

Not just passing through: Life in Mumbai

World Partners Program fellow Sara Hahn is living and working in India. There are currently five other fellows living in Mumbai, and six living in Kampala, Uganda. Sara's reflections on her life in Mumbai are both very moving - and very real:

India is slowly unveiling itself to me, and each day I get a little closer to my aim: to truly live here, not to just be a tourist passing through.

This country is everything it is stereotyped to be. It is heartbreaking to see children playing in piles of garbage, three-legged dogs, and horribly deformed people begging for money.

I am smoking two and a half packs of cigarettes a day just by breathing the Mumbai air. The smells can be overwhelming and nothing gets done efficiently. At times, however, it can be incredibly Western, and girls in skimpy tops and popular American TV shows are not unusual sights.

Living in a developing nation with minimal hand-holding is a new experience to me. I realized that whenever I've traveled before, I've had the assistance of being part of an institution, like study abroad, or some sort of cushion, like staying in hotels or hostels.

Here I have a self-sufficiency that is both freeing and scary, but I am up for the challenge. There are Indian operas, theater, museums, and Bollywood to explore. There are so many opportunities to meet people through my work. And there is the very satisfying feeling of learning you can be completely competent in a country so utterly foreign.

My work

I have never done something I believe in so much. Point of View is an amazing organization. Learning about non-governmental organizations (NGOs) during our New York orientation reinforced my passion for not-for-profit work. It is incredible to be surrounded by people who staunchly believe in working at the most local levels, from the bottom up, to create change abroad.

I am so happy to be somewhere I truly believe in: an indigenous, grassroots NGO that focuses on women's advocacy through media. They engage in amazing projects: film festivals; photography; documentaries; publications; and other creative forms of communication that increase awareness of some of India's most widespread and overlooked issues. These include rape, domestic abuse, body image expectations, and inequality in marriage.

I am connected to this work because these issues are by no means limited to India or the developing world. My country suffers from the same issues. This is not an Indian struggle

but a universal one. Point of View stresses international solidarity and this connects me to overcoming the same difficulties in Los Angeles as here in Mumbai.