

PIAF FELLOWS' FLYER

News and views for and by Princeton in Africa Fellows

July 2008



DEPARTING FOR AFRICA THIS MONTH: *5 full-year Fellows*



From left:

Tom McKay '08, International Rescue Committee, Kenya • **Kevin Block '08**, Lurdes Mutola Foundation, Mozambique • **Jessica Inocencio '05**, Mpala Wildlife Foundation, Kenya • **Brad Milligan '08**, Lutheran World Federation, Burundi • **Stuart Campo '08**, Straight Talk Foundation, Uganda

PIAF HOSTS SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS

Five South African university students visited Princeton in June. Identified as extraordinary young leaders from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, the students were selected to participate in the "2008 Expose, Enlighten & Educate Experience," spearheaded by the Impact Young Lives Foundation. The two-week program provides opportunities for scholars to travel and explore educational institutions, business environments, culture, and democracy in the United States.

During their stop in Princeton, the students met with PiAf staff to learn about the PiAf program, its Fellows, and its alumni.

"It was great to be able to tell them about students like them who have a commitment to Africa," said PiAf Executive Director Cordelia Persen. "They were hungry to know that an institution like Princeton was reaching out to Africa."

For more information about the students and their visit to Princeton and PiAf, please see the article that appeared in Princeton's community newspaper, *Town Topics*, at www.towntopics.com/jul0208/index.html

HAPPY BDAY

July 16
Sandra
Hart

July 17
Stephanie
Keene

July 18
David
Cape

July 23
Nike
Lawrence

SAVE THE DATE!

Princeton in Africa Annual Benefit
October 16, 2008
New York City

The Princeton in Africa Medal will be presented to Frank Wisner,
Vice Chairman of External Affairs at AIG
and former U.S. Ambassador

A special Princeton in Africa Lifetime Achievement Award
will be presented to Ambassador Robert B. Oakley
for his career in foreign service in Africa

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

by Katie White, '07-'08 Fellow at UNFPA in Senegal and Ethiopia

It's 6:30 in the evening, a sticky March night just after my birthday. As the generator clicks on, bringing power for the first time since dawn, I think about where I'd celebrated my "joyeux anniversaire" hours before. I'd been back in Dakar, playing American football on the beach and pretending not to notice the garbage catching on my ankles in the surf.

Now, after a short plane ride south-eastward, I am in the middle of West Africa's version of the tropics. The forest region of Guinea is rural, lush, and humid, with great swaths of thick, low scrub and graceful, leggy palm trees.

With the generator humming in my modest hotel room, I roll over on the bed and bump noses with an entirely different kind of "leggy," a spider the size of my opened hand. There is a moment in which we blink expectantly at one another, until he, taking the initiative, bounces up and down a few times atop his eight sizeable stilts and launches himself at my face. (Happy Birthday!)

To contrast the general mirth of those earlier hours on the beach with the mild terror of an unplanned bedroom safari testifies to how diverse a region West Africa is. It comprises both Anglophone and francophone countries, hosts both thick forests and sandy plains. Depending on the country, the past few decades have been defined by either surprisingly durable stability or surprisingly intractable conflict.

My office until recently was in Dakar, a rapidly developing and feisty city. Despite the calming din of the ocean, it is, in fact, an intense place; people can be aggressive, in everything from speech habits to "marketing" techniques, but my friends, colleagues, and even perfect strangers were also incredibly warm and kind.

In Dakar, I worked in the Regional Information Office of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund. The office did media work for the agency: we circulated information about UNFPA to donor and journalist networks, produced articles for UNFPA's website, and brought journalists and photographers into the field. The most exciting part of the job was visiting UNFPA's partners and writing my own feature stories much like a journalist would.

I'd come to Guinea's forest region, N'zérékoré, to spend a week interviewing the people UNFPA assists and to write a few articles. UNFPA collects population data to advise governments about poverty reduction, but more rewardingly, it also deals with the fundamental process of population growth: women giving birth to children. Hence, UNFPA seeks to "ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect." The mandate is broad; it encompasses everything from census-taking to reproductive health to fighting against gender-based violence.

Fieldtrips were a very small portion of my work in the Regional Information Office, but to date they've been the richest experiences of the fellowship. As I traveled in West Africa, whether to small-town Senegal, or to a village in the forest in Guinea, or to peacekeeper-laden but recovering Liberia, or to Cote d'Ivoire's cosmopolitan capital, I met people who taught me incredible lessons. They were lessons about the hardships people inflict on other people; about how good or bad governance can preserve or waste lives; about the surprising resilience of hospitality, even in survival situations; about what it means to be a good person; and about remaining kind and loving even when you have every justification not to.

Among the most important lessons was the one these field missions helped me to learn about myself. There were times when riding over extraordinarily unmanageable terrain in a UN Toyota that I realized, sheepishly, I'd been feeling for a moment a bit cavalier. But it was very quickly humbling when the people I met and interviewed would ask, "What will you do to help me right now?" With "journalistic" work, the response is convoluted and often dissatisfying: "Well, uh, I will tell your story to the people with money, who can help you when they send...things..."

