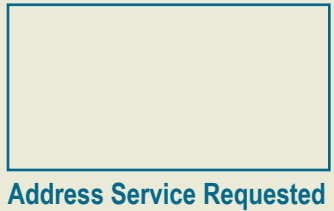




# Institute of Integrated Rural Development

Empowering Bangladesh's Rural Poor to End Their Own Poverty

Spring 2006



## Student Ambassador Program Proves a Life-Changing Experience

“Amazing!” “Powerful!” “Changed my life!” These are some of the words of university students returning from IIRD’s first Student Ambassadors to Bangladesh Program initiated in the fall of 2005. Nine students from Washington University in St. Louis spent two and a half weeks over Winter break followed by eight students from the University of Virginia during Spring break. All returned with a new understanding of what life is in the Third World, and most are still struggling with exactly how the experience will impact their lives in the long-term.

A large part of IIRDnorthamerica’s mission is to educate and spread awareness of the needs in the Third World and how IIRD works to partner with the poor to create assets and resources that will eradicate rural poverty.

College students have long gone on service trips here and abroad to help the less fortunate through their labor. Our program is very different. Participants do no manual labor and do not resolve any problems. The purpose of our program is to introduce college students to a larger experience at a time in their lives when they are exploring where they fit in the world. They are beginning to make life decisions about careers, politics, philanthropy, and purpose. This time of exploration into a world so different can be a defining moment in the development of their values and commitments.

IIRD’s Student Ambassador Program immerses them in the Third World, where two-thirds of the world lives. It introduces them to a new culture, a different lifestyle driven by basic values, raises questions of differences and highlights similarities. Groups of up to twelve students are divided into three – four member teams - each traveling with an IIRD translator and

staff person to two or three of IIRD’s work areas. These small groups allow for a more personal experience and are less disruptive to the daily life of the villages. While in the work areas students live in IIRD staff compounds built near the villages, living in huts and cared for by the staff. They are introduced to different customs and foods and sounds. They learn to live with intermittent electricity and are amazed by the warm welcome they receive at every stop. Through their translator, students are asked to share themselves with villagers, exchanging ideas, and learn about their hosts lives, needs, and hopes. The teams discuss IIRD’s programs with the villagers and learn how these programs are helping individual families, what they hope to accomplish through these

programs, and what they want for their children. Students start out as Ambassadors for America and they return Ambassadors for Bangladesh.

The following quote from a UVA student sums up all that IIRD-northamerica hoped to achieve: “...if you don’t come out of Bangladesh with a new perspective and attitude, then

you didn’t have your eyes, mind, or heart open while you were there. Ideologies and concepts have a new meaning to me now. The definitions I previously had of ethnocentrism, Islam, rural culture, poverty, generosity, and hope have been displaced and discarded by an ever evolving curiosity and openness to exploring these ideas.” – Nikki, University of Virginia

*“A mind stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.”  
- Oliver Wendell Holmes*

*IIRD is committed to preparing young adults to understand the needs of a global world and our responsibility to address those needs. Funds will be sought to build the infrastructure necessary to increase our ability to host more Student Ambassadors.*



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## Updates

IIRD has been selected for a three year grant from Heifer International for \$78,950 to benefit 270 poor women in Dhunot with training in animal care, growing fodder and raising livestock that is given as a part of the program.

Winrock Foundation is sending a tissue culture expert from the University of Florida for three weeks in April 2006 to further IIRD’s work in creating stronger vegetable and plant strains.

BRAC, the largest NGO in Bangladesh, has named IIRD as a partner in a two year outreach to 300 ultra poor families in Nikli. The project includes training, enterprise development, healthcare, agriculture and livestock programs. This \$78,000 grant will start in June 2006.

Concern Worldwide has approved a five year project with IIRD to provide training, help for development, uplifting of flooded lands, tree plantation and credit programs in 9 Unions. The areas are under deep water 6 months of the year. The project grant will begin July 2006.

## Opportunities

- Support a child’s education for 1 year . . . . . \$20
- Underwrite a school for 30 students for 1 year . . . . . \$600
- Train a village woman to use a sewing machine. . . . . \$100
- Buy a sewing machine for the new garment factory. . . . . \$140
- Supply a tin roof before the monsoon season. . . . . \$60



The enclosed envelope lists some of the ways that you can help to support and expand Fr. Bill’s work. Please consider becoming a Friend of IIRD.



