

Microfinance and Morals: The Interplay of the Moral Economy and Capitalist Interests through Business in The Gambia

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May 24, 2011
ANTH 397

Service Learning and Directed Research in The Gambia

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<i>List of Acronyms</i>	
GAWFA	Gambian Women’s Finance Association
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMD (D)	Dalasis (Gambian currency)
GNI	Gross National Income
IBAS	Indigenous Business Advisory Services
MFI	Microfinance Institution
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
WWB	Women’s World Bank

Throughout my semester in the Gambia I began working with the Gambian Women's Finance Association (GAWFA) and continued my research with the Indigenous Business Advisory Services (IBAS) when my plans fell through. These institutions provide access to credit and other business services to entrepreneurs who are looking towards business as a way to better their lives. Throughout my research and talking with both the staff and clients mainly through IBAS, I was able to observe how socio-cultural forces interact with the entrepreneurial lives of these clients. I found that the moral economy plays a huge role in helping keep many people out of poverty, but also can prevent entrepreneurs from fully succeeding in their individualistic business ventures as they have trouble balancing personal and business expenses. Women play a major role in both the business world and providing resources for their family and are the key agents of change in lifting themselves and their families out of poverty. I also looked specifically at food consumption practices in the Gambia and how and individuals view food as more than an economic and material means of sustaining for themselves and their businesses.

Key Words: Microfinance, Consumption, Women, Economy

Introduction

Gambian Women's Finance Association

While I started my initial research at the Gambian Women's Finance Association (GAWFA), I continued at the Indigenous Business Advisory Services (IBAS) when my arrangements fell through and plans changed. GAWFA is one of the first microfinance institutions in The Gambia that was founded in 1987 with the goal of providing financial services to low-income people especially women, in order to enhance entrepreneurship development and alleviate poverty. They are an affiliate of the Women World Bank network and are currently in the process of becoming an independent financial institution as the GAWFA Finance Company Limited. As of December 31, 2010 they had over 49,000 members with 14,780 active borrowers, 96% which are women. GAWFA has helped mainstream women in the national development process as they offer microcredit for income generating activities and farming, as well as business training and advocate for policies that affect low income women and microfinance

institutions. By promoting the social welfare of women, they demonstrate their motto that “You don’t have to go the River, the River will come to you” by providing door to door savings and loans services to low-income women all over The Gambia. The staff work directly with clients in order to serve their needs and are located throughout the country in both the urban and rural areas where access and opportunities are needed the most to help bring women out of poverty. GAWFA’s main objectives are: “to deliver a cost effective savings and credit program for low income women in both rural and urban areas, to enhance the competitiveness and profitability of enterprises operated by low-income women entrepreneurs and to advocate for the formulation of government policies and legislation which are favorable to women entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises”. (GAWFA.com 2011)

GAWFA has developed over the years to enhance its services of targeting micro-entrepreneurs and small businesses that have no access to finance. They began as a direct lending program with a nominal amount targeting few women and by 1990 had signed the tripartite loan agreement with standard charter limited bank ltd and Women’s World Bank where they could provide greater access to credit. Group lending methodologies and the integrated savings and credit programs were introduced in 1994, and from 1994-2007 over 127 million dalasis (D) were given out as loans and more than 48,000 clients had a net savings of D12 million (avg GMD 250/client=US<10). One US dollar is equivalent to approximately 28 dalasis with the current exchange rate. There are three types of loans available; individual loans, solitary group loans and large group loans. Individual loans represent 35% of GAWFA disbursement, with 86% concentrated in the Greater Banjul area. Group loans represent the other 65% and are mainly concentrated outside Banjul. There has been a high growth in credit and savings operations over the years, but credit operations have increased more rapidly than the savings. GAWFA began in

1987 with D65,000 in their lending program given to only 13 women (avg GMD 5000/client = US 180) and by the end of 2009 had loans of D12.323 million and their loans portfolio stabilized at around D21 million. By instilling capitalist financial discipline in women, GAWFA has enabled women to generate capital for investment and income for personal and family consumption. In addition to the credit and savings services they offer, they also offer business advice, advocate on gender and microfinance policies, organize symposiums, and participate in conferences that help benefit the institution (GAWFA.com 2011). GAWFA's main focus is to help women out of poverty by giving them access to microfinance and improving both their economic and social development in the Gambia.

Indigenous Business Advisory Services

In addition to the short time that I spent at GAWFA I continued the bulk of my research at the Indigenous Business Advisory Services (IBAS) which is a government institution established in 1975 under the then Ministry of Economic Planning and Industrial Development. They continue to run under the current Department of State for Trade, Industry and Employment and operate nationwide to serve indigenous small and medium size enterprises. IBAS benefits from government subsidies, has benefited from UNDP/ILO funding in both financial and technological assistance, and generates funds through its own savings scheme. Their institution tries to create a conducive environment for the private sector and be engaged in commercial activities, enhances the prospects for job creation and self-employment, promotes a dynamic enterprise culture that accelerates socio-economic development, and designs and implements business packages specifically targeting small and medium entrepreneurs. They contribute to the national efforts at reducing poverty by empowering individual micro and small entrepreneurs and

give strategic support to productive economic activities that have value to the economy. These include agri-business and food processing, fishing and fish processing, manufacturing, technology enterprises, service industries and retail businesses, handicrafts, and light building construction industries. The strength of IBAS lies in both its business training offered and provision of micro-credit facilities, along with constant business follow up to evaluate the state of the entrepreneurs (IBAS Info Brochure). Even after a loan's repayment, IBAS continues to offer business advice to clients and continues to provide business services as needed.

IBAS gives loans to clients based on loan applicants who are either new borrowers or repeat borrowers and range from micro, small and medium loans that range from 1-200,000 dalasis. One must be a Gambian citizen over the age of 18 to become a client of IBAS and new borrowers are evaluated on the following qualities: proposal based on a viable income generating activity, collateral, equity contribution, documentary evidence of clearance to engage in proposed activity, invoices prior to first disbursement, participation in a 5 day business training, letter of recommendation and fee of D100 (approximately US \$3.70). The criteria for repeat borrowers is different as the basic track record, time lapse of at least three months between the last repayment date and the request for a repeat loan, collateral/guarantor, an invoice or letter requesting for cash disbursement, an application letter, and no equity contributions are the characteristics used for evaluation before disbursing the loan. New borrowers have a loan ceiling ranging from D500-20,000 depending on the proposed investment and repeat borrowers have the same range from D500-D20,000 but this can be exceeded if the advisory committee grants an exception. Exceptions would be due to the prospects for employing a larger number of employees, using local resources, and prospects for exporting business products or services. The smallest loan offered is the micro loan from D1.00-15,000 with a recoverable period of one year,

and one month grace period. The small loan is between D15,000.01-D75,000 and is paid within one year and six months, with one month grace period as well. Medium loans are between D75,000-D200,000 with a recovery period of two years. The grace period can also vary as retail sectors have one month, while productive sectors can have 3 months of a grace period. Before any loan disbursement any new borrowers must pay 10% of the total approved loan in cash into the IBAS account as an equity contribution. Monthly repayments are recommended but shorter installments are encouraged when possible as well. Payments are made into the IBAS regional offices an IBAS bank accounts through the commercial bank outlets and their offices are located around the country and can be readily contacted by clients. The interest rate on loans is currently at 20%, which has risen over the years from 16% to 18% and is now at 20% due to rising expenses (IBAS Info Brochure). IBAS's combination of loan services and business training has allowed entrepreneurs around the country to improve their lives through the successful creation and expansion of their businesses.

