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Universal Justice
Fordham University
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[dominican republic spring 2010 field survey]

During the Spring of 2010, Fordham University School of Law student group, Universal Justice, sent a team of students to investigate human rights issues in the Dominican Republic, set up partnerships with organizations on the ground, and lay the framework for a long-term relationship.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Universal Justice

Universal Justice (“UJ”) is a student-led organization at Fordham University School of Law (“Fordham”). Since its inception in the early 1990s, UJ has provided opportunities for Fordham students to design, implement, and participate in international experiential learning trips across the globe. Over the past three years forty-seven Fordham students have participated in UJ trips, eight trip participants have received summer fellowships through the Leitner Center for International Law and Justice to spend ten weeks interning with UJ partner organizations, and one member of UJ received a Fulbright scholarship to work in Nicaragua next year. During the 2009-2010 academic year, UJ led trips to Nicaragua over winter break, and Jamaica and the Dominican Republic (“DR”) over spring break.

Beyond coordinating trips, UJ has made several contributions to the communities with whom it has partnered. In recent years, UJ has established a solar-powered computer program in a rural village in Mirafior, Nicaragua, constructed a website on behalf of an association of chronically ill sugarcane workers (<http://asochivida.org/>), written and directed a play for a group of young, female victims of sexual abuse, sold jewelry to support an organization, Nicoya Mission, working to provide economic alternatives to families living in Managua’s municipal trash dump, and provided tee shirts for Fordham to distribute to students at its annual public service day, produced by a women-owned sewing cooperative in Nicaragua.

Though UJ receives significant financial support from Fordham’s Deans and Fordham’s Student Bar Association, UJ is responsible for raising most of the funds necessary for its trips. Our fundraising campaign this academic year included five bar nights, two bake sales, a speed dating event, selling over 100 pounds of 100% Fair Trade and organic-certified Nicaraguan coffee, and playing a principal role in organizing and running Fordham’s first ever Public Interest Resource Center Mardi Gras Ball. Over \$10,000 was raised at the ball, the proceeds from which were divided equally between Fordham’s public interest groups - like UJ - and an organization in Haiti called Partners in Health.

1.2. UJ’s Dominican Republic Trip

UJ sponsored its first ever trip to the Dominican Republic over spring break 2010. Five Fordham students participated in the trip: Scott Wagner (2010), Katy Mayall (2011), Andrew Cabasso (2012), David Levy (2012) and Colin Missett (2012). The idea for the trip originated with Andrew Cabasso, who spent last summer working in the Dominican Republic with a microfinance institution, Esperanza International. Though the initial vision of the trip involved partnering with Esperanza and residing in a village where Andrew worked last summer, due to a scheduling conflict Esperanza was unable to accommodate us. With our hearts and minds already set on the trip, we began

investigating and reaching out to other organizations in the country. Eventually, we chose an organization called Sister Island Project. (“SIP”)¹

1.3. Goals for the Trip

UJ's vision for its first ever trip to the DR was to conduct a fact-finding mission to familiarize itself with some of the developmental and legal challenges facing economically impoverished and socially marginalized communities in the DR. The ultimate goal was to expand the scope and nature of UJ in order to allow more Fordham students to participate in our organization. Further, UJ was interested in giving first year law student Andrew Cabasso the same opportunity it had given to former UJ members in the past: to design and lead an experiential learning trip to explore an international human rights and/or development issues of particular interest to him. In fact, one of the principal reasons we elected to work with SIP was its willingness to create an itinerary catered to our interests.

When UJ initiates a new trip, its hope is to use the information it gathers, and the connections it makes as the basis for future UJ projects and partnerships. In Section 6 of this report, we suggest several ways that UJ plans to use the information we learned from the trip to further the interests of the communities and organizations with whom we met.

1.4. Itinerary

The Dominican Republic trip itinerary was created collaboratively by UJ and SIP. We arrived in Santo Domingo on Saturday, March 13th, 2010 and departed from the country on Sunday March 21st. During our stay, we resided in a small rural village called Cruz Verde², staying with families connected with SIP. We allocated the majority of our time to meetings with local residents and leaders in Cruz Verde and the small rural communities surrounding it. We elected, however, to spend three days meeting with organizations, people and institutions working in the fields of law, economic/social development, agriculture and politics in the cities of Monte Plata³ and Santo Domingo.

1.5. Objectives

UJ designed this report to detail the following: 1) the logistics of the trip; 2) our observations; 3) our thoughts and opinions based on what we observed; and 4) our next steps.

We hope our report will prove useful to both the Sister Island Project and the Fordham community, whose financial and emotional support for UJ this academic year gave us the opportunity to expand the scope of UJ's activities to include a trip to the DR.

2. Background

¹ See Section 3.1.1. of this report for a more in depth description of Sister Island Project.

² See Section 4, which provides a more detailed description of Cruz Verde.

³ Monte Plata is the capital of the province of Monte Plata where Cruz Verde is located.

2.1. Overview

The Human Development Index, created by the United Nations, ranked the Dominican Republic as the 90th most developed country out of 177 nations in 2009.⁴ Rather than simply looking at GDP, this Index provides an enriched scale to measure country development which incorporates measures of life expectancy, education, and standard of living. According to the United Nations Development Programme, currently 16.2% of Dominican citizens live on less than \$2 per day, with a significant gap in income equality.⁵ Meanwhile, 44.4% live below the national poverty line. The poorest 50% of the population receives less than 20% of GNP while the richest 10% enjoy almost 40% of national income.⁶

Further illustrating the economic inequality is the Gini Coefficient. The coefficient is a ratio based on a 0-1 scale where 0 equals perfect income equality and 1 equals perfect income inequality. At zero every person would have the same income while at 1 one person would have all the income. Currently .516 according to the United Nations, the Dominican Republic has the 19th-largest measured income inequality in the world.⁷

Rural poverty is a major concern in the Dominican Republic. More than 70% of the country's poor live in rural areas. Infrastructure is very limited, children have little formal schooling after the 3rd grade, and homes are frequently built with mud walls and corrugated tin roofs.⁸

Poverty is scattered throughout the country with the highest concentration located in urban Santo Domingo and central Cibao. Poverty is also highly visible in the southern and eastern regions around the *bateyes* (sugarcane-producing communities) where one typically finds undocumented Haitian immigrant labor.

2.2. Haitian Immigrants

Up to one million Haitian immigrants live in the Dominican Republic, many illegally. A common governmental response has been to enact mass deportations.⁹ The northern and central borders of the country have a large population of Haitian immigrants working on farms which consequently drives down labor wages.¹⁰ These immigrants typically earn \$2.50-\$3.00 per day individually, leaving them able to save little to nothing for their families.

⁴ United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2009, Dominican Republic, available at http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_DOM.html (last visited Aug. 1, 2010).

⁵ United Nations Development Programme, Statistics of the Human Development Programme, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics> (last visited July 15, 2010).

⁶ CIA, Dominican Republic, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/dr.html> (last visited July 15, 2010).

⁷ United Nations Development Programme, *supra* note 4.

⁸ Andrea L. Findley, Market Survey of Microfinance for Grameen Replication in the Dominican Republic 5 (2002).

⁹ BBC News, Country Profile: Dominican Republic, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1216926.stm (last visited July 15, 2010).

¹⁰ Findley, *supra* note 8, at 11.

Neighboring the Dominican Republic to the west, sharing the island Hispaniola, Haiti has one of the greatest inequalities of wealth in the world today. One percent of the population owns about fifty percent of the wealth.¹¹ In 2007-2008, Haiti ranked behind only five other countries in the Gini Coefficient income inequality indicator. Fifty-eight percent of the people live on less than a dollar per day. Since the Dominican Republic is comparatively much wealthier than Haiti, it provides better job prospects for workers. Many undocumented immigrants find themselves working in the *bateyes*, performing the tasks that Dominicans prefer not to do.

2.3. Bateyes

The *bateyes* are sugarcane-growing communities in the rural Dominican countryside, and are home to the poorest families in the country. With populations of nearly exclusively migrant Haitian laborers who earn less than the minimum wage, laborers live on subsistence, unable to save. During the harvest season – approximately 8 months – workers harvest the fields for low wages, and are subject to various degrading conditions including forced servitude at the hands of the sugarcane refinery owners (CEA)¹², the police force, and the *braceros* (sugarcane cutters).

It is estimated that sugarcane workers earn 31 cents an hour for an 11.48-hour workday, or about \$23 USD per week.¹³ Less than one-third of the *batey*-workers are literate, on average attending only one and a half years of school.¹⁴ The Dominican government has recognized that 85% of all workplace injuries happen in the *bateyes*.¹⁵

The *bateyes* are home to some of the worst living conditions in the country. Many *bateyes* have neither running water nor electricity. Villagers must travel great distances to either purchase water or collect from a community well. Since the *bateyes* are intentionally isolated from the rest of the country, accessing public services such as health care and education are extremely difficult. Those living on the *bateyes* are the poorest populations in the Dominican Republic, and in the greatest need of aid; however, their remote locations provide many challenges for aid programs.

