



# IRELAND FELLOWS PROGRAMME

1974-2024



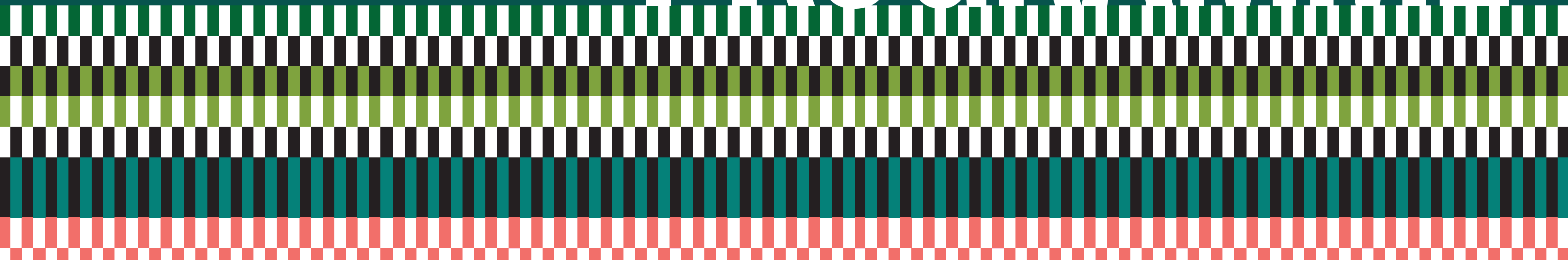
**Irish Aid**  
An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs

**50**  
YEARS

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# IRELAND FELLOWS PROGRAMME





Tánaiste Micheál Martin with  
2024/25 Fellows, Kenya  
**2024**



Fellows with President of Ireland  
Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh  
**1975**



# Foreword

**Micheál Martin T.D.**

Tánaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs  
and Minister for Defence

This year, the Ireland Fellows Programme marks its 50th anniversary of providing postgraduate scholarships to Irish Higher Education Institutions to potential leaders from eligible partner countries. Its inception in 1974, at the same time as Irish Aid, Ireland’s international development assistance Programme, reflects Ireland’s focus on education since the foundation of the State in 1922 and our experience of education being a driver of economic transformation.

From small beginnings in Africa, the Programme expanded to Vietnam in 2009. Students from the occupied Palestinian Territory were included in 2019 and from Small Island Developing States in 2020. A Latin America strand was developed in 2022. 2024 saw the Programme offer the highest number of Fellowship in its 50 year history with 217 awards made to Fellows from 44 countries to study at 18 Irish Higher Education Institutions.

The testimonies from Alumni and current Fellows in this book demonstrate how the Programme has been achieving its aims of nurturing future leaders; developing in-country capacity to achieve national Sustainable Development Goals; and building positive relationships with Ireland. The book also reflects the key role of the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) which supports Programme implementation in Ireland.

The Programme can boast an outstanding group of up to 4,000 Alumni across more than 90 countries. The Embassy of Ireland networks engage with Alumni and of special note are the formal Alumni chapters or networks - Kader Asmal in South Africa; the Vietnam-Ireland Student Association; the Uganda Irish Alumni Association; and the Ethiopia Irish Alumni Association.

This is a very impactful Programme and we are proud that Ireland, through its excellent third level institutions, can help deliver long-term change. We look forward to maintaining the high standards of this Programme and the ambition for its continued expansion in the coming years.

*Michael Martin*



# Foreword

**Seán Fleming T.D.**

Minister of State for International  
Development and Diaspora

Since my appointment as Minister of State for International Development and Diaspora in December 2022, I have had the privilege of meeting the successful Fellows when they arrive in Ireland under the Ireland Fellows Programme and again before they depart on the completion of their studies.

The successful Fellows are an incredibly talented group of people. They express great appreciation of the opportunities the Programme affords them and of the impacts they achieve on returning home with their new knowledge and networks. The bonds and friendships they build in Ireland are an integral part of the Programme.

The experiences of the Fellows here ensure that they join the greater Irish family and help build knowledge and understanding of Ireland around the world. We have a growing Alumni network and a key priority is to strengthen and enhance this. Meeting Ireland Fellows’ Alumni in their home countries has been one of the highlights of my official visits over the last year and a half.

