I spent this summer working with Clean Fund (CF) in Sausalito, CA. Clean Fund’s mission is to finance energy upgrades and clean energy installations within the commercial real estate industry in the US. The only catch is that they use Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) legislature to enable their financing, which means they have to wait until PACE goes live in each state before they can provide their services. As an intern at CF, I helped with sales origination research, build their database for better tracking with their channel partners, learn about the economics of clean energy financing as well as the numerous technologies emerging out of clean tech innovations.

This summer’s experience shed a lot of light about the type of work culture I envision being a part of in my 20s, as well as revealing a lot about what I was actually passionate about. Going back to clean technology, I would want to work in learning about how to make it a viable option for emerging markets and developing countries i.e. sustainable energy development as compared to sustainable energy substitution.

Some of the biggest successes I garnered this summer include sitting in on a strategic meeting with a CEO of a leading Silicon Valley energy start-up (I am not allowed to disclose the name of the company because technically, I was not there). This gave me the opportunity to see company growth from the perspective of the CEO, and to have a better understanding of the pressures that come with that post. In as far as office work is concerned, I learnt about the importance of intentional data architecture in creating transparency and clear progress-measuring metrics. It turns out this can save a company millions of dollars in the long run, if it is done right from the get-go. This work involved gaining an aptitude for managing data in Excel spreadsheets and learning how to harness modern CRM (customer-relations management) tools like Salesforce.

My biggest challenges this summer were keeping myself motivated with the work we were doing. I have a passion for working with emerging markets and being at the cutting edge of innovation. At times it felt like we were so focused on the rich parts of the world. Working at CF made me realize I have a lot of skills to acquire from working under someone else’s wing. There is a lot that intrapreneurship can reveal to the entrepreneur. I find entrepreneurs...
always tend to be big picture types – affixed to the vision with unwavering clarity, but sometimes not fully understanding what it will take to get to that level. I think this experience showed me that a great entrepreneur and/or senior executive really needs to have a basic grasp of how institutional endeavors will be achieved and why they matter. This understanding can also help an organization be more efficient by focusing on efficiency projects that are worthwhile.

This summer's experience has challenged my assumptions about the pros and cons of working in the private sector, especially doing analyst/junior roles. I have always questioned the value of doing grunt analyst work. So much of it is doing work that those in management do not want to do, such as Googling properties and calling up companies for basic information. I saw quite a lot of that in my position, but I was also exposed to great learning opportunities that would have not been as readily available had I been an entrepreneur. I think there is a lot of value in one working under a large organization with many connections in different industries. It has made me consider looking for a job in management consulting during the senior year job hunt.

I will look back very fondly on my summer experience. This experience parlayed seamlessly with my journey so far. Clean Fund gave me a taste of working with a young organization with a societal mission in the private sector, whereas Save the Children – Mozambique (SCIMOZ) gave me a chance to work in the not-for-profit sector with an established organization. I am very thankful to the CSE for giving me this opportunity.