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Challenging. Immersive. Empowering. Surprising. That only begins to describe the experiences of Stanford students who participated in Stanford Seed Internships. They traveled around the globe to work hands-on with companies participating in the Seed Transformation Program, a Stanford Graduate School of Business-led initiative that supports CEOs and business owners in developing and emerging economies to transform their companies and create exponential job growth.

At Seed we believe that business is one of the most powerful engines of change to move developing and emerging economies to greater prosperity. By supporting established entrepreneurs as they scale their businesses, inspiring students to become globally-engaged leaders, and supporting critical research, Seed is working to end the cycle of global poverty. We started in Africa, and are now expanding across the globe.

We hope these Seed Intern stories bring to life our mission, and inspire you to connect with us.
Intern Amal became much loved by her fellow Psaltry workers.

ENGINEERING AN IMPACT BY THINKING BIG

MEET AMAL EL-GHAZALY
Stanford Seed Intern and electrical engineer Amal El-Ghazaly traveled to Africa, excited to help the owner of an agricultural processing plant increase efficiency and production.

When conditions on the ground forced changes to the project, Amal turned her talents to the company’s most immediate needs and received a real-life lesson in the challenges facing entrepreneurs in developing economies. Amal first learned about the Seed program as she was finishing her doctorate. “There was a lot I was hoping for,” she recalled. “The end of a PhD is a critical time in defining career goals and your future. How do I want to define myself? How do I want to brand myself going into the job market, whether that’s industry or academia?”

As a dual Egyptian-American citizen, her concern over making her contribution took on special significance. “What I wanted most of all was to see how my engineering skills fit into this world on the African continent, and what impact can I actually have there,” she said. Amal applied to become a 2016 Seed Intern, joining the ranks of Stanford students selected to undertake projects at companies participating in the Seed Transformation Program. The program, which is housed under Stanford Graduate School of Business, offers high-potential leaders based in developing economies a chance to assess their company’s vision, redefine strategies, and make changes toward exponential growth that will create new jobs in their region. Stanford Seed East Africa, based in Kenya, and Stanford Seed West Africa, based in Ghana, eventually will be expanded to include Seed programs in developing economies throughout the world.

Amal was matched with Psaltry International, an agricultural business with 200 employees that focuses on both farm development and the production of food-grade starch from cassava, a plant with an edible root that is a major food staple in the region. Amal arrived at Seed’s Ghana office in June, received an orientation, and was soon escorted to Lagos, Nigeria, by a Seed coordinator. There, she was met by Psaltry CEO Yemisi Iranloye, who accompanied her on the three-hour trip to Psaltry’s rural site. Iranloye, a Christian, was eager to have the input of a Stanford intern — and was intrigued by the young Muslim engineer who had expressed an interest in her company.
“Can you imagine the strength of a woman in the developing world, which usually is male-focused, who put together a company on her own, applied for local funding, and is leading a team of mostly men and they all respect her? It was really powerful to work with her and learn from her.”

“I wanted new ideas; I wanted somebody to come and look at the business and tell me, ‘This particular thing you’re doing is not good; why don’t you do it this way?”’ Iranloye said. “I wanted to be corrected. I wanted her. I wanted this lady who just seemed to want me.” Amal’s plan — to identify production problems and solve them — hit roadblocks almost immediately. Spotty internet service made online research painfully slow. Access to materials was difficult, and Amal found herself dependent on others to complete tasks she was accustomed to handling herself. Conveniences taken for granted in the U.S. were often nonexistent. “Online banking doesn’t always work,” she said. “We had to drive 30 kilometers to the nearest town to come out with huge bags of cash. We’d be driving back terrified, but that’s what you have to do when you can’t transfer money electronically to farmers.”

