

Personal Reflection
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I learned that there are many Africans who welcome foreign partners in investment and in research, that they are hopeful for Africa's future development, and that there are young students, academics, government officials, and corporate executives around the world that are challenging the status quo of underdevelopment in Africa. I can now go back home and tell my family and friends with confidence that my ambitions to address food insecurity in Africa are not for a lost cause. I believe that within my lifetime, the right stakeholders will continue to work together to make significant strides in curbing malnutrition and chronic hunger on the continent.

I drew further inspiration from listening to Dr. Ruth Oniang'o speak at the President's Awards Banquet. She gave a speech that I will remember throughout my lifetime because it validated why I am called to enter a career in agriculture. She said, "I don't want to treat sick people, I want to prevent sick people." Her statement is a simple mantra that I will use throughout my career to put my work into focus; it will remind me of my own conclusions from a few years ago when I decided that a graduate degree in agriculture would best prepare me to make an impact in improving public health in Sub-Saharan Africa.

I also found guidance in the words of Damaris Achieng Odeny, a Fellow from the African Women in Research and Development. As a mentor, she reminds her mentees to always remember the bigger picture of their research. Her advice resonated with me because in my past I often was bogged down by an overabundance of data that I failed to connect to a larger objective. It was refreshing to hear that others are also taking great care to focus their research towards creating the largest impact on the well-being of people.

Aside from being re-inspired, the IFAMA Forum gave me the opportunity to practice crucial job skills. In preparation for the Student Case Study competition, I practiced filtering text for useful information, time management, collaborating with a team, and public speaking. During the finalist round, I learned from the finalists' presentations how my team presentation could have been better fleshed out with more detailed implementation steps. I am now excited to share my experience with the next team representing Texas A&M. If available, I would like to be on this team again next year.

Lastly, I used my time at the Forum to learn about career prospects. Though I have a scholarship that restricts me to working in the public sector immediately after I graduate, I learned about the many opportunities in the private sector that will allow me to play a significant role in agricultural development. I learned that the majority of investments made in Africa come from the private sector. It is exciting to see that my job prospects will be wide open as I advance in my career. I love the work that program managers and consultants are doing to enable smallholder farmers to enhance their productivity and secure the viability of their businesses. As for my job prospects in the public sector, Dr. Srinivasulu Rajendran of The World Vegetable Center seems to be spot on in advising that I go on to pursue a doctoral degree if my dream job is to manage agricultural development projects in Sub-Saharan Africa for the U.S. Foreign Agricultural Service or a subsidiary organization of the FAO. He also told me to look for internship opportunities with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and that he would be happy to connect me to their staff. I am now considering interning for IFPRI next summer, and I have plans to discuss doctoral degrees at Texas A&M with our career counselor.