Reasons for Choosing Organizations

The work that both GAWFA and IBAS provide to entrepreneurs in the Gambia allows them to gain a sense of economic independence, especially for women who are a key aspect of lifting themselves and their families out of poverty. I wanted to work with an organization that helps those otherwise unable to support themselves, and gives them the tools to make their own changes in their life. By providing financial measures that are specifically targeted towards smaller businesses, these organizations allow those otherwise unable to obtain capital from larger institutions to build up their business in order to independently provide for themselves. I also wanted to work with an organization where I would be able to go into the field and meet the

clients personally to see how their relation with the institution affected their personal lives. Both GAWFA and IBAS pride themselves in their cliental services, and this allowed me to obtain the first hand data I desired for my research. These organizations allow people to lift themselves out of poverty, and by doing so people acquire more resources which can have a positive impact on their food consumption habits, another key topic of my interest. IBAS's role in business services has allowed me to focus more on the business side of the food sector and learn about the different problems faced within it. The concepts of meaning, value and exchange are changed with people's increased knowledge from the training and services these institutions provide, and this affects both the business and personal life of the clients. While the role of these institutions provides economic opportunities to transform the lives of their clients, they also have a much larger role in changing the social and cultural perceptions of material items in the market with food as my particular interest.

When I began my first internship in the Gambia I had wanted to work with a nongovernmental institution that played an important role in the lives of Gambians and helped increase the quality of their lives. I had hoped to work with an organization that targeted women because of their major role in the family and how they are key in the role of lifting the family out of poverty when provided access to credit (Dowla 2006:219). It would have allowed me to see how a microfinance company had developed and runs to expand its services primarily to low income women. While I had initially hoped to obtain all of my research at GAWFA, after some miscommunication and official problems from the higher forces, I had to stop my research there after a short time before I had even begun any field research. The few weeks I spent in their offices at the beginning were not enough to give me any real data as most of my observations were about the workplace environment. I was unable to see firsthand how their services affect

the lives of their clients. While my initial experiences were not what I had expected, it gave me the opportunity to be placed at IBAS, where the remainder and bulk of my research has continued. While IBAS's organization was not one that I would have originally selected as it focuses on both small and relatively larger businesses, I have found working with them very beneficial to my research. They have a wealth of experience working with Gambian business people over many years and are very willing to share with me both interviews and documentary sources that relate business practices to larger socio-cultural issues. They are a progressive institution that plays a large role in promoting women in business, which for me was a personal reason I found refreshing since it was not obviously stated but still emphasized within the institution. Even though I had initially expected to be working mainly with GAWFA and focusing my research on women and the role microfinance plays in helping them lift themselves out of poverty, I found these expectations changed as I found that working with IBAS gave me greater access to both clients and the idea of business education and services that play an important role in addition to having access to credit and capital.

Relevant Literature

Microfinance and its Development

Microfinance institutions provide financial services to low income clients or groups who lack access to banking services in order to help the poor out of poverty. Giving them access to capital is critical, as it allows them to obtain the resources to build their business and make their own profits to help improve their lives. A major problem for the poor is that they have no collateral and banks find them too risky to have as clients and charge high interest rates. Microfinance gives entrepreneurs the opportunity to obtain credit at reasonable rates that

eventually with the growth and success of their endeavors will allow them to increase their income and pay off the loan in due time. The first movement for microfinance institutions was with the Grameen Bank founded in the 1970's by Mohammad Yunus in Bangladesh. The main focus was on alleviating poverty by providing credit and savings facilities for all kinds of poor people and particularly women, who now make up 98% of the borrowers today (Dowla 2006:205). Self-employment not only allows the poor to earn financial independence but also facilitates social-economic development. While many believe that those of lower income will not be able to pay back the loans, Yunus found otherwise, and found that they have high rates of repayment when the correct tools and institutions are in place to facilitate them. The Grameen Bank has changed over the years to meet the needs of its clients, and the biggest change from Grameen I to Grameen II is the role of group and individual loans. The classical Grameen model relied on group responsibility for loans, which simplified the collection of repayments, reduced transaction costs of loan collecting, and supported members in need (Dowla 2006:77). While the role of groups is still important in Grameen II, now the group is no longer liable for individual loans and the group doesn't have to provide a guarantee for the loan to its members. Before if the group performed well there was no reward, but if some individuals performed badly there was a sanction stigma, while now groups are rewarded for their good performance and the principle of group lending as a point of service is still crucial to facilitating both economic and social transactions (Dowla 2006:79).

Those people who are considered the most in need are given priority to microfinance, such as widowed, deserted, or divorced women, beggars, those in unfit living condition, those who earn a livelihood by supplying physical labor to others, those with many household members or no male member to work, landless women, and similar other extreme situations

(Dowla 2006:206). While some of these characteristics may classify people as the hardcore poor, microfinance is not without criticisms, as it is argued that even microfinance institutions do not target these extremely destitute people who are in the worst cases of poverty. While income can be used as a criterion to determine the hardcore poor, there is no clear cut way to classify it as many factors must be taken into consideration, although the World Bank's Voice for the Poor project has identified some major characteristics that includes not owning land or a house, in women headed families, in families with no male income earner, meet food needs by begging, have no access to credit or health care services and are excluded by the society (Dowla 2006:202). One of the problems associated with microfinance providers is the concept of mission drift as the mission of these institutions is to help the poor irrespective of the intensity of their poverty, some microfinance may not be an appropriate tool to alleviate poverty of this hardcore group. Instead of credit, the hardcore poor need funds for food and shelter in addition to funds for investment, along with grants and guaranteed employment to break free. They poorest need more "survival measures" with voluntary savings facilities and emergency consumption credit facilities as opposed to "promotional" measures such as credit for self-employment (Dowla 2006:203).

