Issues is a compilation of visual and written works by international and domestic interns sponsored by the Center for Peace and Global Citizenship (CGPC) in Summer 2014. Designed and edited by Samantha Saludades BMC '15.
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Chris Gardner '15
   JINJA, UGANDA
Lessons from the Jungle

It’s really hard to sum up my experience in the Ecuadorian Amazon last summer in a just a few short paragraphs, but I’ll try. First of all, I can’t be more thankful for this amazing privilege I had to go back to Ecuador and to have an experience full of adventure, challenges, learning, meaningful relationships, amazing scenery and nature, lots of heat, and countless bugs!

My internship was with Runa Foundation, the nonprofit branch of a social enterprise located in the Amazon, that works with indigenous Kichwa farmers to produce and export a beverage called guayusa. Guayusa is brewed like tea and has much cultural significance, having been produced and consumed by the indigenous population for thousands of years. The idea of the social enterprise is to provide a means for the communities to improve their livelihoods while continuing their tradition. The nonprofit branch also provides support and services to the communities they work with.

My project focused on water quality and sanitation practices as the first steps toward a longer-term project to provide sustainable water to the communities. With a small group of interns, I developed surveys, conducted interviews, and tested water quality. During my internship, I also had the opportunity to live with a family for two weeks in one of the more rural communities. It was an incredible learning experience to interact with the members, and learn about their culture and daily lives.

ABOVE: This is María, my Kichwa host mom, after working together in the field, where she grows yuca, plantains, & guayusa. I will never forget learning how to use the machete for the first time - who could’ve imagined I would be swinging a machete in the rainforest in the midst the unbelievable heat, humidity, & bugs? Although demanding, it was an experiential way to look into the daily lives of the...
To cope with the extreme food and petroleum shortages that followed the collapse of the former Soviet Union and subsequent withdrawal of economic support, Cubans mastered the art of farming without the use of petrochemicals. Practically every vacant lot, yard, and rooftop bears evidence of some sort of creative agricultural endeavor. Sometimes these ventures are basic - a couple pots of cilantro and basil on a balcony 'para echar los malos espíritus' (Abuela Wilson). Other times they are more conspicuous - such as this pen of goats. I was shy about asking to take a picture of this goatherd, but he saw me with my camera and offered to pose. Most of the cooperative farms I visited included small food forests, containing a diversity of tropical fruits planted to maximize synergy within the system. Most farmers grew their own unique cultivar of banana. What these lacked in shelf life was made up for in sweetness.
I was sitting in the back of a TASO SUV, driving from a small village in Mpumudde back to Jinja town, when my Ugandan colleagues began talking about why they thought HIV prevalence was so high in Eastern Africa. We had just spent six hours together in various villages, drawing blood from patients, and counseling them on ways to live healthier, so the eagerness to get home eroded any padding in the subjectivity of their thoughts. One of my more outgoing friends in his late twenties championed the local attitude that the average man should be able to have sex with whomever he desired, whenever he desired. It was these kinds of men and their behavior of running around sleeping with a wide array of women that propagated the spread of HIV, he argued. One of the nurses snapped back, exclaiming that the number of men who acted that way could not have solely increased the HIV prevalence to over seven percent in Uganda. Rather, the local culture discouraged discussions about safe sex and sexually transmitted diseases. The local consensus deemed these conversations as “taboo,” and thus the average person was uneducated about condoms, diseases, abstinence, and the like. The nurse truly believed that these factors contributed to HIV’s prevalence the greatest.

The debate continued the whole ride home, but it was at that point I realized that the ideologies
of local cultures were the major contribution to the ongoing HIV/AIDS pandemic in Eastern Africa, potentially more so than any other medical or political dilemma. Both points illustrated by my colleagues describe behaviors that are common in Uganda; a disparity in gender equality promotes a male-dominated society, in which the strongest male is viewed as the one who spreads his seeds the most. Thus it is common for a man to have five to ten kids, and not necessarily with the same wife. Life then becomes a game of survival and the strongest kids live, while the weak perish; kids drop out of school in order to meet basic survival needs, resulting in a lack of primary and sexual education.