## Water Of Life

“There was a woman in a village who showed us the purest joy I have ever seen. She was so excited about a tube well that IIRD had just dug for her that would give her family pure drinking water. She smiled constantly as she showed off the well and how it worked, before running back into her hut and returning with three glasses for us to share her water. It was the greatest joy I’ve ever seen. She is still economically poor, but she has been given a new life. She has hope and spirit and energy. IIRD is helping her to attain a life where she can choose how to ameliorate her own poverty.” – Mark, Washington University

*IIRD has installed 1,906 pure drinking water tube wells in addition to 18 arsenic free deep water wells in areas affected by arsenic. More than 15,000 families are being served by these wells.*

## Schools Fuel “Impossible” Dreams

“We visited a school in a Hindu village known as the “Sweepers Village”. These villagers are the lowest caste and considered untouchables. They live in an isolated area and are given the lowest paying jobs, such as cleaning latrines and streets. The classroom presented a very different story. All thirty of the first graders had the confidence to tell us what they wanted to be when they grew up – many said teachers or military or policemen while others said doctors, garment workers and pilots. Before school their dreams were much smaller, fitting their village life experiences. This day they were all anxious to share their new learning, their new ambitions and the dances they learned in culture class. It was uplifting to see and hear their excitement and joy. The atmosphere is cheerful with the children’s colorful artwork decorating the walls. It is a happy place where hope lives amidst crushing poverty.” – Ina, University of Virginia



“Wow! I really enjoyed the school visits. The children are so happy to be in school. They and their parents know what an honor it is to be able to go to school. Parents show their pride and respect by sending their children to school washed and in clean clothing. Parents are partners in the school, maintaining the building and disciplining the children if needed.” - Jen, Washington University

*48 Primary Feeder Schools are currently operating. It is our goal to reach 60 schools in January 2007.*

## Field Social Workers: the Eyes and Ears of IIRD

“Meeting with the social workers provided insights into the many challenges that IIRD faces at the ground level. These young men and women live in the villages and are recruited and trained by IIRD to be the eyes and ears of the organization. Because they live among the people they are known and trusted. Within days they are aware of any changes in a family’s circumstances and able to notify IIRD so that an intervention can be made quickly to aid that family before serious damage is done to the progress that they have already made. Because of this network of dedicated social workers at the ground level, IIRD families stay on track toward their goal of financial independence.” - Juana and Ben, University of Virginia

*IIRD’s field social workers are present in all its working areas, making sure that our partners have every possible support to reach their goal of financial stability*



“My experience in Bangladesh revolves around the idea of global community. It was equally important for the Bangladeshis to share their talents and insights with others as it was for us to have the insights into their lives and culture. Through the connection I now have with Bangladesh I can fully appreciate the necessity of opening myself up to people in all walks of life and trying to understand our differences under the umbrella of humanity.”

- Nikki, Washington University



“I learned so much about humanity, about how people are the same everywhere you go. They want good things for their families, they want opportunity, they want to be treated fairly and humanely. The Bangladeshis, although largely illiterate, are an intelligent and thinking people. They are engaged in their community and interested in the larger world. They are generous and joyous, and while they face hardships the rest of the world cannot imagine, they love life.”

- Pete, Washington University



“People who must live hand to mouth work as hard as they possibly can under seemingly impossible conditions. The idea that because they are poor they are lazy and unable to rise above their poverty through creativity is laughable. IIRD has struck a good balance by partnering without creating an unsustainable dependency. They simultaneously invest in the development partners’ potential through access to subsidized programs, while encouraging their eventual independence by improving or teaching new skills and educating their children.”

- Ina, University of Virginia



“It is because of the lack of unity and understanding among people in the world that so many of the world’s problems persist. When you meet and share an experience like ours in Bangladesh, the people have faces and shared experiences and real needs. It is so much easier to care about what happens to them. This trip was a priceless investment in our future.”

- Matt, Washington University



“150 million people in a perennially flooding land the size of Wisconsin is just a statistic. Being there changes everything. It’s hard to explain how it feels being suffocated by the noise, pollution and thousands of ever present people ... knowing that everyone in this throng of people has so much less than you do. On returning home I find that I am much less judgmental of others than I have been in a long time. I realize that my life could always be so much simpler and more devoted to the service of others. And yet, I put my needs first despite good intentions.”

- Mark, Washington University



“IIRD has found a very difficult balance between progress and not interfering with the existing social fabric.”

- Juana, University of Virginia

