WHAT IS IPED'S INTERNATIONAL PEACE & DEVELOPMENT TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIP?

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 2011, these travel scholarships were in partnership with Catholic Relief Services. Students were assigned to East Timor, Ghana, and Sierra Leone.

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Michael Felix, CRS Ghana

As a Fordham Peace and Development Fellow working with CRS Ghana, I have had the great opportunity to work on a variety of development projects and assist in the provision of relief to victims of flooding and conflict. These have all been tremendous learning experiences.

When possible, CRS Ghana uses an innovative market-based approach to provide assistance to victims of natural disasters or humanitarian emergencies. In such cases, beneficiaries are typically given vouchers worth US $50 to $70 to use at a local market that is organized by CRS. Vendors are mobilized to accept voucher payment for a wide variety of predetermined items that vary depending on the nature of the emergency.

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Joseph Witwiw, Sierra Leone

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Joshua Kylerr, CRS East Timor

I arrived in East Timor on the 2nd of February 2011 for the start of a six month internship working with the CRS/Timor Leste Livelihood Department thanks to an International Peace and Development Fellowship from Fordham University. In December I received a three-page scope of work while visiting CRS headquarters in Baltimore. Thus far, I have been pleasantly surprised to find that the work it described matches a good deal of my daily activities. I have had the opportunity to work on developing project proposals; help conduct a needs assessment for the Livelihoods Program via literature reviews and stakeholder interviews; and learn a lot about CRS and Timor Leste in the process. In terms of looking at this opportunity through the lens of someone interested in starting a career in the field of development work—a field of such elusive and indeterminate parameters—this is certainly proving to be a fascinating place.

Interest in Timor by the outside world has been going on for centuries. It was a colony of Portugal; an occupied territory of Indonesia; and an official ward of the United Nations. Finally in 2002, it became the world’s newest democracy with one of the highest rates of per capita aid inflows in the world. CRS first came to Timor in 1979 to provide humanitarian assistance and food aid during Indonesian times. More recently, they have again worked in an emergency capacity in response to the outbreak of political violence—first in 1999 after the referendum on independence, and again in 2006, which led to many internal refugee camps on the outskirts of the capital Dili. While CRS still works on Peace Building and Governance as one of its main programs, they are starting to focus more on longer term development initiatives with two additional programs in health and livelihoods. My work has been mostly with the Livelihoods Program.

One of the reasons that livelihoods interventions are getting more attention is due to the pressing and immediate needs in terms of food security and malnutrition in rural Timor. Additionally, much of the donor community seems to have realized that its failure to focus on shorter term interventions with immediate economic benefits for the most vulnerable populations led to the recurrence of violence in 2006. Currently half the population of Timor is under the age of 18, and youth unemployment numbers range around 40%. The country as a whole is a net importer of grain, and rural families on average spend three months

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Joshua Kyler, East Timor

a year without enough food to eat. After subtracting oil
revenues, Timor has the lowest GDP per capita in Asia.
Finding ways to use the aid (and now oil) money to ad-
dress these issues has made it to the top of everyone’s
priority list.

The project proposal that I have been working on is
aimed at a donor from the US called Foods Resource
Bank. CRS is hoping to im-
plement a livelihoods project
with the dual objectives of
increasing maize yields of
upland farmers and decreasing
post-harvest losses. Current
yields are some of the
poorest in the world, and
losses can count for up to
30% of annual maize har-
est—hence the issue of
food insecurity. The pro-
posed project will use im-
proved maize varieties
(whether hybrid or geneti-
cally modified organisms) to
increase yields and im-
proved storage techniques to
decrease losses. The writing
process has been informa-
tive, but I am anxious for it
to be submitted and for the
real test—whether or not it
gets funded.

WHAT IS IPED?

IPED stands for the Interna-
tional Political Economy
and Development Program
at Fordham University in
New York City: a program
that trains graduate stu-
dents in the advanced in-
terdisciplinary analysis of
global economic relations
and international develop-
ment issues. Graduates
frequently work as finan-
cial analysts in the private
sector, economists and
policy analysts in the pub-
lic sector, and project man-
gers in the non-profit
sector.

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Michael Felix, Ghana

In February 2011, I was part
of one fair in Makongo, a
fishing village on the shores
of Lake Volta that had ex-
perienced severe flooding.
During that fair, vendors
offered staple foods, cloth-
ing, school supplies, build-
ing materials like cement and
roofing sheets, as well as
fishing nets. Continuing
their support of CRS
voucher fairs, Ghana Health
Services also sent a represen-
tative to participate in
the fair and accept voucher
payment for national health
insurance.

I was extremely impressed
by the way in which the
flood victims were able to
use the assistance provided
by CRS to respond to their
most pressing needs. Some
needed to rebuild homes
while others needed to rees-
atablish fishing businesses.
Many purchased one year’s
worth of health insurance,
providing a safety net and a
coping mechanism that up
until that point had re-
mained out of reach. When
the fair ended, vendors were
ecstatic that the equivalent
of tens of thousands of dol-
ars had been injected into
the local economy.

In April 2011, CRS Ghana
was asked by their traditi-
onal partner, the National
Catholic Secretariat (NCS),
to assist in establishing a
temporary center for refu-
gees fleeing political violence
in Côte d’Ivoire. As a mem-
ber of the CRS team, I went
to Osekojokrom, Ghana. I
assisted in several logistical
tasks with the aim of provid-
ing a safe, healthy, and dis-
nified refuge for victims of
conflict. The strength of our
team and our partners, in-
cluding the Government of
Ghana, NCS, and UNHCR
(United Nations High Com-
mision for Refugees), en-
abled us to quickly meet in-
ternational standards for
sanitation, water, hygiene,
and shelter despite many
difficulties.

Working in the midst of such
professionalism and efforts
to implement innovative
programming has been the
highlight of my work with
CRS thus far. All in all, my
experience as a Peace and
Development Fellow has
been an excellent comple-
ment to my academic train-
ing at Fordham University.
This week the Freetown office, which is normally buzzing with activity, went empty. The Global Fund Round 10 Field Assessment and the Partners’ Justice Workshop commenced in the same week, forming a perfect storm. The Global Fund grant aims to fight malaria in Sierra Leone with the help of district health centers. CRS/SL will assess the centers’ capacities for the project prior to implementation and budgeting. Meanwhile, the Partners’ Justice Workshop tackles major issues of injustice in conjunction with church partners. Many staff dispersed to fulfill these tasks outside the city, while others remained behind faithfully supporting ongoing assignments.

After finalizing the assessment tools for the Global Fund teams, I left with our country representative and regional adviser on the strategic planning trip for the justice workshop. We joined the bishops, and Diocesan Caritas and justice & peace commission directors to discuss major issues of injustice that Sierra Leone faces in the coming five years.

Although we at CRS facilitated this workshop, it was a tremendous learning experience for us. We gathered and analyzed issues regarding justice and partnership. Ultimately the output of this workshop will be an issues paper that will guide our 5-year strategic plan. At another level however, the value lies in the strengthening of our partnerships as actors for justice in Sierra Leone.

Even though the office in Freetown was relatively empty, Catholic Relief Services Sierra Leone was working as hard as ever. This has been a key week in securing a nation-wide Global Fund grant and developing our strategic plan which will endure in this office for the coming five years.

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