

Upon my first exposure to wide-spread poverty in Juarez, Mexico, I was struck by the material depravity of the individuals I encountered. The families I met lived in utterly dilapidated shelters made of cardboard, mud, and plastic bags, struggling daily to find sustenance in their abject surroundings. My suburban, middle-class upbringing had not prepared me to deal with what I saw or even to begin to contemplate ways of alleviating this distressing situation. Yet, as if a watershed, I became more driven than ever to understand this phenomena through studies and field experience.

As an undergraduate at UC Berkeley, I majored in Political Economy of Industrial Societies, with a concentration on globalization and development, in order to better understand the complexities that underline global poverty from a social, economic and historical perspective. I complimented my studies with further travel and volunteer experiences in South America, Africa, Eastern Europe, South Asia, and the Middle East. Through these travels I became even more intimately aware of the staggering complexity of the issues faced by developing nations and acquired a strong commitment to working towards poverty alleviation and social justice. In the process of researching the viability and impact of microfinance in Eastern Africa and working for the Inter-American Association for Environmental Defense, an environmental and human rights legal organization, my interests began to narrow as to the intersect and dynamic between development and the rule of law. I am presently continuing this line of research through my work in India with International Justice Mission, a human rights, legal organization addressing the issues of human trafficking, forced labor and child prostitution, citizenship, and property rights.

Within the varying issues and challenges that I have observed in the developing world, an established rule of law and effective system of governance has stood out in its potential to foster real and sustainable economic growth. Whether through the prisoners I encountered in Uganda, held for years without a trial, or the Mexican farmers, who were continuously extorted by the local police, a lacking rule of law and the corruption that accompanies it can limit an individual's livelihood and the economic potential of a nation. My undergraduate coursework in International Rural Development Policy and the Sociology of Development and Globalization demonstrated that poor systems of governance often result in human rights violations and judicial inefficiency, which impede or negate the productive capability of those within a country. Therefore, reform in this area could result in more organic and sustainable growth in both the social and economic realm.

Through these experiences, it became apparent that the issues of development and global poverty were pervasive and multidimensional and any attempt to address them must account for their complexity and historical background. I am thus applying to the University of Oxford's Masters of Philosophy in Development Studies because the holistic approach employed by the program will

furnish me with the practical knowledge, tools, and theoretical understanding necessary to approach sustainable development. Moreover, undertaking graduate studies at Oxford will enable me to both engage with the leaders that are spearheading the dynamic and emerging field of development studies and to take part in the global dialogue on the most viable, effective, and sustainable means to address the issue of poverty.

In that light, my proposed thesis at Oxford will focus on a study that explores an interregional comparison between South Asia and Eastern Africa, assessing the effect of established law or the lack thereof in relation to the process of development. To further understand this research area, I plan to enroll in the 'Rural Societies and Politics' and the 'International Relations in the Developing World' options. These options will in turn elucidate the varying obstacles and opportunities that exist at the state and local level and the post-colonial legacy that has greatly encumbered the rule of law in many developing nations. Due to my undergraduate studies in political economy, I have developed a strong analytical background in the history of state formation and politics as they relate to development, and I believe the economics and social anthropology foundation courses would therefore be best suited for my proposed research and future career path.

Following the completion of my degree, I plan to pursue a career with an intergovernmental organization that would enable me to work with developing nations to establish a greater emphasis on the rule of law, including anti-corruption and human rights issues, in the course of poverty alleviation. More specifically, I hope to work with the United Nations Development Programme in the area of poverty reduction policy formation and analysis. To this end I hope my work will effectuate change in the practical application of development policy by accounting for the flagrant injustice that can arise from a nation lacking in the rule of law. Through this, it is my ultimate goal to be a part of the movement that will help propel the field of development as its progress may one day be an integral part of creating positive change for the world's most underserved and disadvantaged.