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SEARCHING FOR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW: AN INTERNSHIP WORKING TOWARD THE ALLEVIATION OF ENERGY POVERTY THROUGH SOLAR POWER AND SEARCH-ENGINE CROWDFUNDING

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THROUGH SOLAR POWER AND SEARCH-ENGINE CROWDFUNDING

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ABSTRACT

Auroville Consulting is an environmental consulting firm, founded in 2010, that works to create an environmentally-friendly and socially responsible world. One of Auroville Consulting's projects, the Solar Village Initiative, works to address the effects of energy poverty by installing on-grid solar panels and solar generation systems in rural villages throughout rural Tamil Nadu., with the Solar Village Search Engine as a crowdfunding tool for the project. By performing day-to-day tasks pertaining to communications, journalism, social media, and promotions for the Solar Village Search Engine at Auroville Consulting; participating in in-office discussion; and living and working in Auroville, I was able to improve my communication skills, gain a better understanding of energy poverty and renewable energy, and understand what it means to be a part of an international community and workplace.

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INTRODUCTION

Auroville Consulting is an environmental consulting firm created by Martin Scherfler and Toine van Megen in 2010. The main goal of Auroville Consulting is to help create a more environmentally-friendly and socially responsible world. Through research, strategic planning, communication, capacity building, and more, Auroville Consulting works to create more sustainable urban and industrial development policies. Auroville Consulting is a unit of the Auroville Foundation, which is overseen by the Government of India.

Auroville Consulting oversees the Solar Village Search Engine, a project which aims to "solarize" 100 villages throughout the Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu. The Solar Village Search Engine uses Bing's search engine interface as a crowdfunding tool. The advertisement revenue generated from users engaging with sponsored advertisements goes toward funding the purchase and installation of solar panels for villages. The solar panels installed in villages are connected to the main energy grid, meaning that these villages will still get energy from the conventional grid — albeit at a very subsidized rate.

The Solar Village Initiative has already started a pilot project in Irumbai Village, right outside of Auroville. Energy audits have already been conducted to predict the village's energy needs, and energy-efficient fans have been installed to help ward off mosquitos. Photovoltaic panels will be installed soon.

Auroville Consulting is based out of Auroville, an intentional living community in Tamil Nadu. Founded in 1968, Auroville is a community that came together around the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and his spiritual collaborator, referred to as "The Mother." Auroville itself is a U.N.-backed community that strives toward the idea of human unity and spiritual research.

CONTEXT

The government of India has been recently promoting its renewable energy resources, with the target of producing 175 gigawatts through renewable energy sources by 2020. Solar energy is becoming an increasingly desirable way of generating energy for governments of developing nations because it not only reduces the need to rely on fossil fuels, but often enhances general energy security for people hooked into a solar grid (Thapar, Sharma, and Verma 2017). Considering this push and the benefits, there are now a number of efforts to bring solar power to rural villages throughout India — which could potentially have the power to address serious socioeconomic issues.

As of 2004, anywhere between 20 and 30 percent of people in India live in poverty, and issues with poverty are "more acute in rural areas in the country." For many of the people living in rural poverty in India, they do not have access to a constant supply of energy to meet their needs (Pachauri et al. 2004). Energy poverty, "also coincides with the other forms of deprivations such as income poverty and social backwardness," meaning that disadvantaged groups, such as lower caste and tribal communities, are "extremely energy poor" in comparison to other social groups — which leads to a double burden of energy poverty and income poverty (Sadath and Acharya 2017). Energy poverty, then, is a socially-stratified issue that requires an innovative solution.

As of recent, there have been more projects to alleviate energy poverty through renewable sources of energy. Oftentimes, when trying to alleviate the impacts of energy poverty, the main obstacles are the "lack of access to improved energy services and worsening environmental shocks due to climate change," which are linked issues in an "energy-poverty-climate nexus — wherein solutions to ameliorate energy poverty can also lessen environmental impacts and increase environmental resilience (Casillas and Kammen 2010). Some scholars even

argue that neither the reduction of greenhouse gasses nor the eradication of energy poverty or fuel poverty will happen on their own; rather, a joint solution must be come forward through the integration of these two fields for policy justification and energy efficiency standards (Ürge-Vorsatz and Tirado Herrero 2012).

