

A Life Altering Experience in Indonesia

By Elizabeth Wagner

2000 Summer Internship in Indonesia

Last September when I, Elizabeth Wagner agreed to attend the World Food Prize Youth Summit, I had no idea how it would affect my life. I had never even heard of the World Food Prize Organization (WFPO) before September of 1999 when my teacher asked me if I would be willing to write a paper for a conference in October. I agreed not really giving the decision much thought because I didn't know what the WFPO was all about. My teacher gave me the topic information for the paper, and I proceeded to research the topic.

Last year's topic was the logistics of global food security. In high school I had been a member of the student organization, Model United Nations or Model U.N. In Model U.N., students from across Iowa, the United States, and even the world role-play the United Nations, and each school represents a different country. I was playing the United States on the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) when one of my topics to research had been global food security. I have enjoyed learning about international issues, conflicts, and policies, which was why I was a member of Model U.N. and why going to the youth summit appealed to me a great deal.

When it was time for me to go to the youth summit in October of 1999, I was actually dreading it because I thought that a bunch of boring adults were going to lecture us students all day about the logistics of global food security. Lucky for me I was wrong. I was the first person from my school, Centerville High School to attend the youth summit, and thus didn't know what to expect. The organizers of the youth summit had an excellent balance of activities planned for us students. We were all learning, but at the same time we were having fun, and we were kept busy.

I enjoyed the conference immensely. The adults didn't talk down to us students like we were just high school students. No, they treated us like equals, like we students had opinions, ideas, and ideals that were important. Very rarely do professionals want to hear input from high school students. For me the conference was such a great experience that I decided to apply for the overseas internship. I was treated respectfully at the conference and my opinions were valued. Before the conference I didn't even know that I had the opportunity for an overseas internship. Because I had agreed to write a paper for this conference for my teacher, I had the opportunity of a lifetime awaiting me. The youth summit really taught me that although I was only 17 years old at the time, that yes in fact, I could have an impact on the world. I also didn't know what I was going to study in college and I applied for the internship in the hopes that by experiencing a different way of life, I could maybe even gain some insight in regards to my career plans and aspirations.

Not applying for the internship would have been the equivalent of passing up the opportunity of a lifetime, and I would just like to thank everyone who made it possible including my family, everyone at the WFPO, and everyone in Indonesia who made my stay so wonderful. I applied for the overseas internship not exactly knowing what qualifications the WFPO executives wanted in a candidate. I truthfully didn't know what I was going to study in college, and many of the candidates seemed to have their career all planned out.

When I received word that I had been accepted as a candidate and that I would be going to Trinidad and Tobago or Belize I was elated. Eventually, the hardest part for me was waiting to hear where I was going to be stationed. At the beginning of May I still didn't know. It was going to be one of these four: Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, Kenya or Indonesia. Finally, I received word that I would be going to Indonesia. Two days after departing from the Des Moines International Airport, I arrived in Jakarta, Indonesia. My final destination was Bogor, Indonesia in West Java, which is about 60 km South of the capitol city of Jakarta. The experience of a lifetime was just beginning.

The research center I was stationed at was the Center for International Forestry Research or CIFOR. CIFOR runs many different programs, but I was made a member of the Adaptive Co-Management team or ACM. CIFOR specializes in forestry research, but also incorporates an agricultural branch into its offices, called ICRAF.

The ACM program exists because although substantial human and monetary resources have been invested in forest management over the past few decades, not much improvement has been recorded in most places. Forests are still neglected, degraded, and cleared while the livelihoods of those who use them regularly, especially poor and politically less powerful groups, have not been improved. Nowhere is this truer than in developing countries where resource and infrastructures constraints, compounded by limited institutional capacity, and the demand for forestland further exacerbate the process of disempowerment, resource loss, and poverty. Part of the problem is that managers and resource users have just begun to acknowledge how many stakeholders there are in the forest and how quickly and dramatically their relationship with each other and with the forest can change. At present, forest management systems generally do not deal with the complexity and dynamism of forest ecosystems, the relationship among the many stakeholders with interest in the forest processes, and the rates of socio-economic changes.