I was brought on by TASO to primarily assess and perform routine tests on patients, as the health center was understaffed in the "physician" department. By the end of my eight-week stint, I realized that my contributions to individual needs would hardly reduce HIV prevalence. I understood that three facets of life dictated HIV's occurrence: political legislations that enabled health centers to receive adequate funding for treatment and counselling programs; social reforms that focused on improving sanitation and schooling conditions; and shifting cultural tendencies that promoted woman empowerment and gender equality. Even though these changes direct Uganda to a modernized, Western society, I have a hard time justifying the morality of initiating cultural changes. Is it ethical to force changes in the way a group of people have lived for generations, even if the changes would improve the quality of their lives?

Chris Gardner '15

THE AIDS SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

For two months, I lived on the side of Highway 219. Every day, I ran past dewy farm fields and patches of black-eyed susans. I sprinted up the Zen trail and rooted myself in fresh-ly-tilled soil. Swaying in a hammock, mosquitoes orbited around my ears. American goldfinches sang in the canopy. Chipmunks skated the ground beneath my low-hanging co-coon. Little time passed on before I adopted this land as a home and before it began to nourish me.

All summer, this land fed me. My plate was piled with challenges, frustration, sadness, extreme bliss, laughter, and above all, love. In August, I emerged from a love-woven womb.

With newborn eyes, I left West Virginia hyperaware of how my body moves through space and the impact I make on the world around me, physically and figuratively. The soft keratin of my fingernails continues to grip onto the lingering campfire melodies and the sweetness of nightly tuck-ins.

I am a moth, a creature who flourishes at night, who lives in the dark. Blindly fumbling, I learned to embrace uncertainty, not fear it. Now, I enter the unknown carrying two lessons: make it up and use all of your senses.

Taking flight anew, finding strength in the dark.

Wild and wonderful West Virginia, your raw beauty untamed me. You gave me more than I can give back. All summer, the mountains hugged me and tucked clouds under my head. An endless array of stars enmeshed itself with fireflies. I felt like I was floating in a cosmic imagination - it was that unreal. And as the starry-night twinkled, stories from the forest lulled me to sleep. Their whispers taught me to love this land and to take pride in calling myself a domestic intern.

Dana Duncombe '17
HIGH ROCKS ACADEMY
While in northern Michigan, I encountered incredible beauty all around me. What struck me about this beauty was to the degree to which the community identified with the beautiful scenery of Michigan. It created this incredible community that people felt loyalty and pride about. This connection to the landscape brought people together in tangible and remarkable ways. People aspire to help one another as much as they can. I was met with such kindness from the community that stills awes me.

While working in Michigan, one of the projects I worked with was about getting an Enbridge pipeline out of the Mackinac Straits. Even if people didn’t know or care about oil dependency or pipelines, they could still all get behind preserving the Great Lakes because it is something that means so much to everyone here. Water in Michigan defines the experience of what it means to live here, and people are in touch with water in a way I’ve never seen or experienced before.

The Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is considered one of the most beautiful places in Michigan and it was very close to where I was living and working in Traverse City. My roommate, Wendy, and I went on a day trip there where we hiked the dunes.

I am so thankful that I was able to experience this community of beauty for a summer and be part of making sure that it stays beautiful through some of the environmental work I did. My summer in Michigan will always be an experience that I cherish. I can’t wait to go back and be surrounded by the beauty and be part of that wonderful, caring community again.

Rebecca Fisher ’17

A Community of Beauty
Before this summer, I didn’t know much about oral history or for that matter about Burma, the conditions in women’s prisons in the United States, and the political situation in Colombia. So when I started my internship at Voice of Witness in San Francisco, I already knew that I was going to learn a lot. Even so, I came away with so much more than I expected! Voice of Witness is a nonprofit organization that works to amplify overlooked voices by publishing oral histories about current human rights crises. They also run an education program on how to create oral histories and use Voice of Witness books in the classroom. By using oral history as their main tool, Voice of Witness lets the voices and experiences of the narrators stand without interpretation by a third party. Their books are also very readable, which makes the stories accessible to a much broader audience. I could see all of these positive aspects and more as soon as I began to work at Voice of Witness. I could also see that, through their education program, the organization had a local impact as well as a global one. People in the Bay Area were excited to explore projects that they could do using oral history in their communities, and Voice of Witness gave them the tools to record the stories all around them.

I left Voice of Witness in August with a better understanding of both oral history and human rights issues that the organization has explored through their books. I feel more informed on human rights crises that are affecting people across the world right now. Beyond that, I’m now more conscious of the fact that everyone has a story, whether it is about their escape as refugees from Burma, or the hard work they have put into graduating college. Thanks to Voice of Witness, I’m now looking for those stories all the time. What an amazing outcome to come out of a summer internship!