Michele Wucker best sums up life on the *batey* in her book, *Why the Cocks Fight*:

Isolated on the *bateyes*, the *braceros* see no future beyond the waving stalks of sugarcane. They hardly exist on paper. Their children have no country. They are lucky if they get medical treatment. They have no hope. Dominicans will not do the work they do, and most Dominicans hardly blink at the subhuman treatment meted out to the immigrants. The cane cutters are animals, says Dominican common wisdom. They are good for labor and no more, worth consideration only to make sure they do not

¹¹ One World, One World Haiti Guide, <http://uk.oneworld.net/guides/haiti/development> (last visited July 15, 2010).

¹² The State Sugar Council, CEA, owns around 220 of the approximately 500 *bateyes* in the Dominican Republic. James Ferguson, *Migration in the Caribbean: Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Beyond*

¹³ Michele Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight* 94 (1999).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

leave the *bateyes* and spread their inferior culture, their black, black skin. What concern is it that the Haitians do not receive proper medical care? They chose to come to Dominikani. What matter if Dominicans brought them here? They agreed to come.¹⁶

In July, *el tiempo muerto* (“the dead season”), the *braceros* are left to earn a wage however possible. The *batey* owners generally permit the workers and their families to live on the property in their self-made houses year-round in exchange for their labor in the harvest season. In some cases the plantation owners may build uniform shacks themselves. While the plantation owners consider this a fair trade for the *braceros*’ labor during the harvest season, it appears more like a system of ceaseless indentured servitude.

While these workplace conditions are deplorable, the Haitian laborers suffer through them to try to save some money to bring back home at the end of the harvest season to their families. At the border there are many places the *braceros* can change their money from the Dominican peso back to the Haitian gourde. However, there have also been reports of corrupt border guards demanding the *braceros*’ earnings, leaving them with nothing as they go back home for *el tiempo muerto*.

2.4. Remittances

Remittances, or *remesas*, are payments made by Dominicans living in the United States back to their families in country. As they have greater earning potential in the United States, oftentimes one family member may travel to the United States to seek work and send any money earned to his/her family who remained in the Dominican Republic. Many Spanish-language *remesa* websites exist like Envíos Boyá where people can make online money transfers to Dominican bank accounts. According to a recent survey, 38% of Dominicans receive remittances averaging \$2,350 USD annually.¹⁷ Remittances and tourism, the country’s two largest economic contributors showed signs of slowing as the economy worsened in the end of 2008.¹⁸

2.5. Moneylenders

Moneylenders have existed in the Dominican Republic much longer than any microfinance institution (MFI) has. Their very high interest rates and unethical lending practices have turned many borrowers to service-providing MFIs. The going rate for moneylenders in the country differs by region, but can be upwards of 50% per week in some locations. The Grameen Bank has noted that often borrowers will find themselves barely able to repay the moneylender, having to take out subsequent loans to survive while simultaneously entering a never-ending cycle of debt.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Id.* at 112-13.

¹⁷ Dominican Remittances Not Likely to Fall Significantly, Inter-American Dialogue, Dec. 12, 2008 <http://www.thedialogue.org/page.cfm?pageID=32&pubID=1728>.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Eames Roebing & Tove Silveira, Remittance Crunch, But Women Migrants Keep Sending, IPS, Jun. 30, 2009, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47424>.

¹⁹ Muhammad Yunus, *Banker to the Poor* (1999).

2.6. US Policy

Although the United States has contributed development aid aimed at reducing poverty in the Dominican Republic, several of its policies regarding international trade have crippled the agriculture industry of the country. In May of 2002, the Bush administration enacted a bill providing huge subsidies for U.S. agriculture producers of the already-subsidized corn, wheat, and soya bean crops while providing new subsidies for peanuts, lentils, chickpeas, dairy farms, honey, wool, and mohair-producers.²⁰ The bill called for \$173.5 billion in subsidies over ten years. The predicted effect was a crippling of developing country exports, effectively shutting out foreign imports to the United States. Experts predicted the prices of these commodities would fall 10-15% as the U.S. produces 19% of world agricultural exports.²¹

According to the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), 63% of agricultural exports went to the U.S. in 1999. With this new bill, the Dominican Republic's agricultural exports were severely diminished. Critics of this policy in the European Union claimed the U.S. preaches free trade but practices protectionism.²²

In 2005, Bush enacted the U.S.-Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) to allow more sugar from the region to enter the United States.²³ Further, the agreement made the provision of removing all tariffs and quotas on all but four agricultural commodities. For the U.S. that commodity was sugar (a crop vital to the Dominican agricultural economy). U.S. sugar producers opposed the bill, fearing that the increase in sugar imports would lower prices. Meanwhile, with the elimination of tariffs and the current subsidies given by the U.S. to its agricultural producers, the United States stands to benefit heavily from this bill. It will increase its exports while imported products will be unable to compete with U.S.-subsidized commodities.

3. Cruz Verde

3.1. Overview

Cruz Verde is a rural village located in the Monte Plata province of the Dominican Republic. It is comprised of roughly 80 families and 200 total residents. The village is adjacent to a main highway that was constructed less than two years ago. The village has limited access to public infrastructure – electricity is sporadic and doesn't reach every home, and only a handful of homes have running water. This necessitates using one of the two communal wells in the village. One of them is powered by electricity and thus only functions when there is power. Only a few of the homes have electrical

²⁰ Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 PL 107-171 (HR 2646) May 13, 2002

²¹ Norman Girvan, *US Farms Subsidies will Impact the Greater Caribbean*, Association of Caribbean States, May 17, 2002, <http://www.acs-aec.org/column/index36.htm>.

²² *Id.*

²³ Remy Jurenas, Cong. Res. Serv., *Agriculture in the U.S.-Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) 12 (2006)*, <http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/assets/crs/RL32110.pdf>.

generators, while the rest of the community must wait for the capricious electricity supplied by the government. In the center of the village lies a Catholic church and a *colmado* (general store). The *colmado* is the principal center of community activity. It is the area's sole vendor, and a place for locals to congregate in the evenings.

Cruz Verde faces numerous obstacles to development. Beyond the public infrastructure problems discussed above, many locals do not own title to the land upon which they live, jobs in the region are scarce, and there is no semblance of a banking infrastructure in the town. Most of the villagers are either self-employed locally, or work in Santo Domingo. Those who work in Santo Domingo generally live in the city during the week - typically with relatives or friends - and then return to Cruz Verde for the weekend. Residing in Santo Domingo allows them to reduce their traveling expenses from commuting between the two places -- \$3 USD to travel to Santo Domingo and \$5-6 to travel back.²⁴ Since Cruz Verde lacks public transportation, several locals with motorcycles have started transportation micro-enterprises, ferrying locals on the back of their motorcycles to the provincial capital of Monte Plata where they can then access *gua guas* (buses) to Santo Domingo.

3.1.1. Sister Island Project

Sister Island Project was founded by Victoria Santos and Peter Blaustein in 1999 after Victoria, a Washington resident, traveled back to her birthplace, Cruz Verde. SIP seeks to improve the quality of life in Cruz Verde, and the numerous villages surrounding it. SIP provides scholarships to help youths receive a college education, constructs homes for local residents, runs a summer program to stimulate children, and is responsible for financing a local learning center with a computer lab. Further, SIP strives to promote economic development opportunities in the region by providing vocational training and start-up capital for various small business enterprises including a women-run sewing cooperative called RECLAIM and a candle making business. Finally, SIP organizes and facilitates several annual service learning trips for volunteer groups from abroad to visit Cruz Verde. These groups typically teach English or computers classes, or work on construction projects.

3.1.2. Luz Maria Learning Center

Cruz Verde is home to the Luz Maria Learning Center, which houses a library and computer lab for local residents. The center offers classes, tutoring, space for arts groups and microenterprises, as well as training and leadership development programs. The center places a strong focus on vocational training and ESL courses. Sister Island Project opened the center in July 2006.

3.1.3. Scholarship Program

SIP has a robust scholarship program, which provides half-tuition scholarships for local residents to further their education by attending college in Santo Domingo. We met with a group of twelve of the most recent scholarship recipients, eleven of whom were women. They explained that the university system also has more women than men, although not by such a large margin. One reason for this is that because of societal

²⁴ The current exchange rate is about 35 Dominican Pesos to 1 United States Dollar.

norms, men are generally able to find employment after high school in the military, law enforcement, or through manual labor. Women, on the other hand, have far fewer employment opportunities, unless they have a college education. The women were grateful for their scholarships because without SIP's assistance they would not have been able to afford college. Most of them would have ended up like their peers - getting married and having children immediately - and would be highly dependent on their husbands for financial support. The young women in the program noted that many of them have friends their age who are currently parents because they did not pursue a college education.

