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Renforcement des Femmes: WOPA and Sustainable Empowerment Through Vocational Training

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SIT Study Abroad

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Renforcement des Femmes:

WOPA and Sustainable Empowerment through Vocational Training

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Abstract

The Women's Promotion and Assistance Association (WOPA) is a Non-Governmental Organization located in the tourist town of Kribi, Cameroon. This study examined whether WOPA's vocational training program, *The Center for Education and Training for Women*, responded to the needs in participants' lives and the needs of the local economy to effectively economically empower young women. Using 21 one interviews with current and graduated students of the program, as well as local government officials, I concluded that WOPA's training does fit the needs of participants' lives; and that the trainings offered in sewing, culinary arts, and community health adequately fit the needs of Kribi's economy. WOPA's classes are hands on and free, which meets the needs of low-income and undereducated students. Sewing is a popular job for women in Kribi, and graduated students face competition; research on alternative types of trade that are not gender-stereotyped is necessary. Graduates lack funds to begin work, but feel emotionally empowered by their new skills.

« The Women's Promotion and Assistance Association » (WOPA) est une organisation non gouvernementale située dans la ville touristique de Kribi, au Cameroun. Cette étude a examiné si le programme de formation professionnelle de WOPA, *Centre d'Education et Formation de la Femme* a répondu aux besoins de la vie des participants et les besoins de l'économie locale de manière efficace pour l'autonomisation économique des jeunes femmes. Utilisation de 21 interviews avec des étudiantes actuels et diplômées du programme, ainsi que des représentants du gouvernement local, j'ai conclu que la formation d' WOPA correspond aux besoins de la vie des participants; et que les formations offertes dans la Couture, Restauration et de la Santé Communautaires correspondent adéquatement aux besoins de l'économie de Kribi. Les cours de WOPA sont pratiques et gratuites, qui répond aux besoins de faible revenu et les étudiantes sous-éduquées. La couture est un travail populaire pour les femmes à Kribi, et les étudiantes diplômées font face à la concurrence; la recherche sur les métiers alternatifs qui ne sont pas stéréotypés de genre est nécessaire. Les diplômées manquent de fonds pour commencer à travailler, mais se sentent habilitées émotionnellement par leurs nouvelles compétences.

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To my Yaoundé Family: "*Come home smarter*"...Annie, I will come home to the U.S. smarter, if for no other reason than the countless times lying on our bed talking about life, women's roles, culture, Cameroon and so much else. Some of the biggest and most important lessons I have learned here I learned from you. Thank you for being my sense of security and home.

To my family: You are my strength. Coming home to you will always be the biggest joy in my life.

Dedication

Pour les femmes et filles de WOPA: Votre détermination et votre force sont mon inspiration et courage.

“Renforcement des Femmes:

WOPA and Sustainable Empowerment through Vocational Training”

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I. General Introduction

My Independent Study Project was dedicated to studying The Women's Promotion and Assistance Association (WOPA) a non-governmental organization in Kribi Cameroon which has a vocational training school to economically empower young women. I studied WOPA's "*Centre d'Éducation et Formation de la Femme*" to examine the efficacy of skills and job training at creating sustainable economic empowerment for women. The objective of my study was to find whether WOPA's job trainings in sewing ("couture" in French), culinary arts, and community health are designed and modified to fit the needs of the participants' lives and the needs of the local economy; because both elements are needed to create sustainable empowerment. WOPA's mission is to improve the quality of life for women, girls and children, and it seeks to do this by providing "poor women and children with educational and economic skills and resources."¹

My research question number one was "*Is WOPA's training program designed to effectively fit the challenges and needs of the participants' lives?*" I hypothesized that WOPA does design and adapt its trainings to respond effectively to the unique needs and challenges in the lives of its participants. My second research question "*How effectively do WOPA's job trainings fit the local job market?*" concerned the long-term success of WOPA's trainings in Kribi's economy. I hypothesized that WOPA's trainings are designed to reflect common types of employment in Kribi's tourism dominated economy.

However, there is a fine line between popular types of employment and overly popular types of employment, and I wondered if WOPA's participants had to compete with over-saturated markets upon finishing the program. Surveying literature upon the subject of job trainings for women, and particularly vulnerable or exploited women, reinforced the necessity that skills

¹ Women's Promotion and Assistance Association. <http://www.wopassociation.org/> (Accessed 26 April, 2014.)

training programs must have clear links to openings in the private sector, and do not just provide “training for the sake of training.”²

Significance of Topic and Definition of Key Terms

The subject of job trainings programs and women’s economic empowerment is incredibly significant because it directly contributes to development. Studies have shown that when women are economically empowered, they invest primarily in their families, food and education for their children.³ As women are economically empowered, they invest strategically in their children, creating positive cycles of improved life quality. This is particularly important in Kribi, where 80% of relationships are “libre” and unmarried mothers are left with the burden of raising children alone.⁴ As WOPA’s website summarizes: *In Africa, women are generally more disadvantaged than men. However, with training, they are often more successful in running businesses and the fruit of their work is used to feed, clothe and educate their children and families.*⁵

I define empowerment as the central ability to have control over decision making power in one’s life.⁶ More specifically, I define economic empowerment as “Having access to and control over the means to make a living on a sustainable and long term basis, and receiving the

² Anders, Lisborg. “Re-thinking Reintegration: What Do Returning Victims Really Want and Need? Evidence from Thailand and the Philippines.” *SIREN@undp.org. UNIAP (United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking)*. 2.

³ Joyce, Endeley B. “Conceptualising Women’s Empowerment in Societies in Cameroon: How Does Money Fit In?” *Gender and Development*. 9, No. 1, (March 2001). 34-41.

⁴ ONU-HABITAT. Profil de La Ville de Kribi. Programme des Nations unies pour les Établissements Humains (2007). 12.

⁵ WOPA Website.

⁶ Lotsmart, Fonjong. “Fostering Women’s Participation in Development through Non-Governmental Efforts in Cameroon.” *The Geographical Journal*. No. 167 (Sep. 2001): 223-34.

material benefits of this access and control.”⁷ The distinction between increased access to money and increased access to the benefits of that money is incredibly important. Economic empowerment in the form of increased access to money does not by itself lead to increased decision making power; as Endeley argues social and cultural gender dynamics and pressures can inhibit women’s ability to make decisions, even with increased finances.⁸ But economic equality is a good place to start creating more equitable gender relations, as Kribi’s former Delegate of Social Affairs said in an interview “*S’il y a les hommes qui te donnent, ce sont les hommes qui décident tout! Ça fait que les femmes ne sont pas libres! Elles ne veulent pas prendre leur liberté.* »⁹

If I wanted to study whether WOPA created “sustainable economic empowerment” I needed to create a definition of sustainable empowerment. Merriam-Webster defines sustainable as: Able to last and continue for a long time, without being used up,¹⁰ *ie something that is able to reproduce and sustain itself*. Combining this with my definitions of empowerment, I personally define sustainable empowerment as empowerment which is self-sufficient and lasting, a continuing increase in decision making capacity and feelings of self-efficacy etc. It is a positive cycle of increased empowerment, with economic empowerment leading to psychological empowerment and vice-versa.

⁷ M Carr. Women’s economic empowerment: Key to development. In. L. De Pauli (Ed.), *Women’s empowerment and economic justice: Reflecting on experience in Latin America and the Caribbean*. New York: UNIFEM (2000).

⁸ Endeley, “Conceptualising Women’s Empowerment.”

⁹ Interview with Dieudonné Bernard, Ngui. L’Ancien Délégué d’Affaires Sociales. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 15 April 2014. *French and English*. English Translation: If it is men who give you [everything], it is men who decide everything! The effect is that women are not free! Women do not want to take their liberty.

¹⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica Company, Merriam Webster Online. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sustainable> (Accessed 2 April 2014.)

While reviewing literature and deciding on my research objectives, I decided to solely focus on economic empowerment and not include official questions about psychological empowerment in my research. I define psychological empowerment as having a sense of self-efficacy, that your actions can take effect, it is a belief in one's own ability to change your circumstances.¹¹ I decided that given my time limits and my French ability, I would not explicitly delve into the subject in my research but would of course be cognizant of it. My research design and methodology will be further explained in the next section.

