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Transformational Leaders and Social Change: IFP Impacts in Africa and the Middle East

FORD FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIPS PROGRAM

ALUMNI TRACKING STUDY | REPORT NO. 4 | JULY 2018



Transformational Leaders and Social Change: IFP Impacts in Africa and the Middle East

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Throughout the report we include stories of IFP alumni working on social justice issues in their home communities. We hope that these stories provide concrete examples of the report findings and help illuminate the impacts of IFP alumni.

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On The Cover: Kenyan alumnus Aggrey Willis Otieno visits his mother, sister, and niece in Nairobi's Korogocho slum, where he was born and raised. After his sister survived complications during childbirth, he decided to dedicate himself to reducing maternal and infant mortality in Kenya. Aggrey earned his Master's in Communication and Development from Ohio State University.

FOREWORD

Each Fellow of the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program (IFP) has a unique and compelling story to tell. All have faced significant challenges in their past and in their home communities stemming from discrimination, economic hardship, and disability. Their uniting bond is their continuing work in social justice and activism and their deep commitment following IFP to their home country and community. For the past five years, our aim at the Institute of International Education (IIE) has been to document the impacts of IFP on the Fellows and their communities. As we approach the halfway mark of our 10-year Alumni Tracking Study, the data that we have collected from more than 2,100 Fellows speaks to the significant impact this program has had worldwide.

Our fourth report in the IFP Alumni Tracking Study Series focuses on qualitative fieldwork carried out by research teams in four locations: Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Palestine. Cognizant of the varying local contexts in the Africa and Middle East region, these researchers focused their fieldwork on speaking with Fellows and those close to them to understand how IFP made a difference in their lives. The findings that follow speak not only to a personal commitment to social justice but also an unwavering promise to give back to their communities through professional work or volunteerism.

This report is also the culmination of three years of local fieldwork in regions where IFP was implemented: Asia, Latin America, and Africa and the Middle East. In each region, while we saw the important differences between each country and region, we were also impressed by the similarities that we found. The transformative nature of IFP at a deeply personal level has emerged in each region, a finding that touched not only the Fellows that participated in local fieldwork but also local researchers and IIE's team. Other themes were crosscutting as well. In Africa and the Middle East, for example, we noted the important role that the fellowship had on women Fellows. Although we had seen this similar outcome in Asia, we focused on this analysis further in this report.

Themes that stand out in Africa and the Middle East, however, bear mentioning. Among the most notable has been the positive impact of the fellowship on the perception of alumni toward international scholarship opportunities and the transparent



Community members work on a mapping exercise as part of a focus group in the village of Mavalani in South Africa's Limpopo province.

selection process and management offered by IFP during its tenure. In countries where nepotism is common, IFP stood out in providing fair opportunities for Fellows to participate in the program, an important consideration for other implementers offering fellowship programs in the region.

Finally, we pause to reflect on the vast amount of work we have been able to accomplish in the past five years, and to thank those who have helped us in this endeavor. We have been grateful to the 2,105 Fellows who have shared their stories with us and with our research teams. We worked with 45 local researchers in 10 countries who enriched our data collection with their local perspectives. And we continue to be grateful to the Ford Foundation for its unwavering support for the study and interest in supporting research that documents the impacts of international fellowship and scholarship programs.

Mirka Martel

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the stories and perspectives of alumni of the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program (IFP) in Africa and the Middle East. The Institute of International Education (IIE) is currently administering a 10-year tracking study of this program to capture the personal and professional trajectories of the IFP alumni in their home countries and communities. This report reflects our fieldwork in four locations: Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine and South Africa.

This is the fourth report in the IFP Alumni Tracking Study Series and builds upon prior quantitative and qualitative tracking study research. Our first report, released in 2016, shared findings from a 2015 Global Alumni Survey of 1,861 alumni in all 22 IFP countries, capturing 43% of the alumni population. To complement the global breadth of our survey research with local depth achieved through qualitative research, in 2016 we began fieldwork in three IFP regions: Asia, Latin America, and Africa and the Middle East. Findings from our Asia and Latin America fieldwork were published in March¹ and November² of 2017. Taken together, our tracking study reports seek to provide a holistic look at the potential outcomes and impacts of IFP.

ABOUT IFP

From 2001 to 2013, IFP provided graduate fellowships to 4,305 emerging social justice leaders in 22 countries, reflecting the Ford Foundation’s focus on promoting social change in the developing world. The foundation provided \$420 million in funding resources for IFP, the single largest program commitment in its history. Fellows were selected from marginalized communities that traditionally lacked access to higher education and who had demonstrated academic and leadership potential as well as a commitment to social causes. By investing in these individuals, IFP hypothesized that it had the potential to promote social change on a broad scale.

IFP was unique and innovative in several respects, but two aspects of the program design are particularly relevant to the findings shared in this report. First, in seeking to support individuals from marginalized groups, the program defined disadvantage according to each national context, with implementing international partner organizations drawing on existing research and consulting with experts from higher education, government, and civil society to determine target groups in each country.³ In Africa and the Middle East—as elsewhere—this approach produced a diverse group of Fellows, as noted in the location descriptions that follow. Second, the program was largely “portable,” allowing alumni to study in their home countries and regions as well as overseas. 100% of Nigerian and 98% of Kenyan Fellows studied overseas, compared with 75% of Palestinian and 69% of South African Fellows.

The four locations discussed in this report were home to 699 Fellows in total, accounting for 49% of all Fellows from Africa and the Middle East and 16% of the global IFP population. The remaining Fellows in the Africa and Middle East region come from Egypt, Ghana, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The organization of the report aligns with IFP’s hypothesis that impacts at the individual level would lead to broader changes at the organizational, community, and societal levels. The opening sections share the study and fieldwork methodology and provide an overview of key contextual factors in the region. The following sections share the impacts of the IFP experience on alumni and others, following a progression of the locus of change from the individual to the communal. The final sections of the report focus on salient crosscutting themes—in this case, the experiences of women—as well as reflections on the link between higher education and social justice. The report concludes with a discussion of what we have learned through our research and how these lessons can inform the design and implementation of other studies and programs that seek to help similar populations.

¹ Kallick, J. Martel, M., & Bhandari, R. (2017). *Social Justice Leaders in Action: IFP Impacts in Asia*. Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program Alumni Tracking Study, Report No 2, March 2017. New York: Institute of International Education.

² Brown Murga, A., & Martel, M. (2017). *Leaders, Contexts, and Complexities: IFP Impacts in Latin America*. Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program Alumni Tracking Study, Report No. 3, November 2017. New York: Institute of International Education.

³ Bigalke, T. W., & Zurbuchen, M. S. (Eds.) (2014). *Leadership for Social Justice in Higher Education: The Legacy of the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴ This table reflects final program data IIE received from IFP in 2013, as well as data from an IFP finalist survey gathered by the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies, University of Twente, the Netherlands in 2010.

Kenya

The Forum for African Women Educationalists implemented IFP in Kenya, which supported 128 Fellows in total. In Kenya, the program focused on marginalized groups that included women, people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, people with disabilities, and ethnic groups such as the Pokot, Turkana, and Massai. As a result, 48% of Fellows were women, and 30% came from the Rift Valley, a region with high populations of marginalized communities. The majority of Fellows from Kenya studied in the United States (69%), with the United Kingdom (18%) and Australia (7%) hosting many Fellows as well. Only 1% of Kenyan Fellows stayed in Kenya to pursue graduate programs.

Nigeria

Pathfinder International in collaboration with the Association of African Universities implemented IFP in Nigeria, which supported 174 Fellows. In Nigeria, the program focused on recruiting Fellows from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds, especially women from rural communities and the Muslim North, people with disabilities, those from educationally disadvantaged regions, and people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Because of these efforts, 41% of Fellows came from the Muslim and largely economically disadvantaged North, 43% were women, and 9% were Fellows with disabilities. Similar to Kenya, a majority of Fellows studied outside of Africa. 53% studied in the United Kingdom and 40% studied in the United States.

Palestine

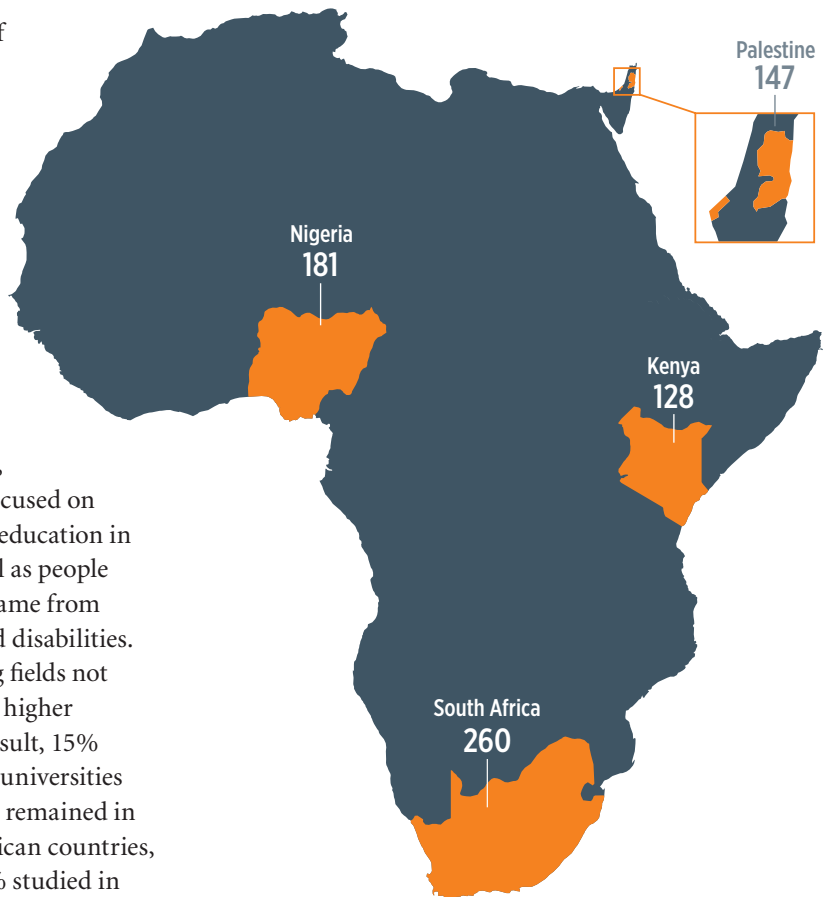
In both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST) implemented IFP, which supported 147 Fellows. The program focused on people with historically little access to higher education in Palestine, such as women and refugees, as well as people with disabilities. As a result, 28% of Fellows came from refugee camps, 44% were women, and 7% had disabilities. IFP also focused on selecting Fellows studying fields not available locally to develop the capacity of the higher education sector upon Fellows' return. As a result, 15% of Fellows received teaching positions at local universities upon their return. 46% of Palestinian Fellows remained in Palestine or in Middle Eastern and North African countries, 34% studied in the United Kingdom, and 15% studied in the United States.

South Africa

In South Africa, the Africa-America Institute implemented IFP, which supported 260 Fellows. The program focused on those from historically disadvantaged racial backgrounds who had been negatively affected by the Apartheid system of government and education system—especially those from rural areas and low-income suburbs or townships—as well as women and people with disabilities. As a result, 40% of Fellows came from rural areas, 35% came from low-income suburbs or townships, and 50% were women. Unlike both Kenya and Nigeria, a large number (43%) of Fellows in South Africa studied in local universities, 31% studied in the United Kingdom, and 23% studied in the United States and Canada.

IFP Alumni Population⁴

	Kenya	Nigeria	Palestine	South Africa
% Women	46%	42%	47%	51%
% First Generation Study	63%	16%	12%	44%
% Low Socioeconomic Status	93%	72%	54%	79%



FIELDWORK IN AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

From September to December 2017, four teams of local researchers carried out qualitative fieldwork in Africa and the Middle East. Through a combination of interviews and participatory focus groups, these four teams met with 361 IFP alumni and other stakeholders.

FIELDWORK PARTICIPANTS

Research teams used a combination of purposive and convenience sampling to speak with alumni that represented various demographic characteristics. These researchers were also able to meet with 101 alumni who had not participated in the 2015 Global Alumni Survey. To confirm and complement findings that emerged from conversations with alumni, researchers also met with alumni's work colleagues, community members, government officials, regional experts, and former IFP staff. The researchers conducted 16 case studies (four from each location) with alumni, capturing the sum of these sources to illustrate a range of IFP experiences. The report features selections from six of these case studies and includes examples from other case studies throughout.

