

# PIAF FELLOWS' FLYER

News and views for and by Princeton in Africa Fellows

August 2008



## DEPARTING FOR AFRICA THIS MONTH: *10 full-year Fellows*



*First row:*

**Sam Clendon '07**, UN World Food Program, Mauritania • **Hahna Fridirici '06**, Bristol-Myers Squibb/Baylor Pediatric AIDS Initiative, Burkina Faso • **Mike Honigberg '08**, Bristol-Myers Squibb/Baylor Pediatric AIDS Initiative, Malawi • **Tim Callahan '07**, International Rescue Committee, Tanzania • **Emily Stehr '08**, International Rescue Committee, DRC

*Second row:*

**Cat Richardson '08**, Africare, Ghana • **Stuart Malcolm '08**, Bristol-Myers Squibb/Baylor Pediatric AIDS Initiative, Lesotho • **Nana Boakye '08**, International Rescue Committee, Ethiopia • **Audrey Banks '07**, International Rescue Committee, Sierra Leone • **Katie Fiorella '06**, UN World Food Program, Uganda



Above: Ambassador Robert B. Oakley '52 (back row at left) joined PiAf's first full-year Fellows during their midyear retreat in Rwanda.

## PRINCETON IN AFRICA ANNUAL BENEFIT

We are busily preparing for our Annual Fall Benefit which will be held on **October 16, 2008 at the Racquet and Tennis Club in New York City**. This year, we look forward to honoring two outstanding Princetonians who exemplify the mission of Princeton in Africa: *Ambassador Frank G. Wisner '61* and *Ambassador Robert B. Oakley '52*. Ambassador Wisner will be honored with the Princeton in Africa Medal. Currently Vice Chairman of AIG, he has served as U.S. Ambassador to Zambia, Egypt, the Philippines, and India and most recently as U.S. Special Envoy on the future status of Kosovo. Ambassador Oakley will be honored with a special Princeton in Africa Lifetime Achievement Award for his career in foreign service in Africa. He has served as U.S. Ambassador to Zaire, Somalia, and Pakistan and as the Special Envoy of Presidents Bush and Clinton in Somalia.

Please save the date for this special evening. We look forward to seeing you there!

# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

by Alyson Zureick, '07-'08 Fellow at IRC in Ethiopia



Above: Alyson (left) with Amie Samba, one of IRC's community mobilizers in Sierra Leone's Kailahun District

It's hard to know what to expect when you come to work in a country that is only five years removed from war—and whose popular image in the United States is tied to a Leonardo DiCaprio movie. I arrived in Sierra Leone in October 2007 to work with the International Rescue Committee, an international NGO that worked with refugees in West Africa during the late 1990s and early 2000s and has now largely transitioned to post-conflict reconstruction/development and human rights work in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. Sierra Leone is known internationally for its brutal 11-year civil war, which ended in 2002 and was fueled in large part by diamond smuggling between Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia. Today, poverty remains stark throughout the country, but in Freetown there are many signs of progress, from the increasing availability of national electricity to the growing number of businesses and tourist facilities.

Working with IRC, however, has also exposed me to some of the areas hit hardest by the war. In February, I traveled to Kailahun District, Sierra Leone's easternmost province, which remains physically isolated from much of the country and extremely underdeveloped. Working with Amie Samba, one of IRC's community mobilizers for its democratic governance program, I traveled to Koindu Town to learn about the challenges they face in recovering from the war.

Koindu is a small town in Kailahun District located about one and a half miles from Guinea and about four miles from Liberia. It takes about an hour to drive the 17 miles from Kailahun Town to Koindu, along gutted dirt roads that dip at bone-rattling angles. Driving into Koindu the first thing you notice is the houses: once-solid stone and brick structures with slender columns, sweeping arches, and wide verandas are now charred, with thick bush sprouting out the remains of windows and creeping over half-destroyed walls. The elegance of the buildings speaks to Koindu's past as a regional trading hub. Prior to the RUF invasion in 1991 Koindu's weekend market attracted traders and merchants from across Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia. Relatively well-off Sierra Leoneans lived alongside Lebanese traders who ran a maze of stores alongside the outdoor market in the center of town. Rebels razed the town during the war, however, and according to the town's residents the market has not yet recovered.

My car drove into the center of Koindu around mid-day where one of my co-workers had assembled the town's leaders to speak to me about IRC's democratic governance program. After four months in Sierra Leone I was still stunned by the fact that half a town would turn out to meet me because I am a foreigner and I work for an international NGO. The town representatives included Koindu's District Councilor, ward committee members (the governing body below the District Council), Women's Action Group members, the head of the market women's association, and local school teachers. Even the local paramount chief made an appearance. The presence of so many town leaders was not just a testament to the power of foreigners to draw a crowd but also to how little there is to do in these remote towns.

The residents of Koindu shared many problems that are common throughout Sierra Leone: a lack of good roads, quality water and food, decent medical care, jobs, etc. Time and again, though, talk returned to the market. Even with peace in the region, trade has not picked up again in Koindu, the locals reported. Several of them walked me through the old market—an assembly of stalls made out of rough sticks...