¹¹ Ike E. Onyishi. and Aaron A. Agbo. "Psychological Empowerment and Development of Entrepreneurship among Women: Implications for Sustainable Development in Nigeria." *Gender & Behaviour*; 8. No. 2. (2010).

II. Research Methodology

Site Selection:

I wanted to work with The Women’s Promotion and Assistance Association (WOPA) before the time I chose my study abroad program in Cameroon. My eventual career goal is aftercare and alternative job training for sex trafficking survivors, and after researching on the internet and finding that SIT Cameroon worked with WOPA (which has had anti-trafficking programs in the past) I selected SIT Cameroon hoping to work with WOPA for my ISP. I was keen on doing a project specifically focused on sex trafficking in Kribi, which is a large problem. As a beautiful seaport town, Kribi’s economy is based on tourism, and for Kribi’s women the economy is based on sex tourism. However, throughout the pre-ISP period my research project shifted. WOPA was not currently working on a project specifically related to sex trafficking, and the Director of WOPA Madame Véronique Folack informed me that research directly on sex work was difficult as young women were reluctant to speak about the topic.

However, I found that WOPA had opened a training school “*Le Centre d’Éducation et Formation de La Femme*” which provided skill building and job opportunities to young, low-income women who might otherwise have no economic choice but to become “*filles libre*.”¹² I was equally enthusiastic to study a project on the preventative level, and decided to study how and if WOPA designs its program to meet the needs of the young participants’ lives, and whether the trainings chosen reflect viable economic opportunities for young women.

Target and Sample Population:

As a specific case study of WOPA’s training center, my target population was current and graduated students of WOPA. Overall for my sample population, I interviewed twelve students,

¹² *Filles Libres* is a common term in Kribi for girls who are not enrolled in school, very frequently used to mean young women engaged in sex work.

seven who have finished WOPA's training, and five current students. I also interviewed an additional student who had dropped out of the program, and had hoped to interview three more women who had not finished the program, but they were unavailable. My primary data calculations focus on the responses of the five current and seven graduated students, six of whom had primary school education and six students who had secondary school education. Graduated students ranged from twenty-four to thirty-two, and current students ranged from fifteen to thirty-one. All current students had no profession, and of the graduated student three were employed as "*Couturières*" or seamstresses, the other four graduated students were unemployed. Nine out of the twelve total students were financially responsible for either a child or a family member, and all current students had a monthly income of less than 28000 FCFA, Cameroon's minimum wage.

Establishing Rapport:

Establishing rapport with research participants was not just an important methodological tool for me; it was and is the best part of my ISP experience. Girls arrived at the Center for 8:30am classes, and for the two days a week when classes start at 10am they often arrived early to work on homework, practice on one of the four sewing machines, or just talk. As much as possible, I tried to immerse myself into the group, laughing, joking, buying morning baguettes and walking to practicums together. We took endless "selfies" (the younger girls especially loved getting photos) and frequently had impromptu dance parties while waiting for class. My participant observation was heavy on the "participatory" element, I learned along with the girls to fry and "braise" fish and helped wash dishes during culinary practicums. I asked questions, not just about my research topic, but about how to peddle the sewing machine and how their

Kaba¹³ was coming along. The young women were patient with my constant curiosity and imperfect French, and they opened up more and more throughout the weeks of research.

Ethical Concerns:

An ethical concern was the fact that potentially some of the young women had been previously engaged in sex work. I respected the privacy of this issue, and in fact did not touch on the topic in my research questions or my general behavior. I worked with a population of current students that varied in age from fifteen to thirty-one; aside from the five current students I interviewed, there were four other students who I did not interview because they were under eighteen.

But the largest ethical dilemma I faced was questioning my role as a researcher. In “But is it Ethical?: Learning to Do Right” researcher Glesne perfectly captured the emotions I experienced, saying “You are thankful for the richness of what you are learning but begin to feel guilty for how much you are receiving and how little you seem to be giving.”¹⁴ I felt and still feel incredibly humbled by the openness and patience each person I talked to had while answering my questions, sometimes on personal financial and family matters. While I hope that my research findings and suggestions can help WOPA help these young women in the future, I also strove to find other small ways to give back, such as placing clothing orders with graduated students to help support their new businesses.

Data Collection:

I observed and participated in seven classes taught at the Center, three in culinary arts and two each in Community Health and “Couture.” I had originally planned to distribute

¹³ A popular Cameroonian dress and the project in Couture class while I was at the Center.

¹⁴ Corrine, Glesne. *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction, Third Edition* Pearson education, Inc. 2006. Chapter 6, *But is it Ethical? Learning to Do Right*. 133.

questionnaires and then conduct follow-up interviews with both current and graduated students. However, because of the students' literacy level I ended up asking questions and recording answers instead of having students fill out the questionnaires. With current students, I did preliminary interviews with just the basic questions from my survey, and then conducted follow-up interviews to gain deeper information. With graduated students, I did interviews that followed the basic format of my original questionnaire but I added and developed further questions.

I also conducted interviews with the Delegation of Small and Medium Enterprises and the Delegation for the Promotion of the Woman and the Family to find out what types of job opportunities are generally available for women in Kribi. I also conducted an interview with the former Delegate of Social Affairs to gain the perspective of a social scientist on the role of women in Kribi's economy as well. I conducted two interviews with Madame Folack, the Director of WOPA, and frequently benefited from being hosted in her home, I was able to ask questions freely. By participant observation and interviews with current students, I was able to look at the ways WOPA's trainings respond to the needs and challenges of the young women's lives. By conducting interviews with graduates of the program and the local Delegates, I attempted to examine the correlation between the job trainings they received and the local economy.

Data Analysis, Sorting and Coding:

I kept the original questionnaires with private names and numbers either with me or secure at my homestay in Madame Folack's residence, and coded each student's data with an assigned number to protect privacy as I transcribed responses into online data. I also used the assigned numbers for each student in my field journal. I kept original files with complete interviews, but also created files according to questions so that I could easily compare answers as

themes emerged. By transcribing myself, I was able to become intimately acquainted with my data.

Strength and Limitations:

My primary concern going into my ISP was my language ability, though I have worked hard and my French has improved considerably since my arrival in Cameroon, my language ability was still a challenge. There were times during interviews when I did not fully understand responses initially and missed opportunities to delve deeper for richer information. Had I had better language skills, I would have been able to create more spontaneous, in depth questions as I went along. I put effort into working around my language level during interviews, keeping a sense of humor and frankly acknowledging difficulties caused by my language competence, which many interviewees found amusing.

I worked with and hired my host-sister, another young woman staying with Madame Folack, to correct all my transcriptions and ensure the validity of my data, which also increased and confirmed my comprehension. I worked hard to verify my facts and observations and created multiple questions concerning emerging themes to cross-check my data. In the following sections, I hope to identify strengths of WOPA's training program, how it responds to the economy, and offer suggestions for continued improvement.

III. Part A. Research Question One and Findings

Founding of the Center:

The story of the creation of WOPA's "*Centre d'Éducation et la Formation de la Femme*" helps to answer my research question number one: "Is WOPA's training program designed to effectively fit the challenges and needs of its participant's lives?" WOPA is a larger association created in 2001 with a history of projects on HIV/AIDS Education and Support, Agricultural Promotion and Anti-Trafficking awareness, amongst others.¹⁵ The Center for Education and Training is the specific program which my research focuses on, and was created in 2011 by Madame Véronique Folack, the director and founder of WOPA. Madame Folack created the Center after working with an SIT student and receiving direct feedback from local young women in the sex trade in Kribi. In "On n'a Pas Souvent Le Choix" SIT student Courtney Baxter discovered that lack of education forced many young women into Kribi's sex trade.¹⁶ When asked whether they would want to return to school if they had the means, the young women said that they would prefer to learn a trade and this inspired Madame Folack to create the Center.

The Center offers year-long training courses in Culinary Arts, Sewing or "Couture," Textile Dying, Community Health, and a small amount of Computer Literacy.¹⁷ Madame Folack said that she "*decided on the courses according to what was said on the field*" because the initial forty-five survey respondents said that they wanted to learn sewing and computer skills. Thus far, two groups of young women have graduated from the program. Culinary Arts and "hôtellerie" (hotel trade) were added during the third year after the participants were very interested in a

¹⁵ Women's Promotion and Assistance Association. <http://www.wopassociation.org/> (Accessed 26 April, 2014.)

