A just workplace and living wage for the lowest paid staff of Catholic Relief Services/Cameroon

Samantha Ellis
School for International Training

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A JUST WORKPLACE AND LIVING WAGE FOR THE LOWEST PAID STAFF OF CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES/CAMEROON

Samantha Ellis
PIM 59

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of International and Intercultural Management at the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont

May 13 – 24, 2002

Ryland White, Advisor
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ABSTRACT

Many international relief organizations, whose mission it is to serve the poor and improve human rights, actually continue the cycle of poverty and injustice in their workplaces for some of their local employees. Catholic Relief Services/Cameroon (CRS/CM) is no exception to this, as this paper presents the case that a just workplace and just wage should be an area of concern for CRS/CM and for CRS as an organization, particularly for its lowest paid local employees.

In my research, I explore the quality of life, cost of living, and just workplace issues for the Cameroonian guards at CRS/CM, where I worked for a year as the Assistant Program Manager of the Peace and Justice program. The primary research question is: What impact does an unjust workplace have on the guards and what changes can be made in the management and operation of CRS/CM to make a more just workplace for this group? I used CRS’s Just Workplace document and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) as guidelines and standards. Through a questionnaire, cost of living survey, focus group interviews, and individual interviews, the guards expressed and detailed areas of employment where they feel CRS/CM falls short of a just workplace and does not live out all the principles of CST, and how their lives are a daily struggle from lack of a living wage. Included in this analysis is how culture influences policies, expectations, standards, and reality for both the guards and CRS Management.

Incorporating the suggestions of the guards, I created a set of recommendations that both CRS and other international humanitarian organizations could use to promote and monitor a more just workplace and increased living wage for its local staff in the field offices.
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<tr>
<td>ACR</td>
<td>Assistant Country Representative</td>
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<td>AM</td>
<td>Administrative Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>APM</td>
<td>Assistant Program Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFA</td>
<td>Central African Franc (currency in Cameroon)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>Country Representative</td>
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<td>CRS</td>
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<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>P&amp;J</td>
<td>Peace and Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Program Manager</td>
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<td>RSPF</td>
<td>Regional Small Project Fund</td>
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INTRODUCTION

My research manifested from my experience with Catholic Relief Services in Yaoundé, Cameroon (CRS/CM), where I was a Fellow in their International Development Fellows Program following the on-campus phase of my Masters program in International and Intercultural Management at the School for International Training. I was assigned as the Assistant Program Manager (APM) with the CRS/CM Peace and Justice (P&J) Program because I speak French, have lived in central and west Africa, and have experience and training in the areas of peace and justice work.

At CRS/CM, I played two roles: one as the APM for the P&J program, the other as a student of International and Intercultural Management. As such, I was interested in not only the projects my colleague, the P&J Program Manager, and I were working on in the P&J program, but also with the internal management of the office, which included the responsibilities of the CRS/CM Country Representative (CR), also known as the Director, and the Assistant Country Representative (ACR). (See the Organizational Chart in Appendix 2).

After a few months at CRS/CM, I began to think about possible Capstone topics. I wanted to do something that would make a positive impact in some way. Our projects in the P&J program were very interesting but they were located far from Yaoundé. I felt that researching and writing on one of our P&J programs would be very based in theory, since I did not have much access to those directly involved in the projects. I also realized that my interest was more leaning towards the internal management of the office and how P&J
related to that. I was extremely impacted by my direct daily involvement with CRS/CM employees and policies that I felt needed attention in the area of justice.

The Topic

The topic I researched is the Just Workplace\(^1\), including Living Wage\(^2\), for CRS/CM. I researched this by looking at two main areas: 1) the cost, standard of living, and quality of life for the guards\(^3\), and 2) the management practices, including wages and benefits, of CRS/CM that pertain to these employees. My decision to focus on the guards is based on the facts that: 1) The guards do not have much say or influence in work policies that affect them. 2) Their salaries are based on comparisons with similar NGOs and privately owned guard companies instead of on the current cost of living. 3) From the results of the CRS/CM Office Environment Survey conducted by the ACR in October 2000, the guards identified the need for more attention to Just Workplace issues; and 4) CRS’s mission is to assist the poor and this group is the poorest of all CRS/CM employees.

My topic focus grew from a just wage to a just workplace, encompassing wage, through a series of interactions and events. The problem of inadequate wages was first brought to my attention by the CRS guards that worked at our house in Yaoundé, who shared with us some of the life issues they were facing, including that they cannot financially meet all of their and their family’s basic needs. For instance, they lamented

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\(^1\) The Just Workplace is a document that was created by CRS Headquarters in May 2000 to be distributed and discussed in all CRS field and home offices.

\(^2\) A living wage, I have defined, is one where the employee can meet all their basic living needs: shelter, energy, education, health/sanitation, nutrition, transportation, clothing, with 10% discretionary for savings or other needs. This definition is a compilation of definitions from the various sources consulted.

\(^3\) CRS Cameroon has a total of 26 employees, of which 15 are locally hired Cameroonian guards. There are three guards for each of the four expatriate residences and for the office.
about not being able to provide quality medical care and food for their children. It is for the guards that I conducted my research in hopes of finding solutions to relieve what they see are problems in their lives due to employment issues and wage and to open up dialogue in CRS/Cameroon on the issues.

When I approached the Country Representative (CR) at CRS/CM about what I felt were unjust wages for the guards, I was told that a salary adjustment had just been done based on what other NGOs and guard companies in Yaoundé were paying their guards. Since CRS bases it work on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and its mission of helping the poor, I felt that CRS should have taken more into account in the salary adjustment such as CST principles, the cost of living in Yaoundé, and the standard of living of its lowest paid workers. (CST is discussed later in the paper; see also Appendix 4.)

I recommended to the CR that I conduct a survey of living costs in Yaoundé to assess the wage of the lowest paid workers and he was receptive to the idea, saying that such a study did not currently exist. About the same time, I was helping the Assistant Country Representative (ACR) prepare an Evaluation for the CRS/CM Office Environment, with a section on the Just Workplace. The results of this survey, completed by all staff, did indicate that many of the employees, mostly non-management, thought that CRS/CM was not just in a number of areas. These results were my initiative to focus my Capstone topic on the Just Workplace with an inclusion of Living Wage.

The timing of this topic and research for CRS seemed ripe. The Central Africa Regional Office (CARO) of CRS, of which Cameroon is a part, met in the beginning of
June 2001 for their annual regional strategic planning meeting. The new Regional Director (RD) for CARO had the issues of the Just Workplace and Living Wage as one of the important topics for discussion at that meeting. This director, formerly the RD for the Southern Africa Regional Office (SARO), has recently been exploring the issues of Just Workplace and living wage for that region’s field offices. This region-wide and high-level management interest should greatly enhance my research, as it should give me a receptive audience for my research findings.

The Problem

The problem is that the lowest paid staff feel that CRS/CM is not a Just Workplace in that they are earning too low a salary to meet their minimal daily living expenses, they have no say in the workplace policies that affect them, some of those policies are not just, and that they are not treated fairly in the workplace.

In terms of a just salary, CRS currently has no basis on which to define what is a just wage to ensure an adequate standard of living for the lowest paid workers. The problem of an unjust workplace was manifested in the results of a staff-wide CRS/CM office evaluation, where most of the guards cited numerous cases of unjust treatment regarding employment and workplace issues, such as not having their issues and grievances treated in a timely and respectful manner and insufficient employee wages and benefits. Another aspect of the problem is that Senior Management have not broadly explored and shared the Just Workplace document with the guards to make it a living document, as CRS stated it should be. Many of these staff feel that Management is deaf to

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4 CRS has field offices in over 80 countries around the world, which are organized by geographical region.
their questions and concerns and they have no forum to be heard since there are weekly Management meetings but Non-management staff are not invited and there are never any all-staff meetings where guards are included to listen and be heard.

**The primary research question I seek to answer is:**

What impact does an unjust workplace have on the guards and what changes can be made in the management and operation of CRS/Cameroon to make a more just workplace for this group?

**Sub-questions that inform the primary question:**

- What elements of quality of life and work for the guards are influenced by workplace policies, including wage?
- What are the current areas of CRS/Cameroon management and operation that the majority of the guards feel are unjust and what has Senior Management already done or said they will do to address these?
- What are the elements of CST and the Just Workplace document that support a just workplace?
The first piece of literature, which is actually a set of principles, a body of thought, and a call to action that piqued my interest in this Capstone topic is Catholic Social Teaching. The information on CST used for this paper was contained in a booklet entitled, A Century of Social Teaching. Basically, it is the call to work for justice, serve those in need, pursue peace, and defend the life, dignity, and rights of all our sisters and brothers. It is a call to conscience, compassion, and creative action. The basic themes are 1) Life and Dignity of the Human Person, 2) Rights and Responsibilities of the Human Person, 3) Call to Family, Community, and Participation, 4) Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers, 5) Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, and 6) Solidarity. Aspects from each of these themes support my topic and can be applied to CRS/CM to work for more justice in the office as it relates to the guards. I am particularly drawn to the idea of “creative action” as that frees us to look beyond the business-as-usual model to an outside-the-box approach to solving problems and daily management. CST is a tool that offers an alternative social system and fundamental values that test every nation and, most importantly to CRS/CM, asks not simply what can we do, but what ought we do. So, although CRS/CM feels it is already doing some benefit for its employees, according to CST it should also be asking what more it can do.