Fieldwork Participants	Kenya	Nigeria	Palestine	South Africa	TOTAL
Alumni	36	45	57	44	182
Community members and leaders	34	14	20	26	94
Other stakeholders	13	15	33	16	77
Former IFP staff	2	2	2	2	8
Total	85	76	112	88	361

ALUMNI DEMOGRAPHICS

Degree Completion and Fields of Study

According to the 2015 IFP Global Alumni Survey, 95% of alumni from Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa had completed their IFP-funded studies, most often pursuing degrees in the environment, health, and applied sciences (25%); development studies (21%); education and communications (17%); social sciences (14%); and the arts and humanities (12%).

⁵ Alumni could select more than one option in describing the areas they work.

Current Location

In 2015, the vast majority (86%) of IFP alumni from Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa were living in their nations of origin. Almost half (44%) were living in their home communities. The remaining alumni were living in other countries (14%), including Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Employment Fields

Compared with IFP alumni globally, African and Middle Eastern alumni are more likely to occupy positions in community development, education, and gender issues, according to 2015 survey data. In fact, almost half of the alumni from Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa work in fields that include community development (48%) or education (51%). In addition, about one-third (30%) of alumni work on gender issues.⁵

ANALYSIS

The following IFP Alumni Tracking Study research questions reflect the overall vision of IFP in linking higher education to social change. The first question provides a foundation for analyzing change at various levels of impact. The study's qualitative fieldwork also focuses on research questions two and three, as these questions require a deeper analysis of IFP outcomes in the local context.

Research Questions

1. What have been the long-term impacts of the IFP experience on its alumni? How has the program enabled alumni to contribute to long-term impacts at the organizational, community, and societal levels?
2. What contributions to social justice have IFP alumni made as leaders in their communities as a result of their fellowship opportunity?
3. What is the link between higher education and social justice? How can higher education fellowship programs provide opportunities to address social inequalities?

To ensure accuracy and allow for greater depth, IIE's study

ADAPTATION OF THE KIRKPATRICK MODEL BY IIE



team took an iterative approach to analyzing the fieldwork data. Local researchers in Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine and South Africa conducted primary data analysis using a code system developed in collaboration with the IIE study team and summarized their findings in location-specific reports. IIE then synthesized the analyses into a regional report with input from the local researchers. As such, this report synthesizes findings from all four reports as well as other relevant sources of primary and secondary data, primarily quantitative findings from the 2015 Global Alumni Survey.⁶

Kirkpatrick's Levels of Evaluation

IIE relied on a modified version of the Kirkpatrick model to analyze mixed-methods data from the IFP Alumni Tracking Study.⁷ IIE added a fifth level, External Results, that considers the farthest potential reach of alumni impacts on policy and social behavior at the regional, national, and international levels.⁸

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

As with any research of this kind, IIE is cognizant of the limitations of the report's analysis. As a result of the qualitative and contextual nature of this research, it is not possible to extrapolate these findings to the larger IFP populations in Africa, the Middle East, or globally. The four fieldwork locations were chosen to explore in-depth examples and are not meant to be representative of the entire IFP Africa and Middle East region.

All four research teams also faced considerable challenges reaching alumni, in part because of security issues. In Nigeria, for example, the southeastern part of the country was in the midst of a secessionist conflict, preventing researchers from visiting the area. In Kenya, turmoil and tensions resulting from the 2017 presidential elections inhibited some alumni from meeting with researchers. And the Palestinian research team—themselves divided into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—had to work closely to overcome their physical divide throughout the fieldwork.

Finally, because the qualitative fieldwork focused on alumni living in the four locations, the outcomes and findings of the report reflect only the work of those who had remained or returned home post-fellowship. According to the 2015 Global Alumni Survey, 86% of alumni from Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa were living in their home nations, which aligns closely with the 84% of global IFP alumni. The study team plans to conduct additional data collection with alumni residing overseas in the next year to learn about their experiences and motivations for leaving home as well as the social justice impacts of their careers.

⁶ As with the qualitative findings, quantitative findings from survey respondents from Africa and the Middle East refer to those from Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South African alumni specifically, unless otherwise stated.

⁷ Kirkpatrick, D.L. (1979). Techniques for evaluating training programs. *Training and Development Journal*, 33(6), pp. 78-92.

⁸ Several international scholarship programs have used adaptations of the Kirkpatrick model, including the USAID ATLAS/AFGRAD program, which was the first to add a fifth level to measure impact beyond institutions.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

To better understand the findings that emerged from our fieldwork in Africa and the Middle East, it is important to first have an overview of the context in which IFP alumni from Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa find themselves. Drawing on the insights of our local researchers as well as desk research, the following section outlines key historical and contextual themes from the region that are relevant to the welfare of IFP alumni and their ability to promote social change.

It is important to note that the contextual information provided here is not meant to be a comprehensive summary, nor to sufficiently capture the unique contexts of these nations. As a fellowship program that ultimately sought to promote social justice on a broad scale, IFP was implemented to help Fellows grapple with the challenges touched upon here. The themes have relevance to the contexts from which alumni were drawn and the broad challenges they are now working to address.

BRITISH COLONIAL RULE

Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa have all been subject to British rule to varying degrees, and the legacy of these occupations is apparent when looking at development challenges, tensions, and inequalities that remain today.⁹ In Nigeria, for example, the British deliberately separated religious and ethnic groups to maintain central control and thwart any efforts at independence. This history is now especially apparent in the present-day divide between the Muslim-majority North and Christian-majority South. After World War II and the dissipation of the British Empire, Kenya and Nigeria gained independence following a decades-long suppression of their indigenous political parties. South Africa gained independence after World War I, but black South Africans did not gain political independence until after the end of Apartheid in 1994. Britain administered what is now the “Palestinian Territories” until 1948 when Britain played a key role in the creation of Israel. Since 1967, two regions that remain under Arab rule—the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—have been under Israeli control.

⁹ Fraser, P. M. et al. (2005). Palestine. Encyclopedia Britannica.; Kirk-Green, A. H. M. et al. (2000). Nigeria as a colony. Encyclopedia Britannica.; Lowe, C. C. et al. (2007). *Reconstruction, union, and segregation (1902-29)*. Encyclopedia Britannica.; Ntarangwi, M. et al. (2007). Kenya colony: Political movements. Encyclopedia Britannica.

¹⁰ Beaubien, J. (2018, April 2). *The Country with the World's Worst Inequality Is...* National Public Radio.

¹¹ World Bank. (2018). *The World Bank in South Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southafrica/overview>

¹² UNICEF. (2012). *Simplified Common Country Assessment – Nigeria*. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/NIGERIA-CCA-Final-Rev_2_JO.pdf

¹³ Human Rights Watch. (2017). *Kenya*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/africa/kenya>

POLITICAL TRANSITIONS AND INEQUALITY

After the British left, democracy was tentatively established in each of the four locations but has faced numerous setbacks. Inequality has persisted across changes in government, and continues to impact security and development in the region. Many of these inequities remain most acute in South Africa where the legacy of Apartheid—a system of institutionalized segregation and discrimination that lasted from 1948 until the 1990s—has contributed to South Africa’s status as the most unequal country in the world in terms of income.¹⁰ However, South Africa’s 1994 transition to democracy and 2016 elections have been upheld as beacons for the rest of the continent, and the country’s robust economic growth in the past decade also brings promise.¹¹

Despite Nigeria’s successful democratic elections in 1993 after years of military rule, poverty and systemic inequality remain pervasive in Africa’s most populous country. Poverty is inextricably tied to regional, ethnic, and religious inequality, and the country is divided between the majority Muslim North and majority Christian South. The southwest has an average poverty rate of 50%, and the northwest has an average poverty rate of more than 70%.¹² Kenya has long grappled with deep-seated ethnic cleavages, and last year’s presidential elections sparked renewed ethnic conflicts and polarization, which show no signs of abating many months after the elections.¹³

Finally, in Palestine, the relatively low inequality rating belies the more complex inequities experienced by residents of the Gaza Strip compared with those in the West Bank. Since the end of the Palestinian Second Intifada (uprising) in 2005, the West Bank has been focused on nation-building, while the Gaza Strip has experienced continued social and economic isolation and suffers from a higher rate of poverty, where 80% of the population rely on international aid.

CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa all grapple to some extent with violent conflict and displacement of their citizens. Palestine is the site of the most acute and protracted violence, which has led to the internal or external displacement of 41% of Palestinians.¹⁴ In 2015, 5.2 million Palestinians were registered as refugees by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.¹⁵ IFP alumni exemplify the prolonged refugee status of many Palestinians, as a number grew up in refugee camps within the territories or in neighboring countries.

In Nigeria, terrorist attacks in the northern part of the country have displaced millions. In 2009, the Boko Haram Islamist movement gained enough momentum to initiate a wave of violence that has continued for years and spread to bordering countries. The most infamous violence perpetrated by the group was the 2014 kidnapping of 200 Nigerian school girls from the town of Chibok,¹⁶ although as recently as February 2018 another 110 girls were kidnapped from the community of Dapchi.¹⁷ Other conflicts in the Niger Delta stem from factions who seek to gain control of the region's oil fields. These combined conflicts have resulted in 208,000 Nigerian refugees and 1.7 million internally displaced Nigerians.¹⁸

In Kenya, violent conflicts have ebbed and flowed among pastoral communities in the northern Rift Valley region as well as between residents and police of informal urban settlements. And in South Africa, violent crime in urban centers such as Johannesburg remains prevalent.¹⁹

NEPOTISM AND CORRUPTION

Kenya has consistently been ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world.²⁰ This corruption—coupled with tribalism and nepotism—has marginalized many in the country and contributed to ethno-political tensions that often boil over (most recently during last year's presidential elections). In early 2018, South Africa ousted its president, Jacob Zuma, after a nine-year presidency racked with corruption charges that have set the country back. Zuma was charged with violating the Constitution as well as fraud and corruption.²¹ Corruption in Nigeria is growing as the country has fallen to 148 out of 180 countries surveyed by Transparency International on corruption perception.²² This has undermined the promise made by President Buhari when he came to power in 2015 to eliminate corruption and increase transparency.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Educational development differs across Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa. However, all four have struggled with issues of unequal access, uneven quality, and a lack of government support. Although Palestine has the highest literacy rate in the region (96%), and enrollment rates in higher education increased 94% between 1993 and 2011,²³ many Palestinians have difficulty accessing higher education in Israeli universities. In Nigeria, education has been disrupted because of violence, especially in the Muslim-majority North, which has also grappled with low rates of educational attainment and an environment where women often have little access to education and economic resources. Kenya's economic inequality has also contributed to a struggling education system that is underfunded and continues to exclude vulnerable populations, exacerbating inequalities in the country.

Despite these challenges, there have been positive developments. In South Africa, for example, the introduction of racial quotas in 2002 has provided opportunities for black South Africans and those of South Asian descent. In 2017, free higher education for poor, deserving South Africans with the required pass rate and admission was made available, and other scholarship schemes have provided funding for postgraduate students of all backgrounds.

¹⁴ UNHCR. (2016). *Global Trends—Forced Displacement in 2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7.pdf>

¹⁵ Halbfinger, D. M. (2018, January 17). *U.S. Funding Cut Reignites Debate on Palestinian Refugee Agency*. New York Times.

¹⁶ BBC. (2018, February 26). *Nigeria Country Profile*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13949550>

¹⁷ Searcey, D., & Akinwotu, E. (2018, March 21). *Boko Haram Returns Dozens of Schoolgirls Kidnapped in Nigeria*. New York Times.

¹⁸ UNHCR. (2018). *Nigeria emergency*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/nigeria-emergency.html>

¹⁹ Dixon, R. (2015, December 11). *A night of violence that shattered a South African's view of her white privilege*. Los Angeles Times.

²⁰ Transparency International. (2017). *Kenya*. Retrieved from <https://www.transparency.org/country/KEN>

²¹ Onishi, N. (2018, February 15). *New South Africa Leader Faces Old Question: Is There Will to Fight Corruption?* New York Times.

²² Transparency International. (2017). *Nigeria*. Retrieved from <https://www.transparency.org/country/NGA>

²³ UNDP: Palestine. (2015). *The 2014 Human Development Report: Education*. UNDP Publications.