Some of the efforts to implement more sustainable development projects to address social issues and energy poverty are manifested through "solar village projects," and these projects are not necessarily new ideas. The Government of Tanzania and the National Academy of Sciences had a joint workshop in August 1977 to discuss potential solar technologies for villages. Hypothetical calculations comparing the cost of solar-generated electricity projects and diesel-generated energy from the grid found that "each of the five technologies [studied] is either now competitive with diesel or will be in a few years" as of 1978 (Brown and Howe 1978). Since this initial study, research has found that solar energy eventually brings back a profit to villages that have their solar arrays connected to the larger grid. Thus, both income poverty and energy poverty are addressed.

Projects to install solar arrays of any fashion and for any purpose are learning processes, as observed by ongoing observation and research being done in "solar villages." Research done on solar transition towns are considered a "social learning process," meaning that introducing new technologies into communities requires an understanding and incorporation of the existing social fabric of the community in question (Ulsrud et al. 2011). Thus, working to not only help local populations is not enough; it takes continued involvement with communities and constant communication, evaluation, and adaptation. Not only that, but the aid and communication coming from outreach organizations must be culturally specific and culturally adapted. Research has shown that science communication — the attempt to disseminate technical information related to science and technology in an accessible and easy-to-understand manner — must be

culturally specific in order to be effective, because different populations have different understandings of their environment and different cultural values placed on the natural world (Medin and Bang 2014).

Auroville Consulting, a unit of the Auroville Foundation, has a project they call the "solar village search engine." When a user searches with the Solar Village Search Engine, any revenue generated through ads goes toward future solar projects. Through Auroville Consulting's Solar Village initiative, Auroville Consulting hopes to use its search engine and portions of the revenue from existing solar projects to fund 100 solar villages throughout rural Tamil Nadu (Auroville Consulting 2018). Auroville Consulting's project aims to address issues of energy poverty, environmental stress, and socioeconomic issues that tend to stratify rural villages.

OBJECTIVES

During the internship period, my focus was to better understand how renewable energy was being used to address issues of energy poverty. In addition, my focus was to better understand what tools are available to help fund these renewable energy projects, and how these tools are implemented and/or marketed.

Aside from this focus and the work tasks laid out for me by my supervisors, I had a set of objectives that I laid out for myself, though they were admittedly more abstract. During my time at Auroville Consulting, I hoped to get a better sense of what the work culture of an international organization might look like, because given the nature of Auroville itself, there are a number of people at Auroville Consulting with quite a diversity of backgrounds and countries, so I expected the workplace dynamic to be completely different from any workplace I'd been in before.

I also wanted to better understand how organizations and "social enterprises" work with local communities to bring them aid through traditional sources of revenue without being exploitative. While intentions for social enterprises are often very good, there is often a struggle

between altruism and commercial interest — as one research paper suggests, the mission of a social enterprise lies "in managing the tensions between commercial opportunity exploitation and pursuit of social mission" (Doherty, Haugh, and Lyon 2014). Though Auroville Consulting is a nonprofit, there is still something to be said about the exploitation of vulnerable populations to do fundraising and development projects on their behalf. Thus I was interested in seeing how, if at all, this might manifest at Auroville Consulting.

In addition, I wanted to improve my communication skills so I could help convey the unique selling points of the Solar Village Search Engine to varying audiences. To do this, I wanted to improve my written and spoken communication skills, and improve the ways in which I digest technical information on solar energy, search engine mechanics, et cetera, to a general audience.

TASKS

During my internship at Auroville Consulting, I assisted members of the Solar Village Search Engine team with any pre-launch tasks that needed to be done. Specifically, I assisted with communication, "flyer action," social media, and media relations. I worked eight hours a day for five days a week from 12 November to 7 December. In total, I completed 160 hours of work at Auroville Consulting.

