The long-term benefits of supporting maternal health do not always seem apparent but that is why organizations like the Center for Environment and Population (CEP) and Friends of UNFPA play such an important role in promoting the advantages of funding reproductive health initiatives. Over the course of my fellowship/internship in the organization I learned how interconnected the various components are in achieving the ultimate goal of a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person’s potential is fulfilled. Without the support of any one, no progress can or will be made.

I began my fellowship open and prepared for whatever tasks might be presented to me. As I had not worked previously in an office setting, let alone in an NGO, I wanted the opportunity to hold a position in an organization that promotes women’s health. Because this academic year will be my senior and final year in college, this kind of professional experience is pertinent in helping me decide what direction to take in my career. My background with women and women’s rights issues gave me foundational knowledge upon which I hoped to gain further exposure by becoming involved on an international level but besides that, I knew little about the overall mission of the Center for Environment and Population (CEP) and Friends of UNFPA, or really of the broader international reproductive health movement. I therefore wanted to come out of my internship knowing more about women’s reproductive health than I began with and to have a better idea of the direction I hope to take with my career.

In addition to realizing my more general goal of immersion into women’s rights and reproductive health work, I had great success in fulfilling many concrete assignments over the course of the summer. The specific tasks to which I was assigned developed as time progressed and as I focused my own interests and I am very pleased with the outcome of my work. I approached each task as a challenge and went into everything knowing there is always room for learning and improvement. I learned that good communication between intern/employee and supervisor is absolutely essential in fostering a successful team built upon hard work and trust. I learned that good work takes time. Progress in women’s health and empowerment isn’t something that will happen over night and it isn’t something that can be done standing alone. In terms of more concrete examples of what I accomplished while at the CEP/Friends of UNFPA
During my internship, I worked with the Marketing and Communications teams and achieved the following:

- Learned the ins and outs of working in an office environment including the expectations for performance.

- Improved my own understanding of how to use social media and widened the scope of our online presence through frequent updates to Twitter and Facebook accounts.

- Drafted a factsheet/biography for one of the two Friends of UNFPA International Honorees sent to Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin and other Friends of UNFPA supporters.

- Drafted the content of the Friends of UNFPA online newsletter sent to donors and subscribers.

- Updated and enhanced the Friends of UNFPA online newsletter. Posted a project report for the UNFPA Reproductive Health kit fundraising initiative.

- Complied a list using Cision Point database of media contacts in the Minneapolis/St. Paul region for an email advisory sent to publicize the Friends of UNFPA film screening held in Minneapolis on July 16th. Followed up with phone calls to each individual contacted.

- Researched remarks from key leaders in reproductive health issues for placement on our Pinterest account. These quotations were made part of a “Words to live by” Pinterest board and were re-pinned by the UN.

- Learned to market and promote for Friends of UNFPA and for the greater mission of the organization by using key language and communications strategies to better target our audiences and to bring in new supporters.

In recent months and years, the faulty economy has done more than just cause families in the US to reduce day-to-day spending. National markets have cut back on domestic spending for programs within their own borders and on investments with global reach. Our own government - one of the largest and historically supportive contributors to UNFPA - has even questioned reducing their own annual giving in order to reduce budgetary expenses. So why is it that initiatives allocating financial support to family planning and reproductive health programs are often the first to be eliminated? Such measures signal a bigger trend among donor governments and organizations, a trend that leaves millions of women without adequate health services. The greatest challenge faced in reproductive health issues is the urgent need for sustained commitments for reproductive health programs around the world. All of which stems from a misunderstanding of reproductive health and a disconnect between action and results. What we are left with is a world in which millions are simply denied one of their most basic rights. When
we do not understand what our money is financing or do not have clear-cut results to refer to, why fund at all?

Convincing donor governments of this reality is a hard task as they are often unwilling to pledge financial support to programs that inherently will not show instantaneous results. The long-term benefits of investments to reproductive health services do not become immediately apparent thus are frequently cast as risky because of uncertain payback. We see the direct result (prevention of unwanted pregnancies, healthier and empowered women) but beyond that, outcomes seem scattered and vague to the untrained eye.