¹⁶ Courtney Baxter. " "On n'a Pas Souvent Le Choix": Why Girls Leave School and Become Filles Libres in Kribi, Cameroon." SIT Cameroon Spring 2010.

¹⁷ Interview with Madame Folack, Number 2. Folack Home, Kribi Cameroon. 22 April 2014. French, translated by Marcelle Tchuenteu.

practice cooking session.¹⁸

WOPA's training school was created to meet a fundamental need for education, and after researching the various needs in participants' lives, I have concluded that providing education is still the most important way WOPA meets women's needs. When asked what the best part of WOPA's training program was, 62.5% (5/8) of responses listed the opportunity to gain an education as the "meilleure chose" which WOPA does for young women. As Graduated Student Number 2 said « *Les meilleures choses que WOPA fait est que WOPA aide les jeunes filles, les filles de la famille diminuent, les jeunes filles libre, donc, WOPA ne veut pas que les jeunes filles restent dans la ville à ne rien faire. Celles qui n'ont pas pu fréquenter là, il faut qu'elles fassent quelque chose. La meilleure chose que WOPA a fait c'est d'aider les jeunes filles.* »¹⁹

In the following sections, I will examine why women have had to leave school, and explore specific themes that emerged about the type of education that they need. I will conclude my research question one by listing other needs in the women's lives, and their own suggestions for improvements in the program.

Need for Education: Why Women Left School

For both current and graduated students, the highest level of education was BEPC (Brevet d'Etudes du Premier Cycle), the first certificate received in secondary school, and the lowest level was CEP (Certificat d'Etudes Primaire), the certificate of primary school. Six students had a primary school education and six students had achieved some secondary school education. The

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Interview with Graduate Student Number 2. Atelier au Marché. Kribi Cameroon, 15 April 2014. English Translation: The best thing that WOPA does is that WOPA helps young women, the girls whose families have fallen down, the young free girls [ie prostitutes], so, WOPA does not want the girls to stay in town and do nothing. Those who could not go there [to school], it is necessary that they do something. The best thing that WOPA has done is to aid the young girls.

lack of education of these women is reflective of a larger problem within Cameroon, primary education is mandated in Cameroon but only 46% of women in Cameroon complete their primary education.²⁰ At 59% basic education in Kribi is one of the lowest in the Southern region.²¹

As Madame Folack observed “*Elles sont à la maison parce qu’elles n’ont pas l’argent pour continuer à l’école...*”²² the underlying reason the women had to leave school was poverty, with “*Il n’y avait pas assez de moyens*” cited the most frequently. Poverty was often caused or exacerbated by the death of a family member and provider. 55% of women had lost the family member who provided their school fees. Two of the eleven women I asked had to leave school because of early pregnancy, and two were forced to leave school when their families chose to prioritize sending their sons to school over daughters. Five of the women were influenced to leave school by the need to help provide for their families.

Need for Affordable Education

The Education and Training Center for Women charges a 10,000 FCFA inscription fee,²³ but after the inscription fee there is no cost. It is the only training center for women in Kribi which is free, including a center created by the State and supported by the Delegation for the

²⁰ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 57th Session 10 February – 28 February, 2014. Submission on the Rights of Women in the Republic of Cameroon. Prepared by The Advocates for Human Rights January 24, 2014. 2.

²¹ Profil de Ville de Kribi, 7.

²² Interview with Madame Folack, Véronique, Number 1. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 9 April 2014. *French*. English Translation: “They are at home because they do not have the money to continue at school.”

²³ \$20 U.S. Dollars

Promotion of Women and Family, where students have to pay 40,000 FCFA.²⁴ All current students listed their monthly income as less than 28,000 FCFA, many citing 15,000 FCFA as a more accurate number; poverty is their largest and most basic problem. Even the inscription fee is difficult for some of the young women; one student is five months into the program and has yet to pay her inscription fee,²⁵ and others had to save or have boyfriends or family pay for the inscription.

Need for Hands on Education: “*On fait la Pratique*”

Because students have minimal primary and secondary school levels, they struggle with reading and particularly writing skills in French. When I attempted to distribute initial questionnaires with current students, they had difficulty writing their responses and I ended up asking and recording answers instead; only one student completed the survey by hand after she asked to take it home with her. When asked later if writing in French was difficult, only one student said no. While interviewing student number 7, another younger student I was not able to interview heard me asking if there was a course or skill that should be added to the program. She said a course should be added in French, and when the original student laughed, she said “*Tu connais c’est difficile pour quelques autres. Elles n’ont pas beaucoup de Français.*»²⁶ The professor of Community Health scolded the girls when they struggled to take notes in class and told them that they needed to go home and learn to write faster.²⁷

²⁴Interview with Madame Folack, Number 2. \$80 U.S. Dollars

²⁵ Interview with Current Student 1. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 17 April 2014.

²⁶ Interview with Current Student 3. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 21 April 2014. English Translation: You know it’s difficult for several others, they don’t have a lot of French.

²⁷ Observation Notes, Community Health Class, WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 8 April 2014.

WOPA responds to the low-level of education amongst its participants by designing its classes to be hands on and practical. When asked whether they would prefer to learn a material at WOPA or return to school, four out of five students said they preferred to learn a trade at WOPA, and when asked why one student responded “*Ici-là, on fait la pratique, à l’autre école on fait l’écriture,*”²⁸ even though she had attended a technical school. As Madame Folack said « *On fait juste un peu de théorie...on écrit un peu un peu, mais le reste du temps c’est pratique pratique.*»²⁹

Classes are designed to be as hands on as possible, for the sewing “Couture” class the students practice on four sewing machines in the Center, and for the Culinary Arts class, “Restauration” students either practice baking small things at the Center³⁰ or visit the near-by restaurant of the culinary arts professor. The Culinary Arts class also includes “hôtellerie” and students visit hotels to learn to clean and manage hotel rooms, etc. Community Health is the most difficult to make practical and hands on, but even in Community Health class they learn to take temperature, give injections, and even participate in local community wide vaccination campaigns in Kribi. However, Madame Folack is thinking about ways to lessen theory in Community Health and make it more practical next year, because most girls find it to be the most difficult class.³¹

²⁸Interview with Current Student 1. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 17 April 2014. English Translation: “Here, we practice, at the other school they write.”

²⁹Interview with Madame Véronique Folack, Number 1. English translation: They do just a little bit of theory...they write just a little little, the rest of the time it’s practice practice.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Interview with Madame Folack, Number 2. Folack Home, Kribi Cameroon. 22 April 2014. French, translated by Marcelle Tchuenteu.

By creating hands-on classes WOPA responds to the current desires of its participants, who prefer the practical approach and struggle to write in French. However, it might be not meet their long term needs; the same problems which make classes with “L’écriture” difficult now will likely continue in the future. Without sufficient literacy, the young women might struggle with aspects of their future work, particularly if they wish to pursue Community Health. Increased literacy is essential to true poverty alleviation worldwide, and poverty intervention programs need to combine multiple approaches (including vocational trainings such as WOPA) to increase literacy and break cycles of poverty.³² The young women of WOPA need sufficient literacy so that they can successful manage future businesses; with practical skills they are equipped to work, sew or cook etc., but without sufficient literacy there is the danger that they will not be able to grow future businesses and would simply become “working poor.” This is defined as “an individual or family that remains poor even though they have regular employment” ie their employment revenue is not sufficient for them to break out of poverty.³³

Need for Understandable Education “*Ils Expliquent Bien*”

I was unable to observe a practicum in Community Health, but in Culinary Arts and Couture each student gets to practice individually with the help of the professor, whether it was sewing a kaba or braising a fish.³⁴ For the young students at the Center, the atmosphere of the classroom is important, and each class varies depending on the teacher. Madame Folack chooses

³² Bjorn Harald Nordtveit. “Poverty Alleviation and Integrated Service Delivery: Literacy, Early Child Development and Health. *International Journal of Educational Development*. 28, No. 4 (July 2008) 405-418.

³³ USLegal.com. “Working Poor Law and Legal Definitions. <http://definitions.uslegal.com/w/working-poor/> (Accessed 3 May, 2014.)

