

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: EPISODE 4: KEY TAKEAWAYS

Hosted by Bridget Barry and Nora Nemeth

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC]

BRIDGET BARRY: You are listening to *Between Two Worlds*, a podcast series about the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program, or IFP, a scholarship program for social justice leaders from marginalized communities in 22 countries around the world. My name is Bridget Barry, and I have been one of the researchers and narrators of the podcast series.

[0:34] **NORA NEMETH:** I am Nora Nemeth. We both work at the Institute of International Education and have produced this podcast to explore the lives and impacts of IFP alumni living outside their home country. We wanted to learn about what their lives look like today and how they are impacting communities, both where they currently live and where they are originally from. In this final episode, we are going to reflect a bit on the series as a whole and some of our key findings. We want to explore a few remaining questions we have, and discuss what is still left to learn.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC CONTINUES]

[1:12] **BRIDGET BARRY:** So, Nora, to me one of the fundamental themes that surfaced in the interviews was the identity of the IFP alumni. This was something we continued to hear, what being an IFP alumnus or alumna meant, and how the IFP experience shaped the identity of these individuals as social justice leaders. This was a seminal experience for many.

[1:34] **NORA NEMETH:** I agree. IFP alumni carry a sense of responsibility for changing their communities, of continuing to give back – such as the experience shared by Lola Lawrence, an IFP alumna from Nigeria living in Canada. She spoke about her pathway to working with Statistics Canada as an agricultural economist and her involvement in advocacy at the federal level.

[1:56] **LOLA LAWRENCE:** Then the minister called, and they asked me to come and be part of the people that will speak to other immigrants with very high educational experience trying to integrate to Canada. I was able to give my experience and it was part of their bridging material. They included them. So, okay, that's good. Sometimes you don't know how you're impacting people's lives. But something that you see might help people to move on and they say, "Okay. This person has gone through the same kind of experience I'm having right now and if that person's able to navigate through those paths and they're succeeding in what they're doing." I think it's a good thing...

[2:41] **BRIDGET BARRY:** I think what Lola's example really highlights is that giving back can look different based on where you are – here she uses her IFP experience to serve as a bridge to other immigrant communities in her new home country of Canada. It seems to drive the actions of IFP alumni in various fields and countries and is not limited by geographic borders.

Ligaya Leal from the Philippines takes it one step further and connects the duality of her identity and experiences – from her original home country, as well as her current country, the United States.

[3:15] **LIGAYA LEAL:** For me, I'm so amazed to hear the story of everybody. So that really makes the power of – the distinction of being a Ford scholar because we're bringing all these experiences here in America from home, and we also can bring our experiences here from America back to home. So, it's very interactive.

[3:33] **BRIDGET BARRY:** For Ligaya, this opportunity to create bridges to and from her home and current communities is part of the legacy of IFP.

[3:41] **NORA NEMETH:** And related to this finding around the continued significance of the identity as IFP alumni is the significant role of the IFP alumni network – even 5, 10, or 20 years since their Fellowship experience. Really what it meant to be part of an individual cohort of Fellows, but also their broader network of 4,300 fellow alumni.

Many alumni have maintained connections with each other, usually among those from their home countries and/or cohorts. They organize events together and even co-author publications. They continue to exchange ideas, engage in common projects, and lean on each other when they need speakers and experts for events. Alumni also leverage their networks to raise money and share financial support – a topic we'll expand on a bit in a moment.

[4:31] **BRIDGET BARRY:** As an aside, it has been really exciting to see the joy and enthusiasm that came merely from getting the alumni together in focus groups in order to conduct this study – the alumni enjoyed speaking with each other, learning about others' pathways, and wished to strengthen existing connections with others from their countries and cohorts.

And we've picked up on that. For the final couple of years of our Alumni Tracking Study, we are using new ways of engaging with alumni through social media and virtual meetups. This is another way alumni can continue to stay in touch and collaborate – personally and professionally, and another way the study itself is contributing to the program and its impact.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC]

[5:17] **NORA NEMETH:** And finally, we wanted to come back to that idea of alumni coming together and contributing to a cause. To reiterate the purpose of IFP a bit, Ford Foundation wanted to provide proven social justice leaders with access to higher education through scholarships for graduate or post-graduate degrees. The idea was that access to higher education in specific fields of social justice would make IFP Fellows more effective social justice leaders.

