Is higher education a path to
social change?
ORIGINS
JOURNEYS
RETURNS
FORD FOUNDATION
INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIPS PROGRAM
2001-2010
The Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program (IFP) began with the conviction that social justice is advanced through equitable higher education. The program provides fellowships for post-graduate study to emerging leaders from marginalized and excluded communities. For the past decade, IFP has worked to educate, empower and enable thousands of talented individuals from among the world’s most vulnerable populations, to transform not only their own lives but also to foster social change, one community at a time.

Building on more than 50 years of international grantmaking and a strong network of field offices and international staff, in 2000 the Ford Foundation decided to create a new kind of fellowship program geared toward grassroots leaders and social innovators. Foundation trustees and staff concluded that, if given the right tools, socially committed individuals from disadvantaged communities could succeed in postgraduate studies and would advance social change upon returning home.

To realize this vision, in 2001 the Ford Foundation awarded the largest single grant in its history — $280 million over 10 years — to launch IFP. Recognizing IFP’s achievements, in 2006 the Ford Foundation pledged an additional $75 million for the program. To date, IFP has selected nearly 3,900 Fellows in 22 countries, and will have supported approximately 4,300 post-graduate students when selections conclude in 2010.
WHO ARE IFP FELLOWS?

IFP Fellows are from some of the most disenfranchised communities in Asia, Russia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

- Half are women
- Over two-thirds come from rural areas or small cities and towns
- Over 80% are first-generation university students
- They have experienced injustice due to poverty, rural origins, ethnicity, and gender

In China, India, Russia, and the Southeast Asian countries of Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, IFP has selected nearly 1,700 Fellows. In contrast to elite programs, IFP Asia/Russia Fellows are from ethnic minorities, outlying regions, remote islands, rural areas, and the poorest social classes.

In Africa and the Middle East, where young people aged 18-24 have limited access to higher education, IFP has already selected more than 1,250 Fellows and has broken new ground by recruiting women and members of rural, nomadic, and refugee communities.

In Latin America, IFP has selected more than 900 Fellows, the majority of whom are from indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, which experience the region’s highest concentrations of poverty.
“I grew up in a polygamous family with fifteen siblings. My late father was a nomadic pastoralist, so we always moved from one part of the country to another in search of water and pasture for our animals. We dropped out of school on many occasions, but my father was determined to give us an education, even though he never went to school himself.”

IFP Fellow Aaron Mushengyezi, UGANDA
Rodrigo Pérez Ramírez was born in an indigenous community in Oaxaca, Mexico, and became an activist for the sustainable use of forests in some of the country’s poorest communities. With an IFP fellowship, Rodrigo attended the University of Zaragoza, Spain. After obtaining a master’s degree in renewable energy, he returned to work on the design and construction of small wind turbines. “Wind turbines can prevent further degradation of natural resources, which are central to indigenous community life,” says Rodrigo. He is now the General Coordinator for the Project on Sustainable Development for the Rural and Indigenous Communities of the Semi-Arid Northwest (PRODESNOS) and continues to work on renewable energy.

One of IFP’s most innovative features is its decentralized model, which balances global goals and policies with local implementation. IFP has partnered with nearly two dozen locally based partner organizations, called International Partners.

International Partners analyze local and regional inequalities and develop innovative recruitment and selection procedures to reach the most talented candidates from disadvantaged communities. They manage local systems for recruiting, selecting, advising, mentoring, placing, and monitoring Fellows.

The IFP Secretariat, based at the International Fellowships Fund (IFF) in New York, coordinates strategic planning for the program as a whole. The Secretariat administers program resources, manages global operations, and ensures consistent application of program policies. The Institute of International Education (IIE) in New York administers the Fellows’ grants worldwide. Other specialized organizations assist with international placements and program evaluation.
Solange Pereira da Rocha is a descendant of enslaved Africans brought to Brazil. “Even in the 20th Century, Brazilian elites sought to ‘whiten’ Brazil and disparage black contributions to Brazilian life,” says Solange. Using her IFP fellowship to earn a doctoral degree in history at the Federal University of Pernambuco, Solange began to chronicle the many historical and cultural contributions of Afro-Brazilians, and her dissertation was awarded top honors by Brazil’s National Historical Association. Solange is currently a professor in the Department of History at the Federal University of Paraíba, where she teaches and conducts research on slavery and affirmative action policies.
Paul Onyango Ogalo comes from Kenya, a country in which conflicts over land contribute to violence and poverty. With an IFP scholarship, he earned a master’s degree in coexistence and conflict at Brandeis University, conducting fieldwork through Gawad Kalinga (GK), a national NGO in the Philippines. GK promotes peace-building activities between Muslims and Christians by building houses for the homeless, using development to bridge gaps between religious and ethnic communities. “The experience,” says Ogalo, “will offer me the opportunity to look at Kenya’s land conflict with a new lens.”