There are also demand and supply side factors as to why the poor are excluded from Microfinance Institutions (MFIs). On the demand side many poor may self-exclude themselves due to the lack of inputs of land, capital, working family members, human capital and knowledge of running a business. They will receive a low return from using credit and thus create a supply side deterrent from MFIs who don't want to provide loans to these poorest of the poor. Also on the supply side is geographical targeting in which MFIs choose areas with better access to infrastructure, which are not the areas where the poorest individuals are found, thus excluding

the poorest of the poor (Dowla 2006:204). One of the biggest problems that microfinance institutions face is from the borrowers themselves, who need to be convinced that they can change their lives using credit from the bank. This relates to the issue of self-exclusion of the hardcore poor, and it is up to both the staff and the success from other clients who need to help empower those who have self-doubts. Another criticism of MFI's is the high interest rates some institutions charge, that are needed to cover the many administrative costs associated with making thousands of tiny loans that are guaranteed even with a lack of collateral. With higher operating costs, it can be argued that these larger interest rates can be justified even if they are higher than normal bank interest rates. While these high interest rates make the life of the microfinance institution more sustainable and profitable for the future, it creates problems for the poor who are the individuals paying this high rate. Entrepreneurs with access to MFI's may be paying a higher interest rate than if they borrowed from a commercial bank, but it can be argued that MFI's are taking a bigger risk, with higher costs, to provide people with these opportunities. These individuals may find it difficult to repay these high rates however, and if they cannot successfully pay back their loans, then the MFI is not fulfilling its goal to help people alleviate their poverty, but instead putting them deeper in debt (Rosenberg 2009). Microfinance institutions have been giving people the tools to make their own changes in life and even with their own problems and controversy, the benefits they've brought to millions of low income people, especially women, cannot be argued against.

Microfinance and the Role of Women

One of microfinance's initiatives from the beginning has been focused on women to make changes in the lives of the poor, as credit is used to benefit more than the individual client,

but the families that they support as well. Women are the key agents of change as they build assets, guard against risk and provide opportunities to their children, enhancing the quality of their life through the participation with microfinance institutions. When the World Bank surveyed households from 1991-1993 in Bangladesh that were either borrowing from the Grameen Bank or were not, they found that a 10% increase in credit to women borrowers raised household per capita weekly expenditures by 0.43%. It also resulted in higher consumption rates for women than for men, as 1 *taka* of credit provided to women adds 0.18 *taka* to the total annual household expenditure while men only add 0.11 *taka*. The increase in borrowing also results in increases in net worth, probability of school enrollment, and improves the nutritional status of the children (Dowla 2006:37). Women are also experiencing income and substitution effects with access to credit as they are affected by the income effect with an increase in income when they spend more time on market-related activities which thus increases the demand for children as the increased income makes it possible for the family to have more children. If this increased income cannot be sustained over time and keep up with the growing financial restraints that more children bring, this could cause the family to fall back into poverty.

The substitution effect plays a role in which the increased market value of women's time makes it more costly for them to spend it raising children and they will desire fewer children. This plays a large role in the concept of population growth and limitations of food production, as Malthusian theory states how unchecked population growth is exponential, while food supply growth is arithmetic. While a decreased number of children would put less strain on resources, if this higher level of income is not sustained over time, then more children may be desired who will put even greater constraints on resources. With cash income women are able to increase their bargaining strength in the household and thus have more control over the decision to have

children (Dowla 2006:39). This bargaining power due to access to credit has also increased women's perceived contribution to the family, as 3% of borrowers feel that the husband contributes more to family compared to 23% among non-borrowers. It was also found that females own significantly higher amounts of land and non-land assets compared with non-borrowers wives, and all of this has contributed to the greater empowerment of women (Dowla 2006:49). Empowerment can be classified as giving individuals or groups greater economic, political, and social strength in society, and MFI's that focus on women are thus able to affect more than just the financial opportunities they provide to their clients. Women are given the chance to develop not only themselves as individuals, but use the opportunities, services, and knowledge to impact their family life and position in society. Women are thus affected on both and economic and social level by having access to credit and their own independent source of income.

Microfinance institutions such as GAWFA that are affiliated with the Women's World Bank network have helped women around the world achieve financial support through both the services, training and access to credit that they provide. Women are able to become the key agents of their own change and this organization provides a worldwide network of sharing knowledge and skills (Forbes 2010). Both the Women's World Bank and GAWFA work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals particularly focusing on Goal 3, promoting gender equality and Goal 8 enhancing global partnerships. The WWB is careful to keep its focus on women and is trying to mitigate the trend of MFI's moving away from low income populations as they move into the commercial mainstream. MFI's continued development of providing more than just credit, to an array of financial services such as savings and insurance, will help women have a safe place to save their assets and protect them from catastrophic losses. Women are

empowered with the skills they learn through training sessions such as one that was held by GAWFA in the Upper River Region in December 2010. This allows those who attend to gain a breath of business knowledge, and women are encouraged to share this information with others who were not able to attend and spread their experiences to help all entrepreneurs (Njie 2010). In addition to sharing information with other entrepreneurs, the Women's World Bank is encouraging women to share this business information and experience with younger girls; the next generation that can use this financial education to help enhance their lives from an early age (WWB 2010:13). The WWB also focuses on the growing income gap between urban and rural residents, and believes that rural lending is critical for those households and individuals dependent on agriculture who experience variable cash flow due to the seasonality of their production. The loan product takes into account these seasonal fluctuations and understands how the applicant's business needs to be specifically analyzed in order to benefit the client the most. There are a different set of challenges when giving access to credit in rural areas, from the requirements for obtaining a loan, limited physical mobility and existing social and cultural norms surrounding women in business in particular (WWB 2010:19). The WWB is addressing these crucial issues with research into how to continue to develop its rural lending programs, and MFI's continue to develop in order to better serve the needs of their clientele.

Structure of Gambian Economy

In order to look at the role of microfinance and business services in a developing country such as the Gambia, the structure of the economy and issues of poverty must be addressed. The Gambia is an agricultural based economy with a gross national product (GDP) of around \$730 million and a gross national income (GNI) of around \$740 million. There has been annual

growth rate of 4.6% of the GDP in 2009, and annually inflation has increased at 2.4%. The breakdown of GDP by sector is mainly agriculture followed by wholesale and retail trade that makes up a large percentage of GDP (African Economic Outlook 2011). The Gambia's population has been increasing by 2.7% annually and currently has a population of 1.71 million people (World Bank 2011). Even with the sound economic growth over the years, 60% of the population still falls below the poverty and 40% falls below the food poverty line. Although urbanization has increased the urban population to 58% of the total population, there is little difference of poverty in rural and urban areas except for the higher prevalence of food poverty in rural areas (CIA.com 2011). This is due to the fact that seasonal food poverty affects the rural population more seriously than the urban populations who have a higher proportion of household income from cash activities that are used for imported food supplies. The Gini coefficient in the Gambia from 1998 was 50.2 that indicate the degree of inequality in the distribution of family income from a scale of 0-100 with 100 being if wealth was distributed completely equally and 0 being if wealth was maximally unequal (CIA.com 2011). The Gini coefficient is used as a measure of inequality in wealth or income, and the Gambia's Gini coefficient of 50.2 demonstrates that there is a higher rate of inequality in incomes based on this ratio analysis. One problem with this statistic is that although it plots the proportion of total income of the population that is cumulatively earned by a percentage of the population, it is vague in nature and does not take into the wealth of countries and differences in the availability of necessary resources in rich and poor countries. The Gambia's poorest quintile in 1998 controlled 4% of the share of expenditures and this was generated using the National Household Poverty Survey. (UNdata.com 2011). This measure of inequality indicates that the poorest 20% of the population have a tiny share of the resources and are living in very impoverished conditions considering