As per the work package that my supervisor provided, 50 percent of my workload was dedicated to a marketing plan to reach people in the U.S. and Europe. This mostly entailed researching organizations in the U.S. and emailing them about our project. First we started with colleges and organizations that we knew personally, such as our home institutions and scholarship programs, and then branched out to national organizations that had themes of sustainability, technological innovation, and social justice as a part of their mission. An initial contact email would consist of describing the Solar Village Search Engine project and our goals,

and then follow what support was desired by the organization. If possible, contact emails would also list facets of our project that could appeal to an organization's network — that an organization's support would show that they care about innovation, that they could showcase an international partnership, et cetera.

Twenty percent of my work done at Auroville Consulting went toward helping my supervisor with what she referred to as "flyer action" throughout Auroville. This mostly entailed overseeing the logistics of printing flyers for places around Auroville — coming up with number estimates, ordering test prints, planning locations for said prints, et cetera.

Ten percent of my work went toward helping our social media coordinator. This would be anything from brainstorming posts, suggesting different formats and platforms (Facebook stories and Instagram stories versus actual posts), and reviewing content for publishing.

Finally, ten to twenty percent of my work was helping with publicity and communication to outside organizations. There is a long-term member of the Solar Village Search Engine team who handles press releases and the like, but given my background in journalism, I was asked to assist him in writing articles and blog posts, and to adapt press releases to for specific organizations or outlets. In addition to all the aforementioned work, my fellow intern, SIT student Aedan Raleigh, and I would help proofread all written materials so that English and grammar made sense.

POSITIONALITY AND ETHICS

During the internship period, I assisted members of the Solar Village Search Engine team with any pre-launch tasks that needed to be done. As a journalism and environmental studies double major at my home institution in the United States, I understand separate aspects of both communications and environmentalism, but within a much different context. Through the course

of my internship, my hope was to understand how communications can be applied to a mission of environmentalism and social advocacy in the unique Aurovillian context.

Given that I was not interacting with vulnerable populations while working on my internship, there was not too much of a need for specific ethical precautions. Still, it was important to keep in mind the villages that Auroville Consulting works with while I was writing promotional materials and appealing to organizations for support. To ensure that the materials I produced were not exploitative or making a spectacle of energy poverty, I tried to focus on the hard facts of our project rather than make too much of an emotional appeal. Harping upon the struggles that people may be facing in the rural context and only painting a very depraved picture of these people, just to gain the support of other organizations, would have been crass and simply unethical. Instead, my work focused more on the aspects that Auroville Consulting controlled — how the collaboration between villages and consultants worked, the benefits of solar power, et cetera — so that material would steer clear of exploitation.

In addition, there is always the need to keep things very professional in a workspace. To ensure my coworkers' privacy and my own mental health, I did my best to create a good work-life balance. To do this, I tried not to discuss too much of my own personal matters while in the workspace. It was hard to keep work out of my personal life though, as Auroville is a very small and tightknit community and there was still the desire to establish real friendships with the people that I worked with. However, conversation was kept light when I saw coworkers outside of the office space, and other members of the office were not discussed.

OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATION

The work culture at Auroville Consulting was really unlike any office I had ever been in before. The open layout of the office space meant that anyone could sit anywhere, and it changed

every day. This led to a more open, relaxed environment where collaboration seemed easier —

whenever one of my supervisors asked to speak with me about a task I had done or a piece I had

written, we either stepped off into the adjacent conference room, or we were able to just pull

chairs around a common desk and brainstorm. This also led to a very dynamic social atmosphere

to the office — though some people were closer to each other than others, it seemed like

everyone knew everybody else, as if there weren't any apparent office cliques.

Auroville Consulting itself is an impressive organization in itself. Through Green

Practice Workshops offered to professional organizations and students, the Center for Green

Practices summer school programs to teach "urban furniture-making" courses to local people,

projects to help local farmers with smart irrigation practices, and a variety of different services

offered with research, strategy, and policy, Auroville Consulting is truly doing the most it can to

help make the local communities as sustainable as possible. I was constantly surprised by the

scope of the work being done at Auroville Consulting, considering that there are only about 15-

20 given people who are core team members.

