



# HELPING GRADUATES INTO DEVELOPMENT

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Many talented British graduates with the skills and ambition to make a real difference in the developing world struggle to gain the practical work experience they need to enter a career in international development.

- The Tropical Agriculture Award Fund was set-up in 1989 to give young British graduates the opportunity to work on agricultural projects in developing countries. Awards help graduates with air fares, living costs and other expenses, allowing them to take on unpaid assignments. Awardees are also linked to mentors with relevant experience to help them make the most of their projects
- Gatsby provided core funding from 2001 to 2009, during which time 67 graduates benefitted from awards. Projects covered topics including food security, forest conservation and climate change adaptation
- Recipients have gone on to careers in aid agencies, consultancies, charities, universities and commercial companies
- The Fund continues to operate and is currently funded through one-off contributions from foundations and individuals



## AWARD FUND

The Tropical Agriculture Association (TAA) is a professional association of individuals and corporate bodies concerned with the role of agriculture in development throughout the world.

TAA set-up the Tropical Agriculture Award Fund in 1989 to help young, suitably qualified British graduates gain appropriate training and practical experience in developing countries.

The Fund aims to support projects that will benefit both individual awardees and local communities in developing countries, with an emphasis on sustainability and long-term career development. Longer awards support projects of 6 to 12 months, while there are also 6 to 8 week awards for MSc students wanting to undertake overseas field work for their dissertations.

## SELECTION

Applicants qualified in subjects such as agriculture, forestry and environmental science identify their own overseas projects before preparing proposals which are submitted to the Fund's selection committee.

Selection committee members are experienced development workers from government, aid agencies, industry, consulting firms, universities and colleges. They consider the applicant's academic record, experience and commitment to a career in development, and the relevance and likely benefit of the proposed project to both the individual and community concerned.

Successful applicants receive up to £2,000 for travel and subsistence, plus the support of a mentor with professional knowledge

and experience of the country and sector concerned. The mentor helps the awardee fulfil their immediate project objectives and consider how they can play a greater role by arranging in-country training or exchange visits for their local counterparts and colleagues. Mentors also offer advice on career development after projects.

## GATSBY SUPPORT

From 2001 to 2009, Gatsby provided core funding for the scheme. This was used for awards, website development and an annual meeting of awardees.

67 graduates benefited from awards during the time of Gatsby's support. They undertook projects across 28 countries, 10 of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Projects in Africa included:

- Classifying native forage vegetation and developing livestock feeding strategies in Ethiopia;
- Assisting with the regeneration of East African Juniper trees in Ethiopia;
- Creating a Wikipedia-style website to gather knowledge collected by the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre in Namibia on arid ecology and related fields;
- Helping to establish a beekeepers' cooperative in Zambia.



In the latter, Daniella Hawkins used her award for a project lasting just under a year in the Copperbelt Province, Zambia, working in association with a small local NGO called Kaloko Trust.

**"I'm 100% sure that without this experience I wouldn't have got my current job, where I use my development knowledge on a daily basis." - Daniella Hawkins, 2005 Awardee**

She helped register the Luansobe Beekeeping Cooperative Society and created a business plan to ensure its development and sustainability. This ensured local beekeepers had access to credit, markets, and partnership and training opportunities.

On returning to the UK, Daniella secured a



position as a grant officer with a charitable foundation. She now also serves on the TAAF selection committee, alongside three other awardees.

Other recipients have gone on to careers in aid agencies, consultancies, charities, universities and commercial companies in the UK and the developing world.

## LESSONS

The Fund has shown that modest grant support can be very effective in helping graduates launch careers within development.

Mentoring has been crucial to the success of the programme, ensuring that graduates start their projects with the prior knowledge needed to make the most of their placements, that they are supported throughout, and that they can build on their experiences through access to specialist advice on career development from people in the field who have had time to assess their strengths.

TAA has worked hard to keep awardees involved after their return. Part of the award is free membership of TAA for two years, and awardees are invited to present at TAA events and regional meetings.

Several awardees have also begun to serve on the fund selection committee, and the TAA membership, publications and finance committees. This has helped rejuvenate TAA and the Fund by keeping them in touch with the needs of a new generation of development workers.

The Fund is currently financed through one-off contributions from foundations and individuals. It continues to have a positive impact on award recipients, on the communities awardees work with, and on bringing new blood into the development profession.

### CASE STUDY - PROTECTING THE RAINFOREST IN MADAGASCAR

After completing an MSc in International Natural Resources Development at Bangor University, Joana Coutinho decided her future lay in agricultural development. However, she was unable to find a job, despite her qualifications.

She applied for a TAAF award to help fund a placement on a large conservation project aiming to protect and restore parts of the eastern rainforest in Madagascar.

For six months in 2007/08 she worked with local communities alongside seven local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to find alternatives to the traditional practice of slash-and-burn agriculture. Joana helped develop 8 hectares of sustainable forest gardens and vegetable plots to serve as demonstration sites, and trained more than 100 remote rural farmers on composting, terracing, agro-forestry and sustainable horticulture.

The solutions help to protect both the rainforest and the livelihoods of local farmers, and the project is being cascaded through the region by local NGOs, with more than 25,000 farmers set to benefit. Joana now undertakes consultancy work on the project through an international conservation NGO, returning for annual field visits to evaluate progress and help determine strategy.

Joana says: "I have built on my CV, accumulated valuable international development experience, carried out work I am proud of and got a foot in the doorway of the area I have always wanted to work in. I could not have done that without the technical and financial support I received from TAAF."