

Final Report: Scott Kloeck-Jenson Fellowship (2009)
Internship, Local Economic Development Team of the International Labor Organization

The purpose of my internship with the Local Economic Development team of the International Labor Organization, funded by the Scott Kloeck-Jenson Fellowship, was twofold: (1) to gain exposure to potential careers in international development and (2) to explore the International Labor Organization as a case study for my PhD dissertation on the role of international organizations in promoting participation-based local economic development strategies. For both of these purposes, this summer was extremely fruitful and enabled me to establish relationships at the ILO which I am using now and will continue to use. The Scott Kloeck-Jenson fellowship made this internship possible and, for that, I am deeply grateful.

The Local Economic Development (LED) team of the International Labor Organization (ILO) is housed on the 11th floor of the ILO headquarters, located in the hills overlooking downtown Geneva. Now a UN agency, the ILO was established in 1919 to promote the decent treatment of working people through the coordination of activities between national governments, organized labor, and businesses. The LED team works within the Employment Division of the ILO, which is primarily tasked to help businesses grow through coordinated efforts by the three constituent groups to promote of high quality employment. I was initially interested in this team, in particular, because the ILO was one the first international organizations to apply a localized participatory approach to the promotion of equitable economic growth and integration into the global economy. In the early 1980s, with contributions from several University of Wisconsin faculty members, the ILO carried out some of the first research on local social network structures and public-private institutions that enabled clusters of small and medium sized businesses in European regions to compete against vertically integrated mass-production firms in global markets. The ILO's strong tradition in LED also draws from its application of localized participatory approaches to post-conflict reconstruction during the early 1990s, which helped to bridge the gap between an economic development approach originating in a European context and development needs situated in economically and institutionally impoverished areas. The current LED team at the ILO builds on these foundations to implement and assist projects to realize economic development through the establishment of localized participatory public-private institutions that can more precisely and responsively provide public resources to enhance the competitiveness of local economies in the global market. I applied to work with the LED team of the ILO in order to learn from and participate in that strong tradition, but also in order to study its effectiveness in the broader context of my academic research on new approaches to economic development.

With the support of the SKJ fellowship, I was able to spend 3 months interning with the LED team in the summer of 2009. The team consists of 4 full-time employees and nearly 10 employees in other divisions or groups, who devote part of their time to LED projects. The responsibilities of the team range from managing finances and allocations from donor governments, to producing research to facilitate new practice areas, to administering and monitoring field projects, to organizing knowledge sharing through websites, conferences, and workshops. While I worked as a part of the team and thus participated in the weekly meetings, read drafts of documents for colleagues, assisted with miscellaneous projects, and attended briefings on behalf of the team, my primary responsibilities this summer were new projects. First, I developed a concept paper on Green Jobs and Local Economic Development, whose purpose was to serve as a guiding framework for field offices to incorporate environmental sustainability and GHG reduction into their LED activities. As the paper was compelled by an ILO-wide initiative to seriously

engage the challenge of environmentally sustainable development, a secondary purpose was to reinforce the claim that a bottom-up localized perspective was an important component of any Green Jobs strategy. My paper received several rounds of comments from ILO experts and I presented my findings at a monthly inter-departmental meeting where new applications of LED approaches are shared. At the conclusion of the internship, we discussed the possibility of an external collaborator contract to finalize the report and I am in the process of negotiating that contract with the ILO.

My second major area of responsibility, while at the ILO this past summer, was to help organize a knowledge sharing conference for South East Asian countries on innovative local responses to the global financial crisis. A colleague and I drafted the framework document for the funding request, drafted the invitation for national ministries, conducted background research seeking to identify best practices, and drafted country-specific background memos on the financial crisis and its effects. By the time my internship ended, we had finalized the list of attendees, completed the background memos and identified best cases, and were drafting the schedule for the conference. It is unfortunate that the ILO will not support my attendance of the conference, as I was so closely involved in its conception and realization, but also because the conference will be located in Bali, Indonesia!

For my dissertation research, I had been interested in the possibility of using the ILO as a case study, if it provided variation in the participatory economic development model and mechanisms used to disseminate the model. During my time at the ILO, I was able to conduct informal narrative interviews with the past 4 heads of the LED team, going back to the late 1980s, and I was able to collect documents from the ILO database and library archives. Initial observations yielded two interesting findings. First, in contrast to the EU and World Bank, which encourage the establishment of formal local participatory economic development institutions, the ILO's participatory development model seems to allow flexibility in the formalization of local governance. Second, as opposed to a dedicated participatory local economic development program, as is the case with UNIDO, the EU, and the OECD, the ILO seems to be shifting towards the integration of participatory governance into other program areas like youth entrepreneurship, natural disaster management, and infrastructure development. These observations suggest that ILO projects would provide useful variation in the model type and dissemination mechanism. But because the majority of my time was devoted to my work for the LED team, I was only able to draw preliminary conclusions from anecdotal evidence. In order to verify these findings more systematically, I have been awarded a Center for German and European Studies travel grant to return to the ILO between December 17th and December 31st, 2009 to gather documents from the archives and the organization's internal computing network.

In sum, my time in Geneva this summer was highly productive. I was able to directly participate in several projects that will provide practitioners with the resources to compete equitably in competitive global markets. I was also able to establish professional connections which will surely be fruitful in the future. And, finally, I was able to conduct some initial independent research which now serves as the foundation for the follow-up trip that I will take in December 2009. I am deeply grateful to the Kloeck-Jenson Fellowship and the Kloeck-Jenson family for this opportunity.