

Life as an Intern at BRIA



Report on my
internship at the
Better Rice Initiative
Asia
from 1st of July until
30th of September
2016
By *Sofie Heintz*

Activities:

- Set-up and regular update of databases that monitor the implementation of the project's objectives in the four countries
- Support for internal evaluation processes such as impact reports
- Re-organisation and translation (English-German) of the existing project archive (DMS)
- Edit and fact-check for quarterly reports
- Draft of the project's annual report
- Draft of a hand out containing facts, figures and success stories of the project and the Southeast Asian rice sector
- Support for preparation and evaluation of the regional in-house workshop
- Minutes keeper

In what way was the internship connected to my studies?

My three months internship at the Better Rice Initiative Asia in Bangkok allowed me to gain deep insight into the daily business of a project that is concerned with agricultural development cooperation. The solely theoretical knowledge I had acquired beforehand during

my university courses was complimented by my assignment mostly focused on Monitoring and Evaluation. These tasks allowed me to observe and assess the various activities regarding the implementation of the project in its four countries of operation; Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. Since the project is set up on a public-private partnership of the German public sector and different companies of the private sector, its implementation is not solely targeted at basic agricultural development aid and food security but also aims to render the rice value chain more sustainable environmentally and economically. During my internship I therefore learned about the characteristics of the rice sector and its implications in Southeast Asia, but also about its connection to the private sector and thus international trade. I think these insights have greatly contributed to my understanding of economics and trade and to the agricultural sector in the developing world, benefitting my knowledge in the field of international relations. Because of the multinational implementation of the project, the Monitoring and Evaluation assignments also allowed me to get to know and compare the rice sectors and its different practices in four countries, relating to my study focus in comparative politics.

What was particularly enjoyable and what was challenging?

The goal of this internship was set during my application process; I wanted to broaden my to this point only theoretical knowledge about development cooperation and fully understand how a development cooperation project is implemented. My path towards this goal during these three months was not only extremely instructive but also great fun. The colleagues at BRIA were a set of very bright people that deliberately and always politely advised me and shared their knowledge with me in every way I could have wished for. To be able to learn from such a supportive environment was a great and rare opportunity. I also greatly appreciated that I was assigned to work on tasks independently from the beginning of my stay. Although it was somewhat challenging at first to get an overview over all the different activities of BRIA, its relation to BMZ and the private partners and the differing objectives in the project countries, the assignments were always informative and helped me understand the modus operandi of an implementation-oriented organisation.

My mentor and supervisor Dr. Juejan Tangtermthong met with me regularly to discuss my tasks and to track progress. Her guidance was always encouraging, respectful and constructive and through her I got a first impression about the importance and also the challenges of Monitoring and Evaluation in the context of a regional project.

Albeit I supported mainly Monitoring and Evaluation for BRIA, I also occasionally helped out colleagues in other departments and in connected projects. The flexible working dynamics easily adapting to changing workflows at BRIA and other GIZ-implemented projects create a diversified working atmosphere that I thoroughly enjoyed and tried my best to accomplish the varying tasks assigned to me.

The cultural aspects of daily life in Thailand struck me as highly interesting, but also very different from customs in my home country. Because I did not know about the details of the concept of 'face' and the different perception of respect in Thailand in the beginning, I was trying to be as wary as possible not to offend anyone with my behaviour, which might have inhibited straightforward communication in the beginning of my stay. After some time, however, I felt that I grew accustomed to the Thai mentality and as I was always treated very nicely and openly, my initial shyness diminished and I felt free to ask questions and discuss more candidly. Therefore, I value this internship not only in terms of work experience, but also as a great opportunity for intercultural exchange.

Apart from the great work experience, the daily life in Bangkok appealed to me more than I would have expected. It was the first time I spent three months alone in an Asian capital and to organise my daily life and household surely helped me to evolve to a more mature person.

To what extent did I gain new insights?

The concept of uniting public and private funds to benefit development cooperation was new to me. This newly-won knowledge about how a partnership with the private sector can increase the scope of a project and help it to have a sustainable impact on production

practices and the value chain broadened my horizon in terms of development and helped me understand the complexity of multilaterally strengthened international cooperation.

Due to the fact that my internship was taking place in the Regional Secretariat of BRIA, I also witnessed the opportunities and challenges that are connected to the regional context of a project implemented in four different countries. The work of the Regional Secretariat adapts itself to the country offices and vice versa; this dynamism of all colleagues involved is a crucial factor of succeeding in the implementation and achieving the project's overall objectives. Before my stay I was not aware of such working mobility and it impressed me a lot.