In the first principle is stated, “The test of every institution or policy is whether it enhances or threatens human life and human dignity” (p.4). In examining CRS/CM and its office policies, Senior Management must ask which current and new policies could better
enhance the life and dignity of their lowest paid workers. In the Catholic social vision, the human person is central. That means that the guards should be seen as whole people, not just in their roles as guards. This links up with the second principle that states “People have a fundamental right to those things that make life truly human: food, clothing, housing, health care, education, security, social services, and employment” (p. 5). Along with this phrase, I believe CRS/CM should ask, “and what quality of each of these things?” Is it enough to have, for example, food that offers little nutrition and variety, one or two pieces of clothing, and a one-bedroom home for a family of five? When dignity enters the equation the answer is probably no—when one struggles with living day-to-day with not enough quality food and cramped housing, particularly considering they work for an international humanitarian organization, dignity is compromised.

Within the third principle is stated, “A central test of political, legal, and economic institutions is what they do to people, what they do for people, and how people participate in them” (p. 5). CRS/CM should be included in this test as it is an institution with policies that affect its staff economically. CRS/CM should ask what its employee benefits do for its staff and do they do as much as they could, and whether its management policies allow all the staff to participate in them. The title of this principle, Call to Family, Community and Participation, includes the words family and community—that family needs to be supported, who in turn have a responsibility to contribute to the larger society. As supported by two pieces of literature below, work hours must support an employee’s ability to spend time with his/her family and in community and that salary must support being able to contribute monetarily to causes that benefit the community.
The fourth principle offers the strongest support for my case of a just workplace. If CRS/CM examines its management policies, benefits, and salaries with “conscience, compassion, and creative action” (p.3), it must question whether it is providing “decent and fair wages” (p.6), and supporting its workers in forming and joining union and worker associations. Linked with this is the fifth principle of Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, which, within CRS/CM, is the lowest paid staff who live hand to mouth. This fifth principle states that “a basic test…is how it’s most vulnerable members are faring,” and “our tradition calls us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first” (p.6)

Looking more specifically at how Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is applied to living wage and employment practices, Richard Haas, in his article “The Living Wage Makes Good Business Sense,” has some very relevant insights. He provides the following Catholic teaching definition of living wage as “workers and their families receiving a salary that provides them with adequate food, clothing, and shelter in addition to spiritual and cultural needs and that it offers sufficient income to meet not only the present necessities but also unemployment, sickness, death, and old age.” The term “adequate” is culturally relative, so when looking at living wage, an American organization such as CRS/CM must inquire and understand from a Cameroonian point of view what adequate is. I have attempted to give more insight into the Cameroonian guards’ feelings of adequacy with my research. Haas helps us understand more by stating that “a living wage does more than provide the worker with his or her just due—it is a satisfying wage that inspires true productivity, because once a worker’s basic needs of food, shelter, and health, are secured, then that worker is able to give monetarily back to society.” This wage should
reflect a standard of living that is characterized by a sense of fullness, completeness, and satisfaction. In my research, I will show that the guards have many concerns about those basics of food and health that do negatively impact their quality of life and how much they are able to give back to society.

CRS agency-wide has a whole pays its American and Management staff well because it wants to retain the best employees and it wants to free them from preoccupation with personal financial concerns to be able to focus on quality work in the office. Haas recognizes that most businesses do this with their top executives as businesses “try to provide [them] with a lifestyle that is conducive to the organization’s goals. Compensation is structured so that key managers can afford the right neighborhoods, social clubs, and even the right political contributions and charitable donations.” But, from a Catholic standpoint, “the connection between generous compensation and generous effort should hold for every worker—not just the best-paid portion.” These principles of equality and adequate compensation were my main points when I was introducing this topic to CR and ACR at CRS/CM. Unfortunately, I met with resistance, as they didn’t feel that this “generous compensation” should apply to all staff.

As Dosset, in her article in Sojourners, states in support of this, “the principle behind these living wage campaigns is simple: If a person works full time, he or she should not be poor.” She quotes a billboard in Santa Monica that says “The Choice for L.A.’s Working Poor: Food, Rent, or Medicine?” to make the point that the poor often have to choose between important necessities. My research results show that this is often the case for the working poor of CRS/CM.
In finding a framework for defining living wage and what constitutes a fixed bundle of goods and services to base this on, it is the measuring of a fixed bundle of goods—that it is the preferred mix of goods and services, not sub-optimal, that needs to be priced and quantified (Dumond, Hirsch, and Macpherson 1999, v. 37). This means that looking at the lowest quality and price for items and services is not adequate for a living wage/standard of living survey since these are not necessarily the “preferred” mix of what that particular population would be consuming and using. This is particularly relevant in light of conversations I had with the CR, who felt that I needed to find out the lowest quality of items for this lowest paid population since that is what they would choose. My argument is that they might buy these lowest quality items, but it is not necessarily what they would choose to buy if they had the finances to choose otherwise. In my research, I asked both questions—what the guards do buy and what they would prefer to buy to get a better idea of where an optimal living wage should be set.

In another study about living wage (Kahler and Hofer 1997), the authors believe, as I do, “that, as a matter of public [and organizational] policy, full-time work should be adequate to ensure economic self-sufficiency and a decent standard of living.” With my research, I tried to find out from the guards what they believe a “decent standard of living” is and how economically self-sufficient they felt they are.

The way of thinking for most international NGOs is to base the salary levels of their low-skilled workers at the minimal needs level. Many of these levels have been undercalculated, have not been adjusted to meet current prices and inflation, or not
adjusted for real needs. As the study states, “the original concept of ‘minimum needs’ ignores changes in living standards and consumption patterns.”

In looking at standard of living, or quality of life, as a way to help formulate a living wage, I used some ideas from the article by Lever (2000). She states that, “In order to explain Quality of Life (QOL), it is not enough to focus upon the socio-economic context of the individual and attempts to improve it. Rather, a complex internal construction exists which must be taken into account in order to develop an integral definition of Quality of Life. That construct is the individual subjectivity with which one internally processes the surrounding world.” Since I am of a very different culture than my research participants, it was important for me to understand their culture and view of the world in order to help me better define their quality of life. I explain some of these cultural ways in the Findings and Analysis section.

As in Haas’ article that stated that a living wage not only benefits the employee but also society, an article by Montgomery, Gragnolati, and Burke in *Demography* (2000 vol. 37), discusses the wider benefits of a higher income for those in developing nations. They state that a higher income gives command over resources that could promote health, lessens need for high fertility, and reduces opportunity costs of schooling. The article entitled “Perspectives on a Global Economy,” by McGuckin, Van Ark, and Barrington, adds to this benefit of increased income by stating that, “Increases in life expectancy are highly correlated with lifetime consumption of healthy food and the availability of affordable medical services. Increased consumption of educational services also improves living standards…In general, the more discretionary income available after necessities are
purchased, the higher the living standard.” My research shows that the guards do not end up with any discretionary income after purchasing all their necessities.

In helping to define living standards, Montgomery, Gragnolati, and Burke give some indicators beyond the usual “basics” list by adding that there are a few common features, which include access to water and the nature of toilet facilities, indicators of housing quality, and ownership of selected consumer durables. I made note of these factors when visiting the homes of the guards during the individual interviews.

The document that supports a Just Workplace was developed by the CRS Management Strategy Team at CRS headquarters in May 2000 and is called “Developing and Living a Just Workplace.” It was distributed to all the CRS offices at Headquarters and in the field and was meant to be a living document to be discussed with all staff in each office. Although this document had been sent to CRS/CM months prior, when I went looking for it, it was not to be found and had not been used. So I wrote to Headquarters to have it resent. When I left in June 2001, the document had still not been discussed with the whole staff—the guards were left out of the discussion. I would like to use this point to show how a Just Workplace was put on very low priority by CRS/CM Senior Management and how resistant they were to including all the staff in this meaningful and insightful process. A questionnaire to assess the office environment was created by the myself and the ACR and distributed to all staff for their input but the forum for discussion that was suggested by Headquarters was left out of that process for the guards. A team of CRS/CM management level employees was created to implement the changes recommended from that questionnaire, but non-management staff were not represented on that team.
The seven components outlined in the Just Workplace document are 1) Leadership Engagement in Development of a Just Workplace, 2) Balancing Rights and Responsibilities, 3) Institutionalizing CST Themes in Our Work, 4) Management Policies and Practices, 5) Employee Relations (Due Process), 6) Effective Communication, 7) Valuing Differences. (See Appendix 3 for a synopsis of the Just Workplace document.) In almost each of these components, CRS/CM has fallen short in including and meeting the needs of the guards. In the Findings and Analysis section of this paper, this is reflected in the guards’ input through the questionnaire and interviews and through my own observations and engagement of CRS/CM office management.