I am especially pleased that in recent years the Programme has enhanced its approach to inclusivity by increasingly promoting gender equality, equal opportunity, and welcoming diversity.

I have also been impressed by the broadening of the Programme. The Learning Programme through which Fellows are offered training and capacity building opportunities started in 2022. The Ireland Fellows Volunteering Programme was also launched in 2022, with Fellows engaging in volunteering activities in their local communities while in Ireland, enriching the Fellows’ engagement with Ireland.

This book provides a wonderful opportunity to mark 50 years of a successful and valuable Programme which is now supporting capacity in 79 countries in Africa, Asia, Small Island Developing States, Latin America and the Middle East. I hope the book will also be a valuable resource for students considering applying for the Programme.

I look forward to the continued success of the Programme in the coming years.

*Seán Fleming*

Fellows of the Graduate Course in  
Engineering Hydrology, University College  
Galway (now the University of Galway).  
The Fellows come from Tanzania, Zambia,  
Jamaica, India, Uganda, Ghana, Liberia,  
Lesotho and Sudan **1981**



Minister of State Fleming with  
Fellows, Seminar Day  
**2024**



# Purpose

The Ireland Fellows Programme enables early to mid-career professionals with leadership potential from eligible countries, to benefit from a prestigious, world-class, quality education contributing to capacity building. It offers selected Fellows the opportunity to undertake a fully funded one-year Master's level Programme at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Ireland.

The aims of the Programme are to nurture future leaders; to develop in-country capacity to achieve national Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and to build positive relationships with Ireland. The Programme is intended to support graduates on their return home, through the skills they develop, to contribute to capacity building in their home countries and to become one of the next generation of leaders in their respective fields. It is also envisaged that they will contribute to building enduring positive personal and professional relationships with Ireland, promoting institutional linkages. The Ireland Fellows Programme promotes gender equality, equal opportunity, and welcomes diversity.

The Ireland Fellows Programme is fully funded by the Irish Government and is offered under the auspices of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). The award covers Programme fees, flights, accommodation, and living costs. It is managed by the Irish Embassy responsible for eligible countries. The Programme is administered by the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) in Ireland.

Fellows with President of Ireland  
Mary Robinson  
**1992**





# Brief History

From its beginnings in 1974, the Ireland Fellows Programme, previously known as the Fellowship Training Programme, has been central to supporting Ireland’s international development and capacity building efforts globally. Initially offering Fellowship opportunities primarily to partner countries in Africa, the Programme has grown over the years with several significant expansions taking place, including to Vietnam in 2009, Palestine in 2019, and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in 2020. Most recently, a Latin American strand was established in 2022 as part of Ireland’s commitment to foster stronger ties with Latin America, the Caribbean and Pacific Islands.

Historically, Fellowships in Ireland were divided between (a) the general pool (managed by ICOS) and (b) those earmarked for the Diploma/Masters in Development Studies at the Kimmage Development Studies Centre. From 1997 to 2018 the Programme also provided Fellowships to study in students’ country of origin, or within the region. These were known as ‘regional’ Fellowships. Another past feature of the Programme was placements in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland.

In 2019, the ‘Ireland Fellows Programme’ was established to bring a greater alignment with Ireland’s policy for International Development, *A Better World*, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The new Programme would also focus on strengthening positive relationships with Ireland through study at Irish Higher Education Institutions and aimed to expand the number of Fellowships awarded to approximately 210 by 2025 (from 84 in 2018).

The first extracurricular activities were organised for Fellows in 2021 and consisted of Irish language and tin whistle classes. The Learning Programme through which Fellows are offered training and capacity building opportunities started in 2022. The Ireland Fellows Volunteering Programme was also launched in 2022, with Fellows engaging in volunteering activities in their local communities while in Ireland, enriching the Fellows’ engagement with Ireland.

Since 1974, almost 4,000 Fellows from over 90 countries have benefitted from the Ireland Fellows Programme (including Fellows who were awarded a Fellowship and studied in Ireland, the UK, and at a regional level). 2024 saw the Programme offer the highest number of Fellowships in its 50 year history, with 217 awards made to Fellows from 44 countries to study at 18 Irish Higher Education Institutions.

A gift to ICOS from an Ireland Fellows Programme participant





# Impact

The testimonies from Alumni and current Fellows in this book demonstrate how the Ireland Fellows Programme has been achieving its aims of nurturing future leaders; developing in-country capacity to achieve national Sustainable Development Goals; and building positive relationships with Ireland.

