

# Man shares photo prize with Senegalese

**VANCOUVER:** Engineer who entered World Urban Forum contest shares cash with photo subjects



Oulymata Coly holds a copy of *The Province* in Senegal. Coly was featured in the newspaper during the World Urban Forum held in Vancouver in June 2006.

BY LENA SIN  
STAFF REPORTER

Brendan Baker believes you can change the world one photo at a time.

That was the reason he entered a photograph contest at the World Urban Forum held in Vancouver last summer.

The 26-year-old engineer hoped the 8,500 delegates at the United Nations event would be inspired when they saw images of how people around the globe are finding inventive ways to solve urban poverty.

That he walked away with an extra \$2,500 as the winner of this contest was a perk Baker never expected.

Now the Vancouverite has embodied the spirit of WUF by returning to Senegal — the country where his prize-winning photo was taken — to share his reward.

"I brought a copy of the *Vancouver Province* that featured the photo to show them where their work ended up," says Baker. "I sat [my friend Abdoulye Lo] down . . . I then showed him the article, noticing a

glimmer of pride as he saw his work featured."

The image Baker submitted was taken two years earlier when he was volunteering with Engineers without Borders on a clean-water project.

When he first arrived at the West African nation in 2004, he was ready to teach locals a simple technology to source clean water from wells.

But there was one problem he didn't anticipate — the plastic needed to manufacture the water pump was in short supply.

And the nearest city Baker could buy the plastic was 14 hours away.

After a weekend of mulling over the problem, local resident Lo came up with a solution by melting old plastic buckets, which could be recycled to manufacture the water pump.

A photo of Baker's friend Oulymata Coly triumphantly holding the finished parts was the image he submitted to the photo contest.

Baker says Coly was completely surprised by the publicity the project had garnered halfway across the world.

"When I pulled out the paper to

show her grinning face splashed across the page, she was entertained and was trying to read the English," said Baker. "[Then] as I pulled out another thicker envelope with her share of the prize, she took it and opened it. Her initial surprise turned to shock as she flipped through the bills, counting about a month's salary."

Though it was only \$200, for Coly it was a huge sum. And Lo, who has since created a thriving business manufacturing water pumps, was similarly surprised to receive a share of the prize money.

"Part of fighting this incredible challenge of poverty involves connecting Canadians and, in my case, Senegalese on a meaningful level so that we can understand the beauty and challenges in other cultures," says Baker.

"The competition was a step forward in deepening this understanding and increasing our empathy. It was gratifying to see this connection come full circle."

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