3.1.4. Volunteer Program

SIP conducts volunteer trips to Cruz Verde four to five times per year. The groups stay in the homes of local community members for a reasonable fee. Volunteers include both church and student groups. The majority of volunteers participate in service projects, which includes constructing new homes for residents out of brick and mortar, or teaching English to locals.

The general opinion of the residents was that the English-teaching programs were largely unsustainable, as volunteers generally visit Cruz Verde for a limited period of time. This made it difficult to learn English phrases that were more than very basic.

3.2. Development Challenges

3.2.1. Access to Credit

From our conversations, it appears that residents of Cruz Verde do not currently have access to credit. No bank currently exists in Cruz Verde or in the immediate vicinity. The closest bank in Monte Plata considers the vast majority of residents to not be creditworthy either because they lack collateral, (in part due to the lack of land title, or because they do not have the proper country-issued identification cards that many legal residents have found difficulty obtaining. When asked about the presence of local loan sharks which are often found in the rural villages of developing countries, a local man exclaimed, "We're too poor!"

While local banks refuse to make loans to the poor residents of Cruz Verde, the government has created a program to provide loans to the poor in the Dominican Republic. Unfortunately, none of the loans have reached Cruz Verde. Agriculture loans are also unavailable to the residents of Cruz Verde, as banks consider them too risky. While local farmers have their farmland for collateral, the harvests are inconsistent and thus pose a significant risk to lenders.

Microfinance – loans and savings programs for small self-employed businesses - has yet to reach Cruz Verde, despite several microfinance institutions serving communities around the country. Although the microfinance industry has vastly expanded in the last thirty years following the example of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, it has had difficulty reaching the rural poor.

3.2.2. Transportation to Santo Domingo

Transportation to Santo Domingo is crucial for most of Cruz Verde, as it has the biggest market for vendors as well as the most opportunity for employment. The cost of transportation to Santo Domingo, however, is very expensive for Cruz Verdeans, costing approximately \$9 USD roundtrip. As this is a significant percentage of income for locals, who may only earn a few dollars per day, they often stay in Santo Domingo with relatives during the week, only returning home to see their families on the weekend. The transportation issue also seems to hinder the amount of scholarships SIP can provide, since transportation is a huge expense for university students looking to attend school in Santo Domingo, and no alternative cost-effective means of transportation currently exists for locals.

3.2.3. Job Opportunities

There is no formal wage-earning employment in Cruz Verde. Everyone is either self-employed locally, has employment in Santo Domingo, or is unemployed. Furthermore, in Santo Domingo there is little formal employment. Thus, locals must rely on the informal economy, or selling goods in Santo Domingo or popular tourist destinations.

Unemployment in Cruz Verde is high. While no quantitative data exists, from several community discussions, it became very apparent that finding employment is a problem for the majority of the villagers.

Although there are large, open plots of land in the community, the land is generally uncultivated, or cultivated by locals for farmers not residing in the community. While a few small-scale farms exist, the opportunity for agricultural development appears ripe. From our conversations with locals, however, several obstacles were raised. Dominicans' lack of interest in working in the agricultural sector, the lack of land titles makes agricultural projects risky, and there are high costs startup costs associated with such a venture.

3.2.4. Electricity

As indicated above, access to a consistent source of electricity is impossible in Cruz Verde. In fact, electricity is a problem throughout the Dominican Republic.²⁵ Though not uncommon for developing countries, many in Santo Domingo rely on gas-powered generators during the blackout hours of the day; however, only a handful of Cruz Verdeans have generators since they are very expensive to purchase and power. Because electricity is sporadic, refrigeration is limited as is the ability for people to use other forms of electrical equipment.

3.2.5. Water

Cruz Verde also generally lacks a reliable system to run water throughout the village. The few homes that do have running water only have it when the electricity is working, and even then not every faucet produces water. For the families that do not have running water, they travel with large plastic basins to one of the two communal wells to

²⁵ Our flight out of the country was delayed over 7 hours after the airport lost electricity and its principal generator failed to function.

collect water for bathing, washing, and using the restroom. One of the wells is powered solely by electricity, so it only works sporadically.

3.2.6. Land

Much of the land in Cruz Verde is unused. Open fields that were once farmed are currently empty. Other spreads of property are fenced in, but appear to be completely uninhabited. Residents explained that while there used to be a sugarcane refinery nearby, once it closed they stopped producing sugarcane.

Cruz Verde's current residents have no title to these large swaths of open land. It is either owned by the government, or private interests who stopped cultivating the land and/or abandoned it. One local plot of land was farmed for twenty years until the landowners returned and made the farmers pay for what they had used, and subsequently shut down the farm. In our opinion, the community would benefit through an investigation into the current state of land title in the community. By learning who owns what land, members of the community could then decide whether it is worth trying to purchase land from a private owner, request title from the government, or to begin the legal process of obtaining land through an adverse possession claim.

3.2.7. Healthcare

About 60% of Cruz Verde has health cards. These cards are issued by the government and are necessary for receiving subsidized healthcare. Health cards are unfortunately only available to those with a license, which are issued by the government to persons of Dominican heritage only. Even Haitians living legally in the Dominican Republic have difficulty obtaining health cards. Without these cards, those who need care often go untreated. To obtain these licenses, Haitians living in the Dominican Republic will frequently have Dominicans legally adopt their children. The children take the last name of their adoptive parents, and are then issued a license giving them the ability to be treated at Dominican hospitals.

3.2.8. Education

The licenses used for healthcare are also required to permit children to attend secondary school. Without the licenses, children are turned away from school following elementary school. Thus, Haitian children living legally in the Dominican Republic are generally denied an opportunity to attend school past the elementary level. The children of Haitian immigrants, without education, are unable to make better lives for themselves.

3.3. Interviews

This section highlights several interviews that took place with various members of the community members in Cruz Verde.

3.3.1. RECLAIM – Sewing/Candle-Making Cooperative

RECLAIM currently employs 12 women who sew bags that SIP distributes in the United States. The bags generally sell for between \$8-14 USD. RECLAIM splits the profits

between the women. In addition to sewing bags, they also make decorative candles, which SIP also distributes in the United States.

RECLAIM currently faces numerous challenges. First, there is a limited market for the bags and candles, which decreases the economic potential of the enterprise. Currently, RECLAIM is entirely dependent of SIP's ability to sell its products. As a result, the women do not get paid until its bags are sold. The bags are not being sold locally, because this requires a license, which the women do not know how to obtain. While the women expressed interest in selling their products locally, they have yet to seek a distributor or to inquire into possible domestic markets. Second, the bags suffer from both quality and design flaws.²⁶ The design of the bags is simple and likely to draw interest only from for a limited, older consumer base. In addition, the fabric patterns are limited, and the quality of the product is weak. Third, RECLAIM's current production capabilities and future growth potential are negatively affected by the community's electricity problems. When the power goes out, sewing comes to a standstill. Though the center has a generator, it is also used to power a computer center and it is very expensive to continuously operate. Fourth, the women are completely dependent on SIP – from the purchase of their materials to the selling of their finished products. SIP is responsible for providing the fabric as well as transporting, marketing, selling and then compensating the women for the bags. This dependency on SIP inhibits RECLAIM's ability to control their business enterprise.

3.3.2. Zona Franca Worker

One woman we interviewed had previously worked at the *Zona Franca* or Free Trade Zone. The *Zona Franca* is a haven for foreign companies that seek cheap labor for manufacturing. The *Zona Franca* has numerous tax exemptions and no import duty to incentivize foreign corporations to build factories there. The woman we interviewed worked in a factory making garments. She earned \$45 USD per week, a significant portion of which she needed to commute to and from the *Zona Franca*. Most of the factory employees were women. Working in the *Zona Franca* requires a license issued by the government.