One aspect of a Just Workplace is the amount of hours worked per employee per week. In most workplaces, 12-hour days are the exception, and where it is the rule, there is higher compensation to accompany it. At CRS/CM, the guards work 12-hour days, five days a week, but because there is a clause in the Cameroonian labor laws saying that guards can work up to 56 hours without overtime pay, they are compensated very little for what any other employee would be 20 hours of overtime. The article by Waskow, “Free Time for a Free People” (2001), shows how long work days and many work hours per week are detrimental to the well-being of the worker and to society as a whole. It harms the person in that it “grinds underfoot deep human needs for rest and reflection, for family time and community time.” Waskow cites a study at Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations that found that “workers who put in more than fifty hours per week are more likely to experience severe work/family conflicts.” He even goes so far as to say that “twelve-hour days, sixty-hour weeks reduces the number and quality of jobs
that are available to others.” In-so-far as it adversely affects community, he refers to Ralph Nader, making the connection between overwork and undercitizenship. He also cites religious groups, including Catholics, that have taken on the issue of a shorter work week in order to give people more time with the spiritual side of life. The statement Free Time/Free People, created by a committee of religious groups, “urges political, business, and cultural leaders to reduce the hours of work without reducing employees’ income.” The committee seeks to build alliances between blue and white-collar workers that would be rooted in “sharing deep human needs and intentions.” I will address ways I think CRS/CM could rethink its policy on hours per week and overtime for the guards, in the Conclusions section of this paper.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I used a variety of data-gathering techniques to be able to include a number of viewpoints, get enough information, and verify my data considering my cultural bias. It was important to me for the guards to have their voices and views clearly represented and heard through my research so I chose very personal methods, such as focus group interviews, individual interviews, and visits to the guards’ homes, all of which were videotaped. At the same time, I wanted to present an objective side that could be quantified and measurable, so I chose other methods with more standard responses such as a cost-of-living survey and questionnaire. (See appendix 5, 6, and 7 for more information on these research instruments.)

As one third of the participants were Francophone, the other two thirds Anglophone, all my materials and outreach had to be in both French and English. I translated all the French responses and tabulated them with the English.

Illiteracy did inhibit some participants from fully taking part in all aspects of data collection. There were only three illiterate participants and they all came to the first set of introductory meetings but I was not able to engage them for the entire process. The three who were illiterate were of particular interest since they were of the ones with the longest relationship with CRS/CM. One was the housecleaner, who has worked in the CRS/CM office for many years, another was an office guard who spends a lot of time in the office itself or just outside, and the third was a guard at the Director’s residence. They were the ones who would have been able to give a real perspective on my research topic since they
had worked so long with CRS/CM, but I found that I did not have the time to spend individually with each of them at each phase of the research. Instead, I had asked each of the illiterate employees to form a relationship with one of the other participants or someone in their neighborhood or family to help them read all the material. In the end, their participation was very limited and I did not collect much data from this group.

In retrospect, I might have limited my research participants to a randomly chosen number so as to spend more time with each participant. But my intention with this research was to make it available to all who felt they had something to share or learn. Since they have been kept “out of the loop” for so long, it was my desire to have them all feel included and for the process to feel inclusive. I realize now that the unintended consequence of that was the exclusion of the illiterate.

I sent out introductory letters to all the guards that gave a basic outline of the research with invitations to an introductory meeting held at my home. For each of the discussion pieces of my research, I had to have two meeting times to include all with different time schedules. I paid each participant for his transportation and had refreshments. I got full interest from everyone who came, which was all of the guards. I had a second set of meetings to explain the cost-of-living survey and questionnaire and hand them out. I sent out invitations for two sessions of the focus group interview. At the focus group interview, I set up times for individual interviews, most of which took place at the guards’ homes although some took place at my home— it was at their discretion. I was also invited as an observer to one of the guards’ monthly meetings held at one of the guards’ homes.
Cost of Living and Income Survey

I created this survey by taking an Oxfam “Basket of Goods” survey used by CRS/Kinshasa and giving it to a few guards to modify it to reflect their reality of spending needs and wants. With all my research methods, I solicited not only what is, but also what could be. I wanted to capture their current reality and some of their hopes and dreams. So, for instance, in the cost-of-living survey, I asked them to not only include in the list what they do currently spend money on but what they might or hope to spend money on.

For one month, the guards were asked to record on a daily basis their spending and income for any of the categories. It included any money spent or earned by anyone in their household family. (For a definition of “household family,” please see Appendix 6.) I had a comment section where they could put the quantity or any other specifics, but that amount was less quantifiable because many of the measurements are done in piles, handfuls, tin cans, capfuls, etc.—not by weight or standard measuring tool (such as ounces, grams, kilos, etc.).

Questionnaire

Before handing out the cost-of-living survey and questionnaire, I had a meeting with all the participants explaining how to fill them out and what each item meant, and I answered any questions at that time. I made myself available through telephone, office, or home visit if anyone had any questions regarding how to fill them out. The survey and questionnaire were not anonymous so that I could follow them up in the interviews.

The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions to be able to have uniformity while giving the participants a chance to express what was exactly
on their minds and include information for which I would not have thought to ask given the culture. It delved into questions of quality of life, standards of living, and thoughts on CRS/CM as an employer and their role/life as an employee and as it related to the Just Workplace document and Catholic Social Teaching.

**Focus group interviews**

After looking over the questionnaire results, I conducted two focus group interviews to solicit a more participatory approach to the research and clarify any questions I had based on the answers from the cost-of-living survey and questionnaire. I believe the focus group interview gave the participants a feeling of commonality with what they were experiencing as an employee of CRS/CM and gave an opportunity for them to share thoughts, feelings, and solutions to their issues with each other.

**Individual interviews**

These interviews, like the FGI, allowed me to verify written information, gather more details, and obtain information not stated on the questionnaire. From my experience of creating the questionnaire earlier in the year for CRS/CM, I learned that some questions were interpreted in many ways by the lowest paid workers—both due to lower literacy and unfamiliarity with CRS programming and policies. It allowed the participants a chance to have me visit their homes and meet their families, to be videotaped, and to share on a very personal level. The purpose of videotaping was to have a product that gives life to my research, to put a human face on the statistics and words of the results, to show the guards’ standard of living, to have hard proof for CRS Headquarters and CRS/CM of how their
employees think and feel about a Just Workplace, and to give the guards a means of
expression that reinforced to them that what they had to say was important.

Review of documents

The CRS/CM documents that I have found most useful to analyze salary and
employment policies are 1) a memo from the ACR to the CR on salary adjustments dated
January 2000 with actual salary figures, 2) a memo from the CR to the Regional Director,
dated March 2000, regarding salary adjustments that notes that CRS/CM’s salaries are
below average for the region, 3) a copy of the CRS/CM Administrative and Procedures
Manual dated April 2000, 4) the progress report on recommendations for office
improvement created by the office improvement committee between January and April
2001, and 5) various administrative notices issued by the CR and ACR to all staff
regarding changes in policies as influenced by the above progress report.
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this next section, I examine and interpret all the data that I collected and analyzed, first by cultural and quality of life issues and then by workplace issues. Cultural factors include things such as family obligations, size of family, location of family, choice of foods, work ethic, perceptions and expectations, and other subtle yet important factors. Subtopics of standard of living, which influences quality of life, include food, energy, hygiene, medical/health, lodging, education, clothing, communication, entertainment and recreation, and disposable income. Workplace issues include compensation, benefits, representation, policy, employee treatment, job advancement, processing time, dealing with their direct supervisor, and administration adhering to the Just Workplace and Catholic Social Teaching guidelines.

Culture

Foremost, I feel it is important to understand the Cameroonian culture that influenced all the data gathered. Defining family and family size was very difficult because Americans and Cameroonians have very different concepts of and obligations towards family. Most Cameroonians who live in a city must support their extended family from their home village—therefore, each of the guards have siblings and/or cousins and/or in-laws living with them, for whom they pay all or most of their living costs, or they are obligated to send money back to the family in the village on a regular basis and to contribute to ceremonies and village improvement projects. As one guard said, “An
African family keeps one’s cousin’s children.” Some guards cannot afford to live with their family in the city, so their wives and children live far away in the village.