“In the beginning we looked for target categories, but now we also search for the people who will have great impact.”

A Vietnamese selection panel member on expanding eligibility to candidates who demonstrate sustained commitment to their home communities.
Mayu Mohanna grew up in Lima, Peru, during the turbulent presidency of Alberto Fujimori. With the award from IFP, Mayu earned a master's degree in photography and related media at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. She now works in Peru, photographing and organizing images of Peru’s political violence during the 1980s and 1990s. “It is important,” says Mayu, “to remember.” Her curatorial projects include a landmark exhibition of a century of images and testimonies from victims of Peru’s internal conflicts.
About one-third of IFP Fellows have chosen to study in North America, a third in the United Kingdom and continental Europe, and another third in their home nations and regions.

With lessons learned from each new cohort, IFP has systematically addressed the challenges that Fellows face, offering academic and personal support to ensure their success. The IFP networks of program partners and university advisers help Fellows to acquire “cultural capital” by building relationships with socially committed individuals from throughout the world.

IFP offers Fellows pre-academic training, leadership skills building, and short-term internship and language training programs, as well as opportunities for networking and professional development. This rich array of educational options enables Fellows to develop a sense of shared and wider purpose across borders, even for those who choose to study locally.

IFP provides each Fellow with something few programs do — the opportunity to study in any part of the world, including within their home country or region. This “portable fellowship” is designed to promote educational mobility and the exchange of knowledge worldwide. The global system of International Partners supports students through each step of their transformative study programs.
“Going to another world, the cultural shock is always a challenge. No orientation can fully prepare you for what you are going to face until you get there.”

IFP Fellow Charles Mulekwa, UGANDA
PLANNING FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

IFP provides newly selected awardees, “Fellows-elect,” with customized testing, preparatory training, educational advising, and placement assistance to ensure academic success at their chosen universities. Fellows-elect receive these services in their own countries during the year prior to their postgraduate studies. This has been one of IFP’s most significant innovations, and has proven extremely effective.

Working with local providers, IFP’s preparatory training includes study and research skills, English language training, academic writing in English and other languages, and computer training.

International Partners advise Fellows-elect regarding courses of study, academic support available at host universities, and professional opportunities. They also offer guidance related to academic culture, teaching styles, and life as an international student.

In some countries, volunteer academic advisors based at local universities mentor Fellows from the time of their selection to graduation. These home country connections prepare Fellows-elect for their academic programs and keep them anchored in their home countries, language, and culture — helping to ensure that they return home after concluding their studies.

IFP’s results demonstrate that with robust academic and personal support networks, students from the world’s poorest regions can perform competitively with their more privileged peers. At the collective level, IFP Fellows have succeeded academically in hundreds of universities in dozens of countries. Many individual Fellows have won prizes and awards for their academic achievement, such as Vivek Prasad, from India, who won the International Award for Excellence from the International Journal of Climate Change. Elizabeth Mika, a Fellow from Tanzania, completed her master’s degree in nursing at Boston College and received the university’s Outstanding Graduate Student award.
95% of IFP Fellows-elect make a smooth transition to postgraduate programs within the stipulated one-year placement period
Hafsat Shittu studies the efficacy of medicinal plants traditionally used to treat diabetes. Through her IFP fellowship, Hafsat earned a doctorate in pharmaceutical science from the University of Strathclyde, in Scotland. There, she continued her research on Nigerian plants used by traditional healers, discovering an active compound that could be used to reduce blood glucose in treating diabetics. In 2009, Hafsat was selected for a World Health Organization fellowship to train at a new drug discovery technology lab in Shanghai, China. Hafsat is also principal investigator in a World Bank Project that will support the collection of local plants used to manage diabetes.
IFP now has several dozen strategic university partnerships worldwide. These partnerships arose as IFP identified institutions with a similar mission to serve students from disadvantaged communities. Like IFP’s International Partners, these universities have made a series of institutional changes to accommodate IFP Fellows, recognizing that educational gaps in quantitative skills or knowledge of the English language may reflect poor education, not a lack of aptitude. To prepare Fellows for full-time postgraduate study, these universities now offer preparatory courses while “mainstreaming” Fellows into postgraduate degree programs. About one-third of IFP Fellows participate in host university pre-academic training programs.