Alumni Completion Survey Reports also give an insight into the positive impacts of the Programme. The most recent Reports show that six months post completion: 41% had a more senior position since returning to their home country; 56% reported an increase in their salary; and 88% said they maintained strong links to contacts made in Ireland. Two years post completion: 41% had a more senior position; and 75% maintained strong links to contacts made in Ireland. Five years post completion showed that 81% had a more senior position since completing their studies in Ireland; and 95% had made a contribution to capacity within their organisation.

Irish Embassies stay in touch with Alumni and four countries have a formal Alumni chapter or network: Kader Asmal in South Africa; the Vietnam-Ireland Student Association; the Uganda Irish Alumni Association; and the Ethiopia Irish Alumni Association. On the 50th anniversary of the Programme, the development of a structured Ireland Fellows Alumni Programme is a key ambition to be progressed in the coming years.

Education has been central to Ireland’s development. The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs has been proud to work with Ireland’s Higher Education Institutions in the evolution of the Ireland Fellows Programme and contribute to the experiences of the Alumni captured in this book.

Fellows from the 2005-06 cohort attending their graduation ceremony



President Michael D.Higgins at the Laos National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (LANITH) **2016**



A gift to ICOS from an Ireland  
Fellows Programme participant



Fellows in Ireland  
**1983**





# Staff



Sheila Power  
**Director of ICOS 2005-2019**

I was a director of ICOS from 2005 to 2019, which is about 14 years. I had very direct involvement in the management of the Ireland Fellows Programme because ICOS is the managing agent of the Programme on behalf of Irish Aid.

The Programme is about capacity building and leadership development in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. It's a big part of Ireland's foreign policy, more specifically the Irish Aid policy, but it also aligns with Ireland's internationalisation strategy, which was of keen interest to myself as director of ICOS. But it's much more than that in a way, because I think in recent years, in particular, the language around the Programme has changed to reflect the fact that the benefits of the Programme flow both ways. That it's not just about what the Fellows gain in terms of a great educational experience in Ireland and very well-recognised qualifications from prestigious colleges in Ireland, but it's also very much about what the Fellows contribute to the diversity in the Irish education institutions where they're following their courses and what they bring to the tutorial rooms and the lecture halls in terms of their life experience, their worldview. I think that's appreciated. I think one of the tag lines for the Programme is 'sharing knowledge and experience'. I would say it's very much doing that. It's also about building networks for the future, not just between Ireland and the Fellows, their organisations, where they came from, and the sectors that they're working in. It's also about building networks across the group of any particular year. It's a very diverse Programme. There are great networking opportunities for the future in terms of collaborations between countries and Fellows all around the world, essentially, at this stage.

Internationalisation is a very important strategy in the education sector at the moment, and it's very much about growing the number of international students in Irish Higher Education

Institutions. From many points of view. Obviously, there's the income generation point of view because international students pay higher fees, generally speaking, but it's also about the diversification that they offer and the cultural richness that they bring to the college campus, because we are, after all, living in a global world, so we want the campus to reflect the challenges that students will face when they go out into the workforce. Some of those challenges are that they have to be able to work in teams and in groups with people from all around the world. It's a very good opportunity, for the Fellows who come to Ireland to study, it's also an important learning experience for the Irish students who sit in the classrooms with those Fellows. It always felt to me that internationalisation should include more than just the students who can pay for the opportunity. They tend to come from Western economies and wealthy segments of societies in other economies, but it should also provide space for students from less well-off backgrounds and from poorer countries, essentially, to be given the opportunity to study abroad.

I think the Ireland Fellows Programme crosses those divides, and because it's a scholarship programme, it offers Fellows - initially, it was largely from sub-Saharan Africa - to come to Ireland to study, however now, of course, it's much broader than that. I would describe the Fellows on the Programme as the creme de la creme of their countries and their organisations because they go through quite a rigorous selection process in the first place to get here. I remember one of the nicer aspects of my job, and I loved working on the Programme, was to welcome the Fellows off the plane, essentially, and to welcome them to Ireland. I, first of all, would have said to them; 'Congratulations, well done on getting here' because it's such a difficult process and you have persevered and got here. We then wish them the best for the rest of the year. I do tell them also it's obviously going to have its challenges in terms of