She soon realized many of the projects she’d anticipated working on had either been implemented or were prohibitively expensive. She decided to focus on learning every aspect of the company’s production line, eventually making suggestions for improved efficiency based on international standards of cassava processing — something the management team had never explored. “They had never thought of researching online what others do and how we can match that,” she said. “When they get caught up in the daily grind, with a motor that breaks or issues that come up every day, they don’t have time to think of the bigger picture. So that was the luxury of having me there — the engineer who could now think more abstractly.”

Amal immediately saw a need for workplace sensors and began building them from scratch, cobbling units together from materials on hand. “They monitor the temperature of the starch to make sure it doesn’t overheat, which can ruin the factory and potentially cause an explosion,” she said. “Others were to warn of water exposure near the electric motors, which can cause the factory to shut down.”

She also began researching industry advancements and new equipment, helped make purchases, and began working with Psaltry’s production, utility, administrative, accounting, and agricultural teams. She taught coworkers about data analytics using Excel, demonstrated PowerPoint presentations, and taught employees how to make international purchases online. In turn, Amal was taught power electronics by coworkers, learned
the realities of operating a business in a developing economy, and found inspiration in CEO Iranloye, who became both a friend and mentor. “Can you imagine the strength of a woman in the developing world, which usually is male-focused, who put together a company on her own, applied for local funding, and is leading a team of mostly men and they all respect her?” she said. “It was really powerful to work with her and learn from her.” Iranloye said she’s grateful for the improvements Amal brought to Psaltry, including the sensors she created, which have drastically reduced production line errors that used to mean frequent 24-hour shutdowns of the line for cleaning. In addition to savings in time, energy, and money, Amal contributed to Psaltry in less tangible ways, she said.

“It’s one of the most tremendous things to have happen to us as a company,” Iranloye said. “She’s been able to help my colleagues, my employees, to see that you can be very, very up there — she has a PhD in electrical engineering — and yet be as humble as you can be. She was able to display excellence. She added a lot of value to us.”

Amal is now doing postdoctoral research and has an expanded vision for her future, which may include continuing research on industrial sensors. “I’m now thinking, ‘How can I make research here be useful on the continent?’ I want my work here to be related to what is needed there,” she said. The Seed internship program helped her realize her own potential, and will do the same for future interns, she said. “Be open to this opportunity to change your life and your perspective on things,” Amal said. “No matter where I go, I think I can make an impact or contribute in some way.”
LEARNING LESSONS ON THE ROAD TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

MEET RONNIE WASHINGTON, JR.
Ronnie Washington decided he wanted to become a Stanford Seed Intern before he became a Stanford student. But he never anticipated the way the program would affect his own dreams of entrepreneurship.

Today, Ronnie is a 2016 Stanford Social Innovation Fellow, and the founder and CEO of Onward, a fledgling nonprofit employee-sponsored benefit program that promotes saving, responsible borrowing, and financial education. He credits much of his success to Michael Amankwa, CEO of CoreNett, a transactions processing management company based in Ghana, where Ronnie served as a 2015 Seed Intern. “Being there helped demystify what being an entrepreneur is, and that was really meaningful to me,” he said. “Entrepreneurship felt scary to me; how can you risk everything to fulfill a dream? A lot of doubt came with being an entrepreneur. Having seen Michael, I realize this is possible. I can also do this and bring my ideas to life.” Before coming to Stanford, Ronnie worked with Deloitte Consulting in Atlanta, GA, and spent two years in Ghana helping build a microfinance program. It was there he first learned about Seed.

“I was interested in Stanford and considering applying to the business school when I heard an introduction to Seed in the capital of Ghana,” he recalled. “As an outsider — at that point I was not a student at Stanford, I had no tie to the university — I was just amazed at the work they were doing.”

“The level of access you get to key decision-makers and being in those discussions and contributing to those discussions is an amazing opportunity you won’t necessarily get elsewhere.”
Ronnie eventually was admitted to Stanford Graduate School of Business and applied to become a Seed Intern, joining the ranks of students selected to undertake projects at companies participating in the Seed Transformation Program. The program, which is housed under the GSB, offers high-potential leaders based in developing economies a chance to assess their company’s vision, redefine strategies, and make changes toward exponential growth that will create new jobs in the region. Stanford Seed East Africa, based in Kenya, and Stanford Seed West Africa, based in Ghana, eventually will be expanded to include Seed programs in developing economies throughout the world.

