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LACIS Internship Grant Report  
December 16, 2010

At the beginning of September I began working with Aliança Empreendedora (http://www.aliancaempreendedora.org.br/), an NGO in Curitiba, Brazil. Aliança’s mission is to “Make the economy a place for all,” by providing education and training, microcredit loans, and access to commercialization to low-income entrepreneurs. I worked primarily in the microcredit division, which had recently formalized as an independent organization, Impulso Microcredit (http://www.impulso.org.br/).

I originally arrived to work on Impulso’s social media and online marketing campaigns to recruit international investors, meaning the work would be done primarily in English. However, when I arrived Impulso was still in the process of contracting a company to process foreign credit card investments, which meant that the work I did was extremely varied, and primarily in Portuguese. While initially an obstacle, this change in job description pushed me to develop my Portuguese and allowed me to work in multiple areas of the organization.

While working for Impulso I developed an email marketing campaign, translated their website to English, created marketing videos and an online marketing strategy, as well as completed many on-site visits to our supported entrepreneurs and other potential entrepreneurs. The work became most meaningful when I was able to visit the entrepreneurs and see what sort of impact the microcredit has had on their lives.

We spent many of my final days in Brazil preparing for the launch of Impulso’s online investment portal that was held in Sao Paulo in conjunction with the Walmart Institute. The portal was modeled after the global microcredit organization Kiva’s website, which allows individuals to select which entrepreneur they want to invest in, as well as accompany their
business’s development and progress. Similar to Kiva, Impulso has partnerships with many Microfinance Institutions who find and add their supported entrepreneurs to the website. However, Impulso recruits and supports most of their entrepreneurs directly from their offices, eliminating the middle institutions, and increasing proximity with their online investors. We hope that this characteristic of Impulso will provide more incentive for potential investors.

At this time the Impulso website is only accepting investments from Brazilians within Brazil (or with a Brazilian credit card), but we are hoping to open up investments to people outside of Brazil at the beginning of 2011. When Impulso moves into this phase I hope to continue to do work for them remotely, in order to increase foreign investments.

The website launch was a success, with many well-connected Brazilians attending, as well as a lot of media coverage. The website launch resulted in one of the most followed Twitter personalities in Brazil (Luciano Huck) to tweet about Impulso twice. Website traffic jumped to a thousand hits daily and our exposure within Brazil grew exponentially. Impulso’s next steps will be to harness the growth in awareness, and transform it into an increase in investments on the portal.

While I studied Nonprofit Management and Latin American Studies at UW, I had no previous experience working in a microfinance NGO. Working with Impulso was an excellent opportunity for me to learn more about the administrative side of microcredit, as well as develop my Portuguese language skills. Visiting the entrepreneurs allowed me to see more intimately into distinct Brazilian families and businesses, as well as to better understand why the economic empowerment work that Aliança and Impulso are doing is so important.