

William Glennerster (Economics) - Kenya, Summer 2015

The Peter Ringrose Scholarship allowed me to travel to Kenya. While there I was able to apply the academic skills I have been taught in Cambridge and positively impact the community I worked in. I stayed in Kenya for five weeks and volunteered for a not-for-profit organisation called Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA). My main task was to help in the writing of an academic paper, which discussed the effects of offering dairy farmers loans for water tanks.

IPA evaluate the effect of programs designed to alleviate poverty and has a history of finding donors to fund the most successful programs. Notable successes include Dispensers for Safe Water, which currently serves more than 2 million people, and Deworm the World, which has treated 37 million children in the 2013/14 school year. In order to convince donors of the benefits of a program IPA works with researchers to publish academic studies outlining programs benefits. My role was to aid in the writing of the paper evaluating the impact of loans for water tanks.

When published, the paper will document the benefits of the water tank loans; these benefits include increased access to credit, higher milk production, timesavings and increased girls school enrolment. A draft of this paper has been used in discussions with donors and government officials seeking to scale up the program. The project I worked on has already demonstrated its benefit to the local community but has the potential to benefit a far larger population.

Helping write an academic paper allowed me to apply skills developed in the Economics Tripos. Specifically, I worked extensively on a model of loan take up and repayment similar to models considered in microeconomics lectures. As a result, I was able to apply the skills I had learnt in microeconomics lectures. In addition, I was able to apply skills learnt in statistics lectures. Specifically, a thorough understanding of confidence intervals and an ability to interpret regression results were important.

In addition to applying skills I had learnt on the economics course, the trip developed new skills relevant to my future studies. The trip taught me how to manipulate and analyse more complex models than were confronted in the part I course which will be helpful preparation for the part II course. Working on the model also stretched my mathematical skills requiring me to compute complex equations. Perhaps most significantly I learnt more about the practice of Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs). RCTs are used increasingly in economics, particularly within behavioural and development economics, which are both fields that are covered in second and third year Tripos papers. As a result, going to Kenya was beneficial to my future studies.

The Peter Ringrose Scholarship provided me with a fantastic opportunity to apply and improve the skills I have learnt on my degree course. I would like to thank the college and it's kind donors for the financial support it has given me.