“I’m a big believer in realizing potential, and Seed is about that, going into Ghana and other places others may not want to go, finding entrepreneurs there who can grow businesses,” he said. “It connected with my own mission statement and view of life. I thought it was important work they were doing.” At CoreNet, Ronnie worked with a team helping develop a marketing strategy for Knoxxi, the company’s mobile money platform.

“I had a shorter internship, but it was pretty impactful,” he said. “The project focused on customer acquisition and merchant acquisition strategy; we had to acquire enough customers and businesses to buy into the plan. I did a lot of research on other mobile money platforms to get a sense of what they’re doing. We wanted to know how do we differentiate, who do we target, and how can we make this a different platform than those now on the market.”

Over the five-week internship, Ronnie learned to cope with infrastructure problems and power outages, and found inspiration both in the work and in company CEO Amankwa. “He was very big on doing something that was transformational,” Ronnie said. “During that time, we would ride into work together and I’d pick his brain about what he thought, his routines as a CEO, how he managed leadership — everything I could think of I asked him. What does it take to be an entrepreneur? To do business in Ghana is difficult; there are not as many resources available, not as much venture capital, but he’s doing it.”
For his part, Amankwa relished the opportunity to work with the American student.

“I decided to mentor him whether he liked it or not,” he said with a smile. “While we were driving, I’d ask him, ‘What did you learn? How are you going to process this? What do you think about this?’ Anytime you want to do something, it’s not just about you; it’s about people. Make sure you touch people. Make sure you make a difference. Once you do that, you’re going to succeed.”

Amankwa said he happily received the news of his protégé’s venture into entrepreneurship.

“For me, it’s an amazing feeling to see what he’s doing and about to do,” he said. As the 2016 Stanford Social Innovation Fellow, Ronnie received $110,000 to build his social enterprise and is now immersed in developing ideas and building a pilot program to test the model for his financial platform Onward. The opportunities the Seed internship provides — problem-solving experience and up-close access to a company’s top executives — are beneficial to those in any field, he said.

“The level of access you get to key decision-makers and being in those discussions and contributing to those discussions is an amazing opportunity you won’t necessarily get elsewhere,” he said.

“If you really want to step out of your comfort zone and challenge yourself in ways you haven’t yet imagined, you should do this,” he added. “You get a different perspective on how others live and how they persevere, and you’ll face challenges. “There are lessons to be learned.”
PUTTING PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS TO THE TEST

MEET MAI TRAN

There’s not much Stanford Seed Intern Mai Tran loves more than problem-solving, especially when the challenge is outside her comfort zone. That was the situation Mai faced on a recent internship in Nigeria, where her talents and adaptability were put to the test at a company working to bring critical health care to some of the country’s poorest residents.

“My skill set here in America fits a puzzle, and it’s the same thing in Nigeria, but there, my skill set doesn’t produce the same results,” she explained. “It’s a different puzzle, and you realize very quickly how useless your skills are. You have to use your own intuition and basic common sense. And when the piece is not fitting with the puzzle, you realize how insignificant you are, which is a phenomenal, amazing thing to realize. I think it’s great.”

Following some international travel and an earlier internship at a nongovernmental agency in Ghana, Mai applied to become a 2016 Seed Intern, joining the ranks of Stanford students selected to undertake projects at companies participating in the Seed Transformation Program. The program, which is housed under Stanford Graduate School of Business, offers high-potential leaders based in developing economies a chance to assess their company’s vision, redefine strategies, and make changes toward exponential growth that will create new jobs in their region. Stanford Seed East Africa, based in Kenya, and Stanford Seed West Africa, based in Ghana, eventually will be expanded to include Seed programs in developing economies throughout the world.
It was like I was running a startup or my own project," she said. “Every day I learned something new and had to adapt, and every day I’d do something with that knowledge. It was constant iteration and moving.”
As she worked on research and market analysis for ADCEM, Mai said she focused on the value the work would provide for patients, along with the sharing of ideas between herself and her African colleagues.

