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# Graduate Personal Statement

“Will I die here, thousands of kilometers from home?” I wondered, as I lay feverish in bed in a small hotel in Tarkwa, a mining town in southern Ghana. It was the fourth day since the fever had spiked. I suspected that I had malaria; the doctor soon proved my suspicion correct. At the time, I was conducting research on the community’s response to illegal small-scale gold mining in Ghana for UNDP after completing my first year of studying at Columbia University.

After I recovered from malaria, I become more determined to help the underdeveloped world. Malaria is so common that Ghanaians react to it as if it were the common cold. This despite the fact that malaria is a serious disease; 25 percent of the deaths of Ghanaian children is due to malaria. It is simply because people are used to it and have no choice but to live with it. Similarly, they learn to accept the lack of stable electricity and clean water, let alone internet access. My deep compassion for the underprivileged drives me to where I am today.

Three years ago, I left investment banking and began working in the field of international development. My journey started with a half-year microfinance project in rural Bangladesh and China, followed by graduate study at Columbia University in Economic and Political Development. After my first year at Columbia, I took a gap year to work for the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) in China. As the only junior employee hired in China, I helped Chinese pharmaceutical companies enter into the global procurement system led by major development agencies such as UNICEF, USAID and DFID, supplying medicine to low-income countries at low but sustainable prices.

I really enjoyed my time working for CHAI, however, the most unforgettable experience came from myl then moved to Ghana, where I began working on a research project for UNDP. This involved collecting 102 questionnaires and conducting 46 interviews with major stakeholders such as miners, community members, government officials, and NGO representatives on their interaction with and impression of illegal small-scale mining. I found out that unemployment is the main catalyst for Ghanaians entering into illegal small-scale mining. Complex laws and a difficult registration process were the major barriers to the legalization of small-scale gold mines. Based on these research findings, I made several policy recommendations to both the UNDP Ghana office and the Ghanaian national government, such as establishing an electronic filing system for the Minerals Commission in Ghana. I realized that uncovering the root causes of a social problem by conducting field research, and then making relevant policy recommendations, is more attractive to me than simply implementing a project. I strongly believe in the importance of taking relevant actions to advance progress rather than helping others blindly. This experience has persuaded me to pursue a career as a researcher in the field of international development rather than as a practitioner.

Thanks to Columbia, I have enjoyed many opportunities to meet with and learn from world-renowned scholars and become fascinated by common questions in development. For example, can the cause of poverty be explained and generalized into one big idea (e.g. the lack of an inclusive economic and political institution as written in *Why Nations Fail* by Acemoglu and Duflo) or should we stop searching for a single cause for poverty given its complexity? Should the government spend more money on international aid, as advocated by Jeffrey Sachs, or should we be critical about aid as supported by William Easterly and Dambisa Moyo? My research experience in Ghana has inspired me to further explore natural resource governance in resource-rich African countries. My work with CHAI has encouraged me to delve deeper into the role Chinese companies can play within the western development system. I wish to someday provide my own inputs to answer the above questions based upon my own research.

Though rich in academic resource, Columbia does not offerTo achieve these goals, I now seek an interdisciplinary doctorate program dedicated solely to development studies. The Ph.D. in Development Studies at Cambridge fits complements my interdisciplinary backgrounds in business, economics and development and will help me to achieve my long-term goal of becoming a researcher at an academic institution or think tank. I decided to apply for MPhil in Development Studies instead of the PhD program since I believe that the MPhil program will extend my knowledge by incorporating sociological and philosophical issues in development, while also providing me with more time to decide on my research topic for PhD study. I firmly believe that the MPhil in Development Studies will be a wonderful stepping stone for further doctorate study at Cambridge. The program will help me realize the goal I established upon recovering from malaria: to become a researcher in the field of international development and affect change.

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