I was also a little surprised by how many people there were volunteers. When I've done

service work in the past, I've thought it makes more sense to do service work in one's own local

community to make it more sustainable and impactful. At Auroville Consulting, though, people

come to work from anywhere from six months to over a year — making them a part of a

community, and thus invested in the success of the work they're doing to the outer lying

community.

Perhaps one critique could be of Auroville itself. Auroville is a relatively expensive place

to live — the official website for Auroville suggests that the monthly budget for living in

Auroville is 15,000 Rupees (about 200 US Dollars) a month, which is very expensive in

comparison to the cost of living throughout the rest of India. In addition, to become an

Aurovillian, one must first be a "newcomer" for a year, meaning that they can live and work in Auroville but must make monthly financial contributions without receiving any maintenance that Aurovillians receive. That, and housing costs are very high, as there is a shortage of housing in Auroville at the moment (Auroville.org 2018). All of this is to say that, to become a part of this unique community, one must have the financial resources to do so, which can lead to an exclusive community.

This is not to say that Auroville Consulting in itself is an exclusive community; on the contrary, a number of projects that are being done at Auroville Consulting are being done to help local communities, a number of the people that work at Auroville Consulting are from Pondicherry or local villages and towns outside of Auroville, and another portion of the people in the office are volunteers not from Auroville. This is just to say that it did make me wonder about the positionality of Auroville Consulting, and what precautions had to be taken to make sure the work being done wasn't influenced by coming from an exclusive, affluent community.

RESULTS/ANALYSIS OF FOCUS

The Solar Village initiative aims to solarize 100 villages in Tamil Nadu by 2030. These villages have been identified through cooperation with the Auroville Village Action Group ~ a unit of the Auroville Foundation that works to help the villages around Auroville.

The solar panels installed in the villages are connected to the grid. The reasoning behind this is that the grid can then act as a battery to absorb excess energy; in other words, excess solar energy produced in the villages can go into the grid during the day, and energy from the grid can be taken from the grid at night when the panels are inactive. Typically, with grid-connected systems, solar generation ceases when energy is not being directed to that area of the grid. However, with the partnership that Auroville Consulting has with Tamil Nadu Generation and

Distribution Corporation, special TANGEDCO feeders are installed in each village that are exempt from load shedding — the process of turning off grid access by energy providers to certain regions to save costs (Tamil Nadu Energy Development Agency 2015). Thus, through working through the legal systems that are already in place, 24/7 energy access is guaranteed — a big step forward for eradicating energy poverty.

However, the villages do not directly consume the solar energy produced in-village; rather, any solar energy generated by the solar panels in the villages is sold to third-party buyers. Thus, these village solar systems are producing clean solar energy that is reducing the volume of fossil fuels required to power Tamil Nadu, thus reducing its carbon footprint. Ten percent of the profit is given back to the villages, with the hope that this can introduce participatory budgeting that transcends caste divisions. The other 90 percent of the profit is used toward the installation of solar panels in the next solar village. The hope here is that this income can help alleviate income poverty while also introducing participatory budgeting into the village community, which could in term possibly ameliorate any social stratification issues within the village.

To help fund these solar projects, the Solar Village Search Engine was created. A small profit is generated each time a user clicks on an advertisement or when a certain number of searches is made. A portion of that profit goes to Bing, which houses the search engine and the software, and the rest of that profit goes back to the Solar Village Search Engine, which can then put that money toward these solar projects. This is not necessarily a new idea — Ecosia is a popular search engine that puts its ad revenue toward planting trees.

