

HUMAN RIGHTS, DEVELOPMENT, AND INTERNATIONAL ACTIV

By Leslie Dwyer

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The Center for Peace and Global Citizenship offers extraordinary opportunities to Haverford students. In the summer of 2005, 37 students received CPGC support to work with organizations on issues ranging from public health on the Thai-Burmese border to the plight of Chinese orphans to the struggles of Guatemalans to rebuild communities after civil war. Students often describe these experiences as “life-changing,” providing them with new passion and direction as they consider their responsibilities and privileges as “global citizens.” What is also important to recognize, however, is how these students’ experiences enrich the intellectual life of all of us at Haverford.

For the past three years, I have worked with the CPGC’s summer internship program, both as an advisor to students planning international projects and as the teacher of the course they are required to take upon their return, “Human Rights, Development and International

Activism.” As a faculty member, I have been impressed by the critical energy and ability interns bring to their scholarship. Rather than limiting themselves to hypotheses, CPGC interns are equipped with the experience to consider how theoretical claims articulate with the everyday struggles for social justice that unfold across the globe. In the classroom, they become more than simply students, but active partners in a collaborative learning process.

The course the CPGC sponsors for interns is an intensive seminar drawing upon students’ varied experiences. Discussions begin by examining a number of taken-for-granted conceptual frameworks used to support humanitarian intervention in the world, including development, human rights, NGOs, civil society, and international aid. We ask what efforts have been made to make development more inclusive and attentive to the needs of local communities, and how ideas of empowerment, participation, and social activism are translated, enacted, and challenged in local contexts. From our standpoint at the intersection of academic reflection and community action,

we consider some of the ethical, political, and cultural implications of representing and attempting to ameliorate suffering and injustice, attending to our own positions and assumptions. Focusing on case studies including agricultural development, gender inequality, public health, civil society, and democratization, we work toward a better understanding of the relationships among culture, power, and our own work in the world. In the fall 2005 semester, the course was complemented by a human rights film series, open to the campus community, which featured such films as *Drowned Out*, an inspiring account of local resistance to the World Bank-sponsored Narmada Dam in India, and *The Day I Will Never Forget*, a challenging look at debates over female genital cutting in Africa.

Questioning the assumptions we bring to our work in the world is not always an easy endeavor. Authors like anthropologist Arturo Escobar, who challenges natural-seeming hierarchies between “Third World” poverty and helplessness and “First World” wealth and expertise, lead us to reconsider what we mean when we talk

TACKLING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER IN TANZANIA

By Jenny Rabinowich '08

Nasira and Babu ran up to me with the sneaky looks on their faces that always meant that they wanted something. “Could we read the book again? The one with the animals?” Of course, and I went in my room and pulled out *We All Went on Safari*, a children’s book set in Tanzania. I puzzled for a second over whether it was ironic or fantastic to be reading a book from America that’s supposed to teach American children Swahili with a pair of Tanzanian children eager to just look at a book. We went through the pages together, naming the animals in Swahili and in English: twiga, simba, tembo. Giraffes, lions, and elephants covered the pages. The kids were quick learners; I took longer. We always got into a big discussion when we reached the monkey page. There was a giant tree filled with monkeys, the Swahili name for which I can never remember. Nature, Babu tells me cockily. Nature, nature, nature, pointing to each one. No, I tried to explain, nature isn’t just one animal. I searched my limited Swahili vocabulary for more words. Nature is trees, and rivers, and mountains. Nature is everything outside. Nature, he repeats emphatically, pointing to a monkey. Well, yes, I guess that’s nature too.

My summer internship was spent working at an Education Resource Center in the small town of Kibaya, Tanzania. Most of my work was done in an office with other Americans and Tanzanian teachers with a good grasp of English, but my home-stay was with a family who spoke no English. Luckily, I had been able to study a semester’s worth of Swahili before arriving in Tanzania, but those four months of study flew out of my head com-

pletely once the plane landed. When I arrived at my host mother’s house, I said so little that she thought I didn’t know any Swahili at all. I understood about half of what I was hearing, but never quickly enough to respond. “Mbona huongei?” was a favorite comment of hers. “Why on earth aren’t you talking?” Shopping trips were carefully planned excursions; I would look up the necessary words and write them on my hand in preparation.

For some reason, I became convinced that I was physically unable to learn a new language. This idea stuck with me even as I began communicating and my listening skills improved. All CPGC interns were given an advice booklet written by former interns; I read religiously the section that emphasized the message “Just because you don’t know the language doesn’t mean you’re stupid.” And I slowly began breaking out of my shell. Nasira and Babu, the two kids who lived in my house, discovered that I had a stock of art supplies, and began demanding an endless series of drawing classes. They called their friends over, until I was watching over a group of six or seven kids with never-ending questions about what they should draw and if it was okay to break the crayons. The kids were the best teachers, and I felt more comfortable trying out new phrases with them. In my work at the education center, I started out using English with the teachers, but I quickly began using Swahili because I realized that I could learn more from them if they were using their own language. Group conversations were still difficult to follow, especially because people would often mix their own mother tongues with Swahili, but I was able to carry on a one-on-one conversation. As my time in Tanzania progressed, I went through a complete change in attitude; instead of hoping that the people I was speak-

ing to would know English, I only wanted to speak in Swahili. I was dismayed when, after carefully memorizing the Swahili word for envelope, I entered the stationery store and was greeted by the clerk in English. Part of it was just proving to myself that I could get by with my Swahili, but I also realized that languages have more meaning than I had given them credit for. It’s an amazing sign of respect when you work hard to learn the language of the people you’re visiting rather than expecting to find people who know English, as many traveling Americans tend to do. I realized that I’d finally grown comfortable in this new language when, a month and a half into my stay, I met a person who asked me, “Umekaa hapa kwa miaka mingapi?” “How many years have you lived here?”



Jenny Rabinowich, a sophomore from upstate New York, spent 10 weeks in Tanzania interning at Jifunze, a community education resource center founded by Haverford graduate and former CPGC Program Coordinator

Carrie Oelberger '99. Jenny currently works at the CPGC as the Domestic Programs Assistant. Her on-campus activities include Peer Awareness, STAND (Students Toward A New Democracy—an activist group), and Sneetches Ultimate Frisbee.

Jifunze staff members and volunteers: Rose Msonde, Rebecca Brown, Jenny Rabinowich '08, Mary Malekela, and Patricia Gathua