they only have access to 4% of expenditures, and the other 80% of the population has access to 96% of the expenditures, that can be further broken into more inequalities. The GDP per capita purchasing power parity (PPP) was \$1,900 based on the year 2010 estimates, and the PPP is a theory of exchange rates that represents the relative value of two currencies. The PPP of the Gambia represents the GDP on a purchasing power parity basis divided by the population and is ranked 156th out of 194 countries in the world (CIA.com 2011). These statistics are formulated in Figure 1.1 to observe and compare these important facts that highlight Gambia's economic situation in the world. Gambia's economic figures represent the need for change, as they are facing both the problems of poverty and inequalities that need to be overcome for increased development.

Figure 1.1 Gambia's Economic Data

Statistic	Number/Percentage	Year
GDP	\$730 million	2009
GNI	\$140 million	2009
GDP Growth Rate	4.6%	2009
Annual Inflation Increase	2.4%	2009
Population	1.71 million	2010
Annual Population Increase	2.7%	2010
Urban Population	58%	2010
Pop. Below Poverty Line	60%	2009
Pop. Below Food Poverty Line	40%	2009
Gini coefficient	50.2	1998
Poorest Quintile Expenditure's	4%	1998
GDP per capita PPP	\$1,900	2010

With around three fourths of the employed population relying on agriculture for its livelihood, the Gambia is an agricultural based economy that is trying to survive in a globalized world that favors the Western industrial countries in many ways. The Gambia has a limited natural resource and agricultural base, and still relies heavily on remittances and tourist receipts

although it's main agriculture products include rice, millet, sorghum, peanuts (called groundnuts in The Gambia), corn, sesame, cassava (tapioca), palm kernels, cattle, sheep and goats. Small scale manufacturing featuring the processing of peanuts, fish and hides, is another crucial aspect to its economy and other industries such as tourism, agricultural machinery assembly, woodworking, metalworking and clothing play a vital role in the economy (CIA.com 2011). While the groundnut is the main export source, recent climate changes and price fluctuations have weakened the market and made the lives of farmers more vulnerable. The recent decline in both the tourism industry and the re-export trade has been discouraging for the country as well, as unemployment and underemployment rates still remain high and many are struggling to survive during these difficult economic times. There has been a rise in the banking sector but the economic progress still depends on bilateral and multilateral aid and donors and on responsible government management which does not always prove reliable for a country struggling within the entire world economy (CIA.com 2011). While the Gambia is currently in an agrarian society, its development over time may change if it continues to grow and focus on service and industries as keys to economic success.

Capitalization and Globalization Influences

The increasing role of capitalism in Africa must be understood in both the time and space within history and the role of trade in the world must be studied carefully to understand these changes. Economic, political, religious and social factors all play a role in the changes The Gambia has faced in both its development and position in the globalized world. Globalization has occurred throughout history by integrating the world's people through cultural, economic and social interactions, facilitated in recent times through advances in technology. Globalization

occurs not only on a scale of economic trade, but on one of sharing ideas that play a role in influencing regions once untouched by the larger forces of the world (Wright 2010:18).

Wallerstein's world systems theory helps explain the political and economic relationship of unequal trade and how the rise of capitalism in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries contributed to the current day unequal global relationships. His model relies on core and periphery countries, the core who have central positions in the world network by being efficient producers, efficient users and resources and accumulation of wealth, while the periphery are less centralized and are suppliers of unprocessed resources to the core. As capitalism developed in the Western world, these periphery countries became weaker both politically and economically, and those people who once focused on their own production for survival are now focused on working to produce raw resources for the core and obtaining food, tools or clothing through trading with the core (Wright 2010:19). The Gambia would be considered a periphery country according to Wallenstein's world systems theory, as there is unequal exchange with the core, more developed countries (Wallerstein 1979:271). The Gambia's high level of food imports demonstrates this exact occurrence, and the shift to groundnut production as a cash crop is evidence of Wallerstein's theory within the country. Within the Gambia, globalization has also had important religious influences as the growth of Islam in West Africa contributed to changes in cultural and economic aspects of the country, as Muslim merchants throughout history brought links to the rest of the world through trade. Globalization has impacted the Gambia and its role in world trade to a large extent, and capitalism will continue to influence the role this periphery country has when considering Wallerstein's world systems theory.

While the economy of the Gambia is crucial to understanding its place within our globalized world, the moral economy must be studied as well to get a true understanding of the

role these larger forces play in the lives of individuals. The moral economy is a concept used to describe the embeddedness of social and economic practices, and the focus on collective action towards group survival. Moral economies focus on the norms, values and expectations of the communities that value these social factors to a high extent. These social and economic factors work together to make the moral economy that in the Gambia plays a large role in impacting the lives of individuals. Gambian culture focuses on extended families and hospitality to all relations, which impacts the role that capitalism has played in affecting the moral economy. This type of economy puts a focus on social interests that lead to collective action, particularly to sustain traditional elements, maintain economic arrangements and provide access to food resources. In closely knit communities, this sense of mutuality helps prevent scarcity of resources for the group as a whole, as all are producers and consumers contributing to one another.

The Gambia's increasing reliance on imports particularly for food sources is changing the role of local production and the loss of particular knowledge and skills. Artisans are focusing their skills towards tourists instead of for the own society in certain cases and this is changing the role of commodities within the culture. Over the past three decades West African cities have become more dependent on imported rice from Asia as the inexpensive rice and declining trade barriers helped increase this exchange. This caused an urban shift in consumption away from coarse grains, cassava, yam or plantain bananas to milled rice whose preparation is labor saving. This change in consumption patterns has made countries such as The Gambia, much more vulnerable to fluctuation global rice prices as was seen from 2007-2008 when prices rose by 100%. Between January 2003 and July 2007 the cost of a 50kg bag more than doubled from 220 to 575 dalasis. This reflected the worldwide trends in the grain's market price, and a year later at

the height of the food crisis, the price continued to double. In The Gambia today milled rice imports exceed the amount produced domestically and even with the fall in market prices in 2009, the price is still more expensive than it was in 2007. With rice as a primary staple of food particularly in the growing urban areas, the food sector's vulnerability to market forces affects many consumers. Consumption is closely related to production, and domestic farmers in the Gambia cannot meet the high demand for rice that imports are currently filling (Moseley 2009). As the Gambia continues to develop as a country, it must find a way to both overcome poverty and survive in a global market whose forces are currently holding it under.