Culture needs to be taken into consideration when looking at administration of medical benefits. Many guards use traditional healers, who use herbs and “magic” to cure. They choose these healers mainly because they are cheaper, although some prefer the more traditional methods of healing. As can be expected, these traditional healers don’t make receipts—most are not even literate. With CRS/CM’s current medical policy, one has to pay up front for the cost and then submit a receipt for reimbursement. The problem is, most guards do not have enough money up front to pay for a modern doctor.

There is also a city culture versus a village culture with those living in the city having many more expensive obligations than their relatives in the village: in Yaoundé rent is expensive so many guards live in one room or shared space, whereas in their home village they would have or share a house for little or no rent. In Yaoundé, they have to buy all the food they eat, whereas in the village they would grow or barter for most of the food they eat. In Yaoundé they have to pay for water, whereas in their village they would not pay or would pay very little. In Yaoundé, they have to pay a lot of transportation costs to return to their village for special occasions (funerals, weddings, births, etc.), whereas in their home village they would not have a commute.

The culture of corruption is very much a part of the daily lives of most Cameroonians, and the poorest suffer because they cannot afford to pay into this system. For instance, when I found out that some of the guards had schooling and certificates in accounting and secretarial duties, I asked why they hadn’t gone into those fields directly
instead of choosing to be a guard. I was told that in most cases, one has to bribe the exam official and interviewer to pass and get accepted to the job. If one does not have money to pay the bribes—no job. This relates to CRS/CM in that many were hoping to break this cycle of immobility by starting out with CRS as a guard and then working their way up. Many of the guards had read or heard about CRS’ promotion policy—that promotion is first from within before looking outside—so they are very disappointed to have never seen a notice of a job posting for which they might apply.

**Standard of Living and Quality of Life**

The standard of living of the guards stands in sharp contrast to the standard of living of the foreigners for whom they work, and even of other administrative staff of CRS/CM. This context is important because, although the guards put in a longer work week than the other employees, what they get in return is nowhere near what the other staff receive in compensation. The guards have seen “both sides,” and therefore evaluate their own living conditions in comparison with their colleagues. As one guard said on the cost-of-living survey, “we will keep on living on debt until when CRS shall decide to raise up our status to the standard where we can also live like you the Americans in CRS/Cameroon.” Even though CRS Management says that CRS guards should not have a higher standard of living than other local guards, there are guards—such as those that work for the British High Commission earning three times the salary—that do live better.

On the questionnaire, the guards rated statements from 1 meaning extremely unhappy/disagree/no, to 5 meaning extremely happy/strongly agree/yes. Regarding food, the average score for the question “do you feel that you and your family have good
nutrition” was 2.2, and when asked, “do you feel you and your family have enough to eat and don’t go hungry,” the average was only 2. When asked to comment, three responded similarly to one who said, “the lack of financial resources and high market prices account for poor nutrition and consequently a low standard of living. The family, therefore, goes for foods which are cheaper and less nutritious.” Another guard commented, “the family can only eat fish and meat once in a while because the means is not available.” One was very upset saying, “After going through these [cost-of-living survey] forms you will realize that what CRS is paying us is absolutely nothing because apart from eating for some few days out of the month, we starve for the rest of the days.” From the interviews, one guard said, “we’re sometimes tired because we don’t have a lot to eat. All the guards are sick due to little nutrition and mosquitoes.” The correlation between food and energy was made by another guard when he said, “I cannot afford to feed or give tea to the children before school and they don’t eat while they’re at school so they go hungry until they reach home in the afternoon.”

On the questionnaire, when asked the question, “do you feel you and your family have access to enough energy, water, and hygiene to be comfortable and healthy,” the average response was 2.25. They also commented, “have to travel far for water” and “when the well water is not clean, don’t have enough money to buy water.” In the interviews, I found out that, “there is a real problem of electricity where it shuts off often for long periods of time. An emergency light should be available for all employees because kerosene makes smoke in the house.” (An emergency light is given to all foreign staff free of charge.) Also, with the cost of water being 25 Central African Francs (CFA)
per bucket, with the average family using around 15 buckets a day for washing, cooking, and drinking, it comes to almost 400 CFA a day—this is one fifth of the guards’ daily salary.

Regarding medical care and the medical policy, when asked in the questionnaire, “do you feel you and your family get the medical care they need so there is peace of mind and health of body,” the average response was 2.6, with the same being the rating for satisfaction with the current CRS/CM medical policy. Comments about the medical policy included, “an amount should be given to you to go to the hospital so you don’t have to come up with the money up front that you don’t have,” and “it [the medical allowance] is a little money when one has a big family,” and “CRS should have a fixed doctor and clinic for employees.” In relating health to their living conditions, one guard said, “sickness comes from the place we are staying and we do not have safe drinking water.” When I visited guards’ homes for individual interviews, this was made apparent to me by the open sewers that ran in front of most residences, stagnant water all around, one latrine shared between as many as 15 families, and wells located very near latrines.

Lodging got very low ratings on the questionnaire, with the average answer being 1.4 to the question, “do you feel your home has enough room for everyone in your household family to live comfortably?” When asked what they felt they needed, the top responses were refrigerator, gas cooker, radio, television, chairs, more rooms, internal toilet, bathing room, and kitchen. One guard said he only had two beds for him, his wife, and three children. Another guard said that since they don’t have an indoor kitchen and they must cook outside over a fire, when it rains they are not able to cook.
the homes, I was surprised how many people occupied such a small space. One guard said that because so many people must share the latrine in the morning before going to school and work, his children sometimes don’t get to wash or go to the toilet before school.

School for their children was something that concerned each of the guards. From the time the Cameroonian child enters school, there are fees to be paid for enrollment, uniforms, books, and materials, with secondary school being more expensive than primary. One guard said, “children cannot continue to secondary school because [we] don’t have the means—so the kids end up just hanging out.” While visiting in many neighborhoods, I saw this was true by the number of kids running around during school hours. Many guards suggested that CRS/CM offer loans or scholarships at the beginning of the year to the guards to cover the initial fees for schooling. Since transportation costs to school for all their children are prohibitive for most guards, their children have to walk long distances to school and back. In terms of their own schooling, when I asked if there was anything the guards would like to study, the top responses were computer skills, general knowledge, accounting, and business administration.

Clothing is a concern to some because they feel they need to look smart to show up at work but that they don’t have the means for even second-hand clothes. One guard said, “my entire family is lacking clothes,” while another commented, “we are not able to buy even underwear. One is forced to spend more than one year with one or two underwear.” A few guards, many of whom would dress up for my interviews, sadly showed me the wear and tear on their clothes, stating that it was very old and was the only one they had.
Communication technology was not a large issue to most guards, although two thirds said they would like access to the telephone, the Internet, and email. Although Internet access is very widespread and popular in Yaoundé and relatively inexpensive (about $1.25/hour), this is an impossible opportunity for the guards who earn that amount in half a day of a 12-hour day of work.

When asked what sort of things they would like to do for entertainment and recreation, many of the guards mentioned one or two things such as attending a football match, watching movies, food and drink, and excursions. But, almost all of the guards (92% of questionnaire responders) said that they could never afford any type of entertainment or recreation, particularly for their whole family. Two thirds stated that having enough free time away from work was also a factor.

Giving donations and being part of a saving group (tontine) is an integral part of being Cameroonian. Most guards listed multiple things for which they find it important to donate, including family, friends, village development projects, death and marriage celebrations, birthdays, baptism, and the disabled, but nearly four fifths said they are not able to do this within their financial means. In terms of savings, 85% said they are not able to accumulate any savings on their salary, with one guard stating, “the family asks me ‘do we only work to feed ourselves or to achieve something in the future?’” Many guards have a lot of debt because they owe the provisions stores, which charge them a large interest rate. When asked if they would like to participate in a savings plan through CRS/CM, which would directly put a percentage of their pay into savings, 92% were in favor of this idea. Some things guards said they would like to save for include: medical health care for
the family, construction projects, a personal home, emergency, educating the children, and retirement.

**Workplace Issues**

**Policy Manual**

The CRS/CM Administrative and Procedures Manual, which is supposed to be updated and made available to all staff so that they know their benefits, rights, and responsibilities as an employee with CRS, has not been updated or made available to any of the guards currently in service. As it states, “This manual aims to reflect the Catholic Social Teaching and CRS’ vision of Justice and to ensure the Right working relationship between CRS/CM Program and its employees.” When I asked the guards if they had seen the manual, some said they had seen it years before. When some guards said they had approached administration to challenge some of the current management practices, citing policies from the manual, they were told by administration that the manual was outdated and that the policy had changed—but they were not given a new manual. The manual also states, “The Administration Manual shall be presented to newly employed staff members on the date of their contracting. It must be read during the first 5 days at the institution.”