INDIVIDUAL IMPACTS

IFP focused on two central goals: 1) to provide opportunities to Fellows who traditionally lacked access to higher education; and 2) to advance social justice on a broader scale by selecting Fellows who had demonstrated community leadership and a commitment to social issues. The individual-level impacts that emerged from the fieldwork spoke to both aspects. The program's focus offered a route that was otherwise unlikely for these emerging social justice leaders. In addition, the program supported Fellows as they progressed in their journeys toward their social justice goals.

UNIQUE AND CATALYTIC EXPERIENCES

Many alumni saw IFP as unique in its focus on selecting people from marginalized groups and catalytic in advancing their work. Alumni were already grounded in their social change work and making a difference, but they considered IFP significant in improving their ability to have greater impact.

Alumni described their lives prior to IFP as ones where they suffered deep and often compounding forms of discrimination. For example, a female Fellow might also have a disability, be a refugee, and be poor. Before IFP, alumni described their lives as limited, lacking a vision for how to change their circumstances, and with “lots of obstacles on the road.” After IFP, many Fellows felt the program was empowering, transformative, and broadened their perspectives.

Colleagues also observed these changes in alumni's attitudes and behaviors. “He has developed that desire to learn and the desire to be humble enough to say, ‘How does this work?’” said the colleague of a Nigerian alumnus. “[...] He has various facets, all shaped by his [IFP] training.” Similarly, the colleague of a South African alumnus noted, “Since he came back with his Ph.D., I've seen a transformed man. His thinking, his conceptualization is much better than when he was here [before IFP].”

Fellows saw IFP as a unique opportunity that was not otherwise available to them, particularly for people from marginalized communities. Many alumni expressed pride in being the first in their families or communities to gain a higher education or travel abroad. For instance, a young Nigerian medical doctor who came from poverty sold bananas on the roadside to pay for his undergraduate education. After IFP, he used his newly acquired communications and advocacy skills to contribute to efforts toward universal healthcare across Nigeria.

INCREASED SELF-CONFIDENCE

The experiences offered through IFP improved alumni's self-confidence and emboldened them in carrying out their social change work. For many alumni, the initial acceptance into the program was seen as an important recognition of their distinction and boosted their self-confidence. Many alumni attributed this improved self-confidence to having successfully studied in other countries and the prestige that it brought upon returning home. “You have to believe in yourself and believe in your ability,” said a Nigerian alumnus “to not only affect change but also to create the environment where you can also make that change, you don't wait for an opportunity to be handed over to you. ... Wherever there was an opening, I forced myself through the door.”

UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY AND MARGINALIZATION

An important aspect of the changes in thinking and perspectives alumni experienced was a deeper understanding of diversity, marginalization, and injustice. There were many examples of alumni whose views on injustice changed markedly because of their IFP experience. In some cases, alumni were so accustomed to the status quo prior to leaving their local contexts that they were unaware of the injustice and discrimination they had been facing prior to IFP. Such was the case for a Kenyan alumnus who recalled being asked about his experiences with discrimination: “At my [IFP] interview, I couldn't remember some injustices, but when I left, I did,” referring to being barred from getting a passport for several years as a result of discriminatory practices.

“As someone who lived in poverty in a refugee camp, getting a Ph.D. from a high-ranking European university and then working as a university professor was a great turning point in my life.”

—PALESTINIAN ALUMNUS

IFP also provided opportunities for alumni to interact with people from different backgrounds and encouraged them to find common interests, leading to mutual respect and more open-minded, collaborative attitudes. “[IFP has] also given me a greater appreciation of where other people are coming from,” explained a South African alumna. “We’re all the same, and yet we’re all really different, which I think is beautiful in its own way.”

This opening to new ideas and people began with the Pre-Academic Training (PAT) that helped prepare alumni for their graduate studies by building their academic, language, and technical as well as interpersonal skills. Because Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa have societies that are strongly divided across tribal, religious or racial lines, each of the international partner organizations in these countries designed the PAT’s to prepare candidates for success in their graduate studies, laying the foundation for compassion, empathy, and respect for people from different groups as well as emphasizing the importance of social change in their home countries.

While living and studying in other countries, many alumni were exposed to people from around the world from a wide range of backgrounds:

“When I was in the U.S., I interacted with people from all over the world and that completely changed my worldview. ... Having sat in a class where social justice is not only spoken about but practiced, I got to know that people had rights. ... I think my social justice instincts are now much sharper than they were.”

—KENYAN ALUMNUS

In northern Nigeria and Palestine—where there were often deep-rooted perceptions about people from Western countries and of other religious backgrounds—studying in the United Kingdom and United States was particularly powerful. Many living in the northern areas of Nigeria attributed their ability to overcome their own personal biases to learning from their experiences living as minorities in other countries during IFP. Another Palestinian alumna said he was impressed by the “types of morals that exist in



Western countries, such as honesty, modesty, tolerance, hard work, and the positive attitude toward disadvantaged people, especially those with disabilities.”

Even more poignant for alumni from Palestine were discussions about how IFP helped them connect and interact with the globalized world given their extreme context and isolation. One Palestinian alumna summed the sentiments of many: “IFP has made us better able to live in this globalized world ... by being able to speak and write English, ‘the language of globalization,’ traveling and seeing other countries, interacting with people from all over the world, and knowing the world better.”

In contrast, a few alumni spoke at length about how the injustices they observed in other countries gave them a deeper understanding of marginalized communities in their home countries. For example, a South African alumna observed, “I saw a lot of similarities between [blacks in New Orleans] ... and some of the challenges that we have here [South Africa] as well in health, in education.” Conversely, some alumni said they had a better understanding of injustice in their home countries because of the relative justice and equity they observed in their host countries. “It is through advanced education that you understand that there is no application of social justice in [Nigeria],” said one alumna. “The people here also do not understand social justice. So support is needed for social justice to be put in place.”

Self-Identity

Alumni's experiences outside of their local contexts offered a space for them to reflect on their own experiences or their communities' experiences with discrimination and marginalization. As they explored their understanding of the social injustices in their lives and their own prejudices, they built a stronger sense of self and their identities.

For example, while one South African alumna was in the United Kingdom, she became more connected to her African identity and the experience helped her build an African consciousness. In some cases, alumni felt more connected to the global community, feeling more like "global citizens" or more cosmopolitan, and many also expressed an increased appreciation for positive aspects of their own cultures or an eagerness to return to their communities to apply what they have learned.

A Focus on People with Disabilities

Given the discrimination and significant barriers people with disabilities often faced pursuing education, employment, and overall independence, researchers focused on this group in all four of the fieldwork locations. The number of alumni with disabilities ranged from 9% in Nigeria to 2% in South Africa, and included people with visual impairments, wheelchair users, and people with albinism.

In Nigeria and Palestine, the impacts of the fellowship for people with disabilities who were also marginalized in other ways—such as individuals with disabilities and women—were especially strong. As one Palestinian alumna said, "IFP has helped me transforming my life. ... Due to my disability, I used to feel shy, isolated, pessimistic. ... I feel now that I'm a confident and productive person who can compete, create, and advance in all aspects of life." And in Nigeria, an alumnus described how much more confident he felt "because of my training [through IFP], I am no longer an introvert. I can communicate so people will understand me, and I give motivational talks to those like myself who are hearing impaired."

In cases where alumni with disabilities had studied overseas, there was also frustration upon their return with practical aspects of their lives that were easier when living abroad. For example, an alumnus from Nigeria who uses a wheelchair described the challenges of readjusting to more limited accessibility back home. "When I was [abroad], I received money for a three-wheeled bike, which I used to move around, [but] I couldn't bring it back home with me due to custom charges. ... Fitting back in was more difficult after getting used to that kind of mobility."

COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

Many alumni returned with a stronger commitment to promoting social justice, either because of a sense of responsibility IFP had instilled in them or because of lessons learned about social justice issues during their studies. Indeed, 91% of 2015 survey respondents from Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa said the fellowship had strengthened their commitment to social justice. Several alumni noted that the program had cultivated a sense of responsibility in them to give back to their home communities.

Others noted that the fairness and transparency of the IFP model specifically had influenced their thinking and focus on promoting social justice. A Palestinian alumna, for example, said the fellowship's focus on selecting people from communities that were "poor, refugee, females, individuals with disability, etc." had deepened her commitment to helping these groups through her work at a university as well as through increased volunteering. A South African alumna expressed similar sentiments:

"I would not be the same and I don't think I would be as motivated as I am now ... but because of IFP, I know that it's not about salary, it's about continuous development. That is why I registered for my Ph.D., and I am publishing. I do not think that [without IFP] I would be doing these things."

—SOUTH AFRICAN ALUMNA

PROFESSIONAL IMPACTS

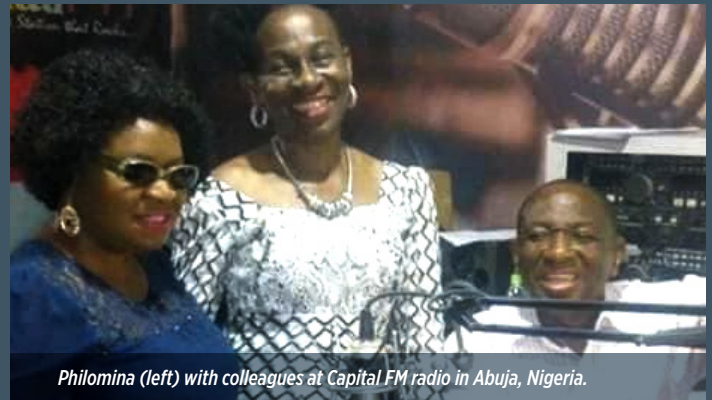
Leadership development was integral to IFP, as the program was designed to select leaders from marginalized communities who had demonstrated a commitment to social change. As one former IFP staff member observed, IFP alumni were aided by the Pre-Academic Training and started to practice and develop their leadership skills from that point forward, beginning with classroom leadership roles during their IFP studies. Another IFP staff member who was involved in the early years of the program also noted this focus on leadership:

“I think the [Ford Foundation] wanted to create a critical mass of leaders who would transform things in their own countries. So I think it was seen that if you have value-based leadership and you have got academic credentials that would allow you to link policy better but also to lead.” —FORMER IFP STAFF MEMBER

Academic and Professional Skills

Given that alumni were drawn from marginalized groups with limited access to quality education, the Pre-Academic Training coordinated by the international partners was critical in providing a necessary foundation for alumni success in their academic programs. IFP program managers described the evolution of these trainings, adapting them to the needs of each context and building on feedback from previous years. Recognizing the significant gap that these trainings filled, most international partners extended the time period for the trainings and offered workshops in English language, research methodology, computer skills, writing, public speaking, and time management as well as foundational issues such as the importance of continuing one’s commitment to social change in their home countries and what it means to be a leader. These initial trainings strengthened the bond among alumni in each cohort in addition to preparing them for academic success. In fact, Palestinian alumni felt so strongly about the importance of these trainings and their “Ford Foundation network” that their IFP alumni association organized several workshops so that alumni could continue their collaborative learning until IFP ended.

During their graduate studies, alumni gained a plethora of professional skills that they then applied to their work, adapting their knowledge to local contexts and finding innovative ways to address chronic issues of injustice. Alumni expected the fellowship would provide opportunities to advance their skills, and most agreed these improved skills enhanced both their work and personal lives. This is corroborated by 2015 survey data, where 92% of respondents from Africa and the Middle East said the fellowship had given a boost to their academic credentials, and 90% felt it had boosted their professional reputation. Grounded in deeper knowledge of their fields, along with advocacy and fundraising skills, many alumni and stakeholders reported increased effectiveness and leadership.



Philomina (left) with colleagues at Capital FM radio in Abuja, Nigeria.

PHILOMENA NWEZE

Nigeria (2006 cohort)
Master’s in Communications
Ohio University, U.S.

After losing her eyesight to a bout of childhood malaria, Philomina faced many barriers to higher education given that many institutions in Nigeria were not well-equipped to educate visually impaired students. She began developing her broadcasting skills at the Radio Nigeria Training School, thereafter becoming the first blind student to be admitted to the University of Jos.

Upon completing her degree in Mass Communication, and after much persistence, Philomina was hired by Capital FM radio in Abuja. She had great success there, and her programs drew a large following. However, there was always a part of her that wanted to study abroad. She applied to IFP twice before being selected, deciding to study in the United States as she had always admired how Western countries treated people with visual impairments. Ever a trailblazer, she became the first visually impaired IFP Fellow to study at Ohio University.