The role of food consumption in a cultural and social context in the Gambia is an aspect that relates back to the economic value of goods, and the increasing role of imports has changed some of the perception on commodities. Food consumption varies between the rural and urban areas where access and availability differ in the products and their everyday reliance. Those with rising incomes in the urban areas are demonstrating a rise in conspicuous consumption, while others are still struggling to provide basic meals. The role of staple and non-staple foods has been changing and the increase of imported rice is a major shift from a reliance on local to globally produced goods. Food plays a vital role in the Gambia and the social implications and habits associated with its consumption are demonstrated in both daily life and during special occasions and ceremonies. Food consumption is a crucial aspect of any culture and in the Gambia the role of food has important social and economic implications.

Methodology

I first began working with GAWFA on January 27th and spent three weeks doing research there until I had to stop while official problems were resolved and I learned I would not be able to return to continue my research. I went in on Tuesdays around 11am and on Wednesday's

around 10am, leaving around 3 or 4pm depending on what I was doing that day. Usually I would spend between 8-10 hours per week there and an average day involved arriving at the office located down the street from our house in Kanifing and heading into the savings and credit office. I would greet the women working there and start helping them with whatever they needed assistance with that day. Usually it was filing the client's folder which involves calculating the difference between the written account sheet and the print out version to find what had been recorded in one and not the other. I also helped with various calculations from the previous day's records and make sure it was properly tallied and recorded. I only went out into the field once to visit clients when they were collecting money to pay back a loan, and during my time I would ask the women questions and observe the workplace interaction and behavior. Unfortunately I had to stop while officials considered whether to give me permission to work with them. I eventually learned that I would not be able to continue my research with them. I didn't work with them long enough to formulate any specific questions or method of research before I had to stop, so I do not have much more than my initial observations and experiences from working in the office.

When I began my research at IBAS, I had a clearer idea of what information I wanted to collect, but had to change aspects of my research to fit this new organization. While I had originally planned to focus on women and their role in microfinance institutions, I needed to open my data collection up to men and their businesses and experiences as entrepreneurs as well. I think that starting at a different organization allowed me to realize what information was possible to be gathered using specific methods and how to properly incorporate these changes into my own research. I started working with IBAS on March 29th, and I work the same two days as I had at GAWFA, going in on Tuesdays around 11am and Wednesday's around 9am. I stay

until 3-4pm, and spent a solid 10 hours a week at IBAS. I have been working with the extension officers to learn more about how the organization is run, and observe the workplace interaction as well. I am able to ask many questions, and have started going out into the field to meet clients and learn directly from them how their experiences with IBAS have impacted their business and lives. By working with the extension officers, I have been able to review client's records and learn more about specific cases and reasons for missed repayments, and the struggles they face in collecting loans from businesses that are falling by the wayside. I have also been able to interview and discuss with other workers of the institution about their role and duties and see their perspective of the issues as well.

Even though I had hoped to focus my research around the issue of women's microfinance and the role of food consumption, I have found throughout my experiences with these organizations that the role of business, access to credit and personal family consumption are issues that have become major problems for entrepreneurs trying to gain independence. This separation of personal and business expenses is a theme that I am focusing on, and the problems entrepreneurs including both men and women, face when balancing their lives. Through talking with the staff at IBAS and doing my own research, I have also decided to focus on women in more depth because of the role they play in lifting themselves and their families out of poverty through access to credit. Women have an important role in the family in the Gambia, and my research also has developed into how they provide resources for their family through various business endeavors. Through talking with various people during my time here and learning about the role of food in the society, I have realized that there are both important social and economic aspects of food that interplay in both the consumption and business side of food related industries. Food is a crucial necessity to all people, and problems occur with entrepreneurs who

try to balance personal expenses that include buying food to provide for the family, with business expenses that are needed to grow and expand the business. While entrepreneurs take out loans to be used towards business investment, many find moral obligations and cultural expectations to take precedence over business development. I had found that the concept of the moral economy and tradition of providing for one another on a community based level interferes with the capitalist nature of business development, particularly through my research in the Gambia. I was able to focus my questions through both my outside research and my discussions with people in the workplace. To collect the information I needed, I used ethnographic data by observing what was going on during my time with the organization in order to understand how they run and see the interactions with clients. I also relied on informal interviews where I would ask questions to both the staff and the clients we would meet when we go into the field. While in the office I would take notes directly as I listened to people, as they provided a wealth of information that I did not want to miss. When out in the field I used a more relaxed system in which I had a general set of questions in my mind and tailored them according to the business or situation the entrepreneur was currently in. I also waited until later to take notes, as I wanted to focus on the interactions and not come across as too formal. I was able to speak to some clients directly, but others I had help with translations from the extension officer who helped with the communication. I have been able to obtain a wealth of information through talking with people and learning their stories and how their participation with IBAS in particular has impacted their lives.

Results and Findings

Organization's Structure and Characteristics

Through the bulk of my research at IBAS and a little bit from my time at GAWFA, I have found how these two different institutions run in order to meet the needs of their clients and

the various services they offer. GAWFA as a microfinance institution has a larger focus on women and lower income clients, and strives itself on its services and door to door access all over the Gambia. Every day the savings and credit officers will go into the field to directly collect loans or attempt to from clients, although many times clients will go directly to the office as well. All of the savings and credit officers I worked with were women, who shared a very close bond and kept a light work atmosphere filled with much discussion around personal life and joking relationships. There were always files that needed to be calculated, and they deal with the largest sums of cash I have observed while in the Gambia directly, often recounting and double checking to make sure amounts were correct before being recorded in ledgers. The use of calculators is crucial to making sure the math is correct, and there seems to always be a lack of at least one for everyone to use. Even with this issue, women are always sharing and making the best use of the resources on hand, and spend much time focused on keeping the client's accounts in order to the best of their ability. Some files proved very difficult to match up with the print outs, and I think that sometimes calculation errors due to half of the math being done by hand may be an error that brings more work to themselves in the end. When this error is not caught, it causes problems for the client's account although these cases appear in the stubborn minority, while most can be solved in enough time. While most of my work was office based in the same room, I still observed interactions with the rest of the staff, such as the role of the executive administrative assistant who provides the print outs when needed and the order of hierarchy with the branch manager and operation manager. I have very limited results from my time working with GAWFA and the majority of my data focuses on my findings from IBAS.