3.3.3. Recycled Paper Cooperative

A group of four women we interviewed called themselves a "recycled paper artisan cooperative." Originally, 35 women were part of the group. The cooperative began in 1995 when a German NGO came to Cruz Verde and taught the women how to recycle paper to make notebooks. The women capitalized on the unique product and were, according to them, the first to market their products in Santo Domingo. Though they initially received significant profits from the enterprise, the venture was short-lived as competitors quickly entered the market, and out-produced them with more capital and labor. Today, the cooperative faces many competitors in a narrowing market due to the global recession. The state of the economy has impacted tourism which is the biggest contributor to GDP in the Dominican Republic. Today, the cooperative makes about 50 notebooks per day. The notebooks are sold in fairs as well as a shop in the Colonial Zone in Santo Domingo. Sister Island Project volunteers also seem to play a large role

²⁶ For example, the bag purchased by a UJ trip participant developed a sizable hole in just two days.

in the purchase and distribution of these notebooks. The cooperative expressed a desire in obtaining a microloan to purchase a machine to produce more notebooks, but it is uncertain whether it would be cost-effective, given the limited market for recycled paper notebooks and their lack of knowledge about how the machine works or its cost. It seems to us that the cooperative is holding on to a dying business. They have great pride in having been the originators, but are unable to compete in today's market.

When asked about possible business alternatives, the women expressed an interest in organic winemaking. The process of fermenting corn, rice and apples, in lieu of grapes to make a uniquely Dominican wine, takes about three months from start to finish. While the group has no experience with winemaking, the women mentioned that another group in Cruz Verde tried it once before but closed the business after it failed. The women mentioned that the business failed because it is expensive to produce the wine, the cooperative marketed it poorly, and the product was inconsistent and of a low quality. Nonetheless, the women were confident that they could make the business work. They hoped to market it to tourists and Sister Island Project volunteers. This idea appears to us, however, to be undeveloped and very risky.

3.3.4. Farming

The land in Cruz Verde that is currently unused but owned by the government could possibly be farmed. Community leaders we spoke with expressed an interest in possibly using the land for cow farming. Cows cost around \$340 USD and bulls \$430 USD. At a minimum, three cows are needed per bull. This equates to roughly \$1,450 USD in startup capital to purchase the livestock. Additionally, grass and feed are required. Cows produce on average 10 bottles of milk per day and produce about one offspring per year. The offspring, however, can then be resold in the market.

Pig farming is very different, costing about \$85 USD for an adult pig and \$43 USD for a baby pig. A baby pig can procreate after one year. The gestation period is around 3 months, 24 days and the average female pig can have two batches of piglets per year with 9-12 piglets per litter. Feeding a pig with special feed for a year is very expensive, costing farmers around \$400 USD per pig, so local farmers often have a separate chicken farm, feeding the pigs from chicken parts.

4. Mata Los Indios

4.1. Overview

Mata Los Indios is a small village approximately 1 kilometer from Cruz Verde, and about 14 kilometers from San Luis. It is comprised of roughly 84 families totaling close to 300 people, 80% of whom are of Haitian descent. During our visit, we spoke with about 20 members of the community, while another few dozen joined as observers. The village is comprised of first, second and third-generation Dominico-Haitians. The villagers are destitute. The vast majority is unemployed and lacks a government-issued identification card that provides access to certain government-issued public services. The *cedula* card is provided to those who are able to prove Dominican lineage. Haitians with children born inside the Dominican Republic will often have Dominican friends

adopt their children to help them obtain *cedulas*. Without these cards, children cannot attend public secondary schools or receive government-subsidized health care.

Most of the Haitian males of Mata Los Indios immigrated to the Dominican Republic in order to work in the sugar cane fields; however, when the government elected to privatize the sugar cane industry in the mid-nineteen nineties, several major national refineries closed. Thousands of jobs were lost as a result, and the sugar cane industry has yet to rebound. Further, the ratification of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), as well as the grossly deflated price of sugar in the United States, due largely to American domestic subsidies of agriculture, have significantly affected sugarcane output and employment.

4.2. Employment Opportunities

The adult members of Mata Los Indios are desperate for stable employment. Based on our conversations, community members seem amenable to most labor opportunities and feel qualified for jobs requiring manual labor. Improving the plight of the people of Mata Los Indios might be achieved through strengthening its agricultural sector. The Dominican Republic is not historically an agrarian society. It is a consequence of Haitian migrants historically performing field labor, a local explained to us. As a result, many Dominicans do not have the knowledge and skills needed to work the land, and actually regard these jobs as socially inferior. If the Dominican government were to invest resources into strengthening its agricultural sector, the Dominico-Haitians would constitute the segment of the population most likely, and willing, to take advantage of such opportunities. We envision that there is an opportunity for increased employment in the large swathes of uncultivated land. Land that is effectively abandoned exists in the area surrounding Mata Los Indios. If community members gained legal possession to this land, the community could cultivate it for both personal use and to sell produce in the domestic market.

4.3. Property Rights

It is unclear who holds title to the land in the village of Mata Los Indios. Villagers speculated that it is either government-owned land, or in the possession of outside private interest. A legal tool that could be used to transfer title to the citizens of Mata Los Indios is adverse possession. This jurisprudential doctrine allows land to be transferred to people inhabiting it, if it is both openly used, and the original title-holder makes no claim to it for a specified period of time (often ten years or greater). Another possibility is to petition the government to transfer ownership of the land over to the community through a government program that would grant the villagers either title in fee simple (complete, unrestricted ownership of the land), or a long-term lease that would effectively allow for uninhibited use of the land. A third possibility could be to purchase the land from either the government or the private title-holder. Regardless of how the title is transferred to the community, this is an essential first step to any development program. Without proper title to their land, capital commitment from outside sources will be more difficult to obtain, and members of the community are placed into a situation where the time and energy they invest in a project could be for

the ultimate benefit of an absent landlord, who might return at any time and repossess it, or demand payment for the conversion of the property.

4.4. Bridge to Somewhere

While the climate of the Dominican Republic is generally arid, there is a rainy season from May to November. During this time, water levels in Mata Los Indios accumulate to extraordinary heights, causing the only road to flood, sometimes for weeks on end. During these floods, the community has great difficulty reaching neighboring towns. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the water often rises over ten meters in certain areas. Access to surrounding communities is essential for Mata Los Indios both socially and economically. The children of Mata Los Indios attend a school in a neighboring village, which cannot be accessed during the rainy season. Moreover, if the community is to be self-sufficient it must be able to engage in commerce with surrounding villages, as well as larger cities such as Santo Domingo, the commercial hub of the country. Currently the village remains isolated for 3 months a year, during the spring and summer months, stifling both the economy and the education of its children.

4.5. School without a Teacher

Five years ago, Mostar, a Canadian non-governmental organization, built a beautiful three-room school in Mata Los Indios. Though the school is by far the most structurally-sound building in the community, the school has never actually been used. Brand new desks and chairs, still packed in their original plastic, lie vacant in the corner of one of the rooms, waiting for the day they can finally be put to use.

This tragic irony is emblematic of a much larger problem that all too often arises in the field of international development. In a typical scenario, a group of wealthy outsiders visits a highly impoverished community for a limited period of time. Eager to help, they raise capital to invest in a project they believe is in the best interest of the community. However, once the project is completed there is no oversight of its implementation. The situation in Mata Los Indios exemplifies this problem: because Mostar failed to secure a teacher to work in the school, it has needlessly lain dormant for five years.²⁷

Discussions we had with residents of Mata Los Indios and various members of the communities surrounding it, including the director of the school where the students now attend, provided us with explanations for why the government either never assigned a teacher to the school, or why the teacher it hired failed to report to work. While we are unsure as to why there is no teacher, the fact of the matter is that an alternative school is located less than a ten minute walk from Mata Los Indios. Though the high waters of the rainy season prevent the students from attending school for several months out of the year, many people stated that the rainy season would also prevent a teacher from traveling to the school in Mata Los Indios.

4.6. Sound Structures

²⁷ Mostar left Mata Los Indios due to a fatal accident of one of its workers caused by the collapse of a building.

The buildings in Mata Los Indios are not structurally sound. Aside from the school, a church and a storage facility, most of the buildings in Mata Los Indios are made from wooden planks and corrugated sheet metal. The vast amount of water that accumulates during the rainy season causes the wood to rot, compromising the integrity of many of the houses in the village. When we toured the area, we were told by community members of the essential need for housing comprised of concrete and cinder block frames that could withstand the elements and last for decades rather than years.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Purpose of this Section

The goal of this section is to set forth our recommendations for addressing some of the challenges hindering the development of the residents of Mata Los Indios and Cruz Verde. We provide our recommendations with some hesitation, considering the limited amount of time we spent in these communities. Further, we are not experts in the field of international development, nor are we in a position to commit the time and/or resources necessary to institute the majority of our recommendations. Our objective for this section is simply to express what we humbly believe are some of the potential ways that SIP, UJ, or other interested parties can assist the residents of Mata Los Indios and Cruz Verde to overcome some of the obstacles that we believe are hindering their economic and social development.

5.2. RECLAIM

As discussed in Section 4.3.1, Cruz Verde's RECLAIM sewing cooperative is completely dependent on SIP for its raw materials, marketing, transportation, and sales. As of today, RECLAIM is neither self-sufficient nor a realistic employment option for women looking for full time work. Thus, we believe SIP should strive to help RECLAIM become more self-sufficient and less codependent.

