

Final Report

I would like to begin by saying a huge thank you to MEJOR Communities, the Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation, the Omprakash Foundation, Diversity Abroad Network, the Wharton Social Impact Initiative, and the Penn Christian Association for generously supporting my Peruvian microenterprise project. Living and volunteering in Peru was such a transformational learning experience. I continue to be deeply involved in the work I started with Expand Peru in Huancayo and hope to keep you updated on future progress.

Accomplishments: Through microloans, business education, and mentoring, I started two businesses in Peru: a women's knitting co-operative and an entrepreneurial bakery with 10 to 15 teenage girls. The education was experiential; the girls were able to apply their newfound marketing, management, and accounting skills as they made and sold bread in Peru. Bread is a staple food for breakfast and dinner in Peru, so the students had a ready market for their products and had very little trouble with sales. For two months, we met every day for two hours. This was a huge time commitment on their part, since many Peruvian youth are responsible for helping their parents with housekeeping and childcare. My goal was to create a safe space where the teens could have fun and learn new skills. To promote socialization, I organized regular games, sports, and crafts for them as well as the occasional field trip.

Prior to leaving Peru, I conducted a survey to assess the impact of the program, and all respondents agreed that their business and leadership skills had improved. I truly enjoyed fostering sincere and long-lasting relationships with the girls. Since the students came from impoverished homes, many did not hear on a regular basis how loved and valued they were. Furthermore, their parents and teachers did not have time for enrichment or extracurricular activities. I thus invested a great deal of outside time and effort into being there for them, whether that meant waking up extra early to play basketball or accompanying them to the bakery on Sundays (technically, my day off). We spoke regularly about the differences between Peru and the United States. They were all very interested in learning English and potentially traveling, so I started teaching basic vocabulary and role-playing common scenarios (e.g. ordering at a restaurant, buying a house, booking a plane ticket, etc.) to improve their English comprehension and speaking skills.

The women's co-operative started when my host mother noticed the success of the microenterprise project I had undertaken with the teenagers. She asked me whether I would consider working with her and her friends – mostly, unemployed women – to help them sell products in the United States. I have now established relationships with various fair trade retailers in the US, including Elevita, Novica, the Global Development Collaborative, and N'SESA International. I will be transferring more money to the women to enable them to purchase materials to knit scarves and hats and fulfill their first international order. The microloan is due to be repaid by the first of March 2014, six months after the first loan installment. We hope to keep this money circulating in the community as a very low-interest microloan fund to jumpstart other entrepreneurial ventures.

Around the fifth or sixth week of my program with Expand Peru, I started volunteering at an SOS Children's Village. SOS Children's Villages is an international NGO that provides loving homes to orphaned children or children whose parents can no longer care for them properly. I ran vocational workshops to teach the older children skills like knitting and jewelry making, with the hope that they could use those skills in the future to gain economic self-sufficiency. I also taught English and financial literacy courses in the evenings to assist "graduates" of the SOS Children's Villages with the transition to independent living.

While on my internship and since coming back, I publicized Expand Peru through various media channels. I wrote a book chapter for *Givology: A Guide to Giving* to increase awareness about the socioeconomic problems in Peru among students both at my university and beyond. My blogs have also been published by *Verge Magazine*, *Omprakash*, *Diversity Abroad*, *MEJOR Communities*, *Wharton Student Voices*, *Wharton Magazine*, *Student Reporter*, and *IMPACT Magazine*.

Challenges: Currently, the main challenge with my work in Peru is to ensure that there are people willing and able to assume responsibility for the projects' sustainable development. Obviously, with the bakery, it is not realistic to expect that an internal leadership transition will happen smoothly after only a few months of work. We tried to enforce accountability within the youth group by establishing a list of norms and designating people to serve as coordinator, secretary, and treasurer, but the girls are young and need a supervisor for the time being.

Through collaboration with *MEJOR Communities*, *Omprakash*, and other organizations, I hope to find a suitable volunteer to relaunch the bakery project and youth group. I would like to be involved with preparing and training this volunteer prior to his or her arrival in Peru. I have left school supplies and curricular materials with Expand Peru to make the work experience of future volunteers as organized and enjoyable as possible.

One of my frustrations since returning from Peru has been communicating with the director of the NGO Bernabe Suarez. Bernabe had promised to visit the girls every two weeks, but since timeliness has a different connotation in Peru, it is difficult to make sure he is following through with this commitment. Eventually, it would be great to hire a Peruvian worker to oversee the project on a part-time basis and to provide me with regular updates.

Needs and Next Steps: Although the girls have found an oven in their community which they can use as long as they pay for firewood, they need a "cortadora" and a "batidora" (a cutting machine and a large blender) in order to continue making bread. Before sending another volunteer down, I plan to fundraise and apply for grants to purchase this equipment. Ideally, the next volunteer could go down during the students' winter break (December-February) because the students will have more time to devote to a bakery when they are not in school. Otherwise, we had talked about the bakery becoming a weekend activity.

In order to recruit international volunteers, I have worked with Expand Peru to fix their Omprakash page and started establishing a partnership between Givology and Expand Peru. I have also begun connecting with service-oriented groups at my university, such as Penn International Business Volunteers and the Global Development Collaborative. These groups will probably send down interns and hopefully will help sell the women's knitted products on Penn's campus. I have supplied detailed information (with visuals) for Expand Peru to put on their website to publicize my two projects, which will be available to Internet users in the coming weeks.

Lessons Learned: Through my volunteer experience, I gained a much greater awareness of the Peruvian culture and values. Peruvians have a very different sense of time, so replying to emails and accomplishing tasks efficiently are not among their top priorities. Although this caused much frustration at first, I learned that my way is not necessarily the right way or only way. Peruvians are much more family centered and less rushed than Americans. My host mother would often cook lunch for her extended family and even for the broader community. Even though relatives and friends had other commitments, meal times were dedicated to conversation and bonding.

In addition, through working in a low-income country, I developed patience and flexibility when confronting challenges. Since the girls did not have regular Internet or phone access, it was often next to impossible to contact them. One day, I had to walk to each of their houses, which took around three hours, to update them on a time for our next meeting. Working with young people is not always easy, particularly when you don't have access to electronic communications, but when the girls asked if I would buy a home in their community to live there forever and my host mother told me how I had given her hope for the future, it made all the effort worthwhile.

People have said it time and time again, but you go to a developing country expecting to benefit people in need, but it ends up enriching your life even more so. I feel humbled and blessed by this opportunity.

Description of Pictures:

Picture 1 – Girls launching “Café Leah and Friends”

Picture 2 – All the girls (and boys) who worked on the bakery after the first day of classes

Picture 3 – A field trip to Ingenio, a nearby town

Picture 4 – With the women's co-operative

Picture 5 – Some of the beautiful hats and scarves produced by the Peruvian women

Picture 6 – Teaching knitting at the SOS Children's Village in Huancayo