In addition, the universities provide personal and professional counseling that helps Fellows bridge the sometimes enormous gulf between their home environments and the university setting and culture. Partner universities recognize that IFP Fellows bring unique experience and knowledge to their postgraduate programs that can enrich the study experience for all students.
RETURNS

IFP Fellow Richa Ghansiyal, INDIA
A big question at the outset of IFP was whether it would inadvertently increase “brain drain,” the outflow of educated people from developing countries to developed ones, the U.S. and the U.K. in particular.

The answer is now clear: IFP Fellows are committed to their home countries and communities. A survey of more than 2,000 alumni — the majority of whom studied abroad — showed that 82% are currently residing in their home countries. Nearly all alumni still abroad are pursuing more advanced degrees or further professional training.

“Part of [my] commitment is to show my community that people can go abroad, study and come back the same way they were. Because we feel whenever people go out there, they get spoiled. But I just showed them that I went, I saw and I’m back with enough knowledge to help them.”

IFP Fellow Mohamed Hussein Shally, KENYA
ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Of IFP’s more than 2,400 alumni to date, 98% have completed their fellowships in good academic standing. A survey of more than 2,000 alumni showed that 85% — including doctoral Fellows whose degrees take longer to complete — had earned their postgraduate degrees. IFP Fellows’ academic success demonstrates that greater inclusiveness can be achieved in higher education without a loss of quality among students or for the institutions.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

IFP alumni have founded dozens of NGOs, created income-generating projects that improve livelihoods in poor communities, established and operated health clinics in underserved areas, and defended human rights among the most vulnerable.

Many Fellows seek to deepen their work on sustainable development and are active in the fields of water, energy, natural resource management, and agriculture. Many others are educators who improve schools in marginalized communities. Some who have earned degrees in law, governance or human rights work as advocates for women’s and children’s rights. Others work in the news media, or as scholars, actors, artists, art educators, and language experts. All have deepened their capacity to be agents of change at home.

“I have benefited greatly from the program, not only in terms of affording me an international Master’s degree at no less than the London School of Economics, but also of involving me in global debates and dialogues regarding development issues confronting my country and region, and the rest of the developing world.”

IFP Fellow Michael P. Canares, PHILIPPINES
Manoj Bhatt

PROTECTING THE HIMALAYAS: SAFEGUARDING INDIA

Manoj Bhatt comes from Uttarakhand, at the foot of the Himalayas, which has a unique ecosystem offering a diversity of natural vegetation and agriculture yielding food, medicines, fibers, timber, and fuel. But, over the years, unchecked environmental devastation has threatened resources, and 70 percent of the state population now lives below the poverty line. Manoj saw the potential to empower his community to fight unsustainable exploitation of Uttarakhand’s natural resources. After receiving his master’s in public policy from Columbia University under IFP, Manoj returned to India and founded the nonprofit organization Research, Advocacy and Communication in Himalayan Areas (RACHNA). “RACHNA works to ensure that the voices of farmers and locals are heard as corporations launch large hydropower projects in Uttarakhand,” says Manoj.

“I became an advocate for the equitable land-distribution policies in my country and helped to draft laws to keep marginal people from being evicted from their lands.”

IFP Fellow Faisal Akbaruddin Taqwa, INDONESIA
IFP is already a catalyst for institutional change. Increasingly, IFP’s model for how universities and scholarship programs can best meet the needs of disadvantaged students is being adopted in different settings.