Besides fulfilling her lifelong dream of studying overseas, Philomina knew she had the commitment and capacity to create a difference, but she also knew she needed to build her knowledge and hone her skills. Upon her return to Nigeria, her work at the radio station changed. Her colleague noted that “The way she carried out the programming ... [was] now more deliberate and strategic.” The skills she gained during IFP (computer literacy, public speaking, and research skills, among them) helped Philomina create new and widely popular programming at Capital FM radio. In fact, two of her most popular shows—“Health Friendly” and “Radio Psych”—were inspired by the health promotion classes she took while at Ohio University. Her shows focus on promoting healthy behaviors by helping young people in Nigeria understand the social and behavioral problems they face in their society.

After IFP, Philomina was also promoted Assistant Director of Capital FM. Her role allows her to serve as an example for both colleagues and her listeners with disabilities. “As Assistant Director, a woman, visually impaired in an organization that is sighted [...] I love to work, and I do my work so I can serve as a role model for others.”

Enhancing their work with these newly acquired IFP skills, many alumni confronted social justice issues as leaders in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), within governments, and as doctors and lawyers. In one case, a Nigerian alumna with disabilities reported that she had struggled for years to get a job, and after returning from IFP, she achieved a leadership position in an international NGO. Another Nigerian alumna who studied gender issues returned to a family NGO she ran with her husband, where she ascended to lead the NGO because she had gained critical skills during her IFP studies. While in Kenya, one alumna's ability to eloquently articulate social justice issues during a forum impressed the Executive Director of an international NGO who then placed her in a leadership position in another country's office: "There were many people suitable for that role, but with [IFP alumnus] it was different, he knew a lot of things and he is logical in his thinking. I believe there are very few people at the national level who think and reason like him."

Career Advancement

Most alumni reported career advancement as a result of their participation in IFP, findings that are consistent with 2015 global survey results, which showed that 74% of survey respondents from Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa were employed following the fellowship. Many alumni agreed that, in addition to the skills and knowledge acquired, gaining graduate degrees from universities outside of their home countries gave them prestige, recognition, respect, and legitimacy that influenced their career advancement. Some felt that the connections and networks they developed during their IFP studies also facilitated their job searches.

Some stakeholders felt that participating in IFP, and gaining a degree from abroad in particular, facilitated alumni career advancements. Given the belief in most fieldwork countries that Western universities provide superior education, many alumni's affiliation with the Ford Foundation and degrees from prestigious universities in the United States and United Kingdom also elevated their status and recognition.

"Any South African who came back home with an international degree and with a wider view of the world would inevitably have a better chance of getting a job, without any doubt at all."

—SOUTH AFRICAN IFP SELECTION COMMITTEE MEMBER

In addition to career advancement, IFP opened the door for or inspired many alumni to continue their studies. In fact, 37% of 2015 alumni survey respondents from Africa and the Middle East reported that they had pursued or were pursuing an additional degree or certification following their IFP fellowship, most often a Ph.D. A few Palestinian alumni in particular cited their improved language and research skills, the opportunity to obtain a Master's degree from an internationally recognized university, and their affiliation with the Ford Foundation as factors that led to their ability to pursue doctoral degrees after IFP.



Palestinian alumna Islam Mamdouh Alboji. Islam received her Master's in Environmental Engineering from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

“I am from a refugee camp and I used to work in the camp as a school teacher. [...] IFP has offered me support to do my [Master’s] at a Western university, and that was the main reason why, later on, I was able to receive another scholarship from [another institution] to do my Ph.D. [...] Even before I officially received my Ph.D. degree, a Palestinian university in the West Bank offered me a job as an Assistant Professor.”

—PALESTINIAN ALUMNUS

65% of 2015 survey respondents from Africa and the Middle East also indicated that they received a salary boost as a result of their IFP experience, and the fieldwork provided examples of how alumni had not only benefited from their increased earning capacity but had also been able to contribute to family and community needs. For example, in South Africa, one Fellow reported investing his additional income in his family and in a community preschool. Other examples of how alumni are contributing their own funds included in Nigeria where one alumna offers financial support to widows in her community, and another set up a reading club for indigent children.

Career Challenges

Alumni had high career expectations upon their return, and although most found satisfying jobs, a number of alumni have faced difficulties finding work after their fellowships. Indeed, 26% of 2015 survey respondents from Africa and the Middle East said they had trouble finding jobs after IFP, and the qualitative fieldwork revealed specific examples of these challenges. Moreover, many alumni were required to resign from their positions when they left for their studies (although survey data show that 36% of alumni from the region returned to the organizations where they had worked before IFP).

Some alumni expressed disappointment at not finding positions that used their graduate degrees or with the time it took to find work. In South Africa, a number of alumni found the biggest obstacle was the low demand for people from within their particular field of study. In most cases, these issues existed prior to their studies, however, alumni felt more aggrieved after living abroad because they had high expectations for the power of their degrees.

Alumni have grappled with other long-standing challenges in the region, including high unemployment and protracted conflict. For example, since 2007, Palestinian alumni have had to contend with the devastating effects of the Gaza blockade. More recently, alumni in Nigeria and South Africa have faced economic recessions.

Given that IFP focused on people from marginalized groups, it is perhaps not surprising that discrimination and corruption also played a role in the job market. “The more corrupt you are, the better [job you get] and salary and money ... to buy opportunities,” is how one South African alumnus described it. Similarly, a Nigerian alumnus referred to nepotism as the “Nigerian factor” that he initially assumed would be the basis for selecting IFP Fellows.

A small number of alumni expressed disappointment with the lack of support the IFP offices provided during the re-entry stage. After having received such strong support in preparation and throughout their studies, they wanted to have that support continue to help them find a job upon return. Although some offices did try to foster professionally oriented networking among alumni, the program was not designed to provide this type of support.

Despite these challenges, there were positive shifts, among them a union in Palestine for people with disabilities that led to improved job opportunities for some alumni. In another case, a Kenyan alumnus felt his IFP experience enabled him to overcome the nepotism that had previously prevented people from his ethnic group from advancing in his organization:

“My Master’s and the training I received from IFP enabled me to move a step further and become the Director of Operations at the organization I work for. This is a position that you can’t hold unless you have a Master’s or you belong to the right clan. [...] So, I made it into that position and I was told I was the first person in the last 35 years who does not belong to clan ‘A’ that got it.”

—KENYAN ALUMNUS

In sum, alumni returned home prepared to contribute more to their work, expecting enhanced job opportunities. However, they found themselves facing endemic economic and political challenges, demonstrating alumni’s significant growth during their IFP studies that facilitated their ability to overcome these challenges and attain jobs that advanced their careers.

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACTS

By offering individual leaders more knowledge, skills, and social capital, IFP intended to improve alumni's ability to impact social change in their home communities. The qualitative fieldwork in Africa and the Middle East provides compelling evidence that this goal has been realized and aligns with the sentiments expressed by 89% of 2015 survey respondents from Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa who indicated they had been able to make improvements in the organizations where they work and volunteer as a result of their IFP experience. Alumni have revitalized existing organizations and programs, have created new ones, and are promoting social justice, learning, and leadership across levels and positions.

EXPANDING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Inspired by their own study experiences and enhanced capacities, alumni have been able to build capacity at the organizations where they work and volunteer through training, strategic planning, and leadership. Many alumni have identified systems-wide improvements toward more effectively and efficiently achieving their organizations' goals. In addition, in part as a result of their IFP experiences, alumni's enhanced management skills and elevated roles have improved their ability to envision and implement changes across their organizations.

According to the 2015 survey, 36% of alumni from Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa were working at the same organizations they had been employed at prior to IFP. Several organizational colleagues who had known alumni before their fellowships noted the growth that alumni had experienced as a result of IFP. For example, the colleague of a Palestinian alumna noted that her strategic planning skills had changed "180 degrees since her participation in the IFP fellowship." "Take planning, for example. She likes to plan things ahead and knows how to do that. [...] I worked with her on conducting a needs assessment of all ... departments. We distributed a questionnaire and we decided the needs of all departments."

Alumni themselves shared examples of their growth and how this had helped them boost the organizations to which they returned. In South Africa, an alumna discussed her transition from a researcher before IFP to a senior position within the same organization, at which point she was able to shift the focus of the organization's work and facilitate middle managers' commitment to "putting the community first" and speeding their delivery of services to the community.

Whether returning to previous employers or moving on to new organizations, a number of alumni noted how their IFP skills, experiences, and networks had facilitated greater access to funding for their organizations' efforts. A Nigerian alumna used proposal writing skills learned during her IFP studies to obtain 15 new grants that support poverty alleviation for women and education for young girls. Similarly, the manager of a Palestinian alumnus described how the alumnus' improved skills had helped their university:

"His English language and proposal writing skills are excellent now. He wrote several proposals and brought funding and projects to our department more than others. [...] He even used his contacts in the UK to provide support to our department."

—COLLEAGUE OF PALESTINIAN ALUMNUS

Other alumni introduced social justice programs that expanded their organizations' strategies. In Nigeria, some alumni who returned to work with their previous employers providing health services to the communities added an advocacy or gender component. Others advocated for multiple issues related to gender, race, and people with disabilities through their new positions acquired after returning from IFP. Other alumni sought to expand equity within their own organizations. For example, when a Nigerian alumnus returned to his previous organization, he ensured health coverage was extended to all working at the organization, regardless of salary level.

A few alumni have built organizational capacity by guiding their organizations toward more strategic and performance-oriented approaches to their work. For example, a Nigerian alumna who became managing director of an organization focused on addressing specific environmental hazards that disproportionately affect the poor. In Palestine, an alumnus applied his IFP learnings by introducing a new technique for creating green energy, whereas another introduced a free communications system that led to significant savings for his NGO.

Some alumni have changed their overall approach to their work. For example, a number of Palestinian alumni who had been professors and teachers shifted from a traditional teaching style to more interactive, engaging methods in the classroom as a result of their IFP experiences (e.g., learning from their experiences working as teaching assistants during their IFP studies). A Palestinian schoolteacher attributed her improved teaching methods to her graduate studies, saying, “I encourage my students to avoid memorization of information and focus on understanding and analyzing things instead. I also encourage them to think critically.”

LAUNCHING NEW ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMS

55% of 2015 survey respondents—a total of 152 alumni—from Africa and the Middle East indicated that they had launched new organizations or programs within existing organizations, and the qualitative fieldwork yielded numerous examples of new initiatives alumni had created. A Kenyan alumnus—himself a native of Nairobi’s largest slum—launched a foundation to cover the school fees of children from the city’s slums and has already supported 120 high school students. In Palestine, an alumnus established a facility at a nearby food company to transform the dung of more than 1,200 cows into a source of electricity. And in South Africa, an alumna has launched a number of programs and campaigns aimed at youth and community development, computer literacy, public health awareness, and the arts. Her initiatives have not only served members of the township where she has spent most of her life but also benefited members of 17 other villages in her district in Limpopo province.

WORK ETHICS

The inclusive design of IFP, along with the experiences and studies alumni had overseas, inspired some alumni to try to foster similar workplace cultures that focused on a strong work ethic, transparency, and a “more positive culture.”

This was also confirmed by organizational colleagues. For instance, in South Africa, some alumni noted that others from within and outside of their organizations sought them for their reliability and expertise. . The colleague of a South African alumna confirmed this, saying that “[the IFP alumna’s] consistency, transparency and accountability attest to her exceptional leadership skills [...]. She’s very consistent with her decision-making, with her leadership qualities, I think with everything that she does.” Stakeholders in other countries also recognized the alumni’s strong work ethic, like this colleague of a Kenyan Fellow:

“She has brought a lot of professionalism, accountability, and transparency. The three values that I’ve mentioned have been strengthened by her having participated in [IFP].”

—COLLEAGUE OF A KENYAN ALUMNA

WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

Although alumni were working to make changes within their workplaces, some alumni faced challenges as a result of ongoing endemic workplace discrimination, most often reportedly because of their gender or a disability. Although these challenges existed prior to IFP, alumni’s increased understanding gained through their IFP experience heightened their awareness of the complexities and nuances of discrimination in the workplace. There were a couple notable examples from Palestine of alumni that faced overt discrimination in the workplace because of their disabilities. One alumnus recounted that during an interview for a position at a university, he had been asked about his ability to teach with mobility impairments. Similarly, a Kenyan alumnus said he was “not seen as a deputy director, but as a person with disability who also happens to be the deputy director.” A Palestinian alumna said work had become a “big challenge” because of the pervasive “masculine culture” at her organization.