At the same time, I do believe that the work I do is critical. I believe it makes a difference. But it isn't always easy to explain that, even to colleagues in my organization. I think that's why I felt somewhat validated when, while speaking with two cousins...

continued on page 4



Above: Katie (left) with PiAf Fellow Hilary Robinson in Lompoul, Senegal—an unusual patch of desert and dunes in the country's interior



Above left: In Thiès, Senegal, Katie met this mother and her son who had attended a meeting about family planning; left: Katie took this photo in N'Déléou, Guinea, a village that was raided by Liberian rebels during the war. The villagers fled, and these women were among the lucky survivors who lived in the forest for two years eating nothing but wild bananas

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

by Sara Piaskowy, '07-'08 Fellow at the International

Institute for Water and Environmental Engineering in Burkina Faso



page 3

I could attempt to explain how much my life has been changed and how much my ideas about development have been challenged because of my time in Africa. However, anyone who has been to this continent which seems to defy all conventional wisdom knows that even the most carefully selected words somehow always seem inadequate for the task. So, instead I would like to entertain you a little with some bits of randomness, short anecdotes, and thoughts that had been prompted by my African adventures. I hope some of these will make you laugh, nod your head in agreement, and even question what the heck I was thinking...

Before we jump in, let me give you a little background on where I was and what I did. At Princeton I majored in Civil Engineering; I came to Africa to gain firsthand exposure and understanding of water and sanitation challenges in developing countries. I worked as a research assistant with the International Institute for Water and Environmental Engineering (2iE) in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. My work included testing a ceramic pot filter for suitability in Burkina Faso and investigating the potential for local fabrication.

According to the United Nations, Burkina Faso is the third least desirable country in the world in which to live. While I loved my time there, I can totally understand the rating. With temperatures between 90-110° for most of the year; meal choices limited to rice, cous-cous, or *tô* (a rice/millet porridge) with a variation of tomato sauce; dust storms; open sewers; and bicycles as the main mode of transportation, it is hard to find some area of life that could not be improved... except for the mangos. Mango season was definitely a highlight of my time in Africa!

Here are some other thoughts and observations about my experience in Burkina Faso:

- Before I had figured out the exchange rate, I spent \$7 for a box of Special K. Never again, my friend.
- My bike looks about 3 years old after having ridden it for only 2 months.
- They have fabrics with the most random designs like lampshades or roller skates...
- On the main roads there are two stoplights, one for the motorbikes and one for the cars.
- They have these awesome little fried dough cookies here which come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, but unfortunately they all taste the same regardless of what they look like. Talk about a letdown.
- Burkina has its own little version of a drive-through. When your bus stops at a station a bunch of people rush up to the windows and you literally hang out the side and buy bread, apples, water, Coke, peanuts, etc from the bowls the ladies carry on their heads. It is quite comical and convenient.
- Traveling to Mali, Ghana, and Togo, you realize most of West Africa is very similar. In two words: hot and dusty.

continued on page 5

Below left: Daily chores of gathering water from the central well near Koubri, Burkina Faso; *below right:* young ladies with babies waiting in line at the WIRED Food Distribution in Sector 30 of Ouagadougou



ALUM UPDATE

by Louise Lamphere Beryl, '04

Louise has returned to Africa for the summer, where she is conducting research for her PhD program in Anthropology and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Due to confidentially restrictions, she is unable to disclose identifying details of the site of her research, but she has shared the following reflections about her experience thus far being back in Africa.

This summer, I am conducting research on child socialization at a rural orphanage in northern Tanzania from June-August. By observing interactions between adults and children, I hope to understand the lessons, including values and skills, that the children are learning. There are a mix of different types of adults here, which include national and expatriate teachers, volunteers, housemothers, and staff. I have written just over 100 pages of single-spaced notes in just 21 days so needless to say I have been busy!

Nevertheless, each day here renews my energy as I get to wake the children up singing to them and pulling off their covers in the cold mornings (I usually can see my breath, because it is winter here), help them read, watch them write exercises in Swahili, jump rope with them, bandage their cuts, pick them up and swing them around until we both get dizzy, fulfill their requests (yes, they ask) to be tickled, watch endless soccer games and cheer them on, help change doll clothes, hold hands and say prayers at dinner, and tuck them in giving Eskimo and butterfly kisses good night. Writing this makes life here seem poetic and bucolic, but of course those of you who have raised children, babysat,

taught, or been a camp counselor know that it is not all fun and games. For example, I have helped resolve fights when one boy called a girl a "chura" (*frog* in Swahili) during a fight and another boy called someone else "mtoto shetani" (*devil child*) for lying. So the orphanage has its share of ups and downs.