IBAS provides both loans and trainings to its clients, and overall business services including business check ups and advice when needed. The loan structure of IBAS is based

Figure 1.2 Map of the Gambia



around micro, small and medium loans, and these depend on the type of businesses, whether they are a single individual who carries all his goods on his back selling various items on the street, or a larger business such as a small goods shop. Generally micro loans go to those individuals carrying on their own, small loans go to businesses trying to stand on their own, and medium loans go to those with an established business that they are trying to expand. Most of IBAS's individual clients are found within the Kombo area and the groups range further into the country mainly in the North Bank Division. A map of the Gambia is demonstrated in Figure 1.2, and the majority of the individuals clients are found around the Western region, with the head office of IBAS located in Bakau. These groups can range in size from 15-1000 individuals, but generally are from around 75-100 people. Each individual and group has their own file, that is marked by their name and number that is used to identify them. The contents of the file vary depending on the client, but generally found in it are the application letter for the loan, interview form, recommendation letter, sovereign equity form, loan agreement with inventory listed and training certificate. A standing order form with a charge from some banks, as well as the bank and IBAS

account information can be contained in the file as well. Each individual pays D100 as the cost to join IBAS, broken down into an appraisal fee of D60 and the purchase of the passbook for D40. This appears to be a reasonable fee, as IBAS also requires business training before the disbursement of the loan that is crucial to business success. In this basic training on business skills, it teaches skills such as keeping a ledger with sales, credit, amount paid, goods bought and how to calculate costs and profits.

The client record card is another crucial piece of information that I've observed, as it contains the date, particulars of the transaction, the disbursement of the loan and equity, the cumulative repayment due, the amount paid and the outstanding balance. While looking through many of these client cards, I found that while some people were paying their balances off regularly and on their way to fully paying back their loan, others had only paid once and seemed to simply disappear. When talking with the extension officers, they state that some of their clients cannot simply be found, although they are trying to get into contact with them to the best of their ability. Many clients have outstanding balances that far exceed the amount they borrowed due to their lack of repayment and the interest rate of 20% that continues to increase what they owe every month. IBAS is currently in the process of recovering their loans, and are not taking in new clients as they try to recover the losses. The extension officers' main duties are to go through the list of loan disbursements and seeing who has paid and who hasn't. They will call clients and do client visits that are both expected and unexpected to get a true sense of how the business is doing and offer advice if the client needs it. There are differences to be expected if the client knows whether or not the officer is coming, and they try to even it out to give an accurate picture of the business's progress or lack thereof.

Figure 1.3 Offices and Units at IBAS

1	Manager's Office
2	Deputy Manager Office
3	Senior Training Officer's
4	Project Officer's Office
5	Extension Office
6	Credit Control Admins Office
7	Recovery Officer's Office
8	Bank Standing Orders Extension Office
9	Data Bank Office
10	Registry Office
11	Secretarial Office
12	Internet Office

Along with extension officers, the list of offices at IBAS is seen in Figure 1.3 that documents in hierarchy the different staff members that make up the organization. They all work together to give their clients the best business services and IBAS's history as an established loan and service provider has kept them above the rest of the competition in providing loans and services throughout the Gambia.

Problems with Business and Personal Life

While talking with both the staff and clients at IBAS I was able to conclude on some general trends in problems people have in both starting their businesses and paying back loans that involve both cultural and social influences in addition to the economic forces at work. Among all of those who are apply for a loan, around 75% of these individuals change their mind about the type of business they want to start. This causes many problems as they have not prepared the correct proposal form and the capital will not be going to where it was explicitly planned out to go to. The reason many change their mind is due to the success they see in other people's businesses, that they believe will come to them if they follow someone else's lead

instead of following their own ideas. This social influence creates many complications, as one individual may not have the same skill set as the other, and may not be guaranteed success in an area that is not their specialty. An example would be if one person planned to open a tailor shop because they had the skills of a tailor, and then decided a restaurant would be more profitable, but they would still have to hire a cook since they are specialized in tailoring. This issue also occurs with family influences that may also persuade the client to either enter a specific sector or not depending on their own perceptions, not on the planning and proposal the client has already made in order to obtain the loan. One woman I talked, Nyakassi, decided to start a small business of selling fire wood on the side, in addition to her job as a teacher. She was influenced by the success of her stepmother, but found that she had trouble managing the business trying to keep up her full time job as a teacher. The need to both sustain an income in order to support her family and begin a business proved difficult as she had not been regularly paying back her loan and the interest was accumulating. While she believed she had the capability to manage and sustain her business, the realities of providing for her family, in addition to managing her own capitalist venture demonstrate some of the issues with microfinance within the moral economy.

In addition to problems of changing one's minds on the type of business, many find it difficult to separate business and personal expenses once they receive the loan. One of the biggest problems with repayment is when people use the money towards their own expenses and do not invest it into the business to grow as planned. This happens out of necessity for other expenses first, such as supporting one's family and paying for children's school fees which I found to be a common issue especially with the women clients I spoke with. While many knew that they shouldn't use the loan money towards these expenses, they had no other option as they had to support their family and believe that education is crucial to the success of the children.

Nyakassi, the teacher who started a side business selling firewood said that even though she explicitly learned in the training session not to use the loan money for personal expenses, she did it anyway and is now facing problems repaying her loan. During the time I spent at IBAS, she repaid a large sum of D10,000 towards her balance of D17,564.68 when I had spoken with her, and is continuing to try and repay the rest of her balance in due time. The role of extension officers is crucial in encouraging repayment, and I personally was ecstatic to learn that she had succeeded in repaying a substantial portion of her loan and fulfilled the many promises officers hear from clients about paying next week or by the end of the month.

Another problem with repayment is that many will lend out their loan money to other family members who are in desperate need and will never end up paying them back, not to mention the interest that will collect in the meantime. This crucial aspect of Gambian culture in helping family out in any way comes into conflict with individual's decision to keep the money to themselves to increase their economic well-being in the long run. This interplays in the role of the moral economy, whose focus is on social units that provide for each other in the time of scarcity. Thus the capitalist ventures from an individual may take a backseat to the needs of others even when the resources were achieved through the use of a loan that was intended for future investment, it can serve a greater purpose to the family in the present. In addition to helping out family members directly with loaned money, some entrepreneurs also find it hard to stop family members from buying from them on credit, and not repaying back to the business expenses that they owe. One man who owns a small shop stated this as his biggest problem, since he doesn't feel he can say no to his family but at the same time is having trouble repaying his loans back now that his business is falling behind. He stated that it was easier for foreigners

to survive in the business world since they do not have constant supply of people relying on them and are better able to keep expenses separate from each other.