In addition, a few alumni had to contend with professional jealousy. For example, several Palestinian and South African alumni experienced negative or unsupportive colleagues “probably due to jealousy and fear that you [IFP alumna] might take their positions or jobs.” A few alumni in South Africa said they had to contend with peers who felt threatened by their international experience.

COMMUNITY IMPACTS

In the Africa and Middle East region, alumni put community at the center of their efforts. This is evident in the large number of alumni committed to supporting their home communities,²⁴ serving as role models that inspire others and introducing new approaches and programs that support community growth. Indeed, 91% of 2015 survey respondents from Africa and the Middle East said they felt they had influenced positive change in their home communities, and the fieldwork provides compelling examples of these changes.

COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL CHANGE IN COMMUNITIES

Many alumni indicated that they became more committed to contributing to social change in their communities because of their IFP experiences and the expectation IFP instilled in them to give back to their communities. Palestinian alumni said they felt “more active and more engaged in their local communities” and “more social,” “less-isolated,” and “better able to communicate with other people and inspire them.” One Kenyan alumnus raised in a slum area said he decided to return to his home country because IFP “told us that they were investing in us so that we could come back and improve our community”:

“I came back to try and utilize the skills and the knowledge that I got in improving our own society. [...] If I went into some other country or remained in the U.S., I think I wouldn’t be doing myself justice, I wouldn’t be doing the people who supported me justice, and I wouldn’t be doing Kenya justice.” —KENYAN ALUMNUS

The community contributions of IFP alumni are apparent through both their employment and volunteer work. They have established programs and associations, modeled good practices and leadership, and organized local activities supporting social change. Many alumni volunteered to support their communities, engaging in even more activities, groups, and leadership positions than before IFP. For example, one Palestinian alumnus became a member of a municipal council as well as being an active member of his hamoula (clan). Another Palestinian alumnus—inspired by what he learned from another student while

studying abroad—launched a youth council to encourage young people to participate in local government. Thanks to the youth council, “that village has become cleaner than all the villages in the area,” he said.

INCREASING COMMUNITY IMPACT

Most alumni have engaged with their communities through their work, applying skills and knowledge learned during IFP to contribute to a stronger impact on community needs and development. Alumni worked to reduce root elements of poverty, focusing on issues including education, health, environmental conservation, access for people with disabilities, and youth and women’s empowerment.

Alumni are leveraging the skills and knowledge gained through IFP to address entrenched issues with new approaches and identify core issues that had not yet been a focus. One example is a Kenyan alumna who led her team in building strong relationships with decision-makers, which resulted in human rights training for prison staff, family visiting days, and education for prisoners. “Previously, human rights organizations would just go [to the prisons] and shout and make noise, but by doing that, you can never make changes. ... So, when I took over the prison’s work ... we decided to be visiting prisons and having meetings with the officers in charge. We then went to see the commissioner of prisons and he gave us the go ahead to start visiting prisons.”

Inspired by their studies and observations during IFP, alumni contributions varied in complexity, from leveraging

²⁴ For the purposes of the tracking study, an alumnus’ “home community” is defined as the community the Fellow was associated with at the time of their application to the program. In this way, “community” can refer to a concrete geographic location—such as the village where an alumna was raised—or it can refer to the ethnic group with which an alumnus identifies. The community in question is defined by the alumni themselves.

technology to providing social services to empowering others. In South Africa, an alumnus developed an app to link the unemployed with options for daily work. Alumni provided services such as mental health and HIV/AIDS education, addressing gender-based violence, establishing a sexual assault assistance line in deaf communities, or supporting community schools. An alumna in South Africa worked with stakeholders to allow migrant children to register at their school without intimidation by community members. Many IFP alumni focused on people with disabilities, improving their access to jobs, healthcare, and land ownership.

Training and empowerment programs were often integrated into alumni work, expanding their reach and building the agency and capacity of others. In Nigeria, an alumnus developed trainings for teachers on poverty reduction and girl child education as well as trainings for community members about how to work with the hearing impaired. Another Nigerian alumnus has been teaching students from his home state about tracking and analyzing state budgets to hold leaders accountable, expertise he developed during his IFP studies:

“I am teaching a unique course, I am the only one trained to teach this course in my university, with all sense of modesty very few Nigerians have this training, it is a privilege to be one of the few.”

In Palestine, a small number of alumni have also introduced new or innovative concepts, such as environmental protection or animal rights, that were not previously recognized as directly beneficial or important for their communities. For example, one alumnus discovered through his research that a large area of land was irrigated with sewage water. His organization raised community awareness and advised farmers to plant trees that are not edible and particularly good at absorbing large amounts of sewage so that community members will avoid eating contaminated food. Another was the first in his university to hold a Ph.D. in renewable energy and developed a unique technique for turning cow dung into green energy that has exceeded the company’s need by producing 380 kilos of electricity per hour. “Instead of buying electricity, [the area] now produces and sells electricity.”



Dr. Roderick Sauls

RODERICK SAULS

South Africa (2007 cohort)
Doctorate in Sociology
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

When Roderick was seven years old, his family was forcibly removed from their Cape Town home by the Apartheid government and relocated to the Bonteheuwel township, an area in the Cape Flats area of the city designated for “coloured” communities. Life in Bonteheuwel was challenging for him and other residents, and he experienced difficulties accessing quality education, even with constant encouragement from his family. Despite these challenges, Roderick became a successful artist, printmaker, and cartographer, and was the first in his family to complete higher education by obtaining Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Fine Arts at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Before IFP, Roderick was a lecturer at UCT and co-founder of Arts@school, a nonprofit organization that works with museums and galleries to provide art classes to students in the Cape Flats. Despite difficulties finding a thesis adviser because no white faculty members would work with him, Roderick earned a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of the Western Cape. Through his graduate work, he sought to understand “how creativity can enhance the culture of learning in schools, especially amongst the previously marginalized groups.” His Ph.D. research revealed that students participating in arts classes have increased self-esteem and life- and labor-related competencies.

Although Roderick is as committed to promoting social justice as he was before IFP, he feels his IFP experience gave him more confidence, tools, and leadership skills. This in turn is helping him advance social change in Cape Flats and other marginalized communities through creativity programs that promote inclusive social and economic development. Since IFP, the results of the Arts@school program have been very positive in the Cape Flats communities. Roderick and his colleagues have seen improvements in student test scores, as well as greater interest and pride in school.

In addition to continuing to empower youth through Arts@school, Roderick serves as the head of the Department of Fine Arts at UCT. He is the first nonwhite appointee to the position, and actively works with faculty and students to “decolonize the mind” through teaching methodologies and curricula. He works with students to understand how viewpoints have been colonized and why it is important to address this to change social and cultural values in South Africa. Most of this work has been at UCT or local museums, and he also has collaborations with institutions outside South Africa.



Mohamed (third from left) with Kenyan and Irish government officials at the Agricultural Development Corporation.

MOHAMED BULLE

Kenya (2009 cohort)
Master's in Environmental Science
Boston University, U.S.

Mohamed was raised in Garissa county, an arid and traditionally marginalized part of northeastern Kenya where pastoralism and farming serve as the primary livelihoods. As one of 12 children, he often had difficulties paying for school fees, and his economic circumstances had destined him to be a camel herder. But like so many IFP alumni, Mohamed was determined to complete his studies, sometimes sneaking into school when he didn't have money to pay his fees. "A Good Samaritan would support me here and there," he recalled. "It was a struggle all the way."

Prior to his IFP fellowship, Mohamed worked in Garissa county as well as Kilifi county for the Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC), an organization that seeks to facilitate the development of local agricultural enterprises in Kenya. He returned to ADC after his time in Boston and quickly rose through the ranks before becoming the Director of Operations, a position that based him in Nairobi and allowed him to have a more direct impact on Kenya's food security policies. Both Mohamed and his colleagues noted that his Master's degree helped him advance in the organization, even helping him overcome a sort of "ethnic glass ceiling" whereby previous directors had only belonged to one clan.

As the Director of Operations, Mohamed has expanded the reach of ADC. He was able to open medical and humanitarian services for communities around farms, designating 60,000 acres for a wildlife conversation and formulating food policies. Outside of ADC, Mohamed has also been instrumental in launching and directing the Al Farooq Islamic Center and Young Muslims Association in Garissa county. Together, these organizations educate more than 1,000 students and assist with food production in the area. One of Mohamed's colleagues at the Young Muslims Association noted the integral role Mohamed has played in the organization's success. "[There] is a change in focus," he says. "[...] The organization now has a strategic plan and invests in innovative issues. ... The organization is more visible than it was before."

According to Mohamed, IFP also influenced his desire to volunteer his time, instilling a "spirit of giving back to the community. [...] Because the sponsorship I got was so they can give back to society, so I should also extend that and give back to the society as well."

SERVING AS CRUCIAL ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

For marginalized communities whose opportunities and access are extremely limited, role models are crucial for inspiring community members to aspire beyond the traditional confines of their circumstance. The qualitative fieldwork yielded numerous examples of alumni who are serving as key role models for their communities, which aligns with findings from the 2015 alumni survey where 91% of alumni in the region said they felt that they were role models for their home communities, and 76% felt others in their home communities look to them when advocating for social justice. Seeing alumni from their communities who had attained graduate degrees and had been supported because of their merit deeply affected members of alumni communities. Alumni have gained experience that community members had not imagined would be possible for them.

"... I do set an example for others from my community, in my network, that these things can be done. Education is key, education is power and you can achieve ... you realize that your path and the journey that you've walked has got quite an impact on everyone else and it motivates them as well."

—SOUTH AFRICAN ALUMNA

According to a Kenyan alumna, only 7% of her tribal community have a secondary education, highlighting the impact on the community (especially girls) that she attained a graduate degree from one of the most acclaimed universities in the world:

"I think for Kwale [people] to even think of a woman going to school is a challenge [...]. But here you are giving such a person an opportunity to get a Ph.D. and return to Kwale and demonstrate to the people there that you can be born in Kwale, but you can go to Oxford and get a Ph.D."

—KENYAN GOVERNMENT OFFICER

In addition, many alumni went beyond their specific job descriptions and roles as supervisors, teachers, mentors, and community leaders to nurture and encourage leadership in others. Alumni working in education played a critical role in supporting their students' growth and learning. For example, Palestinian students received compassionate, committed support from their professor, an IFP alumna who was "sensitive to marginalized and less advantaged students." According to her supervisor, "She would do anything to serve her students especially poor students and students with special needs. ... She would keep insisting [to the university] that this or that student should be supported until we give up and agree with her." One student said he was about to quit school, "however, [the IFP alumna] kept encouraging and supporting me for years until I graduated and earned my BA degree. ... She has a great impact on my life."

In South Africa, one alumna who teaches primary school said, "Every time I make sure that I encourage learners. ... When I see girls and boys that are capable, I encourage them. I help them to apply to universities so that they can develop themselves. ... I've got new experiences and skills that I'm using in my community ... to assist and ... share with them." Stakeholders noticed this commitment. Describing another South African alumna, one colleague noted, "[The IFP alumna] goes out of her way for any student. I worked with her with my postgraduate students and on many occasions, we work here on a Saturday or on a Friday afternoon until very late. She even goes out of her way to cater for the postgraduate students. Even if it means a cup of tea, a sandwich or whatever, we're willing to share whatever little we have. So, it's those extra things that she does."

Members from communities where other alumni originated agreed, and one Kenyan villager described "... many children and many youths have been changed through [the alumnus]. ... We can now tell somebody that this man [alumnus] was just from here, that he was one of us. That can inspire the other youths to also follow suit. ... He's an inspiration to us as a community. ... We say it and through you I'm ... thanking the organization that gave the scholarships to people like [the alumnus] because we are happy that whichever thing they gave to him through his scholarship has not gone to waste. It has made an impact on us as a community and as a country."

FINANCIAL EXPECTATIONS OF RELATIVES

The families of IFP alumni often expected that the fellowship would lead to individual wealth for IFP alumni, as well as generous financial support to others. In some cases, these expectations were not misguided. Even before accepting the fellowship, some family members raised concerns about alumni not having job security on their return, fears that, in some cases, were confirmed when alumni returned home. "When I got the scholarship, I had to do a lot of weighing and sacrificing because by then I was not given a study leave. I had to resign from my job and this really impacted negatively on me and my family because I lost an income," said one Kenyan alumna.