³⁴ Observations Notes.

professors not only on their professional qualifications and reputation in the field, but also on their ability to interact with young students.³⁵

The professor of Culinary Arts told me that he purposely jokes with the young students to make them feel more comfortable and interested in the material. Culinary classes in particular had an energetic and vibrant feel; students were given a large amount of independence during culinary practicums, and would listen to music and talk and laugh while preparing food.³⁶ Students are able to pause lectures and ask questions if they are confused,³⁷ the Madame of Couture often paused her lecture to double-check the students' comprehension.³⁸ Every student I asked reported that they found the professors "bien" and that they were comfortable asking questions, that if "*parfois s'il faut donner un cours et on ne comprend pas, ils prennent du temps pour nous expliquer*"³⁹ and also that the professors were "*très simple...*"

WOPA's efforts to design its courses around the educational needs of its students are effective; every students interviewed said that WOPA was "*facile à comprendre*," students occasionally reported that certain courses were personally more difficult for them than others, but overall reported that the program was easy to understand. When asked whether WOPA was "*facile ou difficile à comprendre*" 46% of students voluntarily emphasized the importance of having personal desire to learn, repeating that you need to "*mettre tout ta tête*" to learn and that

³⁵ Interview with Madame Folack, Number 1.

³⁶ Observation Notes, Culinary Practicum, Restaurant, Kribi Cameroon, 16 April 2014.

³⁷ Observation Notes, Culinary Class, WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 7 April 2014,

³⁸ Observation Notes, Couture Class, WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon, 10 April 2014.

³⁹ Interview with Graduated Student 3. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 16 April 2014. English Translation: Sometimes if they teach a course and we do not understand, they take the time to explain to us.

“Là c’est facile, c’est difficile pour quelqu’un qui n’a pas la volonté, et qui pense à autre chose. Mais...quand tu as un objectif, si tu veux vraiment travailler, c’est facile. »⁴⁰

Need for Stability: “Elles sont Instables”

Another need in the lives of the girls is for stability and regularity; they have a large problem with absenteeism and dropping out. This year’s class of students has gone from nineteen students when I first contacted WOPA to eight fairly regular students during the three weeks of my research. These students were also frequently absent, there were days with only four students at the Center. This creates a difficulty not only for WOPA, but also for dedicated students, three students responded that any weakness in WOPA’s was found in *“Le retard. Les étudiantes venaient à l’heure qu’elles veulent. D’autres ne prenaient pas le travail au sérieux,»⁴¹* absenteeism made it hard for the program to advance quickly because students had to catch up when they returned to class.⁴²

Students miss class or drop out for a variety of reasons. Three students have also dropped out because of disagreements with the professor of Community Health; he is very strict and demands a very attentive, respectful attitude from students, which some students have trouble with.⁴³ Others have trouble affording transportation if they live farther away, one graduated student would walk to her home village every weekend and stay in Kribi to attend school during

⁴⁰ Interview with Graduate Student Number 6, WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 18 April 2014. English Translation: Here it’s easy, it’s difficult for someone who does not have the will, and who thinks about other things. But...when you have an objective, if you really want to work, it’s easy.

⁴¹ Interview with Graduate Student Number 7. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 19 April 2014. English Translation: The lateness. The students come at the hour that they want. The others do not take their work seriously.

⁴² Interview with Current Student 6. Student’s House, Kribi Cameroon. 16 April 2014.

⁴³ Interview with Madame Folack, Number 2.

the week. She said “ *WOPA m’a aidé beaucoup. Ils ont payé mon transport pour venir ici. Ils me fortifiaient de temps en temps, « Je dois continuer, je ne dois pas lâcher. »*⁴⁴ Others drop out because of lack of communication with WOPA, one student was unable to pay her inscription fee and dropped out without explaining the reason, when Madame Folack found out she exclaimed “*Si tu as un problème, dis-moi, on peut trouver une solution!*”⁴⁵

This year’s level of absenteeism is the most extreme, and potentially WOPA’s efforts to aid women by providing free education are in fact counterproductive. Madame Folack said “*I also have the impression that because they don’t pay the school fees for WOPA, they don’t give importance to what they are doing, they think they can do as they like.*”⁴⁶ The Center developed regulations that if students miss more than ten days of class, they are “chassée” from the Center, and professors keep list of attendance.⁴⁷

Other reasons often involve family troubles such as the current student number 9 who was absent for the first two weeks of my research, she said “*Ma mère est souvent malade, et parfois j’ai les problèmes à la maison entre famille.*”⁴⁸ Another potential reason is because they are used to “rester au quartier.”⁴⁹ As Madame Folack said, “*they don’t know what they want, they think it’s a good idea to come to the Center but after they have other problems which*

⁴⁴ Interview with graduated student 7. English Translation: WOPA helped me a lot. They paid for my transportation to come here. They strengthened [encouraged] me from time to time, “I must continue, I must not let go [give up].”

⁴⁵ Conversation with Madame Folack. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 10 April 2014. English Translation: If you have a problem, tell me, we can find a solution!

⁴⁶ Interview with Madame Folack, Number 2.

⁴⁷ Observation Notes, and conversation with Madame Folack. 25 April 2014.

⁴⁸ Interview with Current Student 9. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 25 April, 2014. English Translation: My mother is often sick, and sometimes I have problems at home between the family.

⁴⁹ A French phrase literally meaning “staying in the neighborhood” which is a term for students who have dropped out of school.

*occupy them, their families or their babies, because the majority of them are teenage mothers.*⁵⁰

I was able to speak to one student whose son had become sick, forcing her to drop out to care for him,⁵¹ and four others are unable to come because of pregnancy, they drop out because of morning sickness or to give birth.⁵² During my research time one current student gave birth to her third child.

As researcher Lotsmart Fonjong noted, caring for children and household commitments leaves little time for women to benefit from trainings and education or employment opportunities throughout much of Cameroon.⁵³ WOPA responds to this need by allowing women to bring their children with them to school if they do not have the means or connection to have someone watch their child. Throughout my research time, only one current student regularly brought her two year old daughter to class, but in previous years the amount of women who brought children to class was much greater. The previous year, nine to ten infants/children regularly came to the training center with their mothers, and WOPA paid someone to watch them in another room.

Women's Needs in Women's Voices: *Quelque chose à Améliorer*

I asked students if there were any skills or competences they wish were added to the program, and also asked if there were any weakness or ways WOPA could be improved to cross-check responses. 30% of respondents said that WOPA did not have a weakness, and had no suggestions for improvements. 27% said that they wanted WOPA to prolong its sessions on “*l'informatique*” or computer science; the last semester WOPA had a problem after an electricity

⁵⁰ Interview with Madame Folack, number 2.

⁵¹ Interview with Drop-Out Student Number 1. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 10 April 2014.

⁵² Conversation with Madame Folack, Folack Home, Kribi Cameroon, 25 April 2014.

⁵³ Lostmart, “Fostering Women's Participation in Development.” 226.

cut and three computers were broken, which has delayed computer literacy courses.⁵⁴ But at 37% the most popular response was that WOPA add more years to its training program, to “bien approfondir” their knowledge. As one student said : « *Peut-être pour ma petite sœur, qui va venir après moi, il faut ajouter une deuxième année. C'est très nécessaire, parce que nous avons appris, mais s'il y a une année pour continuer, on aurait ajouter. Dans une année c'est difficile, et peut-être il y a le niveau qui est trop bas. Pour moi, c'est la seule préoccupation avec WOPA, jusque alors que WOPA fait, pour moi, c'est trop grand.* »⁵⁵

Need to Provide for Families

However, the desire to prolong WOPA's training was not universal; several students expressed the belief that one of the best things about WOPA was the ability to learn “Plus vite.” They believed that going (or going back to school) would be “perdre le temps.” Their primary motivation is to gain money to aid their families, which aligns with research about women's increased economic capacity directly benefiting their families.⁵⁶ As one student said “*Je préfère apprendre les métiers ici, parce que je peux sortir, je pourrais mieux envoyer mes petites sœurs à l'école et subvenir aux besoins de la famille.* »⁵⁷ Nine out of the twelve total current and

⁵⁴ Madame Folack, 2nd interview

⁵⁵ Interview with Graduated Student 3. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 16 April 2014. English Translation: Potentially for my little sister, who will come after me, they should add another year. It's very necessary because we learned, but they should add another year to continue. In one year it's difficult, and maybe there is a level that is too low. For me, that's the only preoccupation I have with WOPA, because what WOPA has done for me is too much.

