

Experiences as a BioDiversity Project Intern with the United Nations Environment Program

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This past summer, I interned at the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), based in Montreal, Canada. I set out wanting to see how environmental work is done at the international level, and to both learn from and contribute to the work of the CBD. I've learned a lot and grown a lot as a person, and have met many great people who have helped me gain a more knowledgeable perspective on international level work, for which I am grateful.

Interning in the CBD's Social, Economic, and Legal Affairs branch, under its head Economist Dr. Markus Lehman, I focused on the issue of technology transfer between developed and developing countries, and how it could be improved. I worked on three major projects: a brief that gave me an overall view of technology transfer issues, a sampling of technology needs from developing countries that evolved into an analysis of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPS), and a project to improve and add to the CBD technology transfer database.

My work was definitely a learning process along each step of the way. My first project, briefing the existing Climate Technology Initiative in preparation for a potential Biodiversity Technology Initiative, plunged me right into the inner workings of international environmental work and its many complications. I had to quickly pick up both technical jargon and acronyms, as well as understand how the U.N. builds upon its past work across issues and programs to prevent unnecessary duplication of work. In researching information for my brief, I was able to learn about many of the technical and political difficulties involved in technology transfer issues, and many of the nuances and considerations involved in such work between developed and developing countries, which provided a great background for my other two projects.

My second project, reviewing NBSAPs for technological needs, turned into an assessment and analysis of the NBSAP system. I had originally set out to extract and compile technological needs from each country's submitted NBSAP, but quickly realized that, due to the complicated and varied ways in which the NBSAPs had been submitted, they were not useful for cross-country analysis and use. My analysis included a brief documenting the various issues I found from a non-random, representative sample of NBSAPs from developing countries, and suggestions for how they could be restructured to become more useful for inter-regional analyses, to allow the CBD to better assess and respond to regional needs.

Having looked into the technological needs, my last major project was a perfect follow up to my first two; I worked to compile technologies that could be used to address the needs I had found earlier. This work showed me how much easier it is to find information on what doesn't work than to find concrete, accessible information on what can be done to solve problems. While it was somewhat discouraging to see how dispersed and

non-uniform information is, it was heartening to see that the CBD was trying to do something about it, and really great whenever I could match specific solutions to problems I had identified earlier.

From my work, I've gained a much more thorough understanding of the difficulties and complexities involved in international technology transfer, and international environmental work in general. I've acquired skills in research, database management, and the drafting of substantive UN reports, but more importantly, I've also learned a lot about myself as a person, and the type of work I want to pursue. My experience with the CBD gave me a greater appreciation for biodiversity and how closely related the issues of human health and development are to the environment. It also gave me insight into some of the frustrations of working within a large bureaucracy.

While I enjoyed my work this summer, and feel like I've learned and accomplished a lot, seeing the way international diplomacy and bureaucracy works made me realize that my personality is more suited for other work. I am very much an action and results oriented type of person, and would love to pursue some combination of public and private sector work to advance environmental interests. I think I could have the greatest impact either through some form of environmental advocacy, or by looking into how the energy and efficiency of the private sector could be harnessed to drive meaningful change for the betterment of our planet.

The formality of UN documents made them difficult to navigate, and I prefer a more direct approach to work and communication. I believe the work of the CBD is definitely crucial to the international community, but also necessarily a bit cumbersome, due to the need to incorporate so many competing interests from each member nation. It gives me great hope that even as an intern, I was able to contribute to the work of the CBD, and have my proposals taken very seriously, but at the same time, the effects of the U.S. withholding official and monetary support from the CBD and so many other international forums for cooperation also highlighted to me how desperately the U.S. needs to take a leadership role in the world community. As the nation with the most economic and political resources, it has the greatest potential to move environmental issues forward, which is why I think I could have the most impact working on the home front.



← My awesome supervisor, Dr. Markus Lehman (Economist, CBD Social, Economic, and Legal Affairs division)

(below) Eric and I at a post-work soccer game between members of our respective offices.