A minority of alumni were challenged by a struggling economy and other local constraints, causing tensions between the alumni and their relatives. "The facility to contribute to my family of course is paramount as the oldest child and the oldest sibling," explained a South African alumna. A Nigerian alumnus experienced, "People were surprised that I had no job and no house especially after being part of such a prestigious program, they did not understand the challenges."

In some cases, these family financial pressures then led to deeper emotional struggles. In fact, one Kenyan alumna said that it was "the biggest challenge I faced." And a Nigerian alumnus said, "Sometimes I get depressed about the comments made by my family members, they think I am useless, they said that despite all my education and opportunity I am not doing more. ... I have three masters and yet can do nothing, people say the biggest mistake I made is coming back to Nigeria."



Palestinian alumni participate in a focus group at the Islamic University in Gaza.

SOCIETAL IMPACTS

IFP alumni in Africa and the Middle East have reached almost every sphere of government, influencing policies, plans, and programs at local, regional, and national levels. Their degrees, particularly those from the United States or United Kingdom, played an important role in their elevated and influential statuses. Many alumni have made their mark in academia, using their universities as platforms to publish influential research or creating new departments

“My job is to make policy. I’ll receive some scripted write-ups from the community. We analyze them and then write up a policy to address some gaps and challenges. While still in the field, we ensure that there is inclusivity in our programs.”

—KENYAN ALUMNUS

that expand local capacity and knowledge in areas that affect social justice. The skills, knowledge, and enhanced commitment they acquired through IFP were the foundation for their work, inspiring societal change as an outcome of broadening individual and community change.

INFLUENCING NATIONAL POLICY AND PROGRAMS

Alumni have affected policy change from within the government, advocating for change grounded in their roles at NGOs and universities, and participating as experts on policy design teams. They have focused their efforts on everything from the criminal justice system to food security to expanding rights for those with disabilities to providing education for all. Using their higher level positions, alumni influenced policy change, programming, and planning. Alumni and stakeholders agreed that IFP was a key bridge for alumni from marginalized contexts to reach this level of recognition and participation in policy design.

“Many of [the IFP alumni] were either in academia, in NGOs, or in state institutions, have reached ... the premier agencies for policy impact. This is where policy is being debated, this is where policy is being deliberated on, this is where policy is being challenged, and ultimately this is where policy is being formulated.” —SOUTH AFRICAN ALUMNUS

Alumni across all four fieldwork countries advocated for rights for people with disabilities and implemented education reform. These alumni have developed national strategies on school programs, school safety, peer education, and more equitable distribution of budgets to

include students in need. Nigerian and Kenyan alumni played large roles in advocating and drafting policy for people with disabilities. A Palestinian alumna worked professionally and voluntarily with several institutions to improve the status of people with disabilities.

In one case, a Nigerian alumnus advocated for a mandatory employment quota in the government sector for the visually impaired, similar to what he saw during his studies in the United Kingdom. His colleague said the group of people with disabilities that the alumnus had organized to support this work would have been either sitting at home or begging on the streets had he not ignited their interest in ensuring their own rights.

“... In the next five years or so there really should not be any child with disability who is not able to be in school and that we will have few children in special schools than in inclusive settings.”

—KENYAN ALUMNUS

South African alumni have affected local policy change through their work in high-level government offices, advocating for workers’ rights with the Worker’s Union or city policy on alcohol and drug rehabilitation. And

a Kenyan alumna, after years of unemployment, was determined to contribute to societal change by working “... on a volunteer basis [with an important judicial entity]. ... The skills I had gained doing my Master’s as an IFP alumna helped me to set up the structures at the [entity]. The [entity] ended up becoming a very powerful association. That is the time when we were talking about the new constitution and ... I had to put in a lot of input in the judicial reforms; that is what you now see in the constitution.”

Alumni also used media as a platform for directly sharing information with the public, provoking reflection and dialogue that influenced a shift in societal perspectives. In Nigeria, two alumni were visually impaired journalists who leveraged the communications skills they learned during IFP to broadcast information about issues related to people with disabilities, such as disability rights and more inclusive policies. Another Nigerian alumnus wrote an article in a popular newspaper challenging a controversial state government decision on street trading that targets the poor, arguing that “this accords with the principles of social justice that the state exists because individuals, as citizens exist. That said, the interest of such citizens should be paramount at all times. Society must, therefore, operate as to take care of the reasonable needs and expectations of its citizens. It follows therefore that rules of society should not

aim to injure or hurt an individual unless such is aimed at protecting the generality of society.” The article generated intense discussion resulting in the government providing shops for the traders as compensation.

The same alumnus then used his IFP-acquired journalism skills to spark dialogue on corruption in the national assembly related to constituency projects. This is a long-standing, contentious issue that others have shied away from for fear of repercussions, which was not unfounded given that a local journalist (not an alumnus) was jailed for attempting to investigate pork projects in the state of Nigeria.

Understanding that a policy’s success relies on sufficient funding, alumni often used their IFP skills and connections to secure the necessary funding for the policies they helped to create.

“Starting with the Council of Governors, I was able to support the council to structure their fund-raising strategies and resource mobilization strategies. ... I also helped them to reach out to the 22 UN bodies and the UN bodies were able to recognize the council of governors as a one stop shop for their interventions to the communities.

—KENYAN ALUMNA



Nigerian alumnus Ernest Ogbzor and a colleague from the International Committee of the Red Cross speak with an Aljazeera reporter at the Boto internally displaced persons camp in Bauchi State. As a Cooperation Field Officer with the Red Cross, Ernest worked to help communities in the region displaced by religious conflict.



Maher during conference in Morocco to meet with other renewable energy experts from the Middle East and Europe.

MAHER MOHAMAD AL-MAGHALSEH

Palestine (2009 cohort)
Master's in New and Renewable Energy
University of Durham, UK

Maher grew up with eight siblings in the Al-Fawwar Refugee Camp in the southern West Bank. His father suffered from health issues, and as a result Maher often had to interrupt his studies so that he could work and provide for his family. Eventually, he completed his degree at the Palestine Polytechnic University (PPU) in Hebron, studying Industrial Automation Engineering. After receiving his Bachelor's degree, he was able to support his family and help them leave the refugee camp.

Maher applied to IFP after working for years as a teaching and research assistant at PPU. The ability to pursue his Master's degree in the United Kingdom with IFP support opened many doors for him, including the opportunity to stay in the UK after IFP to pursue his Ph.D.

After receiving his Master's and Doctorate in New and Renewable Energy, Maher returned to Palestine and was promoted to Assistant Professor at PPU. Since returning to PPU, he has written more than a dozen journal articles and contributed to many scientific conferences. In his current role, Maher has used his English language, proposal writing, research, and leadership skills to increase the capacity of an Engineering Department that now serves more than 1,400 students. Many of the graduate students Maher has worked with at PPU have won top prizes in the new and renewable energy field, a nascent and promising area of study in Palestine and the MENA region at-large.

Maher's contributions go beyond academics. PPU's Dean of the engineering department emphasized that Maher returned to Palestine "more open-[minded], especially towards people from different cultures, less shy, and more self-confident." This has translated into him actively participating in the development of new academic programs and fostering positive and supportive relationships with all of his students. Additionally, he worked with several European Universities to establish a MSc program in Environmental Engineering and Renewable Energy at PPU. He has organized trips abroad for his graduate students, leveraging the network he developed in Europe so that his students can present and publish their work. Maher also continues to play a key role in the field of renewable energy as a consultant for private companies as well as public and nonprofit organizations.

PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH ACADEMIA

Leveraging the broad reach of universities, IFP alumni have also made impacts on national academic institutions, in university policy, research and academic contributions, and curriculum development and innovation. Some alumni focused on more equitable and quality education, and others created new departments in the fields of health and the environment. All are equipping the next generation with the necessary tools and understanding for social change. Many alumni have contributed to their fields and ongoing dialogue about social justice issues through their contributions in academic forums, conferences, and publications.

A few South African alumnae have been passionately fighting for the decolonization of education through their university's policies, which has spread to other universities around the country. Another South African alumnus was planning to extend his lectures on issues related to the "decolonizing of the mind" to reach students across the country. And he already noted "the importance of my work amongst the diverse cultural groups has led academics in other disciplines such as the science and medicine, to use my 'voice' to strengthen their intellectual studies of the past 'breakdowns' or 'setbacks' of the majority of people in South Africa since colonialism."

In Palestine, two alumni have had extensive impact on their fields of health and the environment through their universities; developing new programs, establishing new departments, and conducting innovative, influential research that is published and widely distributed. Moreover, these alumni were able to overcome tensions between governance in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and write a joint report about health issues in both territories, reflecting their notion that conflict should not affect medical care.

CHALLENGING SOCIAL NORMS

Boosted with confidence, clarity, and capacity, IFP alumni challenged social norms that had been generally considered taboo or too risky in their home countries, countries where conservatism and conflict can be prevalent. Although raising highly charged topics bore real risks, alumni leveraged their elevated status to engage others in productively discussing and addressing these difficult topics in a way that affected

meaningful social change. As one Nigerian alumna so eloquently summed it up, “I am not the way I use to be before I left [for my IFP studies]. Now when I see a problem, I talk about it and look for ways to confront it.”

Alumni strategically approached promoting social justice, addressing each issue as a step toward a larger shift in social norms. As a South African supervisor described, “I think the selection of the topics on which [the alumna] does research, cyber bullying, bullying in schools, you know, the plight of sex offenders, the way the justice system, all the negative impact and how to get around that. Her focus is exactly on that because she really makes the difference with her research.”

“You have to believe in yourself and believe in your ability to not only affect change, but also to create the environment where you can also make that change, you don’t wait for an opportunity to be handed over to you [...]. Wherever there was an opening, I forced myself through the door”

—NIGERIAN ALUMNUS

In Nigeria, issues like rape, gender-based violence, and rights for people with disabilities were considered taboo, while topics such as corruption and government accountability unnerved top leaders and were generally avoided. Alumni began to address aspects of these issues in their communities, such as the collaborative efforts of three alumni confronting the rising cases of rape among the hearing-impaired community. They worked with the Ministry of Women Affairs to conduct workshops on sexual assault and how to report it. Community members reported that there has been a shift where sexual assault was more often reported and rape more freely discussed.

Another example is a Nigerian Fellow who has used the skills he learned during IFP to negotiate with oil companies about the environmental effects of gas flares, which a community member offered, “[The alumnus] has influenced the oil companies to give a scholarship to some of the community members” and the alumnus was appointed as the community’s representative in the federal-level technical negotiating committee working on safer gas flaring practices.



Kenyan alumnus Aggrey Willis Otieno and students playing educational board games at his former primary school in Nairobi’s Korogocho slum, where he was born and raised.

IFP ALUMNI COLLABORATIONS

Alumni connected and collaborated with each other to contribute to their collective intention of building a just society. Alumni sought each other to support their organizations, particular projects, or events. Some recruited alumni for positions where they knew the alumna/us had particular expertise. In one case, a Nigerian alumna engaged several IFP alumni to participate in her radio program about people with disabilities in governance, while another recruited an IFP Fellow to join the Board of Directors of her organization.

Many reported long-standing friendships with alumni, continuing to connect and share information about mutually interesting topics. One South African alumna said, “I’m still friends with a lot of the IFP alumni now. ... I do meet with not only IFP holders, but other scholarship holders and see where areas of collaboration can be, what way of collaboration can come out of those interactions. ... So through those connections or through those contacts, I’ve got people that I can actually put on the programme. ... I’m always recruiting for these long-term programs, then I look at a cohort of people and their extended networks to see if there’s anyone that I can put on the project.”

IFP alumni associations varied in success according to each country’s specific context. In Palestine, when IFP funds were available, the IFP alumni association was a channel for alumni to share their work by organizing public lectures, professional development activities, and a conference on Social Justice in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Kenyan alumni association succeeded in implementing a number of projects together, although much of the time members struggled to make joint decisions.

CROSSCUTTING THEME: IMPACTS ON WOMEN

A key theme that emerged from the qualitative fieldwork was that women have experienced an additional layer of discrimination in comparison to their male counterparts. In the fight for social justice, women were an even further marginalized community and had to overcome more societal obstacles to participate in IFP as well as to succeed post-fellowship. “It is surprising to see that a woman in a conservative part of the country is able to achieve so much working with men and other stakeholders,” said a Nigerian community member, speaking to the challenges that many IFP alumnae have faced in their efforts to advance change after IFP.