Kaziah White ’17
VOICE OF WITNESS
Parallel societies: Do I dare straddle the divide?

Home. I feel safe there. My housemates attended the University of Cape Town by day and relaxed by night. We cooked together, cleaned together, and spent time at the beach. I feel comfortable around them. These same sentiments made me quickly feel at home in Cape Town as a study abroad student nearly two years ago.

Work. The South African Education and Environment Project. I felt confused there. At the office it was safe; in the townships it was not. The office was the planning and organizational space. I spent just over half my day there doing administrative work and preparing for the afternoon’s lesson. In the afternoons, I was in the townships running environmental clubs and tutoring students in science. Several times, we were not able to go to the schools due to violent taxi strikes and the threat of armed robbery.

One foot stands solidly on each side. Both realities have become a part of me. Yet, I feel divided, split in half. People stare. Their eyes are discerning; they are not quite sure what to make of me. I don’t fit on a side. I straddle the divide.

Fern Beetle-Moorcroft ’14
THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION & ENVIRONMENT PROJECT

In Bihar, as in many parts of India, physical mobility is a major point of difference between genders. Men are seen everywhere: walking on the streets, driving and riding in vehicles, in various occupations from construction workers to bank executives. Women are comparatively invisible in the cities. They are only observable in very limited types of roles, such as students, cleaning staff, fresh produce merchants, and in jobs where the federal or state government has reserved quotas for women. These include bank tellers and, of course, managers in Jeevika, the women’s empowerment and rural livelihoods programme I studied this summer.

Travelling by share auto-rickshaw is the standard way to get around Patna, the capital of Bihar. Up to six or seven people can cram into a single ‘Tempo,’ as they’re called here, and ride for less than Rs10. But this transportation medium is wholly dominated by men. On many Tempo
rides, a driver would stop for a woman waiting by the side of the road, but seeing me and other men inside, she would wave it past. The critical criterion at play for seating is that a woman, by cultural rules, would not sit next to a man she does not know. This precipitates a complex chess game in which very few moves are possible. Thus, the act of moving around the city, not only by foot, but also by public transportation, is made even more complex for women.

Outside of the cities, the situation is considerably more nuanced. Women in brightly coloured saris are seen everywhere in the rural parts of Bihar, at least as frequently as men in the villages. Yet, women’s mobility is significantly constrained in the countryside even more than in the cities. How could this be possible?

Many evaluators would look at mobility with the expectation of a clear trend: if Jeevika is working, women will visit more places, because they are more confident. More mobility is progressive, and less mobility is regressive, right? However, in practice, things are not so clear cut.

The poorest of the poor, in all of the districts we visited, tended to be extremely mobile. Far from being imprisoned in the house, these women delegated chores to their children. Meanwhile, they left their houses to work as agricultural labourers, shop, and pick up remittances from their husbands; most of whom worked ‘outside,’ as migrants. As they participated in Jeevika, took loans, and started to support themselves, many modelled themselves after upper-class women, who have the luxury of not needing to leave the house. In this situation, a poor Jeevika member may devote more time to her children and household chores than she did before.

The final stage of ‘progress’ could be when, slowly, over time, she starts to want to reduce her time in the house and visit wherever she pleases. While the transition between the second and third stages is in accordance with the preconceived notion of ‘progress,’ the transition from the first to the second stage seems, from an outside perspective, to be ‘regression,’ but this is simply not the case. This phenomenon can be mapped as a U-shaped curve of ‘empowerment’ against time – a false result that masks underlying progress.

Mobility is a crucial social indicator. No one is in doubt that the constraints imposed on women by a disempowering society must be loosened through women’s empowerment, and through programmes that attempt to empower women, like Jeevika. But in Bihar, the manifestations of mobility and their interactions with real empowerment are more complex, and by scratching the surface, one can learn more about the real ways empowerment and mobility interact.

Robin Banerji ’15
BIHAR LIVELIHOODS PROJECT
Casa de los Amigos is a Center for Peace and International Understanding in Mexico City where CfGC interns have served since 2007. The Casa was established as a nonprofit organization in 1956 by a Quaker community in Mexico, and its work continues to be rooted in Quaker values. Through its programs, community space, and social and cultural activities, the Casa promotes peace with justice, fosters understanding between groups and individuals, and supports the human dignity of every person. Picture by John Kouakam ’16.