Even I was not given the policy manual to read when I first arrived, nor within the first month, and when I did finally see it, it was indeed outdated and in very bad physical condition with papers falling out and the cover coming off. CRS employs three illiterate staff, so these individuals will never have the chance to read the manual. Although the manual states, “administration will notify all personnel via memorandum whenever the
manual is to be modified,” no notice has ever been given to the guards of any changes. Only when I left CRS in June 2001 did Senior Management start to send out administrative notices of new policies to be enacted or enforced.

Many guards, who have their secondary degree or certain credentials such as accounting, mentioned that they were very disappointed that they were not able to advance beyond their guard position with CRS because they never knew when a job was being posted to which they could apply. The manual states that “the announcements for openings will be circulated to the staff and those who meet required conditions may apply,” and “to the extent possible, vacancies shall be filled by promotion from within CRS/CM.” Some guards feel they do have the skills for basic office work, but they have never been offered the chance to apply. And, although they don’t have computer skills, they really want the chance to learn because “we want the possibility to work for an NGO beyond being a gardener, housecleaner, or guard.” Offering such advancement opportunities is not out of the thinking of CRS, for the manual states that “CRS/CM is committed to the professional development of its employees. Towards that end, it tries to provide training and education opportunities that are either directly related to an individual’s present job or that will assist the individual in obtaining necessary skills to grow with the agency.”

Catholic Social Teaching and the Just Workplace Document

The principles of CST talk about the dignity of people, the common good, and valuing work in the community. I feel that those principles need to play a larger part at
CRS/CM in the decision-making process of calculating the salaries and in dictating managerial practices for the lowest-paid employees. When CRS talks about serving the poor yet about half of the employees at CRS/CM feel they are very poor, it prompts me want to look deeper into why that is.

I asked the guards in the questionnaire how they feel Catholic Social Teaching was being applied in the workplace, as stated in the CRS procedures manual that it should be. I gave each guard a synopsis of CST, since none had ever seen a CST document before, and asked them to specifically address each of the themes. In the theme The Rights and Responsibilities of the Human Person, only 23% felt that they have a share of earthly goods sufficient for themselves and their family. Some of them also added comments such as, “Since these goods are shared through one’s purchasing power, my monthly income cannot permit me to acquire enough of those goods that make life truly human such as food, clothing, housing, health, and education,” and “my family always sacrifices one thing to have another.”

In the CST theme The Call to Family, Community, and Participation, “2” was the mean response when asked, “do you feel that as a CRS employee your family is supported and made to feel central to your life?” Three guards said similar things to the effect of, “this is due to the simple fact that my present salary cannot enable me to sufficiently support my family.” From the Just Workplace document, when I asked, “do you find you can balance all your duties and responsibilities of work, family, community, and personal with your job at CRS,” only 23% said yes. One guard responded, “hours of work should be equal and equal opportunities for work, training, public holidays, and financial aspects.”
Many guards said they want to help their village out with development projects but that they don’t have much time or money to give. The first page of the policy manual makes two statements that could support the guards in that fashion: “CRS gives active witness to the mandate of Jesus to respond to human need in the following ways: by providing assistance to the poor to alleviate their immediate needs; and by supporting self-help programs which involve people and communities in their own development.”

Regarding The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers in CST, the average answer was “3” for the questions, “do you feel that you get to participate in CRS/CM as an institution,” and “do you feel that your job with CRS is more than just ‘making a living?’” Some guards said they were happy to work for CRS but that “due to low salaries, we live in hard conditions with family; considering that work is more than a way of living, then I cannot say that my work with CRS guarantees the above statement since it does not permit me to make just that living.” All of the guards feel like they are not respected, particularly by certain staff in the office. One guard expressed, “headquarters should send representatives [to CRS/CM] with human feelings because the way they treat us is like animals.” Many of the citings by guards of unfair and disrespectful treatment towards them is concerning one person at the CRS office—the Cameroonian Administrative Manager (AM). He serves as the liaison and the gatekeeper for the guards to the office, where they must bring all their inquiries, paperwork, and complaints, get their work assignments, and arrange for sick and holiday leave. In terms of general treatment, the guards have commented, “He doesn’t look at you like you’re a worker at CRS,” and “[He]
doesn’t like to listen to what we have to say.” Many of the guards said that he has said to them, “You’re annoying me.”

Concerning specific treatment in regard to processing guards’ paperwork and requests, the guards cited many incidences when they feel they were treated disrespectfully. For instance, many of the guards expressed that the AM does not acknowledge their presence in the office and does not give them an estimate of how long he will be before he can see them. As one guard said, “I sat for one hour before he signed my paper.” Two guards commented, “after waiting a long time to see the AM, he will say, ‘I’m busy—go and come back tomorrow.’ That happens even if an appointment has been made.” This happened to one of the guards of my residence: He showed up at my house, located around the corner from the office, to ask for taxi money since he had just spent all he had to go to the office, just to be told to come back another day—even though he had made the appointment with the AM the day before. “[He] complicates everything—especially for issues of sick leave and pay advance.” To illustrate this, one guard wanted to collect his medical booklet, so he called in advance to make an appointment. The AM said he had already given the paperwork to Finance. When the guard went to Finance, they said they didn’t have the paperwork. He then went back to the AM who left him sitting for another two hours.

The AM’s treatment is a stark contrast to the treatment they got from the previous Administrative Manager, before Raymond was hired in the beginning of 2001. Three guards stated, “[She] by herself was more efficient—when she saw a guard she would ask,
‘are you here to see me.’” One guard added that the system should return to [the previous AM] handling the guards because she ‘dealt with things quicker and more humanely.’”

Guards expressed their frustration at not being able to communicate their needs and concerns with upper management, with many of them saying, “they don’t give us the forum to discuss with the director.” This is especially important considering that the person that they are having the most problems with is the only one they are permitted to deal with in the office. The guards told me that CRS has never presented to them, in a forum or discussion setting, their rights and benefits—where such a forum would allow the guards to ask questions about things that are unclear. This is especially meaningful for those employees that are illiterate. Although the guards meet monthly on their own at a guard’s home, they said they would also like representation at the office, either to have a guard committee meet with upper management or for upper management to sit in on a meeting of all the guards. In the questionnaire, 85% said they wanted such an arrangement. Some reasons they gave to support this were, “to strengthen the relationship between management and non-management,” “to keep non-management staff informed of current activities,” “for non-management staff not to feel [that they are] being treated differently or discriminated [against],” and “this will give us the way to express ourselves and learn from others, too.”

When I asked the guards what they might recommend in the way of policies that would make them more just regarding career development, they had numerous suggestions. Many guards felt that CRS should offer refresher courses, seminars, and trainings for career development, as well as awards for meritorious workers who show they
are punctual, honest, hardworking, etc. They also felt more promotions should be done internally. One guard stated, “it requires that CRS policy be clearly written, communicated, and even handed in its application.”

Work-related equipment and materials were a large concern of many guards because of their link to their safety, health, and dignity. Malaria is a serious illness that renders its victim painfully ill for many days at a time. The guards are at a high risk of contraction due to their being outside for twelve hours a day. In an administrative notice issued May 18, 2001, it was stated that starting June 15, 2001, two mosquito coils would be provided per night per residence. Up until this point, the guards had no protection against being bitten all day or night long since the guards cannot stay in a totally enclosed area while they are on duty. During a management meeting in which I participated, the CR once dismissed the necessity for mosquito protection for the guards by saying that, “they only get bitten when they are sleeping—so if they don’t want to get bitten they shouldn’t sleep.” This is blatantly untrue. Besides, mosquito coils only work if the guard stands in a specific spot; if he walks around patrolling the house then the coil is useless.

With their outside job, the guards are also exposed to the weather. The administrative notice of May 18, 2001 states that one raincoat per residence is provided. Since many guards do not have their own rain equipment, this means that they would get wet before and after work since they have to leave the raincoat at the residence. The guards also asked for sweaters and shoes as part of their uniform since the evenings can get quite cold and they have to walk around a lot patrolling. All they were told in the administrative notice was that “CRS does not provide these articles to either residence or
office staff.” Now that the new office has moved a mile from the main street where the taxis drop off, all the office staff have to walk two miles each day of work, as do the guards who have to go to the office for any administrative needs and for picking up their pay. This does amount to extra wear and tear on shoes for work-related activity. In the same administrative notice dated May 18, it says that all guards should be provided with two sets of uniforms. Most of the guards have been working the entire year with just one uniform, while still being expected to be presentable for work.