Another huge problem in loan repayment is when clients or their close family members fall ill, and they use the loan money for doctor's fees and medicine in order to ensure their own health before the health of the business. Sickness within either the client or his or her family can quickly cause the business to collapse, as one woman who sold fabric, purses and already make clothes experienced. Sira had a series of unfortunate events in regards to her business, due to the sudden death of her guarantor and her own health problems. She has not paid anything towards her loan whose maturity date is approaching two years, and prospects of repayment are looking slim with her situation. She stated that after she travels to Senegal and resolves her health problems she will be able to properly manage her business again, but this will take time and the interest on her D30,000 loan has already caused her balance to increase to D54,728. Her personal health has impeded the success of the business and using the loan towards non business investment has decreased her chance for entrepreneurial success. This issue of people trying to survive while at the same time supporting their families and managing their business and using the loan money for what its intended purpose is, is one of the larger problems I've found in how the business and cultural worlds in the Gambian are colliding.

The Food Sector and its Consumption in the Family

When looking at specific businesses related to food, a restaurant is larger type of business that needs to have certain characteristics to maintain its success. In addition to serving quality food that is delicious, there are many other aspects to food consumption in a public setting that must be addressed. In urban areas it's common for them to serve all three meals a day, but others only serve dinner and will experience a different set of sales that must be accounted for when

planning the business and understanding the demand of the customers. If restaurants cannot meet the specific quantity demanded of a particular food product, they will lose the sale and must stock reasonably to have enough food, but at the same time not have too much, as food is perishable and needs to be fresh for customer satisfaction. Workers must also have very good hygiene and there must be clean and tidy surroundings, as to give a positive environment to the customer where they will be relaxed. The service must be good, as well as a well-designed atmosphere with proper seating, lighting, and entertainment from a TV or music if possible. The cooks also need to be fast and skilled and able to make a variety of dishes to serve the customer to the best of their ability. All of these business aspects of a restaurant are an important part of food consumption in any part of the world, and IBAS helps entrepreneurs hone in on these characteristics to make their business in the food sector as successful as possible.

Small good shops that sell mainly food products such as spices, vegetables, rice, chicken, drink mixes and other assorted items are another type of business that I was able to learn about through meeting with the clients who own these types of shops. In these shops, profits from each item are small but when combined together can be a way to improve and expand the business. One client I talked to, Sering, owned one of these small shops in Bakoteh and even though his business was currently collapsed due to his own health problems, he had used the loans he had taken through IBAS over the years to expand his business. He used the money towards buying freezers so he could sell more types of items that needed refrigeration, and continued to increase his inventory. Most of this stock comes from Senegal, and he buys from a retailer not a wholesaler, which makes his profits lower than they possibly could be. Among the two types of onions he carried, he explained how the red variety is locally grown in the Gambia, while the white is imported from Holland. These shops are mini centers of our globalized world, with rice

imported from America next to the newly “traditional” Maggi cube, an essential in any Gambian dish nowadays. With a small good shop such as his among many located in the same market, he relies on repeat customers, and business in the Gambia has this important social component attached to it. Many shop owners such as Sering, and service providers such as tailors, will succeed if they can meet the demand of customers over time through both prices and quality. Their businesses may be individual capitalist endeavors, but they rely on the connections and social network of customers as the key to their economic success. There is no business without both a supply and demand, and the clients I met with always emphasized the importance of relationships with their clients as a key factor in managing their businesses.

While a restaurant or shop is an example of a larger business related to the food sector, a smaller business is that of vegetable selling, that brings relatively high profits in the market if one meets the demand in a proper location. The major costs associated with selling vegetables are the high costs of transportation, and carrying the bags into the market, but this can be worth it for sellers who do well. In my observations there are many more women selling vegetable in the market than men, although women are more likely to have tables set up, while men will be in shops selling a variety of other goods as well. Women are finding new opportunities in business and one case study I learned through an interview with the training officer, Mamudou Jallow, he talked about a group of women who grew vegetables and who used to let a man come and buy the vegetables and sell them at the market. He told the women that if they go to the market themselves to sell their vegetables, they could make more of a profit but the women were afraid their husbands wouldn't allow it. Once they were convinced to talk to their husbands however, they started going to the market themselves and made three times more than they could have otherwise (conversation, April 13, 2011). Thus having access to their own business activities has

not only empowered them economically but socially as well, as they were convinced to make decisions together with their husbands instead of assuming that they wouldn't be allowed as they pleased.

While food sectors have helped people in business, the role of food and the business world is not without its complications as women who usually cook for the family and are not working find themselves strained for time, in addition to raising a family. After working at one's business all day, women still have household responsibilities including cooking which is time consuming, yet crucial for survival. If one makes a high enough income to hire a maid that is one option, or if they have other females in the house although most of the time daughters will be busy at school. One woman I talked to said she still enjoys cooking even after a long day, and will ask her children what they want to eat before making it. While some men do cook, a rough estimate from one of the male extension officers I work with said that it's only around 10%, and in that case it may be to support themselves, not necessarily a family with a working female wife.

The role of food is crucial to the family however, as they share a common bowl in which all gather and eat out of, and will always share with guests if they are to arrive at meal times. The role of hospitality is one Gambians highly value, and they are always willing to feed a stranger who arrives around a mealtime. This was emphasized in many of the conversation I had with staff members about how Gambians are able to provide for those who may be strangers and how this doesn't happen in other African countries. It was stated that if "you have no money, you have no food" if you travel out of the Gambia, and that this is one of the differences even across the border in Senegal. This concept of always providing for others is an important aspect of the moral economy that is gradually changing with influences from a capitalist mindset. While there

are still many variations in compounds, some are becoming more focused on their blood relatives and indirectly turning away guests whose stay with them may put a strain on resources. People are becoming more concerned with their financial stability and finding it more difficult to provide for everyone as was common in earlier traditions. This new individualized mindset even if providing only for one's own nuclear family is due to financial concerns and demonstrates how individuals are changing their habits due to pressures from the wider economic system. People are worried about the survival of their own, as prices have risen drastically over the past decade, and new financial constraints are causing people to put less focus on the group, with more focus on themselves. This breakdown of the moral economy as capitalist ideas influence it is changing the traditional habits, although some aspects of food consumption are still maintained within the family level. Breakfast can be eaten alone if it not an item like porridge that is then shared as a family, but lunch and meal times are always eaten together and are usually the same food, cooked once during the day and saved for dinner later on. One must be at the compound when food is served unless they have a legit reason or are working, and food will not be saved if someone simply misses the meal for no good reason. Children are not supposed to speak at meals unless spoken to, and do not join into the adult conversation until they have matured enough and are considered an adult. Another traditional social aspect of consumption is that the food will be placed where the father is first and the family will follow, although this is slowly fading away with changes in the society. These social aspects of food consumption in demonstrate the way food is shared and distributed among the family and the role it plays in both a business and personal setting.

