

EcoPeace Middle East Internship Reflection
September 3, 2016
Sarah Dahnke

My time with EcoPeace Middle East granted me the opportunity for personal growth and gave me a sense of what it was like to work in the region. More than that, it taught me some valuable lessons that I will use throughout my career in water management in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). It showed me what sustainable, cross-border water management looks like, and what community-driven development means to people on the ground. It affirmed that I could be a valued member in a regional nonprofit organization. Most importantly, it instructed me on how to work ethically in my field.

As a graduate student studying water management in the MENA region, I was familiar with the literature on water issues. However, it was not until I began my internship in the Amman office that I began to understand what water management looked like in practice. I accompanied my mentors on field visits where we saw, first hand, the massive sinkholes created by the recession of the Dead Sea. We visited communities in the Jordan Valley where a lack of sewage infrastructure left communities unable to safely dispose of their liquid waste, and I witnessed a model of sustainable development and tourism during my stay in the EcoPark in northern Jordan. This on-the-ground experience radically changed how I think about development, and how I will approach water management in my career.

My time with EcoPeace reinforced the belief that I can and will be a valued member of a regional nonprofit organization. The support and trust of my mentors allowed me to test my strengths and correct my weaknesses. I was treated as an equal member of the team and asked for my opinion in cross-border meetings and site visits. I was given challenging tasks, from assisting on proposals for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to planning content and learning objectives for regional environmental seminars. Each and every day I felt as though I was a valued member of the EcoPeace team. This encouraged me to speak up more, volunteer for more challenging assignments, and grow more from the experience.

Lastly, my internship with EcoPeace has taught me how to be a better and more ethical practitioner in my field. My mentors taught me how to work in a cross-border and cross-cultural context by including me in Skype meetings with their Palestinian and Israeli counterparts. Even when they were not explicitly working with me to develop or strengthen a skill, my mentors' working styles implicitly informed my work. Their actions instructed me not only on proper conduct, but also on ethical practices in the field of development. From greeting their Israeli colleagues in Hebrew to taking the time to listen to a local community member, my supervisors acted in a manner that invited civility and respect. What I will remember most from my time with EcoPeace is not the environmental statistics or the program-specific interventions, but the way I was taught how to do the most good with my career.