ELAW Fellows are doing great work! In February, we welcomed Francis Colee from Liberia, Kwesi Instiful from Ghana, and Merab Barbakadze from Georgia. In March, we welcomed Mariana Méndez from Panama and Jean André from Haiti. ELAW Fellows dedicate their lives to seeking justice for the world’s most impoverished communities. Before returning to their countries, the Fellows shared a common sentiment: “I feel myself charged with new positive energy, skills, and knowledge!” Read more about our recent Fellows in the following.

Kwesi Instiful is a lead attorney at the Center for Public Interest Law in Accra. He represents residents living near gold mines in western Ghana. Gold has been mined here for 100 years, but the villagers reap few benefits. “There is no tap water, the roads are terrible, and all homes have cracks from the explosions. You have your crops and the next day trucks move in and everything is gone,” says Kwesi.

Francis Colee works at Green Advocates, Liberia’s only public interest environmental law firm. Green Advocates is calling on Firestone to clean up poison rubber processing facilities on its plantation. Kwesi and Francis spent two weeks at ELAW to build skills promoting sustainable mining, forestry and climate change practices and policies, thanks to a grant from the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Merab Barbakadze serves on the Compliance Committee of the Aarhus Convention, a European body that ensures that citizens have a voice in decisions about the environment. His ELAW Fellowship helped strengthen ties between Merab and ELAW partners around the world, thanks to support from the Trust for Mutual Understanding.

Mariana Méndez is an engineer working with El Centro de Incidencia Ambiental (CIAM) in Panama. She also tapped the expertise of ELAW Staff Attorney Jennifer Gleason on energy policy. Mariana worked one-on-one with ELAW Staff Scientists and participated in conference calls with dam experts Rich Bower (Northwest Hydropower Reform Coalition), and Gary Carnefix and Chris Frissell (Pacific Rivers Council). She also tapped the expertise of ELAW Staff Attorney Jennifer Gleason on energy policy and issues concerning wind and other non-conventional renewable energy sources.

Jean André is an environmental attorney, an expert at the University of Nevada, Reno. Jean André is defending a judgment that the U.S. Forest Service is appealing. Dan briefed the Fellows about the case before they departed.

Poncho Bridge Poses Hazard

Free passage of river dolphins, crocodiles, and turtles in the Chambal River is threatened by a temporary pontoon bridge that sits directly on the river at Pinahat in Agra, in the State of Uttar Pradesh. The Chambal River is part of a national wildlife sanctuary. Permission for the bridge expired in November 2009, yet the bridge remains. Local groups are concerned that permission for the pontoon bridge will be extended. ELAW partners at the ELA Resource and Response Centre (ERC) joined local community members on a recent tour of the area. In meetings with officials at the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, they learned that more than 1,000 crocodiles and 70 dolphins are threatened by the pontoon bridge. Officials claim that they regularly inform the Department of Public Works about the local violations of India’s Wildlife Protection Act, to no avail. In December 2009, ERC filed a petition with the Central Empowered Committee of the Supreme Court of India seeking to revoke permission for the Pinahat Pontoon Bridge. In January, the Central Empowered Committee issued notice to the Chief Wildlife Warden and the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests stating that the issue of the pontoon bridge is now under review. We expect news within the next few months.

Awards Winning Partners

Asis Perez, Philippines

Asis Perez, Director for Law Enforcement at Tanggal Kalikasan in the Philippines, won the 2010 Clark R. Bavin Wildlife Law Enforcement Award. Asis led the investigation of 23 poachers responsible for killing 200 marine turtles. He co-organized the first Philippine Environmental Law Enforcement Summit and developed a manual on enforcement. He also wrote procedures for releasing seized wildlife and established a training program for enforcement officers in many areas of the Philippines. ELAW has collaborated with Asis and Tanggal Kalikasan for many years.