Since my arrival here, I have settled into the groove of getting up at 6:45am and going to bed by 10pm. In addition to the observations I am doing, I also love tutoring the children one-on-one, and I have attended special dinners at the home of the orphanage's director which are arranged for different Standards (i.e. grades in school) of children. The purpose of these dinners is to introduce the children to "western" food, like spaghetti and sauce, burgers, and meatloaf, and to teach them "western" table manners, including how to eat with a knife and fork, for in Tanzanian they either eat with a spoon or their hands. The older children are pros at keeping their elbows off the table and cutting their food, for they have had many of these dinners with the director before. However, for the younger Standard 2 children, this was their first time trying to use a fork to twirl spaghetti and a knife to cut open a baked potato. They also learned they have to chew with their mouths closed, for the director jokes that they sound like cape buffalo if they chew with their mouths open. These special dinners were prompted after one of the university students that the orphanage sponsors was taken to a restaurant for a job interview at a law firm. She was able to order and follow the same table manners as her interviewers, because she had previously had such meals with the director of the orphanage. However, she noticed that the other candidates did not know how to adapt to this new setting.

I hope the conclusions I am able to draw from my research will be helpful to both the orphanage itself and to policy and grant makers. In regards to the former, this study intends to analyze how explicit policies compare with implicit practices observed of interaction between adults and children. I hope the information from this study will help the orphanage as it evaluates its mission statement, social organization, and/or prescribed roles of adults who interact with the children. In regards to policy and grant makers, this study hopes to offer research to help them evaluate different models of care for orphans and determine the most effective model to promote and fund. Efficacy of models of care can be evaluated from various perspectives, such as economics or psychology, and it is important to also consider patterns of socialization in order to determine best practices.

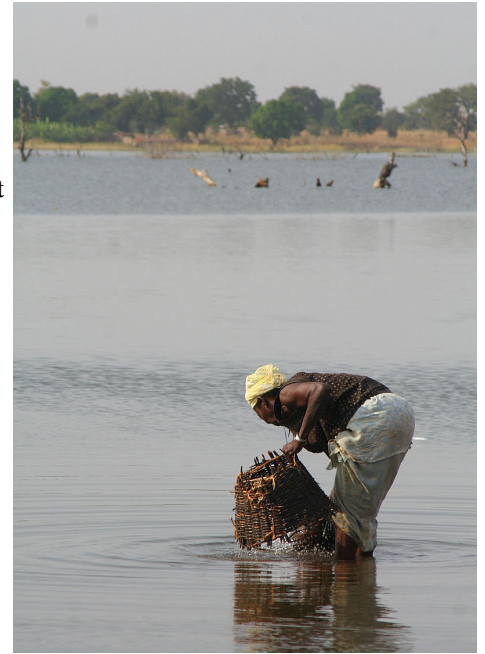
Katie's Notes from the Field (continued from page 2)

...(young boys who'd lost both sets of parents to AIDS), they told me what they wanted to be when they grew up. "Prime Minister!" said the younger, explaining that he'd use his power to secure a seat at every national football match of the year. The older, more pensive boy, sucked on the Bic pen he'd just borrowed from me and scrunched up his eyes for a moment. "A journalist," he announced with a decisive nod.

I've recently relocated to Ethiopia, after the office in Dakar had to close temporarily. Again, I can't help but marvel at my luck. I'm learning the ropes of a wholly different region, eating raw meat with a smile and feeling helplessly lost when the conversation switches to Amharic, the national language. But as much as I'm a junkie for change and new challenges, I hope, in a way, some things don't change. If I can keep meeting people who are courageous enough to share their stories, kind enough to invite me to be a guest in their culture, and wise enough to ask *me* the hard questions, I'll be a very, very lucky girl.

Sara's Notes from the Field (continued from page 3)

- Once when I bought eggs , I knew at least one of them was really fresh because I found a little feather stuck to it.
- I love mangos. Mango juice, dried mangos, mango shakes, raw mangos, mango fruit salad... you get the picture.
- There is a guy in Ouagadougou who makes life-sized animal statues out of concrete. They are surprisingly real-looking and he just happens to display them on the street corner by 2iE. At the moment, there is a whole zoo on my corner! We are talking a lion, peacock, zebra, and wildebeest ramming into a tree trunk. I am not kidding you.
- When I got back to Ouaga after some travels, I found out they had laid gravel on one of the nearby roads. I was like, "Cool!" But then learned it was because the President's brother lives on that road. Not cool.
- The toilet seats do not fit the toilet bowls here. They are constantly too big or too small, neither of which is a good option.
- One day I saw this cute little frog near a gate. I was thinking, "Oh how nice, a frog"... but as I got closer it didn't jump away. In fact, I walked past it and realized to my horror the frog was fried. Dried up and shriveled; it's like he was just chilling there and all of a sudden the sun zapped him! What a way to go.
- At a food distribution, I danced with some African women in their cool drumming circle.
- In one of the villages that I visited, I saw a girl wearing what looked to me to be a cheap rendition of Snow White's classic yellow, blue, and red dress. It was amazing!



Above: A woman washing in the reservoir that serves as the main water source for Bapla, Burkina Faso

Below: More of Sara's photos from Burkina Faso, plus scenes from her travels to Ghana, Mali, and Togo