⁵⁶ Endeley, “Women's Empowerment in Cameroon.”

⁵⁷ Interview with Current student 7. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 14 April 2014. English Translation: I prefer to learn the trades here, because I can go out, I could better send my sisters to school and meet the needs of the family.

graduated students interviewed were financial responsibility for someone; sometimes with the financial help of boyfriends, but they were quick to qualify this aid as “parfois.”

Their responsibilities ranged from one child, to one young woman who supported her child and five younger brothers that she sent to school. After dropping out of school themselves, these women struggle to keep family members in school, saying “*Je prie Dieu pour qu’elles fréquentent et ne soient pas comme moi.*”⁵⁸ These young women need a way to earn money, and with hands on skills they hope that they can go directly into practice.

The next section concerning my findings on research question number two will attempt to answer if this hope is grounded, and if WOPA’s trainings do indeed help women find jobs.

⁵⁸ Preliminary Interview with Current Student 7. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 7 April 2014. English Translation: I pray that they go [to school] and do not become like me.

III. B. Research Question Two and Findings

In this section I will attempt to answer my research question number 2: How effectively do WOPA's job trainings fit the local job market in Kribi, Cameroon? I will give a brief description of Kribi and its economy, and then examine the perspective of local authorities on the job market to determine the viability of WOPA's training within Kribi's economy, and present my research findings on the experiences of students who have graduated from WOPA's training program.

Kribi's Economy: "Une Belle Ville Touristique" »

Kribi is a port city located in the Ocean Department of the South region of Cameroon, and is known as Cameroon's most popular tourist destination. The population is estimated at 55,704 with an urban population of 36, 836.⁵⁹ It is located near the terminus of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, and its economy is influenced by the local seaport and the Kribi Power Station, which has brought an even greater increase of foreign or Cameroonian workers to Kribi. That, combined with Kribi's perfect white beaches, creates an economy based on fishing and tourism, with an underbelly of a bustling sex tourism industry. Women are most often employed in either the sex industry or the informal sector, and make an average of 15,000 FCA per month, about \$30 U.S. dollars.⁶⁰ Because this year is the first year that culinary arts and "hôtellerie" have been added to WOPA's curriculum, I was not able to study whether students who specialized in "restuaration" and "hôtellerie" found jobs, but the field is promising with thirty-eight hotels and many restaurants in Kribi.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Profil de Ville de Kribi, 6.

⁶⁰ Profil de Ville de Kribi, 11.

⁶¹ Profil de Ville de Kribi, 7.

Viability of “Couture” in Kribi: *La Concurrance*

For students who specialize in “Couture,” I met with local Delegates from the Delegation of the Promotion of Women and Families, the Delegation of Small and Medium Enterprises, and the former Delegate of Social Affairs to find out the perspective of local experts on common types of work for women in Kribi, and whether the courses offered by WOPA reflected viable job openings within its economy. All delegates agreed that couture was a very popular type of work for women in Kribi, the Delegate of Small and Medium Enterprises believed women had a “very good chance” of finding work after training,⁶² and the Delegate of Women said “*Plus que les jeunes filles vraiment apprennent la couture....après ça...elles s’installent seuls, elles peuvent déjà survivre avec ça, ça marche.* »⁶³

I had hypothesized that if “couture” was a popular field for women, it might be difficult for graduates to find work because the field was too popular and they would have to compete with over-saturated markets. I asked current students if they knew women employed in either the culinary or “couture” fields, every student knew at least one other person employed in these fields. When I was able to speak with two graduated student from WOPA who had opened an “atelier de couture” (sewing workshops) they reported that their greatest difficulty starting work was lack of clients. When I interviewed Graduated Student Number 1 she gestured at the crowded market, where I could see three other “ateliers” directly across from her own, and said

⁶² Interview with Joseph Rodople Bipoupouth. Le Délégué Des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises de L’Economie Sociale et de L’Artisanat. Délégation Départementale de L’Océan, Kribi Cameroon. 14 April, 2014. *French and English*.

⁶³ Interview with Rachel Bilouer. Madame le Délégué de la Promotion de La Femme et La Famille de L’Océan à Kribi. Délégation De la Promotion de la Femme et La Famille, Kribi Cameroon. 8 April 2014. *French*. English Translation: The more that young women truly learn sewing...after that...they get started alone, they can already survive with that, it works.

“*Au début c ’était très difficile parce que tu vois il y a beaucoup de ateliers »*⁶⁴ and the second student agreed.⁶⁵ Madame Folack concurred, saying «*Yes, there is the competition; it’s hard because everyone does the same thing.*”⁶⁶

The overall conclusion was that while competition posed a difficulty, it did not make success in couture impossible; the secret was to « *faire bien le travail.* » As Madame le Délégué said “*Quand il y a la concurrence, elles vont s’améliorer et ça les pousse à faire du bon travail.*»⁶⁷ The graduated students and Madame Folack talked about ways to draw in clients, such as hanging popular types of dresses in the doorway of your atelier to attract passer-byes⁶⁸ who then wear the clothing and send others your way. The second student summarized, saying “*C’est comme ça tu amènes bien les clients, quand tu as bien fait ton travail.* »⁶⁹

However, the Former Delegate of Social Affairs, M. Ngui posed a dissenting opinion, believing that because of the importation of « *friperie* » or modern second hand western clothing, couture was becoming a more and more difficult and outdated field. When I asked him if there were other sectors that women could work in, he believed that tourism provided an unexplored economic opportunity for women and that women could also be trained to become tour guides.⁷⁰ This is currently unthought-of for women in Kribi⁷¹ and he explained “*Il y a les*

⁶⁴ Interview with Graduate Student Number 1. Atelier au Marché, Kribi Cameroon. 14 April, 2014. English Translation: At the start it was very hard because you see there are a lot of sewing workshops.

⁶⁶ Interview with Madame Folack, number 2.

⁶⁷ Interview with Madame le Délégué. English Translation: When there is competition, they will improve, and that pushes up the good work.

⁶⁸ Interviews with Graduate Student 1, and Graduate Student 2, and 2nd interview with Madame Folack

⁶⁹ Interview with Graduate Student Number 2. Atelier au Marché. Kribi Cameroon, 15 April 2014. English Translation: “It’s like that that you bring in the clients, when you have done your work well.”

⁷⁰ Interview with M. Ngui, Dieudonné Bernard, L’Ancien Délégué d’Affaires Sociales. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 15 April 2014. *French and English.*

travaux qui sont pour les hommes, et les travaux pour les femmes, et généralement les travaux qui sont seulement pour les femmes, c'est les travaux subalternes. Et les travaux de valeur, sont réservés aux hommes. »⁷² His explanation perfectly captures what is known as a “gendered sector” which is when a type of work “is perceived as having the particular dominant attributes of either females or males” such as nursing or “caring” fields being women’s work.⁷³

The former Delegate suggested that not just WOPA, but all the training centers in Kribi should diversify the trainings offered to women to include male dominated and more “valued” sectors. His critique echoed what I discovered in my literature review about job training programs for women, which often follow gender-stereotyped lines which means that women are trained to enter over-saturated fields.⁷⁴ Though the general conclusion was that couture “*marche bien à Kribi*” despite competition, Monsieur Ngui’s point is an important one. It is especially important considering the fact that the two graduates who had successfully opened an atelier said their income had increased, but said “pas beaucoup” when I asked by how much, and that paying for the rent of their atelier and other expenses leaves little left over at the end of each month.⁷⁵

Viability of Community Health in Kribi

WOPA’s course in Community Health is commonly referred to as “*La médecine*” by the students, but Madame Folack is careful to correct the distinction because to call the course

⁷¹ Interview with Madame le Délégué.

⁷² Interview with L’Ancien Délégué d’Affaires Sociales. English Translation: There is the work that is for men, and the work that is for women; and usually the work that is only for women are menial jobs. And the work that is valued is reserved for men.

⁷³ Pat Richardson, et al. “The Challenges of Growing Small Business: Insights from Women Entrepreneurs in Africa.” International Labour Organization (Geneva): 2004. Xv.