For the guards to feel safe and effective in their duties many guards feel they should have hand-held radios to quickly report any suspicious activity, make an emergency call, or communicate to the office if the need arises. The office responded in the May administrative notice that, “the security device [a button that sets off an alarm at the Wackenhut security office] provided by Wackenhut [a local guard service] is efficient and should be more reliable than the radio. As for…communicating with the office, we believe the residences have most of the time a presence at the house, and if need be, the guards are authorized to use the fixed line of the house in order to communicate with the office.” This is not possible if it is at night, if the residents have gone away for the weekend or holiday, or if the phone lines are down. An additional communication concern was for finding a replacement guard if the regular guard was sick. The system for getting a replacement was that the guards had to call the office to arrange with the AM for a replacement guard—but if this fell over a weekend, the guard either had to work sick or the guard on duty before or after this guard had to cover and do a double shift, which is 24 hours. Not only is that an unsafe situation for the residence, but it is not healthy for either the guard that has to work
sick or the guard that has to work 24 hours straight without rest. The few guards who were able to arrange for a replacement in this situation were told by the AM that the replacement wouldn’t get paid because it was not arranged beforehand and he did not know about it.

**Work Hours and Compensation**

There is a large discrepancy between policy of work hours for office staff and guard staff. For instance, there are two different work hour standards indicated in The Collective Conventions of Work of Cameroon. Title 4, Chapter 1, Article 38 states that “conforming with legislation, the legal work time is 40 hours per week.” But article 39 makes an exception for guards saying that for “personnel employed for guarding, 56 hours is equivalent to 40 hours.” In an administrative notice to “all CRS/CM staff,” May 2001, it states that, “to compensate all those staff who work beyond 40-45 hours/week,” senior management will reduce the number of office hours by 30 minutes a day, giving all office staff 2 ½ fewer work hours per week. Although the notice stated “all staff,” what was meant was office staff.

The guards received a separate administrative notice in May 2001 that says that the guards from the previous year (2000) are already compensated for overtime, as recorded in their pay stubs, but guards hired in 2001 did not get included in this overtime compensation. The notice states that, starting in June 2001 they will be given overtime compensation and paid retroactively for overtime worked. Many of the guards who are included in that first group, in the interviews, complained that it was not apparent in their pay stubs
how much they were getting paid for overtime and when they asked Finance to explain it to them, they were turned away. This lack of transparency and clarity regarding their pay was continuously expressed to me by the guards as frustrating and unfair.

One of the biggest concerns of compensation for the guards is that of overtime and holiday pay, for which many have been complaining to CRS for years. The manual states that “CRS provides its employees with twelve paid holidays each year,” but this hasn’t been applied to the guards. In an administrative notice from CRS/CM to all staff on May 18, 2001, it is stated that “guards are not paid extra for working Sundays and that regarding holidays, Cameroonian law is silent.” It adds that “CRS must have ‘consultations’ in order to gain clarity [on whether it will and how much it will pay towards holidays], with a deadline set at October 1.” Again there is a discrepancy as all the office staff get holidays off unless they are traveling, but guards are not afforded that time off.

Questions of seniority pay were also a big concern for most guards. A memo from the ACR to the CR in January 2000 says that “it has been CRS policy to give the employee the [2%] seniority increase at the anniversary date of hiring as well as 4% each year at performance evaluation time.” Most guards said they do not see this extra pay on their pay stub and are confused as to how much they are getting in seniority pay. Many said that when they asked the Finance office to explain it to them they were not given an answer.

Most guards felt that they should be compensated in other ways due to the nature of their work. They want to be paid danger pay since their jobs have the potential to put them in harms way. One guard recounted the story of being held at gunpoint when the American whose house he was guarding was hijacked in his car right outside the house’s
gates. When the Cameroonian authorities investigating the incident came to this guard’s house in the middle of the night, they took him to jail where they interrogated him for three days until he was found innocent. CRS only found out he was taken into custody two days later since his wife was not home to report the seizure. This guard said he was not compensated by CRS for this infringement of his rights, freedom, and pain and suffering spent in jail.

Along with the duty of standing guard, alert to suspicious activity and admittance of residents and guests onto the premises, the guards are also expected to do other work such as manual labor, for which they are not compensated. It is written into their job description that they take care of the lawn and keep the outside of the house clean, and the day office guard is expected to help with administrative duties such as photocopying. For all of their total duties and responsibilities, the guards are paid, net including benefits, between CFA 211 and 362 an hour (variation based on seniority.) To put this in perspective among other local staff, based on a 60-hour work week for the guards and a 40-45 hour work week for office staff, they earn half of what the office cleaner earns, one third of what the receptionist earns, and about one tenth of what Cameroonian Project Managers earn.

When I asked the guards in the questionnaire how interested they were in working an 8-hour day five days a week like the rest of the CRS/CM employees, for the same pay that they are earning now, the average answer was 3.9, with the mean being 5. Some guards commented that would like to work a 12 hour day 5 days a week, but get paid for 20 hours overtime. A few said “working 8 hour days, 5 days a week will benefit me by
allowing me enough time to have some rest,” while others added similarly, “to be able to 
interact with society better and more often. I will have time to do some form of 
agriculture,\(^5\) to get in direct contact with my family, and to enroll in evening school. Some 
other guards added the importance of this extra time for their families adding, “children 
grow up finding it difficult to know who their father is since they go to bed early and when 
their father is off to work early in the morning they are still sleeping,” and “returning late 
at night deprives my children, family members, and friends of my warmth and love.”

**Cost of Living Survey**

One issue that came up when discussing the cost of living survey with the CR was 
that he suggested I would have to find out the lowest quality items in order to make it true 
for the guards. Although the guards do their shopping in the local market, as opposed to 
the foreigners who shop in large grocery stores with imported items, they do not always 
prefer to buy the lowest quality items—it just happens that with their salary they are not 
able to afford higher quality items. When I asked the guards this question, they confirmed 
that they would like to buy more items with greater value (food with better nutrition, items 
that won’t wear out as fast, etc) but their means did not allow that.

The cost-of-living survey included household family, but if their families live back 
in the village, I had a category called “Other” where they could record this spending. 
Since the guards and their families usually don’t shop where there are receipts, many of 
these prices are estimates from what they remember spending.

\(^5\) Cameroonian society is very agricultural based, with most people growing a portion of their food, selling 
food for cash and/or bartering crops for other needs. Even those living in cities will try to find a small plot of 
land somewhere to grow some food.
The guards prefer to buy in bulk because it saves a little money and trips to the market, so some weeks a family might spend a lot of money on an item, then not spend money again for that item for another few weeks. Guards will also spend more money around the times when they are paid at the end of the month, although many take out salary advances mid-month to make ends meet.

While reading the following, please refer to the cost-of-living tabulated surveys in the appendix for a full view of all the expenses and income throughout one month for 13 guards who participated in this part of the research. I will just summarize parts of it here, for illustration and clarification. As many of these items are culturally influenced, I will explain what some of the items mean or their use, starting from the top of the itemized list.

Most guards and their families start out their day with bread or beignets (donuts) and tea or coffee, which comes out to about 225 CFA/day for everyone in the family. The rest of the carbohydrates are usually eaten with a meal, the average cost for each carbohydrate being between 600 and 850 CFA per week, except for rice and maize, which is two and four times more expensive respectively. Maize is used as a base for many meals, prepared in numerous ways, particularly for those from the Anglophone areas, where most of the guards are from. Protein such as meat, fish, milk, and eggs is a lot more expensive, so it is not bought as often. Even with rarely buying these items they cost the families from 730 CFA to 2500 CFA per week (eggs cost 60 CFA each, fish costs 200 CFA for a one-person size, meat costs 1000 CFA a kilo and milk costs 1600 CFA for a one liter tin of dry milk).
In the “other food” category, one can see that a lot of money is spent on cooking oil since palm oil is a major ingredient in a lot of recipes. On a guard’s salary, bottled drinks are very expensive (500 CFA each) but for special occasions, they will go out of their way to buy drinks for friends. Prepared food, which can be as simple as grilled fish and fried plantains from a woman on the side of the street, is also expensive, about 400 to 500 CFA for a one-person meal. Occasionally, though, when one has not gone to the market for ingredients, one is obligated to buy prepared food from somewhere. As many of the guards don’t have any major appliances for cooking, they use the neighborhood grinder to grind food for stews—much of this is the spices and condiments, like parsley, leek, basil, and pepper, which they use generously. Fresh fruit and vegetables are also pretty expensive items, where one does not get bulk for the price, so some families go without these items for a week or two. (An example of prices: four bananas cost 100 CFA, a large avocado costs 200 CFA, five or six carrots, peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, or a large cabbage costs 200 CFA.)

Many of the guards spend a lot of money in the Energy/Hygiene/Water category, with the most expensive items being rent, kerosene (for light and cooking), wood (for cooking), and water. Toilet paper is a real luxury at 250 CFA a roll—with the average buy being one roll per family per week, with some families going without. Soap for washing clothes, dishes, and the body is also pretty expensive, 500 CFA/week and more, but is a regularly bought item.
Medical expenses can take a large chunk of money, even with CRS paying 80% through the medical policy. Most doctor visits cost between 3000 and 5000 CFA, particularly if there is lab work to be done and prescribed medicine from a pharmacy.

