was able to do this internship, gain these work experiences, as well as be supported financially, be involved in the team work and decision making, to get to know so many nice people and their different views of life and stories, the beautiful country with its diverse cultures and getting to know the work of professor and the colleagues who supported me all

the time, lived with me in a very friendly and humorous, relaxed environment and showed me their work as well as told me many exciting stories about their travels. I am also very impressed by the MENTION project which, in my opinion, carries out development cooperation in an exemplary manner and ensures long-term and sustainable promotion with the help of many workshops and close cooperation on site. I would be very grateful to work for this project and with the nice teams in the future again.

I was able to get diverse impressions, live a totally different lifestyle and widen my knowledge in the field of Public Health. My wish to work in the field of international collaborations against inequalities intensified a lot and I really want to get to know more cultures, countries and circumstances affected by different environments to ensure social and health justice.