While Auroville Consulting is constantly in the process of applying for grants and seeking out donors for the Solar Village Initiative — as installing what is essentially a solar powerplant in the middle of rural Tamil Nadu is an expensive undertaking — the eventual goal is to have the Solar Village Search Engine be a large source of income for these projects. As per

the agreement that Auroville Consulting has with Bing, though, the Solar Village Search Engine must reach 100,000 daily searches within the first three months of the search engine's launch date in order to maintain the partnership. This comes out to about 33,000 daily users making three daily searches each. The target audience for the Solar Village Search Engine is young professionals and students who think on a global scale, both in India and overseas in Europe and the USA. In order to target this population, Aedan and I were brought onto the team to help with prelaunch communication materials and emails to organizations that work with this demographic.

In terms of analysis, there is clear evidence that Auroville Consulting is making progress in setting the groundwork for the Solar Village Initiative. Energy audits have already been done in Irumbai village, the pilot project for the Solar Village Initiative, and the collaboration between Auroville Consulting and the government of Tamil Nadu is important in moving forward.

My one hesitation is that, at the moment, the search engine may struggle to compete with search engines like Google or Bing. Due to a miscommunication in the agreement Auroville Consulting made with Bing, it costs more to add "image" or "video" features to the top of search results, like Google has. My fear is that, if this is not added soon, the Solar Village Search Engine will lose early adopter users due to lack of convenience, and thus the commercial success of the Search Engine will be jeopardized. However, I do not have a complete lack of hope for the overall success of the project — as I left at the end of the internship period, the programmers on the Solar Village Search Engine team were looking into possible solutions or compromises to this problem. I hope that this will be fixed in the future though.

REFLECTION

A. MOST CHALLENGING ASPECTS

I. SPECIFIC TASKS

        There were not any specific tasks that I found challenging necessarily, but the prevailing aspect of "getting ready to wait" was frustrating. A lot of the tasks that were assigned to me and Aedan were to contact someone or reach out to an organization, and then we would have to wait a few hours — or even days — until we got a response and could move forward. Some days would be incredibly busy, while others would leave me with so much time to spare that I was a little uncomfortable. For me, at least, this was difficult because I was afraid I was wasting time or not doing enough. Even when I would offer to take over some tasks for my supervisor, she would be grateful but still not assign anything, as she would then have to end up doing twice as much work — assigning me tasks and then having to proof them later, and then sit with me to discuss the proofing process. When discussing my frustration about this with my supervisor during a feedback session at the end of my internship, though, she noted that this was an aspect that she was often frustrated with as well. Knowing this now, I now have the sense that this is just simply the nature of the work we were doing. While that doesn't necessarily make me feel better about having to be so stop-and-go, it is reassuring to know that it wasn't just a personal issue.

        Another issue I didn't expect being a challenge was the way in which the weather impacted the work we could do in the office. Because the internship period was from mid-November to mid-December, I was in Auroville during Tamil Nadu's monsoon season. Whenever it rained, the office was at risk of losing internet connection, and power surges due to the storms could easily wipe out people's computers if they were connected to a power strip. Considering the amount of technical work Auroville Consulting does and how much the work

done there relied on internet connection, it was frustrating to have work come to a halt for hours at a time some days. I think this goes hand-in-hand with issues of cultural adaptation (discussed below) — Auroville is both very rural and Western urban, and the way that comes together doesn't always make sense.

In summary, the tasks I had while at my internship were not all that difficult, but the ways in which I had to go about them were sometimes a challenge. Still, I believe that I gained a sense of patience and independence in my work that I would not have had otherwise.

II. CULTURAL ADAPTATION

Auroville itself is a strange place. It is a very rural community just on the outskirts of Pondicherry, and yet there are markers of Western life everywhere — one weekend, I got vegan mango ice cream and then went to see a screening of "Mamma Mia 2: Here We Go Again!" in the community movie theater later that night. Added to this strange dynamic is the fact that Auroville is surrounded by Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, two of the regions of India that speak Tamil rather than Hindi. And even in addition to that, Pondicherry is one of the few regions of India that wasn't under British rule during the colonial era, but French rule — a difference that is apparent in the layout of the city and the customs of the people.