Lodging costs anywhere between 8000 CFA for a small room to 18,000 CFA for something that is just large enough for a family—usually two rooms. In all of these lodgings, there is no running water, no indoor toilet or bathing area, and little security.

Regarding schooling, since it was the middle of the year when this survey was conducted, there was not a lot of weekly spending, except for a few small supplies. Most of the cost comes at the beginning of the year when one must pay admission, uniform, and book fees. Many of the children have to walk a long distance to school because their families cannot afford transportation (taxi fare) for everyone, which is 150 CFA one way per person.

In the accessories and clothing section, many did not have purchases for the month. The ones that did buy clothing bought second-hand items. The largest expense was on hair and beauty needs, as it is common and fashionable for women to have hair woven/braided or to wear a hairpiece. Men keep their hair short so have to go for frequent haircuts.

The communication and entertainment/recreation categories were the least filled out. Most guards said they just do not have the money for either of these. Some guards have little radios to listen to the news and sports but batteries cost a lot of money, so they can only listen to it occasionally. For news, many of them read the front covers of newspapers displayed at the newsstand. To make a telephone call, which they need to do to make appointments at the office, they would have to use the local telephone booth and
pay per unit. Books and writing materials are usually borrowed from the office or residences where they work. To watch a soccer match at the stadium costs 500 CFA for the cheapest seat. Movies at the theater are a couple thousand CFA. The most money spent in this section was on bottled drinks and snacks for entertaining friends. This is especially true when there is a celebration, such as a baby naming party (bonhouse), where one invites and entertains all the relatives and friends from the same village who live in the city.

Gifts and donations, mainly to the village or extended family members took a large chunk out of a few guards’ savings. Some guards send money back on a regular basis, while others save up to give a large sum for a particular project—such as putting a new roof on their parents’ house.

Since the spending for most families happens erratically, based on bulk buying and cash available, it is hard to say how much each family spends and uses per day—so I calculated it by month. The spending ranges were far above what the guards’ monthly salary was, even supplemented with income from spouses, side income, or contributions by other live-in family members. Each of the guards’ total spending for the month came out to about two times their income from CRS. When I looked at the individual spending, none of the items seemed “above average” of what I know those items to cost but when I added it all up, it came up to more than they would have earned. Some explanations for this are that some of them had bought items on credit, some had borrowed money from friends and relatives and forgot to record it, and some wrote down estimates of spending that were too high or were not accurate. I believe these costs could be verified and made more accurate
by doing a second study that records price per quantity of food, including how long it takes to consume that quantity.
CONCLUSIONS

Statement of Conclusions

All guards were very happy to participate in the research for it gave them a chance to feel heard, included, respected, and it gave them hope that what they felt that was not just regarding employment with CRS/CM might improve. For many of them, no one from Management had ever been to visit their homes and families to see how they live. At each home I visited, I could feel this gratitude as I was generously offered to share a meal or spend time meeting and talking with the family.

I got a lot of positive feedback from the guards in terms of what they got back and learned from participating in the research. Some said that doing the cost-of-living survey was a “lesson of being accountable,” and that they “learned how to guide family spending.” They also noticed where things were missing in their lives, such as one who said, “I noticed that I don’t have very much to spend,” and another who noticed that the items of “entertainment, recreation, and communication were pretty much neglected.” In the focus group interview, they got the chance to share with each other their common feelings and situations and generate new ideas for solutions to their problems.

What CRS Can Do

Offer the Just Workplace discussion to all staff yearly: CRS should offer the Just Workplace discussion to all the staff, including the guards, in much the same way in which the previous forum was organized: There were two days of discussion following
guidelines created by Headquarters on the Just Workplace document, held at a site away from the office, where all staff, except guards, were invited to participate. This was done for the first time in April 2001 but should be repeated every year to ensure that all new hires and new policies are included and are kept up-to-date. Results from the forum in April were shared with the staff at Headquarters, who were able to synthesize, incorporate, and distribute the results from each country’s report organization-wide. Future Just Workplace forums need to include all the staff, including the guards.

**Live out Catholic Social Teaching in the workplace:** One aspect of the Just Workplace is CST, which needs to be applied in creative and real ways. The principle that should be the guiding rule is Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, since the guards are the poorest and most vulnerable of all the staff. Additional recommendations for incorporating CST are found in the literature review section, pages 6-8.

**Give guards direct representation and communication with Management:** In addition to this annual Just Workplace forum, CRS/CM management should have more interaction with the guards on a regular basis, in the office, concerning management and current event issues. Several options would facilitate this: either management could have a representative at a designated guard meeting, or a small committee of guards could have representation at designated office or management meetings, or there could be a combination of the two. In this way, guards would feel included as respected staff and any misunderstandings or concerns about office policy and procedure could be expressed directly and receive immediate attention.
Update and communicate the CRS/CM manual: The policy manual should be updated, distributed, and communicated verbally to the guards so that they have a chance to ask questions and get clarification—guards who are illiterate should be sure to be included. The forms of verbal communication could include quarterly forums with the guards to discuss updates of the manual, and one-on-one meetings with guards and other staff who are illiterate, as well as with any newly-hired employees. Each time there is a change in the policy, the office should make sure that the guards are informed of the new policy. The policy manual needs to be more specific in its definition of staff—in many places the manual states “staff” or “everyone” when it really means office staff.

Facilitate internal hiring for the guards: CRS/CM should promote more hiring from within, which is stated as the preferred policy in the manual, by providing opportunities to current employees to learn skills that will improve their chances of promotion. Many of the guards have done at least some secondary school, are literate, and some have basic accounting or secretarial skills. The office staff are offered opportunities to take courses or training in areas in which they want to develop more proficiency. This same opportunity should be offered to the guards, who either want to take security-related courses or who want to move into basic office knowledge.

Promote literacy by giving library membership: One way to give the guards a chance to learn and also to allow them access to current media is to give them each a year’s membership to the British Council, which has a large library, since there are no public libraries in Yaoundé. For 10,000 CFA (approximately $14), a Cameroonian can have unlimited access to all the resources of the library for a year. When I suggested this idea to
the CR, he refuted the idea, saying that the guards probably wouldn’t be able to afford
transportation there, even though the library is located in a very central location downtown.
If the guards have such a low salary that they wouldn’t be able to afford to go to the library
once or twice a week (CFA 150, approximately 20 cents, for a taxi there), then another
recommendation would be to either give them this extra transportation money or to raise
their salary so they can afford such beneficial opportunities. I have already asked all the
guards if they would be interested and take advantage of having library memberships and
not one guard said no. Most of them are avid readers, as can be attested by the number of
books and magazines that were read by the guards at my residence, from what I had loaned
them.

**Offer a more comprehensive and user-friendly medical policy**: The medical
policy is very frustrating for the guards, who have to pay up front for services, then fill out
office paperwork and wait days before getting reimbursed. Most guards do not have a
substantial amount of cash to be able to pay up front, so they suggested that CRS make an
agreement with certain clinics and hospitals so that bills can be sent to CRS, with CRS
then charging the guards 20% of the cost (the current percentage owed by employees on
most claims).

CRS should also offer free preventative care for the local staff, as is currently
available for the international staff. Guards and their immediate family should be given
one free physical and dental exam a year, in order to prevent serious illness in the future.
Guards should also be offered a basic health and sanitation presentation that would teach
them about STDs and AIDS prevention, how to reduce exposure to malaria and water-
borne diseases, nutrition, and other such basics that would keep the guards healthier in the long run.

**Make development grants from the Regional Small Project Fund (RSPF) available:** In accordance with CRS’s mission statements of helping the poorest of the poor, providing assistance to the poor to alleviate their immediate needs, and supporting self-help programs which involve people and communities in their own development, CRS should make available to the guards applications to the CRS/CM RSPF, which is geared to small-scale projects. Most of the guards belong and contribute to village development groups that help raise funds and give materials to village projects such as making a well, building a health center, or improving a school. These village development groups are well-established groups that have members both in the city and in the village, that have organizational structure, and that work to meet the immediate needs of villagers. The RSPF is an annual fund of about $10,000 that is given out in small grants to groups that have not already applied for a larger CRS program grant, that fit within the criteria of the country program, and that only require a two-page proposal with a small budget. When I left CRS/CM in June 2001, over half of the RSPF had not been used before the end of the fiscal year in October. One organization was given twice the allowed amount because there was so much money left unused. Another person’s ticket was funded with RSPF funds, even though it did not fit into the criteria. If guards were allowed to or knew that they could apply for this fund, many of them would have village development projects that would benefit from this funding.
Regularly evaluate and monitor the Administrative Manager’s role with the guards: CRS/CM needs to evaluate the Administrative Manager’s role with the guards, since he has been the biggest obstacle to getting their paperwork taken care of in a timely manner and the guards feel they are not respected or treated well by him. If the AM is too busy taking care of the administrative functions of the office, then someone else should be assigned or hired to be the manager of the guards. As they represent over half of the CRS/CM employees, this is not an insignificant role or amount of work.

