

Gaining a Global Perspective Through Service

By: Amanda Crow



Kate Stewart participated in the Iowa State University - Uganda Program.

Photo Credit: Jace Hadish

Waking up in a dorm-like compound, Kate Stewart splashes her face with cold water. As she prepares for her day, fellow Iowa State students also prepare for a full day of coursework, service learning, working with each other and gathering information for their own projects.

Stewart, a senior in global resource systems, first experienced Uganda in the summer of 2017 with the Uganda Program through the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Study Abroad Office. Stewart knew it was somewhere she wanted to return, however, she never anticipated how soon she would have the opportunity to travel back.

The Iowa State University- Uganda Program is a service-learning program through the Center for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (CSRL) created in 2005 for students striving to improve global food security while advancing their education. This hands-on opportunity incorporates agronomy, nutrition, community development and youth entrepreneurship while giving back to Uganda. Students and staff from Iowa State University

partner with Makerere University students in the Kamuli District.

During the 2018 spring semester, Stewart and six other undergraduates traveled back to the Kamuli District with the Uganda Program. Even though Stewart and her peers have been service learners before, this time around brought different and exciting things, one of those being a new ISU training center and dormitory that opened March 1 in the Kamuli District.

“After graduation, I want to help farmers better their agricultural management practices,” said Stewart. “This program encourages me to build relationships and understand the farmers now so I can suggest techniques in the future.”

Before leaving for Uganda, students are required to enroll in a course designed to prepare them for their adventures and unique living conditions. While the course has evolved over the years, the core remains unchanged.

“The service learning program has become more comprehensive over the years. We have engaged with

the community with farm visits and bi-national team projects benefiting the school and the children,” said Gail Nonnecke, associate director for CSRL.

An unexpected outcome of the partnership between the universities has been the increase in graduate students choosing Iowa State University. Since the program began, 18 former Makerere University service learners have enrolled in Iowa State University’s graduate school programs.

Samuel Ikendi, a graduate student in community and regional planning and the sustainable agriculture program believes joining CSRL brought back the ray of hope in his life.

“Surely I had no reason to be an agriculturalist before CSRL entered our family,” said Ikendi, “I grew up without seeing any successful farmer.”

Ikendi’s journey included growing maize and sweet potatoes while he watched his mother learn in trainings by the CSRL. During a difficult time, Ikendi volunteered with CSRL and was connected to Iowa State University. With the generous help of scholarships and donors in addition to the hard work Ikendi offers, he is learning new skills every day that will help him live out his passion.

From the different perspectives of Stewart and Nonnecke, one single message rings true: you will never be the same.

“The connections you’ll create between agriculture and related sciences and the experience itself transforms how you view the world,” said Nonnecke.