We do not believe that at this time the United States is the best market for RECLAIM's products. We recommend reaching out to Glays Molina, the director of Adoratices,²⁸ to discuss the process she used to locate local markets for its clothes. We believe that finding a domestic market for its products is essential to RECLAIMS long-term stability. Further, we recommend giving the women the opportunity to purchase their own raw materials in the Dominican Republic. Not only will the fabric most likely be cheaper in the DR, but it will also allow the women to purchase patterns and materials which they believe will popular in the domestic market.

5.3. Scholarships

Interestingly, although SIP provides scholarships to Cruz Verdeans, they might be able to take advantage of the financial aid opportunities available to Dominicans through government programs. The families of the young women and men who receive scholarships must provide the other half of the tuition on their own, and are obliged to make arrangements for transportation to Santo Domingo, and living accommodations in

²⁸ See Section 7.3.

Santo Domingo during the week. According to a Santo Domingo College of Law administrator at Colegio de Abogados, the World Bank has a student loan program that allows students to receive financial aid while they are in school. We believe it is worth investigating the process for applying for these loans, so that more members of Cruz Verde can have the opportunity to attend college.

5.4. Microfinance

Few businesses in Cruz Verde and Mata Los Indios are completely self-funded. We believe that villagers would benefit from access to microfinance loans at reasonable interest rates. Under this model, a partner microfinance institution acts as a bank to the poor, providing loans (usually around \$150 to \$200 USD) at reasonable interest rates to help the impoverished pursue income-generating activities. Currently, there are no banks that provide start-up loans to the businesses of Cruz Verde and Mata Los Indios. Banks most likely write off the villagers as not creditworthy on the basis that they are poor and lack collateral.

Worldwide, microfinance has a global repayment rate of 95%,²⁹ significantly higher than the developed world. With this high repayment rate, this may be a sound venture for an MFI, and have the dual effect of facilitating borrowers of Cruz Verde and Mata Los Indios to greatly increase their income and improve their quality of life. Surveys have shown that when women are provided microfinance, their children are more likely to receive a better education and healthcare.³⁰

Though Peter from SIP expressed some reservations about SIP's providing microloans to members of the Cruz Verde community, we recommend reaching out instead to highly respected microfinance organizations like Esperanza International to inquire into the possibility of providing microfinance loans to residents of Cruz Verde and Mata Los Indios.

5.5. Land

As we indicated in Sections 4 and 5 of this report, many of the residents of Cruz Verde and Mata Los Indios live on land for which they do not have legal title. Though many of the residents have lived on the land, rent-free, for decades, they simply do not possess the legal documents necessary to transfer their land rights to another person, or to use the land as collateral in order to obtain a loan from a bank. Further, they face the possibility that, at any point in time, the legal owner of the property will surface and force them out of their homes and off their land. In the face of such a possibility, residents and investors are often reluctant to invest significant resources to develop the land for fear that the benefits will ultimately be realized by another.

In order to resolve the land title issues facing the residents of Cruz Verde and Mata Los Indios, we believe it is essential to investigate who technically owns the land in the two

²⁹ Jonathan Morduch, *The Microfinance Promise*, 37 J. Econ. Literature. 1569-14 (1999).

³⁰ Int'l Labour Office Geneva, *Small Change, Big Changes: Women and Microfinance*, http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2008/108B09_28_engl.pdf (last viewed July 15, 2010).

communities. For example, significant differences exist between how one might approach the Dominican government as opposed to a private owner in order to obtain title to a plot of land. If the government owns a plot of land, residents possess several more strategies for obtaining title to the land. As we explained in Section 5.3 of this report, Dominican law recognizes the legal concept of adverse possession whereby citizens can obtain legal title to government owned land upon which they have lived for more than 10 consecutive years. Though the law exists on the books, we recommend consulting with several Dominican lawyers in order to get a better sense of how feasible it is to actually successfully argue such a suit. Beyond adverse possession, the residents might opt to either purchase the land from the government at a favorable price, or ask the government for the land grant in order to engage in certain mutually economically beneficial activities such as raising livestock or cultivating agricultural products. We believe that the Dominican government has a vested interest in its citizens cultivating barren land. Efficient land use motivates land-owners to maximize the potential value of the land. It improves livelihoods, generates tax revenue for the government, and increases the overall value of the property. UJ is interested in working with SIP to develop a strategy for determining who owns the various plots of land in Cruz Verde.

5.6. Employment

During our stay in Cruz Verde, a common issue raised by residents was the lack of economic opportunities available to them. Based on our conversations, we created this list of possible feasible economic enterprises. Due to the limited duration of our visit, the business ideas we discuss below represent the concepts that intuitively made the best business sense to us. We were unable, however, to research the actual costs of beginning the businesses, or actually gauge the size of the market. However, we did meet with many successful entrepreneurs and organizations that could serve as consultants in the establishment of these endeavors.

5.6.1. Bakery

Several women in Cruz Verde spoke with us about the idea of starting a bakery inside the center that currently houses both RECLAIM's sewing machines and the computer center.³¹ In our opinion, this idea made better economic sense than a number of other projects that members of the community suggested. First, several women in the community already possess the skills necessary to bake and the community center already has a kitchen where trainings could take place. Second, bread seemed to be a staple food at most meals in the community – a possible indication that a demand exists for baked goods. Finally, we were told that people in the community currently buy baked goods that are brought into the neighborhood from non-residents. Starting a baking project would therefore keep money spent on baked goods in the community.

If the community decided to move forward with the bakery project, we believe it is worth consulting ACOPRO,³² who has the means to facilitate a baking seminar/training at the center. Further, residents of Cruz Verde can apply to take part in one of ACOPRO's baking classes in Santo Domingo, which is free of charge.

³¹ See Section 3.3.1.

³² See Section 7.2.

5.6.2. Mini-Bus

We believe it is worth it for SIP to consider investing in a community van or bus. A community van could be used to transport residents or commercial goods to and from Santo Domingo or Monte Plata. As we indicated in Section 4.2.2, residents pay close to \$9 USD roundtrip to travel from Cruz Verde to Santo Domingo. This high cost hinders residents from making the trip, requires residents to spend the entire work-week in Santo Domingo, and makes it financially difficult for some students who don't have families in Santo Domingo to attend college. As a result, we believe that a community van represents a sound economic investment. The van could transport residents to Santo Domingo for less money than taking the bus, and could allow the community a mechanism by which they can transport their products to the marketplace.

On a much larger scale, our driver Eddy suggested that investing in a thirty-person bus, which would be used exclusively to transport residents from Cruz Verde, and the communities surrounding it, to and from Santo Domingo everyday would be a great financial investment. By charging residents a couple dollars less than they exorbitant prices they are currently paying, local residents would benefit through their savings and SIP would benefit through its investment. SIP could then use the proceeds it gains from the enterprise to invest in other potential economic ventures.

We suggested the idea for a community van to SIP on our return from the Dominican Republic. Though Peter recognized some of the advantages associated with a community van, he was slightly apprehensive about the likelihood that a community van might negatively affect the local *moto* businesses, which transport local residents to Mata Plata where they can transfer to a bus to Santo Domingo.

5.7. Agriculture Development

After determining which plots of land in Cruz Verde or Mata Los Indios might be available, and gaining a proper title to the land, we recommend teaming up with or hiring an agricultural consultant to survey the land of community members interested in agricultural development. The consultant would gauge the plot owner's purpose for developing the land (personal consumption or mass production), the time, energy, and financial resources they would be willing to commit, and the range of crops that could potentially grow on the land. The consultant would help the farmers develop a short, medium, and long term plan for the land, taking into account the various costs and risks associated with the project.

Further, we recommend that SIP provide scholarship opportunities for Cruz Verdeans, interested in agricultural development to attend the university or a vocational program to study agriculture.

On our trip, we visited a massive organic lemon farm owned by a Dominican farmer named Reyes. He has both an advanced degree in agriculture and many years of experience working in the field. Mr. Reyes believes that agriculture is a tremendous field for Dominicans to enter. He also asserted that the land in the Cruz Verde region is perfect to grow lettuce, tomatoes, or coconuts. He, however, along with several other

Dominicans with whom we talked informed us that Dominicans are historically not interested in agricultural development. Therefore, we believe it is essential to determine a concrete interest in agricultural development in Cruz Verde before investing any resources into such a venture.

5.8. Mata Los Indios

This section is devoted to several recommendations for development in the Mata Los Indios community. This community, being much worse off than Cruz Verde in terms of economic development, requires special attention.

