



BEYOND BORDERS

Reports from IPED's International Peace & Development Fellows

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WHAT IS IPED'S INTERNATIONAL PEACE & DEVELOPMENT (IPD) TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIPS?

All matriculated IPED students in good academic standing are invited to apply for IPED's International Peace & Development Travel Scholarships. 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 2010, the IPD Travel Scholarships were in partnership with Catholic Relief Services. One student each was assigned to Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and two to the Senegal Offices of Catholic Relief Services.

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PETER ANDREW GUTIERREZ, CRS RWANDA



Peter Gutierrez, amongst new friends in Rwanda

I found myself this rainy Saturday morning in a small room in Rulindo parish in the outskirts of Kigali. I am part of a team conducting the Mid-term Evaluation of the Community Healing and Reconciliation Project of Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

"Abafunguwe?" Several scattered hands went up across the room. These hands belong to those who had confessed to their participation in the genocide and had recently been released from prison. As the facilitator continued to quickly survey who were present in the room, my mind raced to the painful accounts I had read of the 1994 genocide, where one million Rwandans were

murdered, often betrayed by neighbors and friends. But as I looked at the hands going up, I was struck by the realization that *abafunguwe* were sitting side by side with witnesses against them in the courts, family members of genocide victims, even genocide survivors.

As we visited other parishes all over Rwanda during the course of the week, I encountered the same scene of perpetrators and victims together telling simple stories of forgiveness and healing. In Busoro, survivors invited released convicts to

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GYANU SHARMA, CRS SENEGAL



Gyanu Sharma (center) with fellow colleagues in CRS Senegal

I found out towards the end of my third semester that I was going to Dakar, Senegal on an IPED Peace and Development Travel Fellowship. I was excited, mostly because I had not been to anywhere in Africa before and I knew not either French (the official language of Senegal) or Wolof (the most popular among the many languages spoken here). It was also going to be my first time living and working in a Third World country other than my own.

In early January, I flew out of John F. Kennedy International Airport and after a 24 hour stopover in Casablanca, landed at Leopold Sedar Senghor International Airport in Dakar. A driver from CRS, Fallou, was there to pick me up. On our way back, Fallou pointed out the famous Statue of African Renaissance – taller than the Statue of Liberty, apparently – and a mosque built on the sea.

I am working for the West Africa Regional Office on projects to simplify the business processes at CRS. My internship involves improving various forms required to run an organization efficiently and writing instructions on how to use them. The forms are necessary for almost all transac-

tions at CRS, such as the Request for Goods, Request for Service, Request for Travel Allowance, and Request for Partner Advance etc. One of my tasks is to ensure that the forms comply with CRS policies. In addition, I am also working on setting up an Asset Management system at the Dakar office, with the goal of using the same system throughout CRS offices the West African region. Outside of work, one of the great pleasures of staying in Dakar has been to learn French and Wolof. I want to thank Fordham University for giving me the opportunity to live and explore this beautiful country. ■

PETER ANDREW
GUTIERREZ

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birthdays and other gatherings. In Hanika, neighbors with difficult pasts came together to work on each other's farmlands. These simple stories are testament to the peacebuilding work CRS has been doing in partnership with the Catholic Church. Since 1998, CRS and the Church have trained more than 30,000 facilitators on the gacaca

process (the local courts dealing with genocide crimes), reconciliation, peaceful conflict management, trauma healing.

Even as an outsider looking in, it is apparent that sixteen years later, the scars of the genocide still linger in the hearts and memories of many Rwandans. But the stories of courage, love and forgiveness I have witnessed make me grateful for the opportunity to be a small part of the work CRS is doing in helping heal these scars and building peace. ■

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.

JASON ENDAYA, CRS SIERRA LEONE



Jason Endaya (top, third from right) with project staff and some of the Food and Cash for Work beneficiaries in Waterloo.



"Tenki. God bless you." the last beneficiary, Aminata Kamara, says cheerfully to me after receiving 35,000 Leones (\$8.75)—her earnings for five days' worth of work. My colleagues and I have been disbursing cash to project beneficiaries in a town called Waterloo, a peri-urban area

in the Western Area Rural District (WARD) of Sierra Leone. More than a hundred and fifty male and female youth lined up under the sweltering sun to receive remuneration for participating in the Food and Cash for Work project that is being jointly implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and Caritas—Sierra Leone.

A quick glance at the disbursement registry for women gives a snapshot of the literacy rate in the community of Waterloo: out of 61 female beneficiaries, only 16 were able to put their signatures. The rest signed using their thumbs and an ink pad. Yet at present it is perhaps not illiteracy which is of urgent concern in Waterloo but hunger. According to government estimates, about 26% of the country's population is "food poor," and in the WARD where Waterloo is located, this insecurity is aggravated by a growing population and massive unemployment, espe-

cially among the youth. The Food and Cash for Work project aims to alleviate this food insecurity by providing cereals, pulses, oil and money to youth in exchange for building and improving community assets such as feeder-roads, which in turn will hopefully benefit livelihoods of the community in the longer term.

"Waterloo" usually connotes a place of defeat, but in people like Aminata, I see that this small Sierra Leonean town of Waterloo is clearly not a place of despair. Through the resiliency of the youth, and with the continued help of organizations like the WFP, CRS and Caritas, there is fervent hope that the only thing that will be defeated in this place is poverty. At the moment, I feel the deepest joy in working with CRS, in being present in Waterloo and seeing all this. As I watch Aminata leave, I think to myself, *No, Aminata... thank you. And may God bless you too.* ■

BLAIN CERNEY, CRS SENEGAL



Scene of a village bank in Senegal, where Blain Cerney (below, left) worked with CRS



After three days of no water, you learn to adapt and look for alternative solutions. In Thiès, Senegal, my home for the past two months, the solution is to be up before 5 am with a ready bucket; waking up any later means another day without water and another day without a bath. This is not a major concern when working in the field and traveling from village to village but when you work every day in an office people start to notice an unkempt appearance.

Thiès is Senegal's fourth largest

city and is the home for the headquarters of CAURIE-MF, a CRS Senegal Microfinance partner. Originally a program of CRS Senegal, the independent CAURIE-MF was formally created in October of 2005. Over the last five years the organization has developed into a self-sustainable institution and expanded its client base from 10,000 to 30,000. My task has been to discover and document the key moments of this transition.

Microfinance in Senegal is a rapidly growing industry and CAURIE-MF is one of Senegal's premier microfinance institutions. In 1996 there were only 120 Microfinance institutions, today there are over 1000. CAURIE-MF stands out from these groups because of its unique methodology that focuses on working exclusively with poor women, typically, although not solely, in rural communities. I have felt the effectiveness of the methodology through the firsthand testimony of its clients. Through conversations I have learned about the impact that the agency's loans have had upon the health, education and income of these women's families and seen firsthand the manner in which these women have been empowered.

My experience with CAURIE-MF is my first in Senegal. Learning the intricacies of microfinance in both French and Wolof, subjects that I am also currently learning, has been a tremendous challenge. Luckily I have been fortunate to have the support of CAURIE-MF and CRS. Working with such agencies has made my adaptation and search for alternative solutions much easier. ■



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