

**100 Projects for Peace
Final Report - Summer 2007**

Title: Unheard Voices for Peace

School: Colorado College

Student(s) Information: U.S. (I did not attend a UWC)

1. **Project Summary:** Describe location, timeframe, participants, other funding involved, scope of work, and goals intended.

The Unheard Voices for Peace Project took place in Colorado Springs, Washington DC, and various parts of Nigeria. The goal of this project was to use filmmaking as a way provide a voice for poverty from Colorado to Nigeria. Over the course of three and a half months, two films were created and networks were formed with the intention of connecting those without a voice in policymaking to policymakers. The first film, *Beneath the Peak*, features three voices from a marginalized population in Colorado Springs: single mothers struggling to make ends meet. This film addresses the challenges of healthcare affordability and its impact on socioeconomic mobility. Given that Colorado Springs has recently been considered the best big city in the nation¹, my goal was to highlight issues that are often unrecognized by Colorado state legislators.

The second film, *A Wealth of Desperation*, was intended to impact national legislation and the responsibility of the U.S. for much of the poverty in Nigeria. Specifically, this film focuses on the overall lack of health services throughout the countryside despite the country's well known economic advances related to oil extraction by U.S. corporations. The goal of this film was to highlight the country's potential to make a fundamental shift from destitute poverty to actual development. Specifically, the film addresses the relationship between the actions of large corporations like Chevron and Exxon Mobil and the resulting environmental damage and poverty that is too often neglected by the Nigerian government.

I was the official participant in the development of this project; however, I recruited the help of a variety of perspectives on the issues I was addressing. The Bell Policy Center, Colorado Consumer Health Initiative, Community Partnership for Child Development, United Way, and Urban League introduced me to a network of connections in the Colorado state legislature. The Mercy Foundation, Friends of the Earth, Citizens for Global Solutions, and Institute for Policy Studies were primary motivators and supporters in the production of this film. Most important are the many people who were willing to talk on camera about their trials and tribulations. I spent five weeks in Colorado Springs, three weeks in Washington, D.C., and three weeks in Nigeria. There was no other funding involved and the scope of the work was concentrated at the interactive level in listening to people's stories in both Colorado Springs and Nigeria so that the issues can be heard at a policymaking level.

2. **Project Results:** Self-evaluate the project; your assessment should enumerate what goals were and were not accomplished.

Connecting voices of poverty with legislators in Colorado Springs has been successful in terms of touching base with organizations that have agreed to do screenings for policymakers and legislators. There are a number of settings such as city council and policy discussions where this film will be screened. National legislation has been nearly impossible to impact within this timeframe and scale, but plans to present public screenings to national audiences are being explored.

¹ <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bplive/2006/top100/bigcities.html>

There are three areas that I could have improved on in the planning process to accomplish my goals at the national legislative level: scheduling, assessing funding priorities, and overall timing. Producing a second film to impact national legislation was ambitious and should have been a project on its own. I say this because more time could have and should have been spent in Washington, D.C. and Nigeria. In retrospect, I would have focused my use of funding to pay for living expenses in these areas for purposes of gaining trust in organizations and legislative arenas. In order to gain a voice in these arenas, the issue must already be on the minds of these people. Proposing a film on the impact of Nigerian oil and poverty is difficult to market as opposed to Middle Eastern oil politics. The timing was off especially in the midst of the upcoming presidential elections and the rise of key issues that these legislators are more concerned with.

While producing two films was ambitious, many people have been interested in both of these films and the success that may emanate out of this project is overall public awareness. Specifically, five organizations in Washington, D.C. have agreed to sponsor my film in various film festivals where they feel it will get the attention and hopefully the momentum it needs to create more social change. Public showings through organizations like the Center for American Progress and working with Colorado College alumni like political filmmaker, Holly Carter Orenstein are potential avenues for better distribution. Shortly, there will be a website with these films for everyone to see. Much has been done but arguably much more might have been done if I had focused on one film and spent more time figuring out the intricacies of impacting national legislation.

3. **Implications:** What are the project's implications for peace? What are the future prospects for the project? What have you learned?

I don't know enough about what our country's leaders are doing. At times I do get frustrated by their actions and their lack of action concerning issues. History has shown that many have felt the same and at times have acted on this frustration with violence and eventual revolt. This summer is only the beginning of a project that is intended to minimize the frustration and create more transparency and dialogue. In this age of media, the Internet and video are permeating every aspect of society, even in populations of low socioeconomic standing. These tools can give people a voice.

This summer has been about learning how to listen. Anyone from a single mother working just enough to stay within state Medicaid to a father fighting through crowds to get his daughter basic medical treatment is an important voice in society. I learned that many people do not feel they have a voice in issues like healthcare or tax reform. I also learned that people in political positions do not necessarily have the time to see just one individual. Reflecting on these two points I hope to refine filmmaking as a way to capture a voice that represents an issue and create an efficient system of media dialogue. More can and will be done online to show people that their voices are being heard and with enough influence they will be heard by their leaders.

Peace comes with understanding and technology is the way to share perspectives among groups for conflict resolution, awareness, and overall social understanding.



Photos by Jackson Solway