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Subject: Benton SWCD 2008 Natural Resources Scholarship Essay

2008 marked my last year at OSU. I graduated in June, but thankfully, my senior year was anything but ordinary, in part thanks to the Benton SWCD Natural Resources Scholarship assistance I received. Although my coursework at OSU was interesting and beneficial to my understanding of natural resource management, the highlight of my year and perhaps most impactfull came in the four months I spent in Ghana, West Africa. I participated in a study abroad program at the University of Ghana, as well as an internship with Tropical Agricultural Marketing and Consulting Services (TRAGRIMACS).

While studying at the University of Ghana, most of my coursework surrounded the nation's development since independence, the current political climate and social change in Ghana. While these subjects are not directly related to natural resource management throughout, I was surprised on how closely they are interconnected. In particular, the course on 'social change' described how Ghanaians social structure and views have collectively changed, or are in the process of changing or maintaining their original integrity as a result of colonial control and continued exposure to western culture. It was not however a 'rant and rave' discussion of why traditional culture is better or worse, but simply how things have changed and what we can expect to see change as Ghanaians cope with their changing world. In relation to natural resources and particularly conservation, I was very interested to hear that simple techniques for soil conservation and erosion protection were commonplace throughout Ghana less than 50 years ago. As one travels though that country with an eye towards soils, it becomes

apparent very quickly that those principles are no longer practiced nor taught. This was one example of how knowledge and traditional practices that have fallen by the wayside due to social change.

Experiencing some of the lessons I learned while in Ghana had a profound effect of my desire to work in international development. I was deeply impressed with how difficult a task 'development' is, and how deeply rooted views on natural resource management have a profound effect on what is or is not possible. This lesson is true here in the USA as well as abroad, and it is clear to me that real positive change regarding our natural resources and how we manage them can only really progress as far as the majority of the population wants it to go. Simple tasks such as power, fuel and water conservation have only just now taken hold on our population, after years and years of public campaigns, and we have a functioning infrastructure! This is all to say that I was impressed with the reality of development and the timeline on needs to realistically employ with tackling these issues, as well the energy and resources that need to be mobilized to instill the values that lead to lasting change.

I am sincerely thankful to the Benton SWCD for their lending support to my academic endeavors and their real investment in my development as a student and person. I can honestly say the because of the scholarship I received from the SWCD, my year was enriched as well as my life. Further, my ability to become a responsible professional with a better understanding of natural resource management was also greatly increased.