



BEYOND BORDERS

FORDHAM | IPED

Fordham University's Graduate Program in International Political Economy and Development trains graduate students in the advanced interdisciplinary analysis of global economic relations and international development issues. Graduates frequently pursue professional careers in global finance, international economic policy, global environmental policy, and in international relief and development.

Beyond Borders shares the experiences of IPED students who had undergone internships with Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Over the course of the summer, interns are assigned to the development projects of CRS abroad where they gain invaluable experience in international, relief, humanitarian aid and development.

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Richard Koch assesses projects of CRS Mali

Currently, I am serving as a business development intern at CRS in Mali. CRS has been active in Mali since 1999 working in various sectors including health, education, agriculture, and emergency response.

As a business development intern, I have had the opportunity to work with the staff across these sectors, creating new marketing materials, writing project reports, and contributing to active project proposals. My new focus is on going over the data and interviews obtained by the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) team to complete the initial analyses for various projects.

I am currently reviewing an unconditional cash-transfer program that was administered in the *Koulikoro* Region of central Mali. The program was in response to the food and livelihood insecurity in the region. The frequent droughts and the harsh environment of the Sahel make farming a difficult proposition in the best of times, and the conflict that has been going on in the North of Mali has only exacerbated conditions. This has led to thousands of internally displaced people and thousands more refugees in neighboring countries. This unconditional cash-transfer program, titled *Likhai*, targeted households where the men had left their homes in search of work or food. I have been looking over spreadsheets and graphs and analyzing what impact this project has had on the levels of agricultural production, commodity prices, and women empowerment in the region. The collective findings of the M&E team will have a direct impact upon the next cash-transfer program that is currently being planned.

The CRS Mali bureau is a large and a very busy organization. I have learned a lot in my short time here, especially about the importance of good project design and how it affects both the proposal and the implementation stages of the project. I have worked closely with both the Business Development Coordinator and the M&E Specialist and learned a great deal from them



Richard Koch holding a CRS country program fact sheet which he created.

about the business end of relief work and project design. All my colleagues at CRS Mali have been eager to share both their professional expertise and local knowledge; and this has already been a very fruitful internship.

Fordham IPED was a great preparation for my time here. Dr. Mani's *Community Economic Development* class in particular has been very helpful as it has both helped me identify potential biases in the data of assessments that I am reviewing and identify potential problem areas in projects that are being designed.

My internship has been an enriching experience, albeit difficult and a bit challenging at times. As previously mentioned, Mali is a conflict-ridden country. Yet this very situation underlines the importance of CRS's work here. CRS has been able to go where the government cannot or will not and CRS has shown these communities that they have not been forgotten. I am grateful for what I have been able to learn here and proud of what I have been a part of.

Camille Tacastacas strengthens health systems in Sierra Leone



Camille Tacastacas (leftmost) with her colleagues at CRS Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone has lost nearly 4,000 lives during the Ebola disease outbreak of 2014 to 2015. Many health experts suggested that the death toll could have been smaller had Sierra Leone's health systems been prepared to address such an epidemic. In post-Ebola Sierra Leone, health systems strengthening (HSS) became the Ministry of Health's top priority.

During my internship with CRS in Sierra Leone, I was particularly involved with an HSS project, the Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition and Infant and Young Child Feeding (IMAM/IYCF). By building the capacity of community health workers, public health unit staff, and mother-to-mother groups, the project seeks to reduce malnutrition in children, consequently strengthening the network of first-responders, especially in far-flung areas. During the project's initial stages, when the project leads were yet to be recruited, I had the opportunity to refine the project's budget, results framework, and implementation plan. It was quite an experience fixing a budget in Leonean – on my fourth day in the country!

Embedded in the IMAM/IYCF nutrition project is an operations research study, in which I had the opportunity to play a lead role. The research seeks to discover if positive parenting information, when integrated into existing IYCF counseling and outreach activities, improves the following: [1] children's nutritional outcomes, [2] uptake of IYCF behaviors, [3] and parenting practices. Results from this pilot phase will inform the design of the project before it is rolled out to a wider beneficiary base. Dr. Mani's *Community Economic Development* class, and Dr.

Comb's *Applied Econometrics* class provided me with the lens and tools to do operations research – from design to data analysis and report writing.

In addition to my work on nutrition research, I also had the opportunity to back-stop other project operations. In the fast-paced cash transfer and microfinance project for Ebola-affected petty traders, I learned about the challenges that arise in development projects when political interests interfere and impede proper implementation. To alleviate the situation, our team quickly set up beneficiary accountability measures. Along with our Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) Coordinator, I designed a post-disbursement satisfaction survey which documented our beneficiaries' experiences from selection to grant and loan disbursement.

My engagement in the 2016 Malaria Indicator Survey, sponsored by the Global Fund Malaria Project, made it clear that data has driven a bulk of my work here with CRS in Sierra Leone.

I am grateful to the IPED program for the heavy exposure to data – mostly quantitative from our economics courses and qualitative from our political science courses. More so, I am thankful for the internship opportunity that allowed me to experience the heart of development work beyond indices, graphs, and academic journals. That is, at the core of it all, human dignity is upheld not only through the quality of our programming, but also through the quality of our relationships – among staff members, between staff and beneficiaries, and a non-government organization and its development partners.



