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FSD: Universal Just Action Society
Jodhpur, India
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This summer I traveled to Jodhpur, India to participate in a development internship. I lived and worked in Jodhpur for 9 weeks. The Foundation for Sustainable development, a US based company, facilitated the process of matching me with a host organization and a host family. I was assigned to the Jodhpur based NGO Universal Just Action Society (UJAS).

Universal Just Action Society is an NGO that serves as an umbrella organization for two community- based organizations (CBOs), Pak Visthapit Sangh (PVS) and Seemant Lok Sangathan (SLS). Founded in 1999, the Jodhpur-based Pak Visthapit Sangh is a community-based organization working particularly with post-1965 refugees from Sindh, Pakistan, presently living mainly in Rajasthan and Gujarat. Through public meetings, demonstrations, lobbying and meetings with government officials and leaders of political parties, it has highlighted the problems of the refugees, especially citizenship and rehabilitation. The Pak Visthapit Sangh works mainly on issues related to refugees from Pakistan in Rajasthan. This work is grounded in the demand for citizenship, but as these refugees slowly achieve this goal, the challenges for their access to education, health, and livelihood still remain. In an effort to widen the scope of the work PVS was undertaking, SLS or the 'Border Area People's Union, was also founded to work with communities living in Rajasthan along the border with Pakistan, both Hindu and Muslim. It works through advocacy campaigns, conferences, wider civil dialogue, and action studies throughout the region, especially in the northeast and Kashmir regions. SLS raises issues such as cross-border peace initiatives, citizenship rights and rehabilitation of refugees and easing of travel restrictions between India and Pakistan, as well as matters such as economic development and inter-communal harmony.

The division of the Indian sub-continent into smaller modern nation states of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh has resulted in the fragmentation of its people and their lives. This fragmentation has led to an influx of refugees in the region. Rajasthan, the state that Jodhpur is located in, has been witnessing on-going migration of the people from across the border since 1965. Once in India, Pakistani refugees face an entirely new host of problems. Lacking a clear policy on refugees, the Indian government fails to provide adequate support to these displaced people and often exacts exorbitant fees for visa and citizenship applications. On top of official fees, many immigrants are forced to pay additional bribes to government and border officials in order to cross into India or renew a visa. The minimum length of time spent in India before eligibility for citizenship is seven years, during which time refugees have no access to government schools, healthcare, or subsidized rations. In addition to this, the on-going tensions with the neighbors, and the bomb blasts in the state, mean that the people are often rounded-up as a part of intensified drive from the state police, which harass and try to evict the refugees. Those who have finally been granted citizenship, find that government rehabilitation packages, including a small land allotment for a home and agricultural activities, are never received in person, or are already inhabited. As most of these refugees are Dalit (the lowest caste in the Hindu hierarchy), they are subject to the same discrimination and maltreatment that Indian Dalits receive from other castes, and as Pakistani migrants they are ostracized as foreigners even amongst their brethren.

The Pakistani refugee community in Rajasthan needs advocates. They have found one in Hindu Singh (my boss) and his organizations: UJAS, PVS, and SLS, but the issues they are facing daily require more resources than one man can provide. Thus, throughout my time in

India, I worked on a project that focused on capacity building for UJAS. The activities focused on how more attention, funds, and manpower could be brought to the organization

This overall goal of capacity building was accomplished through three main objectives. The first objective was making the plight of the refugees and the work of UJAS marketable through the avenue of a website. This included sifting through organizational documents, newspapers, and video clips and working closely with the head of the organization and the other staff member. The second was expanding the network of people thinking about and working on the issue of Pakistani refugees in India. This consisted of researching like-minded organizations and creating a document that could be sent out to these organizations outlining the history, successes, challenges, and goals of the organization to begin to create a local and international NGO network for the organization. The third was starting the process of acquiring funds to sustain and build upon the activities of the organization. This was done by identifying funding sources and the requirements to apply for those funds for the organization.

The biggest challenge throughout the summer was the fact that my host organization was simply one man, who is amazing, but very busy. I spent a lot of hours working alone, which was good because I could take ownership of my projects, but after awhile it could get lonely. This situation, however, really allowed me to learn in that everyday I was taking the initiative to make sure the project moved forward. It could have been very easy to sit back and wait for instructions, but I realized early on that nothing would be accomplished during my summer if I took that route. As a result of this internship made possible by the Kellogg Institute I was able to gain the skills to conceive of and complete a hopefully sustainable development project while navigating a completely foreign culture. I would highly recommend this internship to anyone genuinely interested in development work and considering it as a career.