• At the University of Chile and the Catholic University of Peru, the presence of indigenous Fellows has prompted the universities to include new offerings in indigenous languages and bilingual education.
• U.S. government-sponsored Fulbright programs in Brazil and Mexico have collaborated with IFP to increase their sponsorship of indigenous and Afro-descendant leaders, who constitute the majority of IFP Fellows from Latin America.
• The Ford Foundation’s China office is incorporating IFP’s innovative and effective selection model into its work with Beijing Normal University to support an in-country Master’s program, the new China Fellows Program.
• The Indonesia International Education Foundation (IIIEF), an IFP Partner, used the IFP model to implement a short-term program for Indonesian undergraduates to undertake language study and adjust to life on U.S. university campuses. Funded by the U.S. Department of State, the Indonesia English Language Study Program has benefited nearly 400 individuals from underserved regions and communities.
Shenne Savyndai was born in a remote rural area of the Republic of Tuva, which faces serious economic challenges and environmental devastation. In an effort to help those affected, Shenne decided to specialize in strategic planning. “My research focuses on development strategies for economically depressed regions. My IFP grant allowed me to complete a degree program in National Economy Management at Lomonosov Moscow State University.” In April 2008, Shenne won a competition for young scientists organized by the World Public Forum and the Russian State Institute of Intellectual Property. She is one of a group of young Russian scientists and experts seeking to create new models for economic development.
Petra Barghouthi knows that the threat of violence and conflict often means that children in Palestinian territories must grow up faster than children elsewhere. One of 13 children in her own family, Petra grew up in a refugee camp near Nablus in the West Bank. She became a journalist and traveled to London under her IFP fellowship to study and work as a drama therapist, receiving her master’s degree in drama and movement therapy from the Central School of Speech and Drama. Today, she works as a drama therapist at the Freedom Theatre in the Jenin Refugee Camp in the West Bank. “This theater was established on the belief that creative play can help children who have witnessed violence and death to overcome their fear and depression,” said Petra, who also teaches at Birzeit University and conducts training workshops on using art and drama therapy with children.
In all participating IFP home countries, alumni are forming networks and organizations. Through these associations, former Fellows strengthen their connections with one another and with their home countries and communities. Their individual projects are enriched by the group’s knowledge and resources — diverse expertise, familiarity with local languages and cultures, and extended social and professional networks. They also act jointly, on behalf of their associations, through collective projects such as assisting local schools, contributing to income-generating projects in poor communities and producing new academic and policy research.

Sharing hard-earned knowledge within and among the world’s poorest regions is a particularly important component of IFP. In addition to initial financial support of alumni groups, IFP offers Internet-based resources such as a multi-lingual website, where Fellows and alumni share ideas and information.

**THE IFP GLOBAL COMMUNITY**

IFP Fellow Arshad Alam, INDIA
Wang Ximin
A CRUSADE TO SAVE BIRDS

Wang Ximin turned his fondness for birds into a commitment to build community support for conservation. China’s bird fauna is seriously threatened by loss and fragmentation of habitat, hunting and the pet trade, pollution of waterways and inland seas, and use of insecticides on agricultural lands. Ximin received an IFP fellowship to attend the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, earning a master’s degree in environmental education in 2008. Returning to China, he organized a bird-a-thon for Americans to watch birds in China and raise funds for bird conservation and education. “In China, people usually treat birds as pets or food,” Ximin said. “I tried to expand bird-watching activities to improve awareness of bird protection in China.” Ximin’s work is spurring a nationwide education effort to conserve China’s bird populations and their habitats and improve infection control procedures.

THE IFP MEXICO ALUMNI formed that nation’s first Association of Indigenous Researchers, a group of highly trained analysts working to develop collective policy responses to entrenched social problems, using their collective knowledge of indigenous communities.

THE IFP THAILAND ALUMNI NETWORK (IFP THAN) conducted a multi-sector collaborative research program on development alternatives in Isaan, Thailand’s poor northeast region. Alumni organized a public seminar on “The Isaan Community and Globalization,” held at the region’s leading university, which attracted participants from government, civil society, and academia.

THE IFP UGANDA ALUMNI ASSOCIATION enables former Fellows to act as “part of a team” in the struggle against social injustice. The individual Fellows have diverse goals, such as starting non-governmental organizations to address the needs of mothers and children, standing for parliament, and establishing schools and counseling centers in former conflict zones. The Association allows them to exchange information, share their aspirations, and gain strength from the knowledge that they “are not alone.”
OUTCOMES

In addition to helping to develop a new generation of leaders, IFP is a demonstration project with the goal of changing educational policy worldwide to make advanced education more available to marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Results so far have shown that there is great demand for postgraduate education by members of these populations, that they can complete rigorous, advanced educational programs, and that they will return to their communities to apply their education for the benefit of their societies.

“An investment in IFP is an investment in international development.”

Susan V. Berresford
Former President, the Ford Foundation
It is possible to achieve greater equity and inclusiveness in international higher education without sacrificing quality or lowering academic standards.

The risk of “brain drain” following international study can be reduced by targeting scholarships to candidates who demonstrate social commitment and leadership capacity, as well as academic achievement.

Expanding study opportunities to universities worldwide promotes international cooperation and allows more countries to participate in the global higher education system.

Investing in higher education for members of marginalized or excluded groups is a sound development strategy that reduces social inequality and benefits both individuals and their communities.
It is still too early to measure the full impact of IFP. That will take decades. For now, IFP has successfully tapped the power of higher education as a tool to fight discrimination and marginalization, and to build new leadership capacity in the developing world. With these two signal achievements, IFP has opened a broad and promising path to social justice.

Joan Dassin, Executive Director, Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program
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