⁷⁴ Anders, Lisborg. “Re-thinking Reintegration: What Do Returning Victims Really Want and Need? Evidence from Thailand and the Philippines.” *SIREN@undp.org. UNIAP (United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking)*. Np.

⁷⁵ Interviews with Interview with Graduate Student Number 1. Atelier au Marché, Kribi Cameroon. 14 April, 2014, and with Graduate Student Number 2. Atelier au Marché. Kribi Cameroon, 15 April 2014.

medicine exaggerated its scope. The Community Health course covers sexual health, reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases, infections etc. The women learn to calculate the age of pregnancy, how to weigh and care for babies, injections and vaccination, amongst others skills.⁷⁶ In one year the course curriculum is not comprehensive enough to prepare women to be nurses; but they are able to work at hospitals as “Agents-de-Salle” who are responsible for room cleanliness and feeding tasks with patients, or “aides-soignantes” (a nurse’s aide). Kribi has four hospitals, two borough medical centers, five integrated health centers, and thirty-four general health centers.⁷⁷ WOPA’s Community Health class opens up opportunities for students; of the graduated students from WOPA’s first year, one student works in a hospital, two work at health centers, and another found work in Yaoundé at a health center with her certificate from WOPA. The women can also work in “crèches” or nursery schools.⁷⁸ One student hoped that the certificate from WOPA could help her become admitted to other schools to continue to study health.⁷⁹

Have Women Found Jobs?

If the general conclusion was that the Center’s trainings are applicable to the job market in Kribi, the next question was: Have the Center’s graduates actually found jobs? I spoke with five students from last year’s class in addition to the two graduated students who had opened the atelier to find out. Out of the five additional students, only one of the five had begun to work, sewing clothing for neighbors and friends from her home.⁸⁰ The next question to ask is: Why haven’t the women found employment?

⁷⁶ Observation Notes, Programme Scholaire de WOPA, interview with Madame Folack number 1.

⁷⁷ Profil de La Ville de Kribi, 7.

⁷⁸ Interview with Madame Folack, number 1.

⁷⁹ Interview with Graduate Student Number 4. Student’s Home, Kribi Cameroon. 17 April 2014

⁸⁰ Interview with Graduate Student Number 7. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 19 April 2014.

Difficulties Finding Jobs—“Couture”: *C’est le financement qui fait problème.*

For the women who specialized in “couture,” the answer is simple: They lack the funds to begin. As Madame Folack said « *Après la formation les plus grande difficultés sont s’installer ...elles n’ont pas l’argent pour s’installer...elles n’ont pas l’argent pour pratiquer ce qu’elles ont appris à l’école.* »⁸¹ The two students who had successfully opened their “atelier” were part of the first class at the Center, and at the end of the first year WOPA had distributed micro-finance credit to help women get started in their business; this loan was the essential difference between the first two students and the others I interviewed. Graduated Student 1 said the loan was “*le point de depart*” which allowed them to begin. There were eleven students in the first class and WOPA bought the supplies necessary to begin work for nine of the students (one other refused the credit, not wanting to go into debt, and the other already had a sewing machine). WOPA bought the materials directly, not wanting the money to “fly elsewhere;” the total for cloth, sewing machines, or pots and pans was tallied as the micro-credit.⁸² Credits ranged from 115-150 FCFA and students had a three month grace period after which they were to begin paying back in installments over a twelve month period.⁸³

Of the nine students only two have consistently paid back their loans, the first woman I interviewed Graduate Number 1, is close to finished. At the end of each year, WOPA organizes a business management seminar to try and equip students with the budgeting and planning skills needed to start and successfully continue their work. The women’s inability to pay back their loans is indicative of the larger problem of lack of sufficient education. As Greenspan points out,

⁸¹ Interview with Madame Folack, number 1. English Translation: After the formation the biggest difficulties are to get started...they don’t have the money to get started...they don’t have the money to practice what they learned at [WOPA].

⁸² Interview with Madame Folack, number 2.

⁸³ Ibid

financial literacy and business management skills are essential to successful micro-finance programs; otherwise lack of education seriously inhibits recipients' abilities to benefit from and pay back micro-credit.⁸⁴ Women cited pressing needs such as family or child illness which prevented them from paying back their loans,⁸⁵ they need more education in how to “create household budgets, initiate savings plans, and make strategic investment decisions” which would help them “meet near term obligations and maximize their longer term well-being.”⁸⁶

Difficulties Finding Jobs: WOPA's Lack of Funds

Because of the first group of students' inability to pay back their loans, WOPA has been unable to distribute micro-credit to the second year students. Though Madame Folack wants to be able to help the students who are struggling to begin work without finances, WOPA itself is struggling financially. The *Centre d'Éducation* was created with an original one-time grant from the National Employment Fund of Cameroon, and WOPA has a continuing financial partner in the Swiss organization SYMPHASIS. But WOPA lacks other sponsors and is struggling financially;⁸⁷ it is owing to the personal dedication of the Director Madame Folack that the Center stays afloat.

The Center is located behind a cybercafé owned by Madame Folack, and she has used the personal revenue from the cybercafé to pay the teachers at the Center since July 2013.⁸⁸ WOPA has a supply of dresses and purses made by graduated students which they sell when they can, and a former SIT student occasionally purchases purses which she sells in the U.S. But the

⁸⁴ Alan Greenspan. 2002. “Financial Literacy: A Tool for Economic Progress.” *The Futurist*, Vol. 36, No. 4. July-August. 37-41.

⁸⁵ Conversation with Madame Folack, Folack Home, Kribi Cameroon. 18 April 2014.

⁸⁶ Greenspan. “Financial Literacy,” *Ibid*.

⁸⁷ Interview with Madame Folack, Number 1.

⁸⁸ Interview with Madame Folack, Number 2.

income generated by these activities is sporadic and insufficient to be self-sustaining, when orders or materials run out they stop their activities.⁸⁹

Difficulties Finding Jobs: Community Health: *On Attend*

After finishing WOPA's formation, the two students who specialized in Community Health found a three month internship at the local hospital through WOPA. After the official end of the internship, they are still called back to help with the "Programme Maternel et Infantile" at the hospital,⁹⁰ but they too have yet to find paid work. When I asked why, and if they were looking for work they responded similarly, saying « *Je voudrais vraiment rechercher, mais je n'ai pas encore parce que je n'ai pas encore l'attestation....j'ai appris beaucoup de chose ici à WOPA mais je ne peux pas me présenter quelque part et parler avec la bouche j'ai besoin de quelque chose qui prouve.* »⁹¹ Though they had graduated from WOPA in November they had yet to receive the "attestation," their certificates from WOPA. The certificates are signed by Madame Folack and certified by the local government, and the long delay is caused by "*lenteur administrative*"⁹² and governmental paperwork delays. Despite the fact that the lack of "*l'attestation*" inhibits their ability to look for work, the women were unperturbed, repeating "On attend..." in response to my questions. As one student said "*Non, j'attends la Directrice. On attend. J'ai confiance en elle.*"⁹³

⁸⁹ Interview with Madame Folack, number 2.

⁹⁰ Interview with Graduate Student 3. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 16 April 2014. English Translation: I would really like to look [for work] but I have not yet because I do not yet have the certificate...I learned many things at WOPA but I cannot introduce myself and speak with the mouth [I cannot just say I had a training] I need something that proves it.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² "Administrative Slowness"

⁹³ Graduate Student 3. English Translation: No, I wait for the Director. We wait. I have confidence in her.

Why Women are Willing to Wait: *Je Suis Vraiment Fière*

As I analyzed the women's responses, I began to understand better why they so simply accepted the delay. Besides perhaps being more habituated with "*lenteur administrative*" the women take pride in their new-found skills, regardless of whether these skills are helping improve their economic situation. Every graduate who had not yet found work still expressed pride in their skills, saying things like : « *On ne peut pas dormir à la maison quand tu es passée à WOPA, tu as le savoir-faire même si tu es à la maison tu sais déjà que avec le financement tu peux déjà faire quelque choses.* »⁹⁴ Others expressed the social-stigma they dealt with being « à la maison » one student said « *J'avais des problèmes... mon ami me méprisait parce que je ne cherchais pas... WOPA m'a beaucoup aidé c'est depuis 16 ans que je ne fréquente plus. Et pour moi je ne savais pas que je pouvais me retrouver encore à faire quelque chose... Comme actuellement on [the hospital] m'a rappelée ça veut dire qu'on m'a trouvée utile.* »⁹⁵ Those with internships spoke with satisfaction and pride of their continued informal work at the hospital, having useful skills and "Being found useful" gives them "plus de confiance en moi-même."⁹⁶

Out of time and language constraints I had originally limited my research to whether WOPA economically empowers women; but it is clear that WOPA has helped to psychologically empower its graduates. After WOPA, know that they are capable and can "faire quelque chose;"

⁹⁴ Interview with Graduate Student Number 4. Student's Home, Kribi Cameroon. 17 April 2014. You cannot sleep at home when you've been through WOPA's training, you have the know-how even if you are at home you already know that with the funding you can already do some things.