Moreover, I thoroughly enjoyed partaking in a series of meetings that were centred on the proposal writing process for a future project. Although I did not contribute much to the proposal writing, I immensely valued these meetings as the discussions themselves were highly informative and I was able to learn a lot about the rice sector in Thailand and its particular role in international trade, food security and crop certification.

In what way did the internship benefit my studies?

My time at BRIA and especially the tasks assigned to me in Monitoring and Evaluation and my partaking in the proposal process meetings encouraged the wish to pursue my studies in the field of development. As much as I enjoy university courses, I came to realize that to really find the way to my potential future career I had to acquire a sense of the day-to-day business of this metier. This glimpse into the agricultural development and food security business allowed me to reassess my interests and left me eager to find out more. I also profited from the fact that during my time at the office there was another intern and a trainee who had both just completed their studies. Because they were already more acquainted with development topics and finished university very recently, they were very helpful to advise me on the range of Master programs connected to development work that there actually are.

Ultimately I feel that the benefits I gained during these three months were not only connected to work and my future career, but rather importantly this intercultural experience also made me grow as a person, helped me to become more independent and thoughtful of different cultural backgrounds and different approaches to work and life.

What would be suggestions to GIZ for future interns?

While applying for this internship I was told that normally GIZ accepts interns who have already finished a part of their studies or students that use this internship as a base for a future thesis or field study. Since this was not the case for me I am not sure if my experience and suggestions can be extrapolated to other interns; however, one aspect that should be helpful to coordinate an intern's tasks during his assignment at GIZ would be to set up an internship plan in the very beginning in order to keep track of the activities conducted by the intern as well as to witness the personal development. However, since my internship was devoted to gain an overview over the project's activities and I lacked proficient technical knowledge in the field of development, I feel this would not have been practicable in my case, so the dynamic and adapting way my mentor suggested tasks for me was actually directed to achieve the main goal for my internship set by GIZ; to learn about the complexity and the various work mechanisms of an project in development cooperation.

Other than that I experienced GIZ as an organisation, which puts people and their respective talents to use very efficiently, including interns. From the beginning I was entrusted to work independently on tasks that were useful for the project, which people told me is rare in other companies. My work always felt valued and the level of complexity of my tasks increased with time according to my progress. GIZ has proved to me to be a very dynamic organisation and was able to provide me with an unique opportunity to gain first work experience, broaden my horizon and reassure me in my wishes for future studies.

Summary of the key outputs of this internship

The key outputs of this internship include;

- Set up of monitoring databases, which describe and assess the activities of BRIA in the four countries against aggregated indicators and against country components as a means to assess the success and progress of implementation by both the Regional Secretariat and the country offices. The information was drawn from reports, plans of operation and direct communication with the country offices.
- Update of the most important country activities contributing to the county objectives in the RBMs constructed and maintained by my supervisor Dr. Juejan Tangtermthong.
- Support for GIZ internal impact reports by researching and compiling information about the BRIA impact.
- Re-organising folders and files in the project's online archive (DMS) for a better overview and easier access to important information
- Support for editing and fact-checking the quarterly reports by clarifying information with the country teams and researching further details for a better understanding
- Organising and researching information for the project's annual report by drawing information from the aforementioned quarterly reports, progress reports about trainings, conducted studies, newsletters, plans of operation and communication with the country offices.
- Developed content for the project's website and rearranged existing content for easier handling
- Contributed to Communication and Public Relations by submitting an article for the newsletter on the project's progress against aggregated indicators. Furthermore compiled facts and figures and wrote short paragraphs on each country's most successful implementation activity.
- Contributed summaries of studies on cost-benefit analyses for crop certification for the cost-benefit analysis and the barrier analysis of the Rice NAMA project proposal.
- Researched and filled in information about GIZ-implemented agricultural projects in the Southeast Asian region for Annex 3 of the Rice NAMA project proposal.
- Helped during the preparation of the regional in-house workshop held in Medan in terms of organisation; participant lists, name tags, etc.
- Assisted in the post-workshop evaluation by analysing feedback forms and constructing graphics and tables showing the satisfaction of the participants.
- Kept minutes for meetings.

“Hereby I would like to thank GIZ and BRIA for making the three months of this internship a valuable first step in my work experience that I will certainly cherish and remember.”