Provide a Living Wage and regularly monitor the cost of living for the guards: I recommend that CRS revisit what it is paying the guards in terms of a living wage and that danger pay be included in that. Based on the Basket of Goods survey that CRS/CM did with the guards in May 2001 and with the methodology and results of my cost-of-living survey, a living wage can perhaps be calculated. For instance, calculate how much the items on my list cost per given amount then find out how much of this given amount the guard and his family consume on a monthly basis. CRS should not just rely on the Oxfam survey because, as I stated earlier, it did not include many items that the guards spend money on (such as secondary school) and it was too vague (such as the word “carbohydrates” with no definition.) CRS should also follow up their Basket of Goods survey with interviews to get more detailed information from the guards.

Reassess the work hours of the guards: If CRS/CM really cares about a Just Workplace, Management will revise guards’ work hours to allow for personal, family, and community time or they will calculate the guards’ work schedule to be the same as office staff, at 40 hours a week, so that the guards get paid 20 hours overtime. Just because
Cameroonian law says that for guards 56 hours equals 40 hours, CRS can make an agreement that, for fairness, it will not use that equivalent, but rather will go by the same standards for all the staff.

**Support Education**: As the guards suggested, scholarships or loans should be available at the beginning of each school year to help the guards cover all the initial expenses of schooling for their children, such as tuition, uniforms, books, and materials. Like the RSPF, where organizations can apply for grants, guards should be able to apply for scholarships for their children’s schooling. Where scholarships are not granted, loans should be made which could be taken out, interest free, from their paychecks on a monthly basis. CRS has education programming in other countries, yet it puts no value on the education of the guards’ children or for the guards to further their own education. CRS Headquarters should mandate that all country programs, whether they have education programming or not, support the education of their local staff and staff children, just as they do for international employees.

**Headquarters should conduct a Just Workplace audit of CRS/CM, as well as all its field offices.** Headquarters should send or contract out an impartial Just Workplace monitor and evaluator who will speak with employees at all levels to get an unbiased report of whether these offices are practicing a just workplace. There are regional Peace and Justice working groups within CRS, that should help take part in creating the standards by which offices will be evaluated and monitored. Headquarters should also evaluate the CR of CRS/CM for his role in maintaining systems of oppression and neglect towards certain employees within the management of CRS/CM. One guard was working 12 hours
a day 7 days a week for almost a year before he took notice of this injustice. After finding out, the CR did arrange for this guard to have one day off, but his oversight of this situation is of serious concern. Another source, in addition to this paper, that can be consulted to evaluate the CR is the compiled results of the Evaluation of the Office Environment conducted by the ACR. This source will not only give another perspective on the guards’ feelings for their work environment but also other CRS/CM staff’s perspectives on a number of office-related issues.

Reframe the picture: An overall new way of looking the CRS/CM office, employees, and management structure might offer fresh perspectives on the problems, solutions, and opportunities for the office and the employees. To gain more understanding of a different vision, I referred to Bolman and Deal (1991) to see how CRS/CM might be framed and reframed. Out of the four frames they mention—Structural, Human Resources, Political, and Symbolic—I feel that CRS/CM is embedded in the Structural frame. This frame is characterized by bureaucracy, rules, policies, and management hierarchies; responsibilities are allocated to participants; problems are seen as stemming from inadequate systems; and the organization is seen as existing to accomplish a goal. Some examples of this are: that all email and mail correspondence that comes into or out of the office for anyone must be seen and signed by the Director, as do all program ideas or functions; there are very specific inflexible policies for every aspect of the organization; participants are more or less allocated their job duties; when problems arise, Senior Management reworks the policies with little input from office staff; and Senior
Management of CRS/CM holds the accomplishment of the goal of a “successful country program” to be more of a priority than justice in the workplace for all employees.

I also see a bit of the Political frame in current CRS/CM thinking, which sees differences in lifestyles, needs, and perspectives as conflict. Obviously, there is a large difference in perspective on the standard of living the Cameroonians would like and what the foreign Senior Management feels they should have and the conflict arises when it seems that one side has all the resources and power, while the other group feels powerless.

If Senior Management would see the organization more through the Human Resource frame, it might give over some power to this group that feels powerless and it would help Management see solutions not just through policies and hierarchy but through collaboration and understanding. The Human Resource frame sees employees as individuals who have needs, feelings, prejudices, skills, ideas, energy, and limitations and who have a great capacity to learn. The organization holds equal that the job gets done and that the employee feels good about it. It also sees that the organization exists to serve human needs. From this frame, CRS/CM should see that the needs of its lowest paid employees are just as valid as the needs of the poor CRS is serving through its programs. It should also look at the lowest-paid employees more holistically to see that they are people with family needs, who have dreams of living a better life, who have skills to contribute to various aspects of the organization if given the chance, and who have limitations on the amount of hours they can work and how much work they can do on a limited amount of food and rest.
CRS/CM needs to be more genuine and thorough in its approach to including the local staff and guards in their just workplace discussions and living wage surveys. CRS/CM Management recently tried to conduct a cost-of-living survey among the CRS guards but they used an inaccurate data-gathering instrument, did not give clear instructions as to how to fill it out, and had a very narrow study group. The measurement instrument was poorly adapted from a “basket of goods” survey done by Oxfam in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which was then used by CRS/DRC to determine the cost of living for their local staff. CRS/CM decided to use this same survey to assess the cost of living of their Cameroonian guards but did not adapt it to make the items culturally relevant or expanded upon to include necessary goods and services of Cameroonian locals. When the survey was distributed, there was no explanation of what these items meant, no place for questions if something was unclear to the guards, and no blank space for them to put in items that they buy that were not included on the list. The survey was only given to three out of the 15 guards and was given to one guard to distribute to the two others, who had to spend his own money and time to deliver it to these people. They were given the survey on May 12th and told to return it by May 14th, not giving them enough time to price each of the items on the list that are found in various places around town. After the surveys were turned back into the office, no follow-up was ever done with the guards to verify data, answer any questions, or see if the guards had anything to add that was not on the survey.

Other problems with the way this survey was conducted included lack of input from the guards. For instance, although there was a place to write in how much an item
cost per unit, there was no space to put how much of this item is consumed over a week or a month. One guard tried to write in the quantity and frequency that he bought each item but CRS/CM did not accept this. Another problem was that the survey wanted to know how much an item cost per kilo, when most Cameroonians buy goods in the local market using cups, piles, and buckets as measurement units—most market sellers do not have scales to be able to weigh items per kilo.

How This Research Can Be Expanded To Other International Humanitarian Organizations

International humanitarian organizations overseas should also be ensuring a just workplace and a living wage for their local paid staff, since their missions are also to improve the human condition. These organizations could use the CRS Just Workplace and CST models to create their own guidelines for a just workplace. The methods of sharing with and including the lowest paid local staff in this process, as discussed in this paper, should be considered a vital element to ensure a just workplace. The cost-of-living survey, accompanied by the questionnaire, which I created, could also be used as a model to calculate a living wage in whatever country and culture the organization is situated.

Other humanitarian organizations overseas rely on funding from donors and governments for their programs. Funders should ensure that these organizations are consistent with their values and their administrative policies. The principles in Catholic Social Teaching are elementary to the cause of social justice, and can thus be made into universal standards that non-denominational organizations can use. Although the UN is
just another international organization with field offices overseas that should be committed to justice in the workplace, it can also act as a conductor and facilitator to this fundamental goal. As socially responsible business practices become more and more demanded by the public, so will they also seek accountability for non-profit and non-governmental organizations. The more organizations realize that an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, and that there can be no peace without justice, the more they will become active players in creating a more compassionate, equal, just world for everyone—starting from within the office.

**Further Research**

Since prices fluctuate so much in Yaoundé, by season and year, research needs to be done on a regular basis on the cost of living for the lowest paid staff. Before 2000, the last time a salary adjustment had been made for the guards and other local staff of CRS/CM was in 1994. I have been told by many Cameroonians that in that time, the currency and prices had doubled—leaving these employees with half the purchasing power.

More research could be done by CRS into what innovations other CRS field offices might be doing to improve quality of life or employee benefits for their local staff. It seems that CRS strives very hard to create a just workplace for their staff based at headquarters and their international field staff, but CRS/HQ is virtually unaware of employment practices and issues for local hire employees. CRS/HQ’s Peace and Justice
Working Group should be proactive in helping field offices ensure a Just Workplace, beyond just distributing a document that is meant to be shared.

More research could also be done into other international relief organizations to compare their wages and workplace conditions for their lowest paid employees. A collaboration between these agencies could be formed to conduct independent monitoring on these conditions for all their local employees.
**SOURCES CONSULTED**