The goals of the ACM program are to develop a set of models, methods, tools, and etc. to enable local communities to achieve more sustainable and equitable management of forestry resources and human well being. The ACM program wants forestry officials to implement and adapt a forestry management strategy in a conscious, and continuous manner so the management will be self-improving. In addition, the ACM program would like to have equity based collaboration in forestry management via innovative problem solving at the local

level and would like to strengthen the process of responsive policy making and implementation. The ACM program will approach these goals by monitoring the arrangements and support systems based on criteria and indicators; by proposing strategies to accommodate multiple stakeholders of forests and increasing the grass roots participation of all affected by forests; by utilizing user-friendly software, and by practical manuals in journals.

Along with these goals the ACM program hopes to accomplish the following four items.

1. Fairer share of benefits for local people.
2. Poverty alleviation based on improved production.
3. Improved conservation of resources.
4. Improved outcomes stemming from a change in the policy context for forest management.

CIFOR and the ACM program are carrying out a comparative set of comprehensive three-year studies in Bolivia, Brazil, Cameroon, Ghana, Indonesia, Malawi, Nepal, Peru, Philippines, and Zimbabwe. In each country the research will be done by a national research institution, and will usually involve a team of researchers from different institutions working with local stakeholders at each site. Additional research is being conducted on institutions and policies in China, India, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Tanzania. The results of the study will be incorporated into the analysis of the comparative case studies.

The mission of CIFOR and the ACM program is as follows: emphasize poverty alleviation, help create food security, and to ensure environmental protection of both plants and animals. This will be accomplished through research of forests, and research of forestry and human systems while focusing on direct links between forests, local people, forest management, and the impact of their interactions. The ACM program has outlined the basic forestry problem as this. There are many different kinds of people and organizations who are trying to manage forests. They all have conflicting interests. Because of the conflicts forests need an organization that is capable of forest and forestry management.

Research can answer how to best manage forests. The research that the ACM program does is supposed to answer two basic questions concerning the management of forests.

1. Can a forest management strategy contribute to improving local human well being and sustainable forest management in a multi-stake holder environment?
2. Can collaboration among stakeholders in forest management, enhanced by processes of conscious and deliberate social learning, lead both to improved human well-being and to the maintenance of forest cover and diversity? If so, under what conditions?

When I had been selected to go to Indonesia the original plan for my research had been to do fieldwork in Kalimantan or Borneo. Borneo is the largest island in Indonesia and had been famous among Europeans for having headhunters hundreds of years ago. Although there aren't any headhunters in Borneo anymore, much of the interior of Borneo is still unexplored jungle, (the next ECO-Challenge will be held in Borneo) like something out of an Indiana Jones movie. Much of the research done by CIFOR is conducted in Borneo. However, there was a malaria outbreak at the CIFOR research station in Borneo, and consequently I was unable to go to there to conduct any research or to do field analysis.

At CIFOR in Bogor we were fortunate enough to have a small part of the rainforest surrounding us. University students from the agricultural university in Bogor took me around the forest to meet the leaders of local villages. The university students also took me another forestry research institution in Bogor, LATIN. At LATIN I gave a brief presentation about the WFPO, its youth summit, and the World Food Prize that is awarded every year. I also toured the agricultural university, IPB in Bogor. CIFOR employs many of the graduates from IPB.

While at CIFOR I had a variety of job responsibilities. I typed several documents for members of the ACM team, and then would often discuss the studies with some of the members of the ACM team. I proofread several documents that had been translated into from Bahasa Indonesia into English. I

also read several studies that had been conducted in various research sites around the world and helped one of the scientists of the ACM team and a lecturer at IPB, Herry Purnomo, synthesize the studies into one document. However, this was a project I started right before I left, and I didn't get to contribute as much as I would have liked. I also read several studies about forestry. I met and worked with a variety of people who are part of the ACM team, and I would just like to thank them for helping make my stay in Indonesia enjoyable.

Some people may wonder how forestry and global food security are related. From the Western media, we get these images on TV that people are using slash and burn techniques, to have more and better farmland. This is true, but also misleading. The media and journalists fail to show why and who are destroying rain forests. We here in America just see beautiful land being destroyed and we don't really delve into the actual causes of this. Obviously in developing countries, situations and life styles are entirely different than here in the prosperous United States. Some people depend on the farming of the land in rain forests. If they don't cut down the forest for purposes of farming or housing, then they will have no income or nowhere to live. Many indigenous people are dependant on the forests and the products of the forests. These people don't even necessarily use the forest for farming and often times they aren't destroying it. However, they are adversely affected by the destruction of the rain forest. Often times the indigenous people are underrepresented in the

government and/or oppressed. They can do nothing when the forests are getting depleted of resources. Local institutions such as LATIN, try to help the indigenous people get a voice in the government so their way of life can be protected.