⁹⁵ Graduate Student 3. English Translation: I had problems...my boyfriend despised me because I did not look for work...WOPA helped me a lot because it was 16 years since I had not been going to school any more. And for me I did not know that I could find myself doing something...like now, [the hospital] calls me back which means that they find me useful.

⁹⁶ Interview with Graduate Student Number 6, WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 18 April 2014. English Translation: More confidence in myself.

they have an increased belief in their self-efficacy and skills. However, this emotional empowerment does not yet meet the criteria established for sustainable empowerment; which is self-sufficient and lasting, *a continuing increase* in decision making capacity and feelings of self-efficacy. The graduates I spoke with have increased feelings of self-efficacy, but for four out of the seven graduates those feelings are not yet resulting in increased empowerment in other areas, ie economically.

Other Options for Funding: *On Peut Faire le Petit Commerce*

The delay with the distribution of certificates has to be taken into account for the two women who want to continue in community health. As for the two women who lack funds Graduate Number 6 said that her husband could possibly help, and Graduate 5 said “*J’attends que mon petit ami me donne de l’argent pour commencer, ou on peut même aussi demander à la Mama de WOPA.*”⁹⁷ After the interview, the “Mama” of WOPA, Madame Folack, had to regretfully explain why WOPA cannot currently give micro-credit. Madame Folack hopes to call back the students and offer the loan if WOPA is able to find the money, and has assured the current students (many of whom still expect the loan) that she will struggle to find the financing for them.⁹⁸

But some of the young women voiced other avenues and plans to “*gagner de l’argent*” to get started in their hopeful business. Though she first started out vague, saying “*Je vais chercher*” for the money, one student later added that another option was to « *faire des petits*

⁹⁷ Interview with Graduate Student Number 5. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 18 April 2014. English Translation: I wait for my boyfriend to give me the money to get started, or you can also ask the same from the Mama of WOPA [Madame Folack].

⁹⁸ Interview with Madame Folack , number 2.

commerces. »⁹⁹ Other current students echoed this idea, one saying that after WOPA she thinks she will manage, planning to potentially « *vendre pour avoir un peu d'argent* » and that she will start “*pas à pas, petit à petit*» and that when she has enough money she will organize herself well to open a “*grand atelier.*”¹⁰⁰ Another student planned to « *d'abord travailler pour quelqu'un* »¹⁰¹ if she did not have enough money to open the restaurant she dreams of.¹⁰² Graduated Student Number 5 used to “faire le petit commerce” as well, but said « *mais après WOPA j'ai connu beaucoup de choses, je ne pourrais plus faire le commerce, je peux maintenant faire la couture et la teinture* » her increased confidence in her new ability for skilled labor has makes her disdain her previous unskilled labor, she even said “*en faisant le commerce dans l'ignorance.*”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Interview with Graduate Student Number 6, WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 18 April 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Current Student 9. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 25 April, 2014.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Current Student 6. Student's House, Kribi Cameroon. 16 April 2014.

¹⁰³ Interview with Graduate Student 5. English Translation: But after WOPA I knew many things, I could not do that trade [because] I can now sew and dye cloth. AND “while doing trade, it's in ignorance.

IV. Conclusion, Suggestions for Further Research, and Suggested Way Forward

In conclusion, my hypotheses were confirmed by the findings, WOPA effectively designs and adapts its training program to respond to the needs of its participants lives, and the trainings offered adequately fit the local economy. Though over-competition in couture poses a challenge, it is not impossible to succeed. However, WOPA's long term efficacy is hampered by a lack of funds; without the ability to give micro-credit loans at the end of the training, participants struggle to begin working. WOPA's own internal economic sustainability is a critical question that emerged in my research, and which warrants further study.

My research was limited by time constraints compounded by struggles with my French ability; and I lacked the time and background in economics to thoroughly analyze WOPA's economic situation and provide suggestions. Future research by someone with a strong background in economics could aid WOPA to design ways to become internally self-sustaining and find niche openings in the local job market. As the former Delegate of Social Affairs pointed out, a particularly interesting question is whether WOPA could discover new fields of work in traditionally "masculine" sectors that could be increasingly open for women; at present the trainings provided by all the formation centers in Kribi are confined to gendered "feminine" sectors such domestic work, community health, and couture.¹⁰⁴

As WOPA searches to discover more sustainable funding, it hopes to once again distribute micro-credit loans which will help participants begin work after the formation. But in the meantime, WOPA needs to increase its clarity about what financial resources it is able to provide for current students, and should help them continue to formulate plans to find business capital on

¹⁰⁴ For more information on women and gendered sectors in Kribi, see Appendix B.

their own. To be sustainable empowerment, the feelings of self-efficacy and ability to “faire quelque chose” that the women have gained from WOPA needs to be fostered so that it creates economic empowerment as well. Without the funds to distribute micro-credit, the young women of WOPA need to be prepared to find funds elsewhere. As Current Student Number 6 said “WOPA donne beaucoup des capacités à une femme pour s’épanouir c’est à nous de savoir saisir l’opportunité. Si tu ne sais pas saisir est-ce qu’elle va venir te chercher chez toi pour te dire « Vas ouvrir ton atelier ? »¹⁰⁵

It is my earnest wish that WOPA will find sustainable partners and funding, but if it is able to once again distribute micro-credit there is still the concern that the majority of the young women will not be able to reimburse, just as the first year of students. WOPA’s one time seminar in Business Management should be extended to a periodic yearlong class, with a seminar at least once a month. This class could be utilized to spend more time teaching management and budgeting skills necessary for successful businesses and for successful micro-credit programs. Potentially Madame Folack could even have the graduated local student who is close to successfully paying back her micro-finance loan come and speak. The class could be an opportunity to create business plans which include possible sources of revenue to begin work.

Additionally, WOPA hopes to offer courses in French literacy in the future.¹⁰⁶ After a placement test, WOPA could design classes for primary and secondary school levels, and depending on each year’s class size these could further be broken down into elementary and

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Current Student 6. Student’s House, Kribi Cameroon. 16 April 2014. English Translation: WOPA gives a lot of capacities to a woman to flourish, it is up to us to seize the opportunity. If you do not know [to take advantage of the opportunity] is she [Madame Folack] going to pick you up at your house to tell you "Go open your sewing workshop?"

¹⁰⁶ Conversation with Madame Folack. Yaoundé, Cameroon. 5 April 2014.

intermediate levels, which would address the variation in students' education background. Classes could be compromised of literacy activities which would improve the low level of basic education amongst students. Though students respond well to the hands on classes of WOPA, a literacy program could enhance the practical trainings offered. Having sufficient general education and literacy in addition to practical skills would give students the possibility of growing future businesses or continuing their education, and could be an important step towards increased sustainability. Madame the Delegate said of WOPA's young women "*elles peuvent survivre*" with the trainings currently offered. Additional research to help WOPA find the funds to expand its program is necessary so that the young women can thrive, and not just survive.

Throughout my month of research I have been inspired by the compassion and commitment Madame Folack has for the young women of "*Le Centre d'Éducation et Formation de la Femme,*" and the courage and tenacity of the young women as they struggle and hope to provide for their families. Though economic success and empowerment in the real world is far more difficult than understanding WOPA's training classes, I hope that the same principle applies, and that with "*la volonté*" which these women have in abundance, they will be able to succeed.