All that being said, the adjustment from Jaipur to Tamil Nadu was a bit alarming. It felt strange to not be able to communicate with people as well as I wanted to when I was trying to call cafes and organizations to distribute promotional materials. At least in Jaipur, I was able to get by on what little Hindi I could remember outside of the classroom; here, there was almost no chance. What was strange, too, was the fact that the dominant language in Auroville was English. At work and in cafes across Auroville, I was able to strike up a conversation with just about anybody. But when I went into Pondicherry the first weekend I was here to go to lunch with Aedan, I was caught off guard by a woman asking me for food in Tamil.

I think that coming to Auroville was very much both a test for what going home will be like after being in India for three and a half months, but also a repeat of my first month in Jaipur in terms of cultural adaptation.

B. GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS/SUCCESSES

As a journalism major, I was worried that I would fall behind in terms of writing articles and other news pieces while I was abroad and while I was in the internship period. However, I was able to write press releases and posts for major international organizations while I was at Auroville Consulting. Martin, the cofounder of Auroville Consulting, has contacts at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Alliance for Rural Electrification, Oxfam India, and other organizations that focus on India but have an international audience, and I was able to write content that was published by all of them. My byline was even on the article on Oxfam's website, which I was not expecting. (Work published during the internship period can be found in Appendix A)

On a more personal note, I'm very flattered by the feedback Aedan and I got from our supervisor. Our supervisor asked us how old we were on our first day, and when we told her that we were 20, she initially seemed a little wary. But as time passed over the next few weeks, our supervisor began assigning us more and more independent tasks — completely overseeing the printing and dissemination of promotional materials, amassing lists of contacts for overseas organizations and conferences, drafting emails to major Auroville units, et cetera. I'm very content to know that I made a good impression at Auroville Consulting, and that my work was consistently reliable enough to be assigned project-relevant tasks. Though that's not necessarily a quantifiable task, it's something that I am very proud of.

C. EXPECTATIONS AND REALITIES

I had visited Auroville as part of the workshop period, so I wasn't completely going into the internship period blind. I had spent time in the Auroville Consulting office to attend workshop sessions, so I knew that I would be hearing a lot about sustainable buildings and locally-based development. I also knew that I was going to be helping out with communication materials and marketing, but I was unsure about what my day-to-day tasks would be.

The reality of the office, though, was so much better than I could have ever expected. The office atmosphere was very relaxed and communal, but people still worked diligently and efficiently. My coworkers were from all different professional and cultural/ethnic backgrounds, which made for a rich learning and working environment (albeit with some miscommunications here and there that could be chalked up to language confusion). The work package set out for me at the beginning of my internship ended up not wholly reflecting the work I ended up doing, but that wasn't necessarily an issue. My day-to-day tasks ended up being very in-line with my professional interests of science communication and media. I was given the opportunity to draft press releases and write articles for various media outlets, which was really exciting.

D. PERSONAL EVALUATION

I. SKILLS LEARNED/FOR FUTURE WORK

I think the main takeaway from my internship at Auroville Consulting, on a professional level, is that I learned how to work in an international work space. Most of the work I've done before has been with other Americans, and with people from similar American backgrounds at that. But during my time at Auroville Consulting, I had the opportunity to work with people from a number of countries and a number of personal and professional backgrounds. Because of that diversity within the office staff, I feel that I learned how to be patient in the face of miscommunication and misunderstanding.

I also learned how to better communicate technical information across a language barrier. The unique nature of Auroville means that, like the Auroville Consulting office, the people there come from a variety of places and speak a variety of languages, though English may be the primary language of communication. When trying to promote the Solar Village Search Engine throughout Auroville, I engaged in conversation with a number of different people who wanted to know more about our project and how it worked. I had to quickly learn better ways of digesting technical information about photovoltaic solar panels, corporate sponsorships with Bing or Google, and more so that I could better communicate aspects of our project in the simplest terms possible.