5.8.1. Bridge

As we indicated in Section 5.4, the rainy season creates several serious problems for residents of Mata Los Indios, who are prevented from accessing the nearby villages because of the high water. The children, for example, are unable to travel to school. When talking with local residents about the problem, they explained to us how a bridge would solve their troubles. They showed us the precise location where the high waters run and the bridge would be built. We recommend that SIP hire or team up with engineers to discuss the costs and feasibility of building a bridge. One possibility is applying to ETHOS (<http://ethos.udayton.edu/>), an engineering program out of the University of Dayton that seeks to use engineers to address development issues in impoverished nations. We imagine that teaming up with a group like ETHOS would greatly minimize the costs associated with such a project.

If building a bridge in Mata los Indios is simply not feasible or too expensive, then we recommend exploring the possibility of relocating the entire community to a location that is both safer and less alienated during the rainy season. Relocating an entire community, however, is problematic for multiple reasons. Mata Los Indios has been the home to its residents and their ancestors for well over fifty years. Its residents have constructed homes and, with outside help, have built an infrastructure including a *colmado*, a school, and a basketball court. Relocating the entire community is costly, both financially and emotionally. In addition, land would need to be available to accommodate every family, new homes and infrastructure would need to be built, and the community would need access to sustainable employment and education.

5.8.2. School

In Section 5.5, we explained the disturbing details surrounding the beautiful school in Mata los Indios that was built over eight years ago by a Canadian NGO called Mostar, but has never been used because the school cannot secure a teacher. We recommend several possible solutions to address the problem. First, SIP and its various allies could petition the local and national government to hire a teacher specifically for this school. Second, SIP and its allies could host a fundraiser to raise the funds necessary to hire a teacher on its own. A potential problem with this solution is that SIP would then inherit the responsibility to make sure that in the future funds are available to retain the teacher. Third, SIP could reach out to an organization such as the Peace Corps to inquire whether they might be willing to supply a teacher. Fourth, the community may be able to brainstorm an alternative use for the space.

We believe that this latter solution might make the most sense, especially considering that another school is located in such close proximity. Mata Los Indios, for example, could use the space as a computer center, a vocational training program, or an adult education center. We believe that the community of Mata Los Indios would benefit if SIP or one of its allies helped create the infrastructure necessary to use the space in one of these ways. Members of the other communities would be encouraged and invited to travel to Mata Los Indios to use the center. Having members from the more prosperous communities travel to Mata Los Indios to use the center would be beneficial to the residents of Mata Los Indios, as it would raise awareness in neighboring communities about the poverty they are facing. In addition, visitors might be more likely to purchase goods from the local *colmado* thereby helping the local business. Finally, we recommend contacting Mostar to inform them about the problems the school has faced since it was constructed.

5.8.3. Construction Project

During our conversation with community leaders in Mata Los Indios, they expressed to us the community's grave need to have more structurally sound buildings.³³ We believe that the tragic story of the Canadian student who lost his life in Mata Los Indios when a building collapsed on him clearly demonstrates the essential need for safer buildings in the community. We recommend that SIP and its allies engage in a fundraising campaign to raise the capital necessary to replace the most dangerous, decrepit buildings in Mata Los Indios. We also recommend reaching out to Habitat for Humanity to gauge their interest in supporting a building project.

6. Next Steps

As detailed in the introduction to this report, UJ's first trip to the Dominican Republic was designed to learn generally about the country and existing development efforts within it. The ultimate goal for this first trip was twofold. First, we wanted to establish contacts in the Dominican to serve as partners for future projects and as continuing sources for local information and support. Second, we wanted to identify specific projects that UJ could lead or contribute with the goal of furthering the economic and social interests of the communities we visited. Our vision is that UJ will develop and work on these projects throughout the academic school year and during its future spring break trips to the Dominican Republic.

This section is designed to identify the initial steps UJ will take to realize this goal. At the outset, we provide a set of short-term steps we plan to take to maintain our relationships with the contacts we established in the DR, and to make connections between organizations that we believe could receive a mutual benefit by working together. Next, we identify some possible long-term projects and the steps we believe are necessary to get these initiatives off the ground. The various possibilities for long-term projects will be presented to SIP to determine which make the most sense to pursue. Our hope is that SIP will continue to serve as UJ's principal partner organization in the Dominican Republic.

³³See Section 5.6.

6.1. Short-Term Steps: Making and Maintaining Connections

UJ's short-term goals all involve reaching out to various organizations in the Dominican Republic and the United States that we believe might have an interest in UJ's Dominican Republic project. Beyond SIP and the other organizations identified earlier in this report, UJ plans to reach out to the following organizations:

- **ACOPRO** – Our group will put SIP and the leaders of Cruz Verde in contact with the directors of ACOPRO and INFOTEP with the hope that they may be able to provide vocational training for community members in Cruz Verde and Mata Los Indios.
- **Mostar** – Mostar is the Canadian NGO that built the brand new school in Mata Los Indios in 2005. We hope to find and contact Mostar's leadership simply to inform them that their school is not being utilized. Presumably, when they left the Dominican Republic after construction was completed, they believed the school would immediately be put to use. Perhaps UJ and Mostar can then work together to find a solution to the issues with the school discussed in Section 5.5. Our one concern is that Mostar is no longer be operating, which will make it slightly more difficult to contact the individuals responsible for building the school.
- **Colegio de Abogados** – Our group met with Sra. Marien Espinal, an administrator at this Santo Domingo law school. This particular school serves as a graduate school for lawyers who are interested in specializing in a particular legal area. Besides being a valuable source of information about the legal field in the country, Sra. Espinal indicated that she and the school would be eager and willing to be a continuing source of information for our group.
- **The Supreme Court of the Dominican Republic** – UJ members had the unique opportunity to tour the country's Supreme Court with the clerk of the Court's Chief Justice. UJ will maintain contact with Mr. Torres, who appeared willing to be a source of information for our legal questions.
- **The Rotary Club of New York** – One of the meetings we had on our trip was with the Rotary Club of Santo Domingo. At this meeting, we learned about a project that the club funded in Cruz Verde to install a much-needed water source for the community. They indicated that they would be willing to listen to proposals for other projects in the community. By reaching out to the Rotary Club of New York, we hope to initiate a connection between the New York and Santo Domingo Rotary chapters and between UJ/Fordham and the New York chapter.

- **The Dominican Bar Association** - UJ will reach out to the Dominican Bar Association (DBA) to assess their interest in partnering with Fordham/UJ on a project in Cruz Verde or another Dominican community. The DBA seems to be an ideal organization for UJ to work with considering its location here in New York City and its long history supporting native Dominican and Dominican American attorneys.
- **Fordham Law Latin American Law Students Association (LALSA)** - Here at Fordham, UJ hopes to enlist the support of LALSA as a partner with UJ to work on any of the potential projects identified in this report. UJ welcomes the support of any Fordham student group, but believe LALSA, in particular, would have an interest in UJ's work in the DR.

6.2. Long-Term Steps

Our group envisions two primary ways that UJ/Fordham can be a continuing source of assistance to the communities of Cruz Verde and Mata Los Indios. The first is utilizing our legal skills to research legal issues that are affecting these communities, and to provide legal services, perhaps through summer internships, to partner organizations in the DR. UJ has had great success in the past establishing summer internships with its partner organizations in Nicaragua. Second, with guidance from SIP, we will take the initial steps towards implementing projects that we believe make the most sense. Below, we detail some of the steps needed to achieve each of these goals.

6.2.1. Legal Services

As discussed in Section 3.2.6, one issue impacting rural communities is access to land. Specifically, many community members do not have a title certificate to their land and do not know who possesses the proper title. UJ hopes to help with this issue in two primary ways. First, by partnering with Dominican organizations such as the Colegio de Abogados, UJ will take steps to identify the relevant Dominican laws relating to the country's adverse possession law, as well as title claims in general. Second, either through a similar partnership, or on a subsequent trip, UJ hopes to establish the process that will help residents in Cruz Verde and Mata Los Indios to identify who actually holds legal title to the land in their communities.

The first steps toward realizing its goal will be to reach out to the organizations identified above. Subsequently, UJ will have to determine if the work can be done entirely through a partnership with one of these organizations, or alternatively, if a subsequent trip is necessary to gather the relevant information. In conducting its research, UJ hopes to enlist the support of the Fordham Law Latin American Law Students Association (LALSA).

Besides researching these issues, UJ will present this report to the Leitner Center for International Law and Justice in the hopes that one or more of the organizations we met with will become a "pre-approved summer internship placement." We believe that the

*Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados/as y Migrantes*³⁴ is an excellent candidate to become a “pre-approved” internship.

