

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: EPISODE 1: BUILDING BRIDGES

Hosted by Bridget Barry

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC]

BRIDGET BARRY: Hi, I'm Bridget Barry, co-host of a new podcast from the Institute of International Education. It's called *Between Two Worlds*, and in it, I and fellow researcher Nora Nemeth explore the lives of social justice leaders around the world who participated in the Ford Foundation's International Fellowships Program (or IFP). In this program, IFP fellows pursued graduate or post-graduate degrees between 2003 and 2013.

A unique aspect of our work is that we have been conducting the tracking study of the IFP fellows for the past 8 years, and have had the chance to connect with some alumni up to 20 years after their original Fellowship experience – typically we only explore impact up to one year after a program ends.

And in this process, we've gathered quite a bit about life in today's world as a global citizen, both the challenges and the incredible opportunities that the Fellowship experience opened up for the IFP Fellows.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC CONTINUES]

We're excited to share some of the stories of these fellows and how the program impacted their lives. Sisko Rendon, an alumnus from Peru, said his Fellowship unlocked a new level of understanding about his place and possibility in the world.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC STOPS]

[01:15] **SISKO RENDON:** [SPEAKING SPANISH, THEN INTERPRETER CONTINUES IN ENGLISH] It was the Ford Scholarship. It has been the key that has opened up another...a space that was completely unknown to me, where I could walk on my own two feet. It was like, take the key and you'll see what you can do.

[01:32] **BRIDGET BARRY:** We spoke to Sisko and over fifty other IFP alumni, many of whom have also shared intimate stories of who they are and what they accomplished after their IFP Fellowship experience. We'll be sharing more of these alumni stories later in this episode and throughout the series. Very new this year was our decision to share our data highlights by using this podcast format, which lets us share reflections from the alumni in their own voices, where possible.

After our 2015 global alumni survey, we realized that approximately 13% of the IFP alumni were living outside their country of origin. Up until this point, we had been focusing our efforts on measuring the impact of alumni living within their home countries. And this wasn't necessarily unintentional, but informed by the way that most international education evaluations are conducted. This was even a topic of consideration of IFP in its early days, when staff responsible for the conception, design, and implementation of the program posed the following questions:

[02:29] **JODI SANGER:** "What can a close examination of a program such as this reveal about...the challenges of creating and implementing programs that are simultaneously local and global? In an era when the discourse of higher education is saturated with 'internationalism', can IFP help us to refine our understandings of that term?"

[02:48] **BRIDGET BARRY:** This comes from the IFP publication titled "Origins, Journeys, and Returns." The final section titled 'Returns' was where the program discussed the importance and significance of returning to one's home country for program impact. While considering alternative possibilities for the alumni, the final consideration was that, above all, a return home would help develop local economies, and contribute specialized knowledge to the industries of participating IFP countries predominantly located in the Global South.

But we have since wanted to learn more about the 13% of alumni who chose to stay abroad. And we wanted to know things like: What brought them to where they live now? Do they still connect with their home community? What does life look like where they are now? What is the impact they are having—and on whom? Do they remain committed to social justice?

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC CONTINUES, THEN GRADUALLY FADES OUT]

[03:44] **BRIDGET BARRY:** So, let's formally kick off this Series by sharing a little more about our focus cohort – the IFP alumni still living abroad. About half of the alumni that we interviewed remained in the country where they pursued their graduate degree through IFP. This could be Boston or Barbados, Stockholm or Saudi Arabia, or many other cities and villages in-between. And of those who didn't stay in the countries of their studies, the rest chose to live in a third country – not their homeland but another country to which they traveled after the Fellowship.

Regardless of location, more often than not, the initial reasons alumni settled in their new home were predominantly professional, either because they were offered new positions at organizations or corporations, or because they chose to pursue further academic studies. Camilo Pajuelo, who received his master's during his IFP Fellowship at the University of Helsinki, was invited to stay in Finland to pursue a doctorate in musicology. Let me mention as well that Camilo's music is what we're hearing throughout this series.