“The most important and long-lasting impact is our working relationship with each other, and our ability to expand our vision and the way we think,” she said.

After completing her degree, Mai said she hopes to continue finding projects that challenge her problem-solving skills. Future Seed Interns should welcome that same opportunity, she said.

“Focus on the fact that you’re coming there to solve a problem,” she said. “You’ll be stimulated, challenged, and once you’re open to that, you’ll get a lot out of it.

“I think I did what I was supposed to do,” she added. “But what I got out of it was unexpected.”
TURNING BOTTLENECKS INTO BREAKTHROUGHS

MEET MUSILA MUNUVE
Stanford computer science student Musila Munuve was born and raised in Kenya, and had long dreamed of putting his education and skills to work on the African continent.

In the summer of 2016, the Seed student intern program gave him that chance. “For high school, I went to the African Leadership Academy in South Africa,” he said. “Its purpose is to educate the next generation of African leaders, training them to go into leadership in any field they’re interested in. When I came to Stanford, my plan was always to return to the continent. Last spring I got an email outlining the Seed program; its big idea is to eliminate poverty in developing countries through creating jobs. That spoke to me.”

Musila applied to become a Seed Intern, joining the ranks of Stanford students selected to undertake projects at companies participating in the Seed Transformation Program. The program, which is housed under Stanford Graduate School of Business, offers high-potential leaders based in developing economies a chance to assess their company’s vision, redefine strategies, and make changes toward exponential growth that will create new jobs in the region. Stanford Seed East Africa, based in Kenya, and Stanford Seed West Africa, based in Ghana, eventually will be expanded to include Seed programs in developing economies throughout the world. Musila had explored other internship programs outside the U.S., but as an international student faced a daunting gamut of paperwork.

“I’d been looking on my own, but when I was accepted to Seed, they made everything easier,” he said. “Not being an American citizen, travel can be harder. It was helpful for all of us to have one compact application. Seed applied for visas, found accommodations, took care of everything that would be really difficult to do from another country.” Musila accepted an internship with the mobile technology company SMSGH, based in Accra, Ghana.
“They create mobile solutions for different companies,” he explained. “I wanted to learn more about the tech sector in West Africa, and how that company specifically fit into that. The idea was for me to help with customer retention — high numbers of customers were coming in, but a lot would leave. They wanted me to have a closer look at how the teams worked together and how they could better structure.

“It was outside my major,” he admitted. “But I felt confident I could learn about the field and the company and make suggestions.” Musila arrived at SMSGH during a busy time, when the company was in the midst of a rebranding effort, he said. He found himself working with little structure, attempting to improve synergy between the company’s marketing, sales, and customer service teams. He eventually discovered a bottleneck and was able to develop a plan — now in effect — that’s resulted in a more successful collaboration between teams.

“They left me to do it, which I appreciated, but it was a challenge to figure out and implement,” he said. “As a result of my findings and the work I did, the company was able to hire two new people, restructure the teams, and implement some of the suggestions I had. For me, that was a huge success and I’m very proud of that.”

Working closely with the company’s CEO, along with its business analyst, chief technology officer, and chief sales officer, was an empowering experience, he said.

“I had access to the really big projects and the big tasks that I don’t think interns in the States would work on,” he said. “It was a scale of impact that was really amazing, that I couldn’t have made in America.”
They left me to do it, which I appreciated, but it was a challenge to figure out and implement,” he said. “As a result of my findings and the work I did, the company was able to hire two new people, restructure the teams, and implement some of the suggestions I had. For me, that was a huge success and I’m very proud of that.”

The internship provided him with management experience and an increased self-awareness — of his work and communication styles, and how he’s perceived by others. It also provided him with a profound cultural experience, he said.