II. INTELLECTUAL GROWTH/FOR FUTURE ACADEMIC WORK

What pleasantly surprised me about my time at Auroville Consulting was how much I was able to learn that was more technical and intellectual, rather than just information for promotional materials. The biggest take-away I had was through learning more about energy poverty. I knew that a lack of reliable energy definitely wasn't a desirable thing, but I didn't realize how much it could impact every aspect of a person's life. If a family is living in energy poverty, it often means that they're relying on kerosene or biofuels to light and heat their homes, which can lead to severe respiratory issues in the long-run (Bruce, Perez-Padilla, and Albalak 2002). Not only that, but if there isn't a reliable source of light for when the sun goes down, then students cannot study at night, and businesses may not be able to stay open long enough to ensure a profit (Nussbaumer, Bazilian, and Modi 2012). In short, all aspects of life are affected by energy poverty in the same ways that day-to-day life is affected by income poverty. I had no knowledge of this before going to Auroville Consulting, and I'm excited to learn more about this in the future.

Furthermore, I learned about different efforts to address the impacts of energy poverty on vulnerable populations with renewable energy. As I said in the context section, the Government of India is investing a good amount of resources into promoting renewable energy on the whole (Thapar, Sharma, and Verma 2017) but there is a growing movement of research in favor of using renewable energy to address issues of energy poverty — not just in Southeast Asia, but all over the world (Yadoo and Cruickshank 2012). Installing renewable energy projects to help alleviate energy poverty makes sense — off-grid solar projects can be installed in even the most rural and remote villages, and they're often carbon neutral, or at least energy poverty — but the fact that these projects are possibly becoming mainstream makes me so hopeful.

III. WHAT COULD BE DONE BETTER

I think there were times during team meetings and during group discussions that I could have been more vocal about my opinions. Because of the unique atmosphere of Auroville, most people who are working in one of the Auroville units are currently in a job that they might not have had any experience with before — Auroville Consulting included. My supervisor for pre-launch marketing tasks is an electrical engineer, our social media coordinator has a background in sustainable community organizations. Barely any of us had any task-specific experience when we came together for brainstorming sessions, but I still had a hard time reminding myself of that in the moment. As the internship came to a close, I felt more confident in voicing my opinions during team meetings, which is a skill I'm grateful I now have and hope to take with me to future settings. However, I wish that I had that confidence sooner.

CONCLUSION

My main take-away from taking courses this semester in Jaipur that social change should be locally-based, collaborative, and environmentally-conscious. I was very lucky to have seen

these ideas in practice at Auroville Consulting, and I was also very lucky to have seen these in practice in an environment that I would not have expected to see these practices in place, such as a 9-to-5 office setting. Working at Auroville Consulting has allowed me to observe how an organization can address development issues, such as energy poverty, with both sustainable infrastructure and global communal action as tools for success.

Unfortunately, I was only at Auroville Consulting for the launch of the Solar Village Search Engine, and won't be able to really follow the success of the search engine as I might have been able to, had my internship been longer. In my own time, I would like to see how successful the project becomes in the coming months. In addition, I personally found the concept of energy poverty fascinating, as I had never heard of it before now. In the future, I would like to further study this concept and see how renewable energies — including not only solar but perhaps even wind or biomass energy — could be used to alleviate the impacts of energy poverty. I would also like to further study how energy poverty impacts populations closer to home — such as how limited access to energy or fuel for energy affects people living near or below the poverty line in the USA.

Being able to intern at Auroville Consulting for a month has given me a new perspective on what sustainability and effective social change can mean. I hope that the Solar Village Search Engine is a roaring success within the next few months, and that I can assist Auroville Consulting with the project once I return home.

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APPENDIX A: PUBLISHED WORKS

Works written during the internship can be found at the following sites:

- Auroville.org: https://www.auroville.org/contents/4571

- Oxfam India: https://www.oxfamindia.org/index.php/blog/unique-search-engine-aims-tackle-energy-poverty-rural-india

- SIT Study Abroad: http://blog.sit.edu/sit-reciprocity-two-sit-india-students-help-project-to-bring-solar-power-to-villages/

Content for the Alliance for Rural Electrification, Global Ecovillage Network, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development will be published in the months following the launch of the Solar Village Search Engine.

Additional content can be found at thesolarvillage.org.