[04:44] **CAMILO PAJUELO**: My name is Camilo Pajuelo. I'm from Peru. I got the grant in order to do my master's studies at the University of Helsinki. This was in 2003. I finished my master's studies in 2005. Then, I decided to continue with my doctoral studies. That's why I prolonged my stay in Finland in the first place.

[05:13] **BRIDGET BARRY**: When pursuing further academic opportunities, alumni either continued their prior studies within the same university, or pursued additional and further degrees. And those who remained abroad for academic reasons were more likely to stay in their host countries, such as Godwin Apaliyah's experience.

[05:30] **GODWIN APALIYAH**: I came to Ohio State University, and I studied community development. My fellowship was for my master's degree, so by 2004, when I was completing my master's degree and my research, my advisor asked me to stay for the PhD, and that's how I stayed here.

[05:51] **BRIDGET BARRY**: For a second point, when studying abroad for work, many alumni found positions in their fields of social justice at NGOs or humanitarian groups, or within government, media, or academia. **Alok Gupta** from India, while studying in China, got an offer from China Global Television Network, where he's working now. Another alumna, **Huma Khan** also from India, received an offer to work in South Sudan:

[06:15] **HUMA KHAN**: Then I came to South Sudan in 2018 as the Senior Women Protection Advisor, and here my main role is to work with parties in conflict on elimination of sexual violence.

[06:28] **BRIDGET BARRY**: There were also a number of fellows who cited personal reasons, beyond career, for their decision to remain abroad. According to our data, women were more likely than men to move for marriage or to support their partner's careers. While there were a few men for whom their wives' careers or marriage brought them to their current country of residence, it was overwhelmingly women who were motivated by personal reasons to make the move.

Alumnae Aline **Saraiva Okello** and **Roma Mukarramah** shared more about their experience.

[06:57] **ROMA MUKARRAMAH**: So, I had to make decision whether I will be in Indonesia and my husband in Jeddah or I give up everything in Indonesia and go to Jeddah with my husband. And then, finally, after long time of thinking, I decided to go with my husband here to Jeddah, and now, I work for Indonesian School of Jeddah.

[07:25] **BRIDGET BARRY:** That was Roma, an Indonesian alumna who currently resides in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, with her husband. Next, we will hear from Aline.

[07:35] **ALINE SARAIVA OKELLO:** I'm Mozambican, and I was studying in the Netherlands. There, I met my current husband. So, we got married in Mozambique. And then he had work in South Africa, and that's how I came to move into South Africa. And then he's Kenyan. So, actually at the moment, we moved to Kenya because after the PhD, he also got an opportunity on this side. So, currently we're all living in Kenya.

[08:01] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Okay, so as we have heard, the reasons for staying abroad can be extremely varied. Some of the alumni even said they had wanted to return home, but local conditions were making it difficult for them to do so. **Alok Gupta**, who we heard from earlier, had this challenge when he tried to return to his media job back in India covering the impact of environmental politics on rural communities. Here's Alok:

[08:23] **ALOK GUPTA:** So, basically my role was to see how environmental policies and the science policies are affecting the rural communities. So, I worked for that organization for three years. But from 2013 to 2015, the media landscape in India was going through transformation. So, there was rise of nationalistic media and they wanted to hear only stories that are positive about the government. My previous work of comparing policy and how it is working underground, it was getting severely affected.

[09:03] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Alumna **Tairah Firdous**, also working in media, said she faced similar pressures when she was working in the Indian side of Kashmir on a new production. Here's Tairah:

[09:15] **TAIRAH FIRDOUS:** So for me, I think also when I was working in Kashmir on the documentary film that I did, I mean, it became a personal reason to leave because I came under immense pressure and tests. So, for me, leaving altogether what I had invested in, I was a documentary filmmaker, right? So that was my passion, and it came to my personal safety and safety of my family who are still there. I don't know if it would still count as a personal reason, but it became a personal reason at a point where I couldn't work in Kashmir anymore. So I think it's a mix of both, just to flag that.