6.2.2. Service Projects

The recommendations section of this report (Section 6) provides a few ideas which would require commitments from outside organizations and a significant amount of funding. What follows detail the initial steps towards getting two of these long-term projects off the ground.

A Bridge in Mata Los Indios

Section 6.4 of the report explains the severity of the flooding that Mata Los Indios experiences during the rainy season. One of the possible solutions discussed was the construction of a bridge. UJ plans to discuss with SIP the possibility of reaching out to Ethos,³⁵ to gauge their interest and ability to take on such a project. If this is not a viable solution, UJ will develop a strategy to find alternative methods for funding such a project; possible sources of funding include the Rotary Club (of Santo Domingo, or New York), and Engineers Without Borders.

Housing Construction

Section 5.4 of the report details the dilapidated and dangerous condition of many of the structures in Mata Los Indios. While Cruz Verde often has SIP volunteers assist with building houses, Mata Los Indios rarely receives outside volunteer help. UJ will set up a meeting with the Fordham chapter of Habitat for Humanity to determine if the group would be willing to send volunteers to build and/or repair structures for this community.

6.2.3. Microfinance Institution Partnership

Esperanza International is a non-profit microfinance institution with central offices in Santo Domingo and a United States office in Bellevue, Washington. Esperanza provides micro-loans, savings, insurance, business training and healthcare for upwards of 20,000 borrowers located all around the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Esperanza is constantly expanding and looking to serve as many communities as possible. A preliminary talk with an Esperanza official indicated that they would be interested in setting up a lending branch in Cruz Verde and/or Mata Los Indios.

Each bank branch typically consists of a borrower portfolio of 20-50 borrowers and a loan portfolio of \$5,000 USD. Esperanza loan officers visit each branch bi-weekly. Although interest rates are 48 APR range,³⁶ the current repayment rate is around 98%, much higher than any traditional bank. While the interest rate is disconcerting, it is the average interest rate for microfinance institutions in the Dominican Republic, and the high repayment rate and increasing amount of demand for micro-loans is indicative that borrowers are able to repay and simultaneously improve their quality of life.

³⁴ See Section 7.1.

³⁵ See Section 5.4.

³⁶ This is necessary to keep Esperanza financially sustainable to cover its costs.

7. Appendix

7.1. *Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados/as y Migrantes*

The *Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados/as y Migrantes* (Jesuit Service for Refugees and Migrants) is an international organization that began working in the Dominican Republic in 1995. SJRM has three offices in the Dominican Republic: one in Santo Domingo, one in Santiago, and another in Dajabon, on the border of Haiti. SJRM's mission is to improve the sociopolitical, economic and cultural conditions of immigrants, refugees, and displaced persons, with its Dominican Republic-based offices focusing on Haitians. To achieve this end, SJRM uses a multifaceted strategy which includes promoting and defending human rights, promoting cross-cultural relationships amongst different communities, working to improve public policies on immigration and refugees, and strengthening institutions working with immigrants and refugees.

SJRM also conducts fact-finding missions and publishes numerous watchdog reports on the status of immigrants living in the Dominican Republic. Recent reports have included issues such as police mistreatment of immigrants and refugees, improper denial of immigrants' *cedulas* or documentation of legal residency, mistreatment of people living on the Dominican-Haitian border, and labor abuse of immigrant workers.

SJRM works with migrant communities to promote positive leadership, enforce education and employment rights, and provide capacity-building workshops. SJRM also works with the migrant youth by providing art classes, creating youth leadership teams, coordinating intercultural day camps, and teaching Spanish classes. SJRM works to promote the integration of Haitian and Dominican peoples within communities. To this end, SJRM has created cross-cultural cooking classes, wherein people of Haitian and Dominican descent can learn about one another's culture by using food as a mechanism to encourage exchange. In these classes, participants are taught to prepare an array of dishes from each culture and in the process are provided the opportunity to interact and connect with each other. Other cross-cultural exchange programs include sports teams, dance classes and learning about the different holidays celebrated in both the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Working with numerous universities and other non-profit organizations, SJRM has contributed to the creation of a six-month long education program wherein participants earn a diploma in Human Rights. Scholarships are provided to participants in order to finance the program. The course uses an interdisciplinary model to teach students about different human rights frameworks and mechanisms used to protect human rights.

SJRM has an Office of Legal Assistance, where it aids immigrants in obtaining the necessary paperwork for their documentation as well as to attain legal status, such as provisional or permanent residency. The Office of Legal Assistance also conducts labor rights workshops in migrant communities. There is also a legal clinic, where immigrants can receive assistance if they need to go to court. SJRM has also helped workers demand, and receive, back pay from employers. The Office of Legal Assistance

also works on legislative reform in order to encourage the government to adopt policies that will help elevate the status of immigrants in the Dominican Republic.

SJRM also has created a legal clinic at the law school at Universidad Autonoma de Santo Domingo. The goal of the clinic is to engage law students on issues relating to human rights and train the students in the different approaches to protect such rights. Student are taught effective ways to respond to human rights violations, ways of protecting human rights and how legal assistance can contribute to a society that values both respecting and protecting human rights. Students are able to use their knowledge from the classroom in real-life situations. Students in this program receive hands-on experience working alongside the Office of Legal Assistance to organize and assist migrant communities with issues relating to documentation and legal status.

One of UJ's goals is to expand upon our international network of opportunities for Fordham students who are interested in human rights to work abroad for an extended period of time. The Office of Legal Assistance at SJRM is very well suited for a Spanish speaking law student to intern. We hope to utilize our relationship with SJRM both as we continue human rights research, and also in order to assist any Fordham students who may be interested in a placement there during the summer.

7.2. ACOPRO (Accion Comunitaria por el Progreso, Inc.)

7.2.1. Overview

ACOPRO, located in Santo Domingo, is a community organization whose mission is to provide affordable health care and vocational training to local residents. Access to job and technical training is a major concern in rural communities throughout the Dominican Republic. As such, UJ met with ACOPRO to learn how Cruz Verdeans might be able to take advantage of the resources ACOPRO provides. ACOPRO's success in utilizing sources of funding from within the DR may present a practical model for Dominican community organizations, such as those in Cruz Verde, to fund their own projects.

7.2.2. Education and Technical Training

With an initial grant from World Vision, ACOPRO opened its educational center in 1994. The center began by offering general education classes to 204 children, ranging from 4th – 8th grade, as well as a vocational course for adults in electricity.

Since 1994, ACOPRO has focused on expanding the scope of the vocational trainings it offers. While the center still provides computer and technology courses to school-aged children, ACOPRO designs the majority of its courses to teach basic professional and business skills to young adults. ACOPRO currently offers courses in accounting, cooking, restaurant service, bartending, typing, computers, and machine repair. The center currently offers 17 classes per year benefiting about 350 students. Since opening 16 years ago, ACOPRO has trained more than 6,300 students.

7.2.3. Partnership with INFOTEP (El Instituto Nacional de Formacion Técnico Profesional)

Perhaps the most novel feature of ACOPRO is its ability to offer so many beneficial training programs to disadvantaged communities free of charge. Its financial sustainability is due in large part to its partnership with a quasi-governmental organization called INFOTEP (<http://www.infotep.gov.do/>). Although World Vision provided the initial overhead for the construction of the center and other start-up costs, ACOPRO would not exist without the significant annual support from INFOTEP.

INFOTEP was established through an enactment of the country's National Congress in 1980 to promote the economic and social advancement of the nation's work force. Although it receives a significant amount of government funding,³⁷ INFOTEP is considered an autonomous non-profit organization. INFOTEP plays many roles in the advancement of workers issues, but primarily acts as a worker's union by advising the government and private companies on the most important issues facing workers in the Dominican Republic. In addition, it funds efforts of organizations like ACOPRO to teach basic job skills to the Dominican work force.

Since ACOPRO's inception, INFOTEP has fully funded every instructor for the training classes and has also ensured that the computers and other equipment are up to date. According to the directors at ACOPRO, INFOTEP is willing and able to provide funding for any vocational training effort of a community organization in the Dominican Republic.

7.2.4. Access to Credit

ACOPRO's involvement with their students does not end with the completion of their classes. Because ACOPRO recognized the difficulty inherent in securing employment in the Dominican Republic despite its vocational trainings, ACOPRO has partnered for the last 5 years with ADOPEM and other government programs to provide low interest loans for students to begin their own business. According to the directors at ACOPRO, small groups of trainees can collaborate to secure small loans at rates as low as 3%. Since starting their microcredit program, ACOPRO has partnered with seven banks to provide loans to 165 micro-entrepreneurs.

