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Testimonials from the 2015 AIARD Future Leader Forum Participants

Hannah Darr, Iowa State University

It has taken me almost two weeks to truly absorb all of the experiences the FLF program provided me in less than a week. Being named an AIARD “Future Leader” was an incredible honor and it provided an unmatched opportunity for me to learn. As an undergraduate student, I’ve had a minute exposure to the different paths to work in the international agriculture and development field. Iowa State University was incredibly supportive of my participation as a Future Leader, it wasn’t until they called to congratulate me that I realized how big of an opportunity it was! I loved being able to meet with other students interested in seeing people, regardless of where they live, have opportunities to improve their quality of life. I felt that all of the FLF-ers have a desire to make a positive impact on the world, yet all are flexible in their journey to make that difference. This was refreshing to me as I am making big decisions in the next few months about my next step!

I have very few critiques of the experience, most of which are related to my desire for lengthening the program to fit in all meetings and sights of D.C. (but we all know that would take years). My biggest suggestion may be to provide some sort of organizational outline regarding the different agencies we met with highlights of what they do and their accomplishments. I was unaware/inexperienced with some of the groups and as a group we could have moved more quickly without each organization’s general introductions. The other thing I would like to see is an opportunity for AIARD members to talk about the work they are doing, especially if it was pertinent to the fields of study for the FLF.

The chance to learn from professionals and other future leaders about their interests and paths has been very influential to me as I am preparing for my next step towards graduate school/employment. I am so grateful for the FLF program and all those who worked to put it together. I can’t say “thank you”, enough!

Cedric Habiyaremye, Washington State University

I was thrilled to be part of the 2015 class of AIARD Future Leaders Forum and get the opportunity to attend The AIARD Annual conference 2015. This was a great experience and opportunity for me to learn more about the role of agriculture in global development, tackling the global food security needs and networking with different interesting people in this domain. The most exciting part for me was our visit to different NGO’s, USAID and



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consulting firms DC based organization and institutions and interact with them in a form of round table discussion. I learned a lot and gained insights into career opportunities in the international agriculture and rural development; it opened my mind mostly in the international work and the work that is being done locally. The most interesting lesson was to hear thoughtful and inspiring words and advices during our visit to Congressional Hunger Center, I enjoyed how they shared their experience with us. I enjoyed hearing the experience and advices and encouraging words Paul Guenette (ACDI/VOCA) told us: *“Don’t feel like a single drop of job will affect your career development; it’s part of experience and will help you in the future.”* And *“to be a better candidate for international development work, you have to be good at communication, know your personality, know where you are efficient and where the points of impacts are.”* That was very inspiring to me.

The best memories of my time in DC are our visit to WFP and FAO. I was honored to be able to visit WFP and FAO; it was one of the days I have been waiting for long time in my life. It was a fabulous moment for me visiting and interacting with people who are doing the work that have been impactful in my life. I was happy to be able to let them know that I am one their indicators measures and be able to express my sincere gratitude and acknowledgement to their work. It means a lot to me and I am very grateful to AIARD for creating this program that gave me a lot opportunities to network and meet with inspiring people and learn a lot on how I can impact people’s lives in various settings.

Kashi Kafle, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Participation at the Future Leader Forum served as a turning point in my professional career. The AIARD conference and visits to the topnotch research institutions, leading consulting firms, and several other organizations were probably the best part but the lasting impact I had during these 3 days was incomparable to anything. Overall, the forum exposed me to both the opportunities and challenges in international agricultural development and provided more reasons to do even more of what I have been doing. It truly was a 'once in lifetime' opportunity for me.

Angel Elisa Cruz, North Carolina State University

FLF was inspiring, challenging, and thought provoking in too many ways to count. I made some friends that will probably last a life time, made connections that are currently improving my research here in El Salvador and left with a much deeper understanding of job possibilities after graduation. I realized a few places I definitely do not want to work and learned of places I never thought of before. Because of FLF I think I have a better idea of what I want after graduation.



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Kelly Wilson, University of California, Davis

The FLF program opened my eyes to a whirlwind of opportunities that I did not know existed. Not only were we as delegates invited to participate in a conference that hosted important voices in agricultural development and food security, but we were brought into the offices of organizations doing the work that we hope to do in our lives. Best of all was going through this program with my fellow delegates, who are all bright achievers in their fields that I can now look forward to being colleagues with in the future.

Sarah Eissler, Pennsylvania State University

Attending the AIARD Conference as a Future Leader was truly an eye-opening and enriching experience. The conference provided a platform to meet, network and engage with my peers from around the country and leading professionals in the international agriculture and rural development field. As a Future Leader, I was encouraged and able to share my research, interests and passions with others and receive constructive and extremely helpful feedback. Being a part of the AIARD conference and Future Leaders Forum was an incredibly unique experience that I am confident has made a long-lasting impact on me and my future career.

Adam Cobb, Oklahoma State University

For me, personally, this experience opened new options for me to consider. I finish my PhD in May 2016, and had not really considered some of the non-academic paths to involvement in international ag and rural development. Now I see a lot of opportunities! And I am excited about working on the policy side more than I ever thought I would be.

I've been reading "The Last Hunger Season," and keep finding the agencies and initiatives we visited discussed in its pages. I feel that now I can see a bigger map of the various forces working to erase nutrition insecurity across the globe. What I hope is that I can be a part of that exciting work for the rest of my career.

Kara Riggs, University of Missouri

I really valued the team-centered culture of AIARD and that in the FLF we were encouraged to function as a team and learn from each other through our shared research presentations and our final group presentation. It was a safe environment, where the senior AIARD



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members encouraged us to contribute to the group immediately, valuing our perspectives as new members and young professionals.

The FLF gave us exposure to the many organizations involved in agricultural development, and equally importantly-connections with professionals in each of those organizations. I also appreciated the emphasis on describing the organizational culture and entry level positions and opportunities in each organization we visited. We were free to and encouraged to ask the important questions about what they look for in resumes, what would distance us from other applicants, and who we should contact if we wanted to learn more about opportunities in the organization. It was an honor to meet with the many professionals we visited with and to hear from them so candidly, sacrificing their valuable time to invest in our future careers.

I also did not know about the high-impact, shorter missions that you can participate in through the Peace Corps. I'm now looking into these opportunities because of our visit!

I would highly recommend the FLF to anyone interested in agricultural development. I came in as a plant scientist working mainly at the bench, fearing I would not fit in with professionals based in the field. I had completely the opposite experience. AIARD felt so strongly like a family that was invested in our training and success as young professionals regardless of where in the interdisciplinary mix we fell. Our diversity was used in discussions to share perspectives and innovate new approaches, instead of ignoring our obvious diversity and allowing it to separate the group.

Victoria Barth, Washington State University

This experience has changed my life, my career, and my perspective on the international agricultural development world—in the best way possible. The FLF allows for students to finally ask the 'simple' questions that they have desired to get the answers to. It also allowed me to meet some of my heroes in the industry and see what working in the many facets of international development looks like. It is an incredible experience that is bested by none. Thank you for allowing me to grow in my professional network and skillset!