[10:00] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Another perspective to share comes from the alumni who live abroad because of difficulty finding work in their particular field or industry in their home countries. Sisko, the Peruvian we heard from earlier in this podcast, got his PhD in geography during the fellowship, but Peru's geography field is, as he said, practically nonexistent. **Samaher Sweity**, another alumna, said she'd like to do more at home for Palestine but cannot:

[10:26] **SAMAHER SWEITY**: I would love to do more for Palestine, Palestinian community, but it's difficult, I don't know how to do it. I'm happy to volunteer to do anything, but it's like - the skills I built, and the knowledge I built. There is a huge gap. Huge gap between what I can do, and what I've learned and what I'm doing in Palestine. And how to bridge that is very, very, very difficult. There is no something called research nurse. There is no research infrastructure in Palestine. So, how can I – I can't teach, I can't build a curriculum for them to help them to understand research more.

[11:15] **BRIDGET BARRY**: For others still, they found that there were just limited opportunities for them in the workforce at home.

[11:20] **BIKRAM MOHAPATRA**: So, when I came back in 2012 of September, initially, I struggled to get into the job market again, because basically, development works are squeezing in India. So, that was the challenge for me, too.

[11:44] **EVGENIA KOCHKINA**: Then in difficult time, all jobs were short. And so, I have to change my career to become a teacher of computer science.

[11:57] **BRIDGET BARRY**: And finally, was the discrimination some alumni said they faced when trying to pursue certain jobs back at home. **Margarita Huayhua** is from Cusco, Peru, from a Quechua village. She received her doctoral degree in Anthropology from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor in 2010. Since then, she has written extensively on the topic of social hierarchies in the Andes, and had originally sought work as a Professor in Peru to be near family. In conversation, Margarita shared the following:

“I tried to find a job position either in Bolivia or Peru without much success. I guess my title of doctor... seems too much for them because a person like me, coming from a Quechua background... didn't fit the norm of Peruvian... elites who work within the universities.”

Pamela Molina Toledo is deaf, and originally from Chile. She received her master's degree in Disabilities and Human Development from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2007. Prior to starting her position as Disability Specialist at the Organization of American States, she was unable to find paid work in her area of expertise in Chile. She spoke with us via an interpreter.

[13:05] **PAMELA MOLINO TOLEDO, THROUGH AN INTERPRETER**: The reason why I left Chile is because I would help voluntarily the government in Chile to create laws and public policies to be inclusive for people with disabilities for free, but they wouldn't offer me a paid job... In Chile we have no opportunities at this level of labor for people with disabilities. We always expect to look down on people with disabilities, always. There's no opportunities for me. There isn't, in Chile.

[13:41] **BRIDGET BARRY**: We sought to understand whether alumni had felt pushed out of their home country – and therefore unable to stay – or pulled toward their new communities. It is

hard to say either way, as a decision so large is often too complex to boil down to just one factor, but these 60 alumni gave us a peek into the difficult decisions they've had to make, and the reasons that can influence that decision.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC CONTINUES]

[14:06] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Join us again when we share further discoveries about the IFP alumni living abroad. Next time, we'll focus on their social justice work, and how remaining abroad has opened up opportunities to transfer skills in newly impactful ways.

I'm Bridget Barry.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC CONTINUES]

[14:23] **KYLE COX:** Our program was produced by Bridget Barry, Nora Nemeth, and Mirka Martel. Today's episode was edited by the Brooklyn Podcasting Studio and Brand Stories studios in Manhattan. Music featured throughout was composed and performed by IFP alumnus, Camilo Pajuelo.

Special thanks today to the IFP alumni featured in this episode Sisko Rendon, Camilo Pajuelo, Godwin Apaliyah, Alok Gupta, Huma Khan, Roma Mukarramah, Aline Saraiva Okello, Henry Omokwe Dang Oche-Otse, Tairah Firdous, Samaher Sweity, Bikram Mohapatra, Evgenia Kochkina, Margarita Huayhua, and Pamela Molina Toledo. Additional thanks to Cesar Maldonado, Jodi Sanger, and me, Kyle Cox, for lending their voices to today's episode.

Between Two Worlds is part of the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program Alumni Tracking Study, led by a team of research and evaluation experts at the Institute of International Education. Our website is iie.org/BetweenTwoWorlds, where you can listen to each episode of this series, and access past research conducted within the study.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC FADES OUT]