



Villagers in Sierra Leone, where Chengguang Zhao (below) worked with CRS.

## Chengguang Zhao, CRS Sierra Leone

**B**y the time of my fourth fall, I had enough experience to be able to twist my body in midair and aim my landing on a soft spot on the road, which just happened to be my rider's body. There was still room for improvement, of course. I was not able to extract my right leg fast enough and the motorbike's weight landed on my knee, bruising it for the fourth time in two days. I didn't know development was a contact sport.

I was in the field collecting baseline data for the food for education project I was working on. Food for education is a USDA funded school feeding program with the object of increasing school attendance by off-setting the opportunity cost of sending children to school instead of sending them to work in the farm. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is not alone in providing food to school children; the World Food



Program (WFP) is also implementing a school feeding program. The main difference between their program and ours is location. WFP only works in schools which are easy to reach, but CRS has chosen to target the most remote corners.

I remember thinking to myself, "How remote could they be?" Sierra Leone is such a small country on the map that the remotest corner is less than 200 miles from Freetown as the crow flies. But people can't fly and food can't fly; we have to rely on the road, and that is the problem. Sitting on the backseat of a TVS Victor, I was a powerless spectator watching my rider battle with a sadistic road god. Boulders and loose gravel, steep inclines and sudden drops,

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## What is IPED'S International Peace & Development (IPD) Travel Scholarship?

All matriculated IPED students in good academic standing are invited to apply for the IPD Travel Scholarships and up to four are offered each year. Scholarship recipients spend six months at the conclusion of their studies working overseas with an international non-profit relief and development agency. For Spring 2009, the IPD Travel Scholarships are in partnership with Catholic Relief Services. One student each was assigned to the Sierra Leone, El Salvador, and Honduras Offices of Catholic Relief Services.

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## *Bridget Bucardo Rivera, CRS El Salvador*



Price volatility, barriers to market entry, fair trade. These are terms we hear over and over again as students studying international economic development in the IPED program. But through my internship with CRS/El Salvador, I have learned what these terms represent in the real lives of thousands of smallholder coffee producers in Central America.

The production and sale of coffee is an important livelihood for many small producers in rural El Salvador. Coffee prices are notoriously volatile. Lack of machinery and capital make it difficult for smallholder farmers to produce coffee that meets fair trade or organic quality standards and the quantity needed to export.

As part of my internship with CRS/El Salvador I am working on a project called Coffee Assistance for Enhanced Livelihoods (CAFÉ Livelihoods). CAFÉ Livelihoods is

a three-year, four-country initiative that will assist 7,100 smallholder coffee producers in Central America and Mexico to improve production practices in order to access high-value markets, including organic and fair trade. In El Salvador, CRS is working with three local partners to assist 900 smallholder coffee producers. For them, volatile coffee prices mean volatile household incomes. In their lives, barriers to market entry mean that while they



would love to produce fair trade or organic coffee, they lack the machinery and capital necessary to do so.

Through the CAFÉ Livelihoods Project, CRS and its partners are

working to address and overcome these challenges. We are working with farmers to rehabilitate their coffee farms and sharing best practices on harvesting to improve coffee quality. The project will provide the small infrastructure, such as drying patios, needed by farmers to process and prepare coffee for local sale or export. We are also working with farmers to increase their awareness on coffee quality standards through competitions and cupping events. Finally, we will assist coffee producers in engaging high-value markets in order to receive a better price for their coffee. This increase in income translates into improved livelihoods for smallholder producers. When farmers receive a consistently higher price for their coffee, they can provide for their families and secure their right to a dignified life. Now, the technical terms I learned during IPED have taken on new meaning.

## John Briggs, CRS Honduras



*John Briggs with new friends up in the mountains bordering Honduras*

I am standing in a courtyard surrounded by the sounds of hammers, saws, and busy youth. I just met with the directors of Escuela Taller, a vocational school that offers training to the youth of Comayagua, Honduras. The training center is a perfect fit for the technical skills CRS hopes to provide to 70 youth over the next two years.

Comayagua, the original capital of Honduras, lies in an expansive, arid plain two hours north of the current capital, Tegucigalpa. Two months ago, I moved to Tegucigalpa to begin an internship with CRS. Twice a week I drive to Comayagua where I work with our local partner, Caritas. Together with Caritas, we are initiating *Youth Build*, a project that will offer at-risk and gang-involved youth with options for meaningful and sustainable livelihoods.

In Central America, youth from poor families have little or no access to quality education or employment opportunities. With over 60% of the population living in poverty, more than a quarter of the region's youth are sitting on urban street corners, out of school and out of work. Another 37% of youth work in the informal sector due to lack of skills. As these unemployed and unskilled youth search for income and identity, gang memberships are often the best offer.

In overcoming these obstacles, the skills provided by Escuela Taller are at the center of the *Youth Build* project. For five months, the youth will study a specific technical field and practice that skill in a real life work site. Through this voluntary community service, the youth will gain a new and positive image in the community. But beyond construction, cooking, or welding the youth will also receive classes in math, language, life skills, and

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*John Briggs* Continued from page 3



*John Briggs (second from left) meeting with CRS co-workers.*

small business development. In the sixth month, the youth will move directly into an internship position related to their new skill or incubate a small business under the guidance of a micro-enterprise consultant.

In the past two months we have met and formed partnerships with local businesses, the mayor's office, the chamber of commerce, and community leaders. When coupled

with the new skill set, this community alliance will provide the youth options for meaningful employment. These partnerships demonstrate CRS' commitment to subsidiarity—empowering the local community to implement change. This core value is one of the most exciting and attractive aspects of working with and learning from CRS.

*Chengguang Zhao*

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deep gullies and stream fords were thrown at us in a bewildering number of combinations and permutations, but still he fights on. These battles would last for hours and then suddenly they would end, and a village would materialize out of thin air. Villagers gathered to stare at the first "whiteman" to set foot in their hamlets.

The actual surveys are a blur in my mind now, but the children chanting "Tenki! Tenki!" or "Thank you! Thank you!" as we sallied out into the jungle will reverberate in my heart for a long, long time. ■

**What is IPED?**

IPED stands for the International Political Economy and Development Program at Fordham University in New York City: a program that trains graduate students in the advanced interdisciplinary analysis of global economic relations and international development issues. Graduates frequently work as financial analysts in the private sector, economists and policy analysts in the public sector, and project managers in the non-profit sector.