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Below: Remnants of Koindu Town; right: a woman sells produce in Koindu's market



Following his Princeton in Africa fellowship with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Sudan and Ethiopia during 2005-2006, Steve took a Princeton in Asia fellowship with the Natural Resources Defense Council in Beijing. He is currently working as an independent environmental consultant focused primarily on the Olympics and Chinese air quality.

Steve's research on this topic began what has been called a "showdown between city officials and a 26-year-old American environmental consultant who has raised serious questions about Beijing's official air pollution statistics." (*Is Beijing Manipulating Air Pollution Statistics?*, *Time Magazine Online*, March 14, 2008). His research has received international media attention in numerous outlets including *Science*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *The Associated Press*, *Reuters*, *CNN*, and *ESPN*. It was even cited in congressional testimony by the General Counsel of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Leading up to the opening ceremonies of this year's Olympics in Beijing, we asked Steve to describe some of his work in China on the environment and the Games—as well as his PiAf experiences in Ethiopia and Sudan that he continues to draw upon today.



Prior to beginning my PiAf fellowship, I didn't think that moving to Africa would lead me to work in China. But in hindsight, a number of fortuitous decisions and a series of coincidences that occurred make my Africa-China connection appear almost pre-planned.

Only a month after graduating from Princeton in June 2005, I ended up moving into an apartment behind a Chinese restaurant on the dusty streets of Khartoum. Several months later, I would run into a Chinese professor from rural southern China while working on a drought relief project in rural southern Ethiopia. And just as I found elements of China in Africa, Africa followed me to China. For example, after I moved there in the fall of 2006, more than 40 African heads of state and ministers

converged upon Beijing that November, just as the capital was "blessed" with clear, blue skies—something else I never thought would happen in Beijing—aided by restrictions that kept over 800,000 of the city's cars off the roads.

Having majored in the geosciences at Princeton, my passion for data and scientific analysis served me well in the field. One of the most exciting projects that I worked on during my PiAf fellowship was with the expanding use of Geographic-Information-System (GIS) mapping and analysis in the use of program design and evaluation in refugee camps. Systematic data-based analysis—addressing such simple questions as how many people were living in a refugee camp and how that had changed over time—provided significant insights into program design, implementation, and evaluation. Especially since we operated in areas without electricity or running water (including Sudanese, Eritrean, and Somali refugee camps), satellite mapping and photography helped to guide the IRC's decision-making processes.

My research on Beijing's air quality came out of the same desire to systematically analyze a large dataset of information. Although air pollution in China's capital has been at the forefront of international attention with the upcoming Olympic Games, no one had gone through and actually taken the time to examine publicly-reported data. While the Chinese government has reported that the number of days attaining the Chinese National Ambient Air Quality Standard for cities, called "blue sky" days, has increased yearly from 100 in 1998 to 246 in 2007—an improvement widely circulated in government and media reporting—my analysis found that all these "improvements" can be attributed to a) a shift in reported daily pollutant concentrations from just above to just below the blue boundary; b) a shift of monitoring stations in 2006 to less polluted areas; and c) a change in the way that the pollutant identified as having the largest impact on human health, nitrogen oxides, was measured in June 2000.

The African leaders whose paths crossed with mine in Beijing during the Sino-African summit in November 2006 saw blue skies then due to emergency restrictions that were in place on vehicles. Hopefully, the upcoming Olympics—where even stricter temporary pollution controls are underway—will similarly allow for clear skies, but China's dissembling about its environmental crisis should not be seen as a model for the rest of the world. With increasing Chinese investment in Africa, and a global focus on climate change, my work in both these areas will only expand. I look forward to continuing to apply the skills and lessons that I learned while working with PiAf to tackling global environmental challenges in the future.

Steve will attend law school at UCLA in the fall, where he plans to focus on international environmental law.

**Alyson's Notes from the Field** (continued from page 2)

... and lumber where townspeople sell groundnuts (peanuts), peppers, small fish, and a limited range of produce. There appears to be hope within the international community, however, that things will change for Koindu. The World Bank funded the construction of a gleaming new market complex a five-minute drive outside town. The new concrete structure contains 16 stalls with heavy metal doors for security. The opening ceremony for the compound was planned for the next month, when the District Council members were available to inaugurate it.

The new market was the last stop on my visit. The town leaders I spoke with pointed to the new market as a sign of their progress, and they were eager that I publicize it in order to garner additional international support. These are humbling moments, indeed, when you are asked to carry forward a message of such importance and you are not sure to whom it should even be delivered. Even when you are working for an international aid organization, how do you avoid becoming a mere disaster tourist? Even now, after having told this story on my blog ([www.socialedge.org/blogs/alyson-in-africa](http://www.socialedge.org/blogs/alyson-in-africa)) and in this newsletter, what impact has this story had? These are the questions that I asked myself as I got back into my car and drove away from the immaculate new stalls, past children playing hide-and-seek in the burnt shells of the old homes lining the dirt road.



*Above: Alyson with a men's action group*



*Top row: Koindu's old market (left) and the new market complex funded by the World Bank (right)  
Bottom row: Women selling groundnuts and produce in the market; school-children in Koindu*