V. Appendix A: Works Referenced

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(All Interviews in French)

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- Interview with Current Student 6. Student's House, Kribi Cameroon. 16 April 2014.
- Interview with Current student 7. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 14 April 2014.
- Interview with Current Student 9. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 25 April, 2014.
- Preliminary Interview with Current Student 1. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 7 April 2014.
- Preliminary Interview with Current Student 3. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 7 April 2014.
- Preliminary Interview with Current Student 6. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 7 April 2014.
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- Interview with Graduate Student Number 4. Student's Home, Kribi Cameroon. 17 April 2014.
- Interview with Graduate Student Number 5. WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 18 April 2014.
- Interview with Graduate Student Number 6, WOPA Office, Kribi Cameroon. 18 April 2014.
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V. Appendixes B. Additional Information and Perspectives on Women and Gendered Sectors of Work in Kribi.

From an Interview with M. Ngui, Dieudonné Bernard, L'Ancien Délégué d'Affaires Sociales. WOPAOffice, Kribi Cameroon. 15 April 2014. French and English.

Anna: Quand j'ai demandé "Si la formation en couture et restauration et les autres marchent bien à Kribi ? », vous avez dit « Oui » mais aussi vous avez dit aussi « Il faut diversifier un peu l'échange » pouvez-vous expliquer plus ? Vous avez dit « WOPA forme les jeunes filles qui ont travaillé dans le ménage, mais il faut diversifier l'échange. »

M. Ngui Dieudonné Bernard : J'ai dit ceci : À WOPA, comme dans d'autres centres, c'est presque la même chose : la couture, la restauration, mais moi je pense que il faut diversifier, pour donner la chance aux filles de faire d'autres choses. Bon, alors, nous sommes ici à Kribi à la mer, dans une ville touristique, il y a des hôtels, il y a les touristes qui arrivent, alors si on pouvait étendre les métiers à ces secteurs-là, les secteurs touristiques, ça allait être bien, ça ferait qu'il y aurait beaucoup des métiers, et on diversifierait les métiers des femmes. Par exemple dans le cadre des accompagnateurs touristique, dans le cadre des hôtesse d'accueil, on peut. Si on diversifier c'est très bien, ça pourrait donner d'avantage d'emplois aux jeunes filles. Et ici on a l'impression que les métiers couture, ça n'élève pas beaucoup la femme, il faut aussi lui donner l'occasion de se valoriser.

Anna : Merci beaucoup. Oh, aussi, Madame Le Délégué a répondu à ma question, mais à votre avis est-ce que la concurrence (parce que beaucoup des femmes travaillent en la couture) est-ce que la concurrence un problème ici? Ou non ?

M. Ngui Dieudonné Bernard : Non, mais disons que c'est des métiers, à mon avis, déjà dépassés parce que il y a un phénomène le phénomène de la friperie qui est venu parce que les gens s'habillent en friperie, bon qui fait en sorte que le métier, la couture, ne donne plus. Je vous dire que de plus en plus même les femmes ont tendance à aller vers la friperie. Si bien que ceux qui font dans la couture n'ont pas beaucoup de travail. Ce qui fait qu'à force de former beaucoup de gens en couture on crée parfois les gens qui sont formés, mais qui ont peu de revenu du fait que les gens ne sollicitent plus beaucoup celles qui font dans la couture parce qu'il y a déjà beaucoup. Avec l'effet de la friperie, ça fait que la tendance à aller vers la couture baisse un peu. C'est pour ça que je disais qu'il faut un peu diversifier. Faites une enquête, demandez un peu aux femmes qui font la couture si ça leur rapporte. Elles ne peuvent pas avoir suffisamment d'argent en exerçant seulement la couture. C'est ce que je pense.

Anna: Et aussi vous avez dit les femmes manquent la confiance en elles-mêmes. Quelles sont des autres problèmes sociologiques, et dans la mentalité, qui sont les obstacles pour l'éducation et formation de la femme ?

M. Ngui Dieudonné Bernard : Oui, il y a d'abord, comme Madame le Délégué disait, le premier obstacle à la femme c'est la femme elle-même parce que dans la tête elle a la mentalité d'être assistée, elle attend tout de l'homme. Moi, j'étais en Afrique du Sud il y a quelque chose qui m'a intéressé beaucoup. Lorsque par exemple il y a quelque chose à faire on a une prise en charge de

la maison l'homme donne la moitié, la femme donne la moitié, donc pour montrer que les deux êtres sont égaux. Mais ici la femme attend seulement l'homme, elle ne veut pas contribuer, c'est un problème de mentalité. Elle veut toujours être assistée. Il faut que ça change pour qu'elle pense qu'elle ne dépend pas trop de l'homme. C'est ça qui crée des blocages, et ces blocages-là ce ça que j'appelle « L'éducation sexiste. » C'est-à-dire que dès le bas âge, dès la petite enfance, on a éduqué, dans notre culture, on a éduqué, on a montré que l'homme est supérieur à la femme, et qu'il y a les travaux que l'homme doit faire, et que la femme ne doit pas faire.

Anna: Un type de travail c'est pour les hommes, ce c'est pour les femmes ?

M. Nguï Dieudonné Bernard : Oui, et ça montre toujours la supériorité de l'homme sur la femme, c'est comme ça que on a formaté la société, tu vois non ? On dit que la femme est une personne qui n'a doit pas être là où les hommes sont. On essaie toujours d'inférioriser la femme. Tu comprends ce que j'ai dit ? L'éducation sexiste...les femmes soient toujours en bas et les hommes, en haut. Il y a les travaux qui sont pour les hommes, et les travaux pour les femmes, et généralement les travaux qui sont seulement pour les femmes, c'est les travaux subalternes. Et les travaux de valeur, sont réservés aux hommes. Ça participe dans la mentalité de la femme, qui du fait qu'on l'ai éduqué comme ça, on pense qu'elle n'a rien à faire, elle doit être seulement assistée par les hommes. Et c'est ça qui la bloque, elle ne réfléchit pas parce qu'elle attend toujours que c'est l'homme qui doit décider à sa place.

From an interview with Madame Rachel Bilouer, le Délégué de la Promotion de La Femme et La Famille de l'Océan à Kribi. Délégation De la Promotion de la Femme et La Famille, Kribi Cameroun. 8 April 2014. French.

The Former Delegate of Social Affairs was also present, and I asked whether women currently work as tour guides in Kribi.

Anna: Est-ce que les femmes fait ça maintenant? Ou non ?

Madame : Pour le moment les femmes ne font pas ça. Mais je pense elles peuvent commencer faire ça. Peut-être c'est le genre de travail...Moi, je pense ce un peu délicate pour la femme.

Later in the interview.

Anna : Vous avez dit les femmes ne travaillent pas dans la zone touristique, elles ne sont pas les guides touristique. À votre avis, quelles sont les raisons ? Pourquoi?

M. Nguï Dieudonné Bernard: Pour être guide touristique il faut suivre une formation.

Madame : Il y a la formation.

M. Nguï Dieudonné Bernard : Il faut déjà qu'il y ait cette offre de formation pour que les femmes soient aussi les guides touristiques. Vous voyez c'est la chance qu'on peut explorer. On vous a dit que les femmes aiment la facilité. C'est facile de vite faire le poisson que d'aller se

faire former comme guide touristique, c'est ça.

Madame : Pour moi, je me dis que c'est une activité où les femmes ne sont pas encore intéressées. Mais si on commence déjà à les intéresser, je me dis que quand une va commencer, les autres vont suivre. Il faut d'abord intéresser les femmes à cette activité-là leur montrer que si l'homme peut faire, elles aussi peuvent le faire. C'est question d'habitude, on n'a pas encore habitué la femme à mener cette activité.

Anna : On pense que c'est une activité des hommes?

Madame : Voilà!

M. Ngui Dieudonné Bernard : Et même très peu d'hommes le font. C'est des métiers qui ne sont pas connus.

Madame : Beaucoup de gens ne connaissent pas ce métier.

M. Ngui Dieudonné Bernard : Alors que si on sort ces petits métiers on essaie de montrer l'importance de ces métiers, ça va marcher. Comme je dis les guides touristiques partout ailleurs dans les grands pays comme le Kenya même au Sénégal on trouve les femmes qui sont introduites dans ces petits métiers-la qui rapportent beaucoup d'argent. Alors qu'ici là on encourage les femmes à faire la restauration, couture et coiffure et c'est tout, ils doivent donner des alternatives de travail aux femmes.