7.2.5. Health Center

Two years after starting its educational center, ACOPRO opened its Community Health Center. The health center is a multi-service medical center which provides the community with a variety of services including primary care, immunizations, psychological consultation, gynecological examinations, dental services, and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS. ACOPRO has one full-time primary care physician and other part-time medical specialists. According to ACOPRO's directors, members of the community pay about 100 pesos for each visit which is about 10% of what one would pay at a non-subsidized clinic in Santo Domingo. All of the

³⁷ INFOTEP receives mandatory contributions from companies and employees including 1% of all salaries paid to employees of for-profit companies, as well as .5% of annual worker's earnings.

medications and medical supplies, including birth control, are provided free of charge to all patients.

7.2.6. Conclusion

In the context of UJ's trip, ACOPRO represents a model of a successful Dominican community organization that subsists largely on national resources. Unlike several organizations encountered on this trip, which relied on significant annual support from NGOs and other outside funding, ACOPRO utilizes a governmental support system which exists, in part, to support economic development projects. The directors of ACOPRO uniformly agreed that the use of INFOTEP training and established micro-credit enterprises could also be used to bolster economic development efforts in rural communities.

7.3. Adoratrices

Adoratrices Esclavas del Santísimo Sacramento y de la Caridad ("Adoratrices") works directly with female sex workers, providing them with both social support and opportunities to enhance their vocational skills so that they can secure alternative sources of income. Adoratrices provides educational opportunities, job trainings, child care, housing, and small micro loans to sex workers they find working the streets. An offshoot from a program founded in Spain, Adoratrices was established in the Dominican Republic in 1986. Currently, Adoratrices has four centers in the Dominican Republic. The center we visited in Santo Domingo has the resources to support up to twenty women at any one time, and was assisting thirteen women at the time of our visit. The center is run by three Jesuit nuns and has a staff of approximately fifteen, several of whom were women who had previously graduated from the program.

The women who participate in the Adoratrices program have been working as sex workers either on the streets or in brothels. Glays Molina, the head-administrator with whom we met, meets sex workers on the streets of Santo Domingo in the early evenings before the women begin working for the evening. She informs the young women she encounters about the services Adoratrices provides and then allows them to make up their own mind about whether to join. Generally the women range in age from 16 – 21. In fact, many of the youngest women report that they are either encouraged or forced by their parents to sell sex in order to bring money into the household.

Molina informed us that several common "fronts" for brothels are liquor stores and car washes. If a woman is working in this type of locale, it is generally under the control of a madam who takes a portion of the worker's profits. Molina, standing at just under five feet tall and probably less than 90 pounds, told us that she rarely receives a backlash from those profiting from these women, presumably because her religious status garners her much respect in the community and because their principal goal is not to shut down the brothels but to provide opportunities for women to leave the industry. Further, in Santo Domingo, the earnings of a single sex worker are not significant enough to anger madams. However, the administrator reported that it is far more risky for them to recruit women from the tourist areas where customers pay much more, making sex workers far more valuable commodities. When the police do raid suspected

brothels, it is common that the owner will be tipped off beforehand and will either hide the sex workers in a back room before the police arrive, or bribe the officer.

When a woman first arrives at Adoratrices, she participates in an initial interview, a psychological evaluation and a medical check-up. Adoratrices then arranges a visit to the woman's home in order to determine if Adoratrices needs to provide her with an alternative living situation. Adoratrices' goal is make sure that women have the support necessary to make it through the entire program. While some of the women test positive for sexually transmitted diseases or are pregnant when the first report to the center, the administrator told us that HIV is not very common. Adoratrices provides free health care to all the women in its program and encourages all women who are pregnant not to have abortions. If a woman who arrives lack documentation (such as a birth certificate or a *cedula*), Adoratrices will aid her in attaining documented status for both herself and her children. On the streets, the women are generally treated very poorly, which causes many of them to have very poor self esteem. Adoratrices works to help strengthen the women's confidence through self-esteem training, psychological counseling, positive reinforcement and know-your-rights seminars. The women immediately begin attending both individual and group therapy, and are required to devise, with an adviser, a written "personal plan" mapping out concrete objectives and priorities while participating in the programs offered by Adoratrices.

Adoratrices also has a number of different vocational training programs. It is worth noting that before the women are allowed to begin any of these training programs, they must first complete secondary school. If the women have not attained a certain level of education, Adoratrices works with them to help them pass their courses. Once a woman passes secondary school, she may begin a vocational training program to learn skills such as how to sew baby clothes to sell to local stores. As the women progress through the program, they are eventually taught the skills required to run a small business. They become responsible for taking bulk orders, managing the workspace, fulfilling orders, and packaging the clothes for delivery. Within the sewing project, the women are able to rise in the ranks as they learn different managerial skills. The program director indicated that the sewing project began when she realized that there might be a market for children's clothing based on the large number of young children in Santo Domingo. She then began traveling to numerous clothing stores in the area where she persuaded the owners to purchase clothes from Adoratrices.

Beyond its sewing project, the center has a room with the machines and materials necessary to screen-print t-shirts. As we entered the screen-printing room, a giant pile of neatly folded shirts were being sorted and organized by one of the young women. There is also a full service beauty salon at the center with stations for teaching the women how to cut hair, apply make-up, and to perform manicures and pedicures. Women who come to Adoratrices have the opportunity to pick which vocation they would like to learn, and each trade runs on a cycle lasting several months. This training provides the women with the skills necessary to gain employment when they are finished with the program. Finally, the center provides a computer training course where a teacher instructs the women for several hours each afternoon on basic computer skills.

Adoratrices provides interest-free microloans for the women to start their own businesses when they are done with the program. This gives the women the opportunity to become their own employers, instead of having to secure a job when they leave the center. The women are equipped with the skills necessary to manage their microenterprises through the different projects at Adoratrices. Some of the women who complete the program at Adoratrices also have the opportunity to continue working at the center as staff members. Currently, three of the women who have completed the program at Adoratrices are working there as staff members.

Another element of Adoratrices of particular importance is its childcare center, which is open to the entire neighborhood. By providing childcare, Adoratrices assists the area-at-large by allowing parents to work for part of the day. It provides the children with a healthy, safe environment where they can develop. At the time of our visit, the childcare center was filled with lively, bright-smiling children playing and laughing, eager to greet us as visitors.

As is at times unavoidable, some women have left Adoratrices before finishing the program and have returned to working on the streets. Molinda told us that many of the women who choose this path end up returning, and they commonly bring other women from the streets with them upon their arrival. They are, of course, re-welcomed into the program with open arms.

7.4. Esperanza International

Esperanza International was founded as an NGO in 1995 by David Valle, a baseball player with the Seattle Mariners. David played winter baseball in the Dominican Republic and was compelled to start Esperanza after seeing poverty-stricken children living in makeshift shacks. Esperanza initiated its microfinance program in 1998.

Esperanza's networks include HOPE International as well as the Grameen Foundation. Grameen provided training to help Esperanza start-up in addition to investment capital. HOPE provides investment capital as well. Esperanza also receives investments via Kiva, averaging roughly \$70,000 per month. Esperanza's biggest donors include Microsoft, Reserve Bank of the Dominican Republic, USAID, Grameen Foundation, and HOPE International.

The microlending model at Esperanza is based off the Grameen solidarity lending model whereby groups of five women make up a lending group, receive a group loan, and must pay back the loan as a group. Each woman is responsible for her share of the repayment and the group cannot make a full repayment without every woman's share. Since the bank officer only visits each branch once every two weeks to check the status of the groups and collect payments, the groups of women must motivate each other constantly to make sure they can make their payments. This in turn makes the bank officer's job easier as he does not have to hassle the borrowers. Consequently, this practice results in a very high repayment rate, currently at 97.7% based on the Esperanza MIS.

Before loans are disbursed, each member undergoes a weeklong training session, since the borrowers mostly have little to no exposure to business. Potential borrowers choose their own groups with women whom they believe will be reliable and pay back their loans. The week of training has been a complaint of some borrowers while although they appreciate the skills they gain, they are anxious to receive their loans. These women note that the opportunity cost of spending time learning banking procedures and how to save money could be spent working. However, with their training and loans these women are better able to repay their loans and improve their quality of life.

When a loan cycle is completed, the borrower groups are allowed to take out a subsequent loan for 25% more than their previous loan. For Esperanza to be sustainable, they charged a 48% annual interest rate on their loans. The average loan period for borrowers is six months.

In addition to providing microloans, Esperanza has a “Microfinance Plus” program to provide other quality of life-enhancing services. 2% of each loan is put into a savings account for the borrower. Borrowers are all covered with a health insurance program where they can visit the Esperanza-sponsored clinic, *Clinica Esperanza y Caridad*, in San Pedro de Macorís and receive prescription drugs for a reasonable fee. An insurance program permits that should a borrower die or become ill and unable to pay a loan, the borrower’s family is able to keep the remaining balance without repayment.