Camille Tacastacas (right) with Jerica Youngken (IPED 2014) (left) in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Joshua Voges designs projects for CRS Senegal



Joshua Voges (second from left) with CRS and implementing partners during a field visit in Refane, Senegal to document the impact of universal health coverage on Saving and Internal Lending Communities.

Fordham IPED introduced me to Senegal during the summer of 2015. I was a consultant with a Dakar-based non-government organization called *Enda Énergie*, a functional team within a network of programs that span across more than 20 countries. From what I can tell, it was largely a coincidence that six months later, Fordham IPED would send me back to the “Paris of Africa” to introduce me to CRS, one of the most established development agencies in the region.

For CRS, Dakar is home to both the country and regional offices. As a grateful recipient of the International Peace and Development Travel Scholarship from Fordham, I am working primarily with the CRS Senegal country office, which also manages projects in The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Mauritania. CRS has supported vulnerable populations in all these countries through its work responding to natural disasters, separatist violence, economic fluctuations, health epidemics, and malnutrition.

As Program Quality and Growth Fellow, I am working with the Head of Pro-

grams and Program Managers in all phases and aspects of project design, reporting, and marketing. Responding to a call for proposals from the European Union to address the root causes and behaviors associated with irregular migration in the region, I facilitated working groups and conducted research to support the design of country-level interventions in The Gambia. Most recently, I was asked to independently design an emergency behavior change intervention in Cape Verde in response to the Zika epidemic, with the goal of getting local communities more involved in efforts to control mosquito proliferation during the rainy season.

Every day I am using tools that I was exposed to for the first time in IPED—logical frameworks, impact evaluation, and stakeholder analysis, to name a few. However, I believe that the most valuable skill that I learned was not from a specific class, but from IPED in its entirety. As an IPED student, my classmates and I were constantly inundated with information, whether it was from the class readings in *Politics of Global Economic Relations*, the trade models from *International Economic Policy*, new internship

responsibilities at Equator Initiative, or guest speakers on campus. Managing the ever-limited limited resources of time and energy was necessary to satisfactorily complete the degree requirements, and it has proven a crucial skill in my new role with CRS. I am extremely grateful for my IPED experience and feel that it has truly prepared me for the career in international development that I have always wanted.

International Peace and Development Travel Scholarship

All matriculated IPED students in good academic standing are invited to apply for IPED’s International Peace and Development Travel Scholarships. Up to four scholarships 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 2016, the four travel scholarships were in partnerships with Catholic Relief Services. Students were assigned to Mali, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

Elizabeth Shaw responds to emergencies in Mali

The knowledge I gained in my IPED classes has been indispensable thus far during my internship with CRS Mali's Emergency Department. The bulk of my work centers around proposal writing for United States Agency for International Development grants which requires understanding of logical frameworks, budget plans, and monitoring & evaluation (M&E) plans – each unit in Dr. Schwalbenberg's course on *Project Management*. These project proposals are intended to result in rapid emergency responses to conflict, drought, and flooding across Mali. In each context, we utilize findings from rapid needs assessments which include local market analyses to determine the modality of assistance – cash transfers, vouchers, or direct distributions. Dr. Mitra's *Agriculture & Development* course greatly helped me to understand the market influences of these different humanitarian interventions and the importance of designing projects according to the “do no harm” principle.

Also, I find it incredible to witness M&E sewn and staffed into every project here at CRS. Following *Applied Econometrics* with Dr. Mani's *Community Economic Development* course has been advantageous as we not only design which indicators and which statistical methods or techniques to employ in the analyses, but also how to ensure that enumerators are sensitive to the inclusion of vulnerable groups and our M&E practices are well-established to provide critical learning for future lifesaving projects. Lastly, the comprehensive lens that Dr. Labonte taught me to apply to crises and resolution at-



Elizabeth Shaw (second from left) with her female co-workers celebrating International Women's Day.

tempts during her *Conflict Resolution* course has been personally and professionally helpful while living and working in a country which continues to experience violence. As I write the phrase “despite the peace accord in 2015, emergency interventions remain relevant” in proposals, I appreciate some of the complexity Mali faces, including the role of climate change in inducing natural resource competition, the risk of excluding parties during negotiations, the challenge of local ethnic tensions escalated by proxy actors, and the need for civil society engagement as the absence of a justice system that leaves women unprotected from gender-based violence.

My short time in Mali has elevated my enthusiasm for this line of work. It has been a privilege to start this path in Mali with CRS who is both committed to serving the most vulnerable while ensuring staff safety and security, an incredibly difficult and im-

portant balance which I hope to continue navigating myself for some time. I feel alive in my writing, invited to employ the many analytical perspectives that IPED taught me and challenged to quickly learn new sectors such as food security and WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene). I appreciate the sense that the work I provide is utilizing my particular skills as a native English speaker while the cornerstone of the program's success is the crucial role of national staff who ensure daily that the proposed projects are locally relevant and desired. My office is beginning to design projects to support Malian returnees as assistance in refugee camps in neighboring countries is anticipated to fall. As this ties into my previous work in refugee resettlement, there is a lot of excitement for the second half of this internship and all that is to be learned. I am incredibly grateful for Fordham IPED's support to make this opportunity possible!



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