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My internship this summer with the Social Entrepreneur Corps in Ecuador has been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences that I have undertaken during the course of my studies at Notre Dame. As this was my first experience being out of the country, I encountered obstacles I never thought that I would face, was forced to greatly expand my comfort zone, and witnessed a whole variety of culture and diversity all packed within a country the size of Colorado. One of the truly fantastic things about this program was getting to travel to and live in four different parts of the country – all vastly different experiences from each other. I got to see the disparity of living standards all across the country, from staying in a wealthier residential neighborhood in Cuenca, to living in an extremely impoverished subsistence agriculture community named Pulingui. I also got to see the differences in how these people perceived money and its relative importance (or unimportance) throughout the different communities.

While I cannot truly say that I knew what to expect going into the program, the internship managed to exceed expectations in some regards, throw massive surprises at me, and fall short of what I imagined on some occasions. As far as exceeding expectations, the experience of living in such a vastly different world has to be at the top of the list. I understood that living in another country would throw me into a completely different context, but it was not until I had arrived that this truly set in for me. On the flight there, I began to hear Spanish seeping into local conversation and announcements starting at the Miami airport. Yet flight attendants and others would still switch to English when speaking to me, upon the correct assumption that English was my primary

language. I knew I had really begun my adventure when receiving a customs declaration sheet in the Guayaquil airport from a man who rapid-fired some Spanish at me, of which I might have understood half of a sentence. I had entered the world of South America where English was no longer king. As I slowly began acclimating to the language and pulling my four years of high school Spanish out of the recesses of my mind, practicing speaking with locals and my host families soon became one of my favorite aspects of being abroad. Nothing quite makes you feel a part of the local culture like immersing yourself in its language.

One of the most ambiguous things about this program was also how little I truly knew about what I would be doing there. While I had the broad idea that I would be doing consulting work for local businesses, I did not anticipate the variety of work I would actually be doing, such as teaching in schools, working with cheese and jam factories, heading the marketing for a vision exam campaign, and developing financial literacy workshops. I primarily wanted to work on the consulting and business side while undertaking this program, but it was interesting getting to be a part of such a breadth of different work. Each of these areas of work brought about a completely unique challenge. For instance, unsurprisingly, it can be quite difficult getting a classroom of small Ecuadorian children under control and excited to learn about nutrition. One universal truth that I took away from my classroom teaching is the love for the game, “Simon Says” (in this case, “Simón Dice”). It was also fascinating getting to see the Ecuadorian business context for several of the organizations that we consulted for. The jam factory that we advised had not produced any jam for the last six months, had no form of accounting, no organizational structure, and almost nobody on the board knew answers to

any of our questions during a needs-analysis. Not to mention, there were organizations like the one that sold community food baskets for prices so cheap that they literally were losing money on every basket, but still refused to raise prices to try and get out of debt.

Despite the less than fantastic business acumen of many of these people, they all had great hearts and truly wanted to better their communities in all that they did. Three other interns and I actually spent a large portion of our time in-country founding a pro-bono Latin American consulting organization named Pakta Consulting, in order to continue working with these wonderful people with great ideas but lack of access to resources. One of our first clients, Olmedo, runs a community tourism agency that actually gives 90% of its profits back to the community. It was truly phenomenal seeing such a shift in priorities when comparing these Ecuadorian family and community values to the independence and sometimes highly self-serving nature that can be prevalent in America.

Upon further reflection of this summer experience, I can say definitively that this truly has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Not only did I spend my working hours getting to help out local communities, businesses, and schools, but I also got to explore the culture, people, and nature of one of the most beautiful countries in the world. From feeling the astounding power of the Pailon del Diablo waterfall to being part of the Inti Raymi (Sun God) festival in Ñamaring, the cultural and natural immersion was unparalleled. I made the most unexpected of friends (including two amazing chefs, Diego and Wilmo, who run their own upscale restaurant), saw varying cultures everywhere from the Amazon, to the coast, to many different Andean cities, and left truly feeling like I had made a home there. However, this is not to overly romanticize the experience, as there

were many, many things that I missed about home and struggled with while there. Eating soup and rice consistently for almost every single meal can really wear one down. Not to mention having to sleep in at least two layers during my two weeks in Pulingui due to the lack of insulation and freezing nightly temperatures. I cannot say that I overly enjoyed spending some time with stomach amoebas for an entire week and being unapologetically sick either. And this last point of contention can only really be blamed on myself for poor planning, but I would not recommend going to a foreign country in this day and age without your smartphone, because I promise that the Sudoku app on your burner phone will in fact get painfully boring by the time you reach level 27. In retrospect though, it was a nice thing having a respite from excessive technology and always having the internet and phone by your side 24/7.

I am extremely grateful that I was afforded this opportunity by funding from the Kellogg Institute, as this will always be an experience that I remember fondly. There really is no experience more transformative and perspective changing than living in circumstances that are so vastly different from those you know and have grown up surrounded by. I hope to continue my exploration of the world and particularly Latin America after having gotten an initial taste of all it has to offer.