“Women with disabilities suffer for both being a woman and being a person with disability. ... Their chances in marriage is less than other women. ... The same applies to their chances in education, and in getting a job in the labor market.”
— PALESTINIAN ALUMNA

SELECTION AND VALIDATION

Although women and men were surprised at having been selected by IFP after years of discrimination and frustration with their lack of learning opportunities, women expressed feeling an even deeper level of validation and self-worth related to their acceptance to IFP. One South African alumna explained, “I couldn’t believe that they had picked me for America, the village girl. I was overjoyed, at that point I said I shouldn’t undermine myself because I thought those people were better than me. It made me feel a bit special too that I was actually worth something more than I thought.”

The Nigerian IFP team intentionally focused on selecting alumni from a conservative part of the country where women lacked education and lived in extreme poverty, recognizing the women’s significant marginalization. One Fellow from that area struggled to get an education as a child, went on to receive a doctorate in the United Kingdom, and advocated for the state to build a school for female street children and include women in the community leadership where they make decisions on behalf of other women. A village leader said, “We would have still been living in the stone ages because we didn’t know the relevance of a woman, we would have been seeing them as another creature that should be used and useless, we have seen how useful they can be.” This community became one of the most progressive in the area, which in turn

inspired an alumna from another area in Nigeria where a community member said, “Men who rarely listen to us take us more seriously now, after they have attended one of [the alumna’s] lessons [on women’s empowerment].”

Overcoming these additional challenges led some women to feel even more confident and transformed by the program. For example, a South African Fellow who works as a schoolteacher said that leaving her village and obtaining a Master’s degree in Durban “has changed my whole being, my way of thinking, my way of seeing things ... because of this Ford Foundation Scholarship, now I am able to see. It’s like somebody has opened my way of thinking and my eyes. ... There is a huge advancement of my life.” As a female Palestinian alumna described, “I have become more able to express myself and have more courage to express my opinion in society and to stand for my rights ... as a human ... and as a woman.”

In fact, the evaluation teams in Nigeria and South Africa directly observed the impact of female IFP alumni empowerment during workshops where the majority of workshop participants were men, and the women were the most vocal group, which is remarkable given the climate where men traditionally dominate discussions.

FEMALE ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

Women often served as role models and mentors for others in their organizations and communities. One

Nigerian alumna worked with her organization, sharing her learnings from IFP and encouraging others to further build their capacities. According to her colleague, she “has enhanced staff development because a lot of our staffs have undergone training at [the alumna’s] insistence. Like for me, next month I will be in Tanzania for programme management course.” A Nigerian alumna said that simply her presence—as a female from a traditional, Muslim caliphate community where higher education is not easily accessible—in a high-profile position, made possible in part because of her IFP studies, has inspired younger women. She said, “So many people looking up to me and when I take the chair now, I will be the first professor [in my field] from [my community]; male or female. This is important because the likely next person who will also take the chair as a professor is also a female and the next that will do that is a female and so what does that tell me? They were encouraged by my presence.”

In Palestine, one alumna was the first female from her village to travel outside of the country and now she has “started hearing about girls who have convinced their families to allow them to study outside the country using me as a successful example. [...] It turned out that I, unintentionally, have contributed to breaking this negative barrier or social norm.”

Some communities in Nigeria were concerned about negative effects of a woman studying abroad; these concerns were assuaged when the IFP alumnae became role models on their return. One alumna said, “When I came back, people realized that a woman can study, come back, remain herself, decent and contribute to her community.”

RESTRICTIVE FAMILY EXPECTATIONS

Families were generally supportive of female and male alumni during their studies, seeing IFP as a positive opportunity. Many reported some level of challenges related to living separately from their families. However, family support differed significantly depending on a Fellow’s gender, aligning with their society’s traditional expectations for women to be caretakers and men to financially support the family. Each family made their own choices about how to address these challenges. Some families accompanied the alumni and experienced their own growth from this opportunity that would not have otherwise been available to them. Others made alternative



Titi Yakubu presents tree planting materials to community members in Bunga, a village in Bauchi state, Nigeria.

TITI YAKUBU

Nigeria (2004 cohort)
Master’s in Sustainable International Development
Brandeis University, U.S.

Titi grew up in Hawul, a community in northeastern Nigeria, and like many girls in this conservative and economically marginalized part of the country, she faced barriers in her efforts to get a quality education. Eventually she earned a Bachelor’s degree and dedicated herself to women’s education and expanding opportunities for women in northeastern Nigeria. She had just been offered a promotion at the Development Exchange Centre (DEC) when she was selected for IFP, and she left the organization to pursue her Master’s in Sustainable International Development at Brandeis.

Titi’s exposure to new cultures in the United States taught her to embrace diversity, a change in mindset that she brought back with her to Nigeria after IFP. Titi credits her IFP experience with making her see the importance of higher education for women and encouraging her daughter to continue in school. As a result, her daughter now has a Ph.D. and is a university lecturer.

Not long after her return to Nigeria, Titi went back to lead DEC as its Executive Director, reclaiming the position she had given up to pursue her IFP fellowship. Although she experienced challenges re-adjusting to a different work and life structure than in the United States, Titi has made many organizational improvements at DEC. She has re-organized the governance of the organization to include more women in leadership, sometimes working with other IFP alumnae. The organization has increased their reach from nine states to 21 and is now serving close to 200,000 Nigerians through microcredit schemes and other development projects. By applying the grant writing skills she gained during IFP, Titi has also secured funding from the UNDP and the Nigerian federal government, among other organizations, to improve DEC’s microcredit programs and ensure the organization’s sustainability.

According to DEC records, more than 170,000 women have been able to access microfinance loans through the organization. Titi has overseen the expansion of DEC projects beyond microfinance, with DEC initiating projects to increase access to education, build schools, increase access to maternal healthcare in the area, and improve intercommunity relations. Those in her community remark that Titi has also sought to change the perceptions of women so that they can access more economic opportunities.



Samia Hawamda

SAMIA HAWAMDA

Palestine (2003 cohort)
Master's in Psychology
University of Jordan

Born to a refugee family with nine siblings in Nablus, West Bank, Samia faced many financial barriers in her efforts to pursue her education. Thanks to the encouragement of her family, especially her mother, she was able to complete secondary school. However, the First Intifada put her post-secondary studies on hold for three years as she waited for the Israeli military to reopen universities in the West Bank. Eventually, Samia received her Bachelor's degree in Psychology and was hired as a counselor working with women and refugees in Palestine.

Samia initially wanted to study sex education during her IFP fellowship, but because of pressures and rigid social norms in her conservative community, she chose to study psychology instead. The Second Intifada hurt the job market, so despite her new qualifications, Samia had difficulties returning to Palestine and finding work after IFP. She was unemployed for months and spent four years working outside her field before being hired as a counselor at the Women's Studies Center in Nablus. Eventually she was hired by the Counseling Department at Birzeit University.

In her time at Birzeit, Samia has worked hard to open the department to students who suffer from social, psychological, and academic problems. The department has grown to support more than 13,000 students, an accomplishment Samia's colleague attributes to her efforts: "There is no doubt that without Samia's hard work and qualifications [...] and the work of the rest of her team, none of this could have been achieved." Samia has implemented several initiatives, including group counseling sessions for students and workshops on domestic violence, sexual assault, and reproductive health. She leverages the network she gained during IFP to attract partners for her initiatives and increase the capacity of her department to better serve students.

In addition to the capacity-building Samia has engaged in at her institution, she established an IFP-like scholarship for her students at Birzeit. Inspired by her own financial difficulties to accessing education and the IFP model, Samia worked with disadvantaged students attending Birzeit to find them financial support through her extensive networks in Palestine and abroad. She has, herself, financially supported students during their university studies. She has also extended her impact and commitment to education by continually working to provide resources and financial support to local refugee communities and schools.

arrangements to meet family needs at home during their absence, such as a Kenyan alumna who changed her daughter's school and held her back a grade because the Fellow would not be available to provide academic support after school. In Palestine, many women studied at local universities in response to strong family pressures.

In some extreme cases, when women chose to study abroad, there were relationship breakdowns attributed to male partners' feelings of inferiority. Particularly in Kenya and South Africa, female alumni reported their relationships disintegrating because they chose to study abroad. This occurred to a lesser degree for the male alumni.

EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS

During their IFP studies, alumni gained a deeper understanding of the complexity and intersectionality of discrimination and marginalization, particularly for women and girls. They also learned that these issues are best addressed by providing space and building capacity for those women and girls to participate in creating and implementing a solution.

"I never thought I was supposed to have an education or even allow my daughter to have an education. I just thought that maybe when she finished secondary school, she will get married and she will be in her husband's home. But my perspective had changed, today my daughter is a Ph.D. holder and she is a lecturer in the university." —NIGERIAN ALUMNA

In addition, some male alumni described their own awakening to women's issues during their studies and changed their behavior to begin treating female colleagues as they would their male counterparts, funding their own family members' education regardless of gender, and encouraging girls in their families to continue to further their education. For example, one Palestinian alumnus helped "70 female students in his town who dropped out of school by organizing classes for them. ... As a result, they managed to finish their high school and some of them have enrolled in universities."



South African IFP alumni and IFP staff in 2008.

Most alumni work with women, girls, and youth in some aspect of their employment. Many alumni work projects intended to improve women's lives and rights focused on a community-wide solution, recognizing that for sustainable change to occur for one group, it must involve the entire community. One example was a Kenyan alumna who founded a project of girls' empowerment that focuses on eliminating the widespread practices of female genital mutilation and early marriages. He saw impact, saying, "We can see the community members changing their attitude. ... Another major step was in getting the first person to say that he/she has accepted not to cut their girl child; this influenced others to emulate this. ... We've managed to save quite a number of girls."

Education was seen as the key to alleviating poverty and building the toolkit that girls and women can use as they advocate for change in their communities. "I've learned

that as an educated person, I'm the right person that can emancipate women in the community by encouraging them ... giving them the importance of education, their education and the education of their children. I'm working in a very rural society, which I think it needs educated people," remarked a South African alumna.

One Nigerian alumna mentors 30 girls in the STEM field, teaching them skills she learned during the Pre-Academic Training, such as PowerPoint, data analysis, and communications skills. A South African alumna said that she had been supporting entrepreneurs as they started up their own small companies, which she felt had a component of social change and social justice because she had been empowering others from her community to be entrepreneurial. She also supported the agricultural sector, played "an avid role" in mentoring young women in many fields, and created a network for other businesswomen.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The overarching goal of IFP was to improve social justice across the globe through higher education. The fellowship was designed to revolutionize access to higher education and transform it from being an opportunity for the elite to being merit-based. Simply by gaining a degree in higher education, people from marginalized communities were able to participate in society at levels and in ways that were previously unavailable to them. Most alumni have dedicated themselves to improving social justice through activities ranging from their daily interactions to developing national policies.

CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

When alumni were asked what social justice meant to them, their responses were as unique as each individual and their particular circumstances. The underlying concepts included equitable distribution, respect, and equal access, rights, and treatment. One Nigerian alumna defined social justice as “the provision of equity for people within the community,” whether it is “physical, emotional or educational.” A South African alumnus said, “It’s important that we need higher education, nowadays we need to invest in knowledge, through knowledge we can solve these [social] problems that are affecting us.”

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE

“Any country which ignores the development of university education or higher education for that matter, is actually digging its own grave because it will not have individuals with skills, confidence, commitment, and knowledge to support the development of that nation.”

—KENYAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

This study showed that higher education was critical for improving social justice in these four focus locations. Stakeholders and alumni highly valued the impact that a higher education degree had on their ability to affect change and, as a result, improve social change in their local contexts. Many alumni felt their unique, individual opportunity was actually their community’s opportunity; that the benefits derived from their degrees were the

community’s benefits. In addition, the Fellow’s increased influence and social mobility as a result of their higher education brought the perspectives and interests of marginalized communities to higher level processes from which they had been traditionally excluded.

FOR PUBLIC GOOD

IFP alumni expressed that higher education is a privilege, and not just a personal benefit but also a benefit for the greater good. “Higher education is not just about going to the university and getting papers; it’s acquiring knowledge and skills that can help us to solve the challenges of our time,” said a Kenyan alumnus.

“I think it’s an opportunity to see that the education that I have must not end up with me ... it must benefit everyone that I come across, but especially in my case I have a passion for women”

—SOUTH AFRICAN ALUMNA

The more there are effective programs and services in marginalized communities because of local leaders gaining higher education, such as through the IFP fellowship, the more these educated leaders serve the public good.