As I have illustrated, there are numerous stakeholders involved in forestry. We, part of the developed world are trying to save the forests. Some governments around the world who are trying to drain the forest of resources. Other stakeholders include the people who still live traditional lifestyles in the forests and whose way of life is threatened by the destruction of forests. If the needs of some of the stakeholders aren't met, then they are going to suffer from severe poverty, which directly relates to global food security.

Although research is the main purpose of the internship, experiencing a new culture and having fun is also important because if young adults aren't taught about other cultures, than how are we to try and help improve global food security, if we don't understand the region. I was privileged enough to celebrate my 18th birthday in Indonesia. One of the scientists, Chimere took me to his house to meet his teenaged children so I could spend some time with people around my age. We had cake and ice cream and they sang Happy Birthday to me in five languages. Chimere and his family are from Senegal so I was allowed to practice my French skills from high school, which was quite funny. Not only did I get to speak French, but I also went to the city known as the cultural center of Indonesia, Yogyakarta to learn to speak Bahasa Indonesia.

I studied Bahasa Indonesia six hours a day for two weeks at a language intensive school, Puri. It was totally amazing. I went to the school knowing no Indonesian and left the school able to bargain with Indonesians in the market. While I was in Yogyakarta, I stayed with an Indonesian family so not only did I get to experience an intensive language study, but I also experienced an intensive cultural study! The family I stayed with, the Nandung family was completely amazing. They were so hospitable and they were very patient with me while they helped me with my Bahasa Indonesia. They had two young, school-aged children, who were equally patient with. The children and I played Monopoly so I could practice my bargaining and my counting skills and we also played Indonesia Scrabble, which I wasn't very successful at.

In addition to me, the Nandung family was housing four other guests. These guests were also studying at the Puri school, and they were from the Netherlands. The Dutch guests were college students who had been studying Bahasa Indonesia for a couple of years. They tried to teach me some Dutch, but I think learning one language at a time was enough for me.

The Puri school also takes students on occasional cultural tours and trips. When I was at Puri I went to a Hindu temple, Prambanan. Prambanan, which tells the story of the Hindu gods, lay undiscovered for centuries because a volcano had erupted and the inhabitants of Prambanan Plain were killed. I really enjoyed my stay in Yogyakarta. It was safer, cleaner, and not as crowded as Bogor. The mall, the bookstore, and the grocery store were all nearby my home

stay, which made life convenient. In Yogyakarta traditional markets are prevalent, and it is still very common to bargain for items with street vendors, something I wish I could do here in America.

I don't have the right words to say how amazing it was traveling to Indonesia. The trip was educational, informative, life altering, and just plain fun. As amazing as it was, I do wish a few things would have gone differently. Sometimes I felt like CIFOR didn't give me enough work to do. At times I wanted to be challenged a little more in regards to my scientific studies. Sometimes I didn't feel like I was doing enough scientific research. I also do understand that CIFOR had never employed a World Food Prize Intern and so they didn't know quite what to expect. In addition to that, there was the malaria outbreak at the CIFOR research station in Borneo, thwarting the original plans of having me study there.

The worst part of the entire experience was leaving. I had met so many great people, and I had made so many friends that leaving was terribly sad. It didn't seem like I was in Indonesia eight weeks, maybe eight day, but not eight weeks. I miss my friends from Indonesia who aren't just Indonesian, but people from across the globe. That is what the internship was about. It was about meeting people from different cultures. It was about learning to understand a different lifestyle. It was about learning in general, so that when we college and high school students grow up, we have the means necessary to lead the world not only in agriculture and science, but also in communities, politics, and

diplomacy. Awareness needs to be raised among all people including youth, politicians, and the media so that global food security can be guaranteed for all people. The world's problems can start by being solved through research and science, but great leaders are also needed to really give everyone in the world a safe, reliable food source.