[5:44] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Exactly – so it was really the access to further education that was key for the alumni – not only in gaining the knowledge, but also the networks, experience, opportunities, and confidence that often comes with additional learning. And none of this was lost on the IFP alumni – what was really striking for me was how many alumni we spoke to are actively engaged in funding, supporting, or creating ways to replicate the experience they had among people from their home communities. Alumni demonstrated a discrete motivation to advocate for access to quality education as a crucial steppingstone in professional pathways back at home.

[6:22] **NORA NEMETH:** Absolutely – and it was amazing to see how wide-ranging the type of support they provided, from A to Z, really. Some – like **Quyêt Cao Huu** – used his knowledge of navigating the PhD application process in France to help others from Vietnam pursue PhDs and seek funding. Others directly provide the funding, such as **Ibrahim Musa Yola** in Nigeria:

[6:47] **IBRAHIM MUSA YOLA:** Just trying to replicate what IFP did to us because there are a lot of talents but the opportunities are limited. So, there are people that if you don't give them the opportunity, you will never know how far they can go. So, we feel maybe we'll start with the elementary school, from the elementary school to the high school. So, that at least then we can see how it goes.

[7:11] **BRIDGET BARRY:** And then there's **Raul Choque** in Peru – he took it to the next level and designed and implemented a government program in Peru that has supported 100,000 Peruvians to access education:

[7:22] **RAUL CHOQUE LARRAURI:** This scholarship program right now is working also very well in my country. I implemented this scholarship program similar to IFP Program with the same parameters for social inclusion. We implemented a scholarship for very talent people, but the people with the economical background very poor, from the *aldeas*, from the jungle, for the minority communities in Peru, in all my country. This was an excellent experience, and the scholarship program right now is working.

[8:05] **BRIDGET BARRY:** And what's always so striking to me about all of this is the pure, voluntary nature with which the IFP alumni take on these projects. They recognized the difference that IFP made in their lives, and they want to reproduce that same impact in the lives of others. Is it too much to say it gives me goosebumps just talking about it?!

[8:24] **NORA NEMETH:** [LAUGHS] I think it's a fair reaction!

[8:27] **BRIDGET BARRY:** [LAUGHS] So, Nora, what do you think was one of your biggest takeaways?

[8:32] **NORA NEMETH:** Honestly, I think this kind of study reveals the realities of living in a globalized world. And maybe that's something we are not focusing on enough when we study or design international scholarship programs. Alumni as social justice leaders can give back to their communities no matter where those communities are, and particularly alumni living outside their countries of origin can have a direct impact on their home communities through their work, volunteering, and networks, even from afar.

[9:00] **BRIDGET BARRY:** And, that also reflects on the program design, right? Because "return" was not a requirement of IFP, and that is a bit of an anomaly in international scholarship programming. Although the majority of IFP alumni did indeed return and settle down in their countries of origin, the fact that returning was not a requirement, allowed each alumna/alumnus to pursue their own pathway with greater flexibility. Some alumni who currently live outside their countries of origin, remained in their host countries, others in this series moved back home and then moved abroad once again, and there were others who have lived abroad since their IFP experience in various countries. So a takeaway for me is that the flexibility – the openness – of IFP actually allowed for this level of impact.

[9:45] **NORA NEMETH:** So, it's almost as if "return" in this case can mean many different things. It can be a physical return, but it can also be a return through your work or your volunteerism, or even a give-back to new communities.

[9:58] **BRIDGET BARRY:** Absolutely. And you know I feel like I've definitely been affected working on this study, and connecting with all of the alumni. But I think I'll leave the final word to a Nigerian alumnus we heard from in prior episodes, **Henry Oche**, and his reflections on how IFP affected him.

[10:15] **HENRY OMOKWE DANG OCHE-OTSE:** Personally, IFP has affected me, like I have said, that I can't give the story of my life without mentioning IFP or Ford Foundation. To be honest, for me, I've always lived to remember that even when people say when you look back, what do you have to maybe – remember the past for. For me, that is always part of my past, and my future, and the present as I'm living it...because coming to do international development broadened my perspective on a global scale.

[INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC]

[10:56] **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 IFP alumni featured in this episode: Lola Lawrence, Ligaya Leal, Quyet Cao-Huu, Ibrahim Musa Yola, Raul Choque Larrauri, and Henry Omokwe Dang Oche-Otse.

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]