INCREASED SOCIAL CAPITAL AND MOBILITY

A majority of alumni expressed that their social capital increased after IFP. This was particularly pertinent for Palestinian alumni, as a sociologist and local expert noted, “Historically, due to losing everything they had when they were forced to leave their homes and towns in 1948 and due to living in poor, crowded, refugee camps, the main chance

for Palestinian refugees for improving their socioeconomic status or what sociologists call ‘upward social mobility’ is through education in general and higher education in particular. The same applies to disabled people and women.”

In many cases, alumni referenced the education they received in a foreign country as additionally increasing their recognition and boosting their careers, especially when the education was from the United States and the United Kingdom. “It is just different, people treat you differently when you have been abroad, especially to study a course like public health [which is prestigious in Nigeria],” explained a Nigerian alumnus.

Alumni leveraged this social capital to increase their social mobility. For many, as described in the findings section, their promotions also led to improved personal financial security and their personal investments in communities. Higher education provided alumni with deep and unique expertise sought after to contribute to dialogues, policy design, and decision-making processes. As one Kenyan alumnus who influences national and international organizations said, “The skills and the knowledge that I got have enabled me to be in different spaces and to carry out different tasks.”

IFP’S TRANSPARENCY AS INSPIRATION

The alumni’s cultural contexts often normalized a level of corruption and discrimination. Alumni said that when they applied for the IFP fellowship, they did not expect to be selected because they did not have the right connections; some almost did not apply in the first place because of that. This respectful and equitable treatment of alumni continued throughout the program. For some alumni, it was their first experience with fairness and transparency and it increased their resolve to create fair and equitable opportunities and practices in their own work.

Alumni were surprised and impressed by the merit-based, inclusive design. In fact, one IFP staff member said that they purposefully selected alumni who “never imagined themselves as having an opportunity to pursue a degree in-country or abroad and had little hope to pursue higher education due to economic and social barriers and commitments.”

“When I saw the advertisement in the paper, I applied knowing the Kenyan culture. I applied just for the sake of it. I had forgotten all about it until the day I got a phone call and I was asked to come for an interview. ... I was not very sure whether I should go or not because the notion I had was that they had already taken their people and therefore they just wanted to fill the papers with my name.”

—KENYAN ALUMNUS

“I was ranked #1 student in my class. ... I applied too many times to scholarships but with no success. When I’ve heard about Ford Fellowship I said to myself [out of frustration] this is going to be my last time to apply for higher education scholarships. ... The [IFP] selection process was fair and professional. ... IFP made me believe that there is still justice in this world.”

—PALESTINIAN ALUMNA

Inspired by this transparent and professional approach, a number of alumni applied the principles, values, and approaches they learned from IFP’s design. For example, those working with scholarship programs adapted recruitment and selection processes, recordkeeping systems, and technology applications, among others. Many described supporting and creating opportunities for the disadvantaged based on their merit and potential rather than “current” capabilities. For example, one Palestinian alumnus inspired directly by the IFP design—particularly the program’s approach to supporting alumni with disabilities—applied that approach to the way he has integrated students with disabilities at his school.

“When [South African IFP alumna] came ... she initiated a small research programme within the department where we are empowering our post-graduate students. ... She initiated that and we were able to assist them, call them for a cohort on Saturdays, go through with them all the steps of engaging in research, and it’s been a very empowering programme for our students.”

—COLLEAGUE OF A SOUTH AFRICAN ALUMNA

STUDY REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

This report and our fieldwork in Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, and South Africa are the culmination of three years of qualitative fieldwork in 10 IFP locations and three regions: Asia, Latin America, and Africa and the Middle East. During this time, we have approached our research with focus and determination as well as flexibility and understanding. We have learned after each round of data collection, reflecting and improving our methods. As we move to the next round of data collection, with the 2018 IFP Global Alumni Survey and the 2018 Organizations Survey, we consider what we have learned thus far to improve our research design and methods.

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING ABOUT ALUMNI TRACKING STUDIES?

- **Impacts on sub-groups of marginalized alumni.** IFP focused on different sub-groups of marginalized populations in each location, be it the disabled, religious minorities, or women. The outcomes and impacts in our qualitative fieldwork speak to the relative experiences of these various sub-groups. In Africa and the Middle East, for the first time, we decided to dedicate a chapter to the outcomes of women, as unexpected findings relating to women emerged and resonated in each of the four locations. Although the program had significant impacts on both genders, the findings related to women warranted additional analysis. Qualitative data collection allowed researchers to delve further into the relative impacts on this group and voice their own perspectives about the active participation of IFP alumnae during the participatory focus groups.
- **Regional analysis and its perils.** In some ways, this third region of data collection was the most challenging. We collected data in four locations (the previous reports focused on three), and we faced the challenge of presenting data for three countries from East and West Africa alongside a territory in another very distinct region, the Middle East. Nevertheless, we took an approach grounded in our experiences from Asia and Latin America and compared the findings from each location rather than generalizing themes into broad statements. We share this finding to encourage other researchers to not shy away from comparative qualitative research because it may surface interesting comparisons that would not be seen otherwise.
- **Local context and realities.** Our fieldwork exposed the local economic, social, and political realities that IFP alumni continue to face in their home contexts and the potential challenges that endure related to marginalization and discrimination. In 2018, we are launching our second IFP Global Alumni Survey, which will be sent to more than 4,000 IFP alumni in 22 countries. We have added questions asking alumni about the local social and political climate as well as the job markets to understand better the constraints alumni may face in securing work or furthering their social justice goals. We have also updated our questions related to personal and professional change to reflect conclusions of the fieldwork.
- **Impacts beyond the home country.** IIE worked with local researchers to conduct fieldwork in IFP locations to visit alumni in their home communities. However, during our research, we discovered that we were missing a voice in alumni who are currently out of their home country (approximately 16% according to the 2015 Global Alumni Survey) who may be contributing to social justice in various ways. As a result, we plan to conduct select focus groups in fall 2018 with IFP alumni in the United States and the United Kingdom, where many of these alumni currently reside, to understand how these alumni may be contributing to social justice in their countries of residence, their home countries, or elsewhere.

HOW CAN THIS STUDY INFORM HIGHER EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS?

- **Scholarships for transparency and accountability.**

In countries that continue to struggle with corruption and nepotism, scholarship programs that have transparent and accountable selection criteria and processes can help break the cycle and serve as important examples of equitable access to higher education. In Africa and the Middle East, alumni noted how inspired and motivated they were by the IFP model and its commitment to social justice access for those otherwise excluded. Scholarship programs that keep this focus can serve a social justice purpose by leveraging the ability of their alumni to break these circles of inclusion and exclusion.

- **Expectations and re-entry challenges.** In Africa and the Middle East, alumni noted the high expectations they and their families had as a result of the scholarship. Some left their places of employment to participate in the program, and upon return, were faced with high expectations to not only bring back resources from their scholarship but also be placed in high-paying and high-powered positions. Higher education scholarship programs implemented in developing countries face this pressure and need to be aware of the re-entry challenges alumni may face. Expectations add a layer to this complexity, as the pressures of those around the scholarship recipient may further exacerbate the situation. Programs must consider the re-entry mechanisms and anticipate the economic and social realities that recipients will return to after their scholarship program ends. Program support during this re-entry phase is critical.



South Africa lead researcher Adesuwa Vanessa Agbedahin (left) and co-researcher Faith Mkwanzani (right) with community member Richard Maluleke. Maluleke is pastor of the Revelation Church of God and founder of the Community Education Programme in Mavalani, Giyani, in South Africa's Limpopo province.

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These four research teams worked tirelessly over several months to meet with alumni and other stakeholders, collecting an enormous amount of data, conducting country-level analyses, and providing valuable feedback on the draft regional report. At every stage, they carried out their work with passion, professionalism, and dedication. We are grateful to have partnered with them.

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Mousa of AMIDEAST also shared insights from her time as a Program Officer for IFP in the West Bank.

The IFP Alumni Tracking Study benefits from the ongoing guidance of its Expert Working Group, a team of researchers who advise the study's methodology. In addition to Tamara Fox and Benjamin Lough, current members include Everlyn Anyal, Jorge Balán, William Dant, Judy Diers, Amparo Hofmann-Pinilla, Martha Loerke, Mary McDonnell, Patricia Rosenfield, and Ankit Suri. We would also like to thank Douglas Wood for his support and participation in the Expert Working Group throughout the qualitative fieldwork.

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Judith Kallick and Andrea Brown Murga

Photography: Ghassan Abu-Hutheb (21); Adesuwa Vanessa Agbedahin and Faith Mkwanzani (3; 33); Maher Al-Maghalseh (24); © Rolex Awards/Tomas Bertelsen (Cover; 25); Mohamed Bulle (20); Samia Hawamda (28); Philomina Nneka Nweze (13); Roderick Sauls (19); Diana Whitten (14); Titi Yakubu (27); IFP alumni (all others).

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IFP ALUMNI TRACKING STUDY

The IFP Alumni Tracking Study explores the personal pathways and career trajectories of alumni of the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program (IFP). Launched in 2013 with support from the Ford Foundation, the study is being carried out by the Center for Academic Mobility Research and Impact at the Institute of International Education (IIE). Between 2001 and 2013, IFP supported graduate-level education for 4,305 emerging social justice leaders from 22 countries in the developing world. IIE is collecting data at the global, regional, and country levels using a combination of surveys and local fieldwork. The Center plans to publish ongoing findings from the tracking study until the study concludes in 2023.

STUDY TIMELINE



IN THIS SERIES

REPORT 1—SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABLE CHANGE: THE IMPACTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, APRIL 2016

Our first report shares the results of the 2015 IFP Global Alumni Survey and the responses of 1,861 IFP alumni from 22 countries. The findings show that investing in higher education for individuals can have significant multiplier effects for communities, organizations, and societies. By studying the link between higher education and social justice and the effect that higher education can have on marginalized populations and leadership, Social Justice and Sustainable Change gives us a first look at the long-term impacts of international higher education programs like IFP.

REPORT 2—SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERS IN ACTION: IFP IMPACTS IN ASIA, MARCH 2017

Our second report provides an in-depth look at the lives and careers of IFP alumni in three Asian countries—India, Indonesia, and the Philippines—detailing the different pathways alumni have taken and the ways they have leveraged their skills and networks to effect change. Drawing upon focus groups and interviews with 274 IFP alumni and community stakeholders, this qualitative research highlights the stories behind the numbers shared in the study's first report. Findings from Social Justice Leaders in Action provide insights about not only the life-altering impact of IFP at an individual level but also how that transformative power extends through alumni to their organizations, communities, and societies.

REPORT 3—LEADERS, CONTEXTS, AND COMPLEXITIES: IFP IMPACTS IN LATIN AMERICA, NOVEMBER 2017

Our third report shares the stories of IFP alumni in three Latin American countries: Brazil, Guatemala, and Mexico. Based on interviews and focus groups with 268 alumni and other stakeholders, the fieldwork paints a complex picture that highlights the opportunities of the IFP experience against the challenges posed by local social and political realities. IFP alumni in these countries are serving in leadership roles, most often in academia, government, and civil society organizations. At the same time, home-country contextual challenges have limited the extent to which some alumni have been able to advance their careers, their organizations, and social progress more generally. Taken together, these findings show that local environments matter.

INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Center for Academic Mobility Research and Impact

For nearly a century, the Institute of International Education (IIE) has been a world leader in international education, working to build more peaceful and equitable societies by advancing scholarship, building economies, and promoting access to opportunity. As a not-for-profit with 19 offices and affiliates worldwide, IIE collaborates with a range of corporate, government, and foundation partners across the globe to design and manage scholarship, study abroad, workforce training, and leadership development programs. The IIE Center for Academic Mobility Research and Impact brings together IIE's in-house research expertise to conduct and disseminate timely research in the field of international student and faculty mobility. The Center is also a leader in studying the impact of international exchange, leadership, and scholarship programs. The Center is currently carrying out a 10-year longitudinal impact study of the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program (IFP), among other projects.

THE FORD FOUNDATION

The Ford Foundation is an independent, nonprofit grant-making organization. For more than 80 years, it has worked with courageous people on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. With headquarters in New York, the foundation has offices in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program (IFP) was initiated in 2001 through the single largest grant in the foundation's history and was housed at IIE throughout its operation.