After this internship experience, I have learned the important role organizations such as CEP and Friends of UNFPA plays in bridging the gap between policy makers/funders and the results they wish to see. From our perspective it seems the results these funds bring are unmistakable. Reverberations created by simply providing women with the right to choose when, if at all, to have children are not only felt by a woman herself but also by the greater community. Empowered and healthy women bring lower infant mortality rates and higher literacy rates (as girls are less likely to drop out of school due to unintended pregnancy) are just two to name. The implications from here multiply reaching to the very top of the chain of results, a stronger global economy and a sustainable future.

Our role in this equation is to connect the dots. Without the advocacy and education work that CEP and Friends of UNFPA does in the US and abroad, actions would not be connected with their results. During my time as an intern and fellow in the organization, I delivered confirmations of the successes UNFPA has in the field as testaments to the necessity of continued support. By connecting our audiences with the results and the implications of those results we demonstrate the importance of sustained investments for reproductive health. The role I played during my time here is one that will help in ensuring the continuation and further development of our mission. While those providing the funds are incredibly important and necessary, without the voices of passionate individuals to make the case for women’s rights there wouldn’t be the impetus for action.

I am a savvy young person who has grown up in close contact with the ever-expanding virtual domain; I have the ability to give many others reasons to become involved in supporting women everywhere by harnessing these new technologies. Enhancing these outlets brings our issues to the people and allows them to join the conversation in a way not before possible.
Among many of the projects I worked on during my fellowship, what I see as being forefront in the future of reproductive health issues is effective utilization of new communications outlets to promote awareness. We can target new audiences to reinvigorate our principal messages while reinforcing long established partnerships. Remaining on top of trends in media and further advancing with these trends we guarantee a place in affecting the issues.

Blog Entry

Elizabeth Moulic is a member of the class of 2013 at Smith College. She just completed a joint Fellowship with the Center for Environment and Population (CEP) and Friends of UNFPA in NY. She is a rising senior studying French Studies and Government who serves as a Head Resident for the Residential Life Staff with the college. For the 2011-2012 academic year, Elizabeth studied at the Université de Genève in Geneva, Switzerland where she took courses in Swiss Feminism, International Politics and Political Linguistics and where she thoroughly enjoyed living la vie française. Prior to her CEP fellowship, Elizabeth interned at a domestic violence shelter in her hometown of Poughkeepsie, New York where she gained exposure to the advocacy and support system offered to victims of family violence. She has a strong interest in ensuring the rights of women in international development and hopes to pursue a career in maternal and child public health.

Evidence from new numbers on maternal mortality show that progress is coming but in order to sustain funding so that these statistics continue to drop, it falls upon passionate individuals to connect this data to the bigger picture and to show to what these numbers mean. My experience this summer as a Fellow of the Center for Environment and Population (CEP) and Friends of UNFPA in NY has not only taught me a lot about reproductive health, it has opened my eyes to the ways in which I can to contribute to bettering the lives of women. I come out of my fellowship with the desire to continue mobilizing funds and awareness for women and girls everywhere but with a slightly different approach than I went in with. I want to work directly from the standpoint of the implementer as someone who bridges the gap between program funding and program implementation. In that role, I will have contact with the issues in such a way that will allow me to be a better-informed advocate and policy maker. After completing my undergraduate studies, I want to go on to a MPH program where I plan to concentrate in maternal and child health. With a degree in public health and my passion for women’s rights, I want to work for an organization where I can promote both.

Many people are hesitant to fund projects where there is not clarity in how exactly that money will be used. Now that I have an understanding of the difficult task program fundraisers
hold in galvanizing support to underwrite these projects, I want to translate this experience into a path where I can offer concrete evidence of the efficacy of resources in advancing reproductive health. Much of the work I did this summer provided this evidence by telling and retelling stories of UNFPA’s success and I hope to further develop these skills into a career as a delegate for women’s health.