Discussion

My findings indicate how both economics and socio-cultural factors play a large role in determining the success and problems that businesses face. When one has access to credit and is able to obtain loans for their business, it doesn't mean that they will entirely follow the rational and planned out steps towards improving and expanding their business. The impact of the family and personal relations beyond business sometimes take precedence and end up causing problems later on for the entrepreneur. While business growth can be viewed as a capitalist venture where one is trying to build up and make more profits for oneself, this does not always occur so clear cut in Gambian culture. Even when one's business succeeds, women in particular will use the profit to benefit their families and may continue to grow the business not for their own sake, but to provide for their children and other dependents. Women play a vital role in business development as they are hard working and tend to put more effort into their business, knowing that it is the key to gaining resources for the family.

The moral economy and the increasing role of individualistic, capitalism influences are coinciding within the Gambia and can be observed when studying their businesses and the entrepreneurs trying to survive in the market. As clients of IBAS, these entrepreneurs learn the tools to growing and expanding successful business ventures that focus on the importance of investing in the business and using business expenses for their intended purpose. The role of the moral economy however, prevents success from happening in cases where the money can be used to benefit the greater group who may need the money to survive now, not through the investments and profits it could bring later. While the moral economy can prevent success in some cases, the importance of fostering social relationships, particularly in a small country such as the Gambia, is a key to success in one's individual business as well. Changes are occurring

within the economic and social practices, as people become more individually focused and concerned about their financial constraints at the same time, thus demonstrating how the changing nature of the moral economy is both holding strong in some regards, but being broken down in other ways. During one of my discussions with Lamin Konteh, he stated that “some people move for interest, but must know how to move with people” which I think sums up a lot of what my research focuses on. The phrase “moving with” is a popular term here to refer to the way people conduct their lives and what kind of ideas or characters they associate with themselves or others (conversation, May 23, 2011). While people can be individualistic, and feel the forces of capitalism and benefiting oneself take hold, most people still follow the principles of the moral economy and work with others to ensure group survival and success. Thus, while some focus on their own interests, most are still moving with others, in terms of a community and collective group that benefits together. Business practices in the Gambia combine communalistic and individualistic values and perspectives that can have both beneficial and problematic effects both now and in the future for entrepreneurs.

I think that my research can be beneficial to the organization I worked with because I am taking both a business and cultural approach and looking at the interaction of these forces in the lives of their clients. I am attempting to look at how the moral economy in the Gambia interacts with business and trying to get a sense of how clients see themselves in these terms. I am also putting a larger focus on food related sectors and its consumption which may be a topic that is enjoyed by those I have worked with. I think my project can be called a success as I have achieved the objectives I had set out to do, although I think there is always more research and work that needs to be done for future improvement and expansion of my paper. While I think my project would have greatly benefited from more time spent from the beginning of my stay in the Gambia

at IBAS, I think I made the most of the time I had to collect the research I had planned to. I will definitely plan to share my paper with those I work with, and I believe they should see how their help and knowledge combined with my personal interests and research have come together in one cumulative form. I think it will let them see how the work I am doing with them is affecting not only my academic knowledge, but also the knowledge of how I've grown as a researcher and formulated my ideas.

Limitations

While I consider my directed research to be a success, and I am pleased with the data and information I've learned throughout my stay at IBAS, there were still some limitations to my work that would have enhanced my research further. I think the language was one of the biggest obstacles, as even though I could speak a little of the local language, it would have been very beneficial to be able to communicate fluently in the language of both the clients and to understand the staff at all times. Fortunately not fully understanding the language helped me ask more questions and become more inquisitive about what was really going on during the office, so even my limitations proved beneficial in certain ways to me as a researcher. Another limitation I faced was starting the bulk of my research after I had spent a couple months in the Gambia, as I know I could have gained even more research by working at IBAS the entire time. Even though IBAS is undergoing their loan recovery process at this time, I think it would have helped had I been able to do my research during a different time to see how the institution runs during its normal operations. Overall, I was still able to make the most of my research and feel these limitations did not hamper my research to any great extent.

Next Steps

Working with both GAWFA and IBAS and having my plans fall through for the first organization has really helped me understand firsthand the problems that occur when working with humans and how to make the best of any situation. As frustrating as my experiences were while waiting and hoping to get my foot back in the door, it helped me realize that plans change for a reason and for the better in most cases. By working with IBAS it made me see how closely related business and cultural are, and has made me more interested in these interactions and their role in the lives of the clients. I think that it has opened up my eyes to new avenues I could take in life, while still searching for career plans and to never limit myself to one specific thing or organization in this case. I have been able to experience firsthand how to conduct my own research, and even though I am still in the process of collecting information I am still learning how to enhance my methods to gain the maximum possible results. I think talking directly with clients has helped my communication skills and has helped me improve my local language skills while here as well.

I would definitely recommend IBAS as a future organization site for any student with interests in business, loans, advisory services, or looking for a way to interact with Gambian businesspeople on a general basis. They were extremely helpful and concerned about me getting the information I needed, and were very welcoming to me coming in as a student. I think that it will help if students do some background research on areas they want to study in relation to the organization, and I wish I had been able to spend more time working with IBAS from the beginning. The staff was always open to questions and allowed me to both observe and participate in the workplace; giving me a good idea of how the organization is run, is structured and functions on an everyday basis. I think that the PEACE program should continue relations

with IBAS so that future students who may be interested will be able to be put in contact before they arrive and they can maximize both the time and research they hope to do the best of their ability. There are many avenues of research that can be explored through working with IBAS, and they also have material references that they've let me read to use as literature sources as well, from presentations about business training to aspects of food hygiene in businesses. I think future students will both enjoy and learn a lot from working with IBAS, and I would hope that more continue to in the future for both the PEACE program and IBAS's benefits.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Bill Roberts first off for his vital role in the PEACE program, and for being my advisor who has helped guide my research tremendously. I would also like to thank Yamai Seck-Jack for helping with the communications among the two organizations and helping set me up with IBAS when my other plans fell through. She played a vital role in helping my research continue at a point when I felt like giving up, and her back up plan proved to be more beneficial to my research than I think my original plans would have allowed. Also I would like to thank the entire staff at IBAS particularly the director Mr. Manga Sanyang for allowing me to conduct research with his organization, deputy manager Mr. Demba Bah who helped guide me around the organization and facilitated my research, and the head training officer Mamudou Jallow for being an important source to my research. I would like to especially thank Baboucarr Njie, for being a key source of information for my project and always encouraging me to ask even more questions than I had prepared and could think of. I also want to thank him for putting me into direct contact with the clients I've talked to and giving me the opportunity to get first hand data where I needed it the most. In addition, I would like to thank Lamin Konteh for being another important source

of cultural information who was always willing to talk to me and taught me something new every day.

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