“I think too often in going to Africa, a lot of American students can feel they kind of hold the key to solving these problems,” he said. “Students can learn a lot from these companies. They’ve been working on these problems and have more knowledge than the students do. While a new perspective is good, it’s also good to know that your perspective won’t necessarily solve the problem for them.

“This was a big lesson for me,” he added. “You need to go in with an appropriate attitude, keeping an open mind. We all have ideas of what a place will be like. Open yourself to new experiences. Try to engage with the community around you.”

After graduation in 2017, Musila hopes to combine his interest in technology and soccer to help connect fans around the world to each other and the game through digitalization. He credits his Seed internship with galvanizing his plan to someday return to Africa. “That’s definitely part of my plan,” he said. “It’s allowed me to figure out how I’ll fit in going back to the continent and the opportunities that are present.”
EXPANDING A NIGERIAN BEAUTY BRAND IN AFRICA AND BEYOND

MEET MICHELLE GATONYE
One thing I loved was being able to work very closely with the key leaders in the company. You have to learn to communicate and see that your recommendations come across, as well as learn how to defend what you recommend.”
she explained. “Seed does a lot of that for you; they’ve already been working with some of these companies for over a year.”

Michelle met the company’s founder/CEO and its CFO/COO the first day, quickly establishing a project timetable. Then it was on to research and data collection on the international marketplace, competing companies, and cross-cultural beauty preferences. There was also fieldwork, as Michelle accompanied House of Tara’s commercial director to one of the largest open-air markets in Lagos, where many local women purchase beauty products.

“We talked to some of the distributors and customers on the ground about their concerns about products and what they needed,” she said. Michelle also worked at the company’s product stand at a beauty exposition and attended a Seed Transformation Program workshop in Ghana, where she took time to visit 20 area beauty stores and canvas customers on their product preferences. By the end of 10 weeks, her project was complete. “What I delivered was an international expansion strategy in Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, and the U.K.,” she said. “This goes into great detail on what products to introduce, when to introduce them, what customers to target, and what marketing channels to use. Aside from being a high-level strategy, it’s a 12-month roadmap as to what the company needed to be doing every single month in each country to meet its goals. That’s one of the things I’m really proud of.”

Her experience included challenges, including overextended firm leaders with little time to spare for meetings, a different type of company structure, and cultural differences.

“Nigerian food in general is much more spicy than at home; I’m not sure I ever got used to it,” she said with a laugh. “And things there are not as structured as working for bigger companies in the U.S., which was my prior experience. In Nigeria, you get surprises pretty much every single day, and you need to be able to respond to them and stay on track.”

The benefits, however, included getting to know her African coworkers and being able to serve as a role model to younger employees in their first post-college job.

“Over the course of 10 weeks I could exhibit how to drive
projects forward to completion, how you communicate with other employees about what you need from them, how you set up a project plan, and how you determine if you’re meeting or not meeting goals,” she said. Her favorite aspect of the internship was experiencing opportunities that would be difficult to find at many U.S. firms.

“One thing I loved was being able to work very closely with the key leaders in the company. You have to learn to communicate and see that your recommendations come across, as well as learn how to defend what you recommend,” she said. “That kind of dynamic was a great training ground at this point in my career.

“Secondly,” she said, “There’s a sense of accomplishment. There was a lot of work I was able to do on my own. I was essentially driving it from beginning to end, top to bottom, and had that sense of ownership. That was very different from what I did in the past. And I really enjoyed it.”

Her Seed internship experience was compelling to potential employers, and the skills she brought home will serve her well as she begins a new job in supply chain strategy at San Francisco-based Gap, she said.

“It’s all very transferable, whether it means being able to communicate new ideas to senior-level leaders or taking ownership and guiding projects forward,” Michelle said. “Overall, I had a great experience. I learned a lot and I think I grew as an individual. It’s a new environment, and you’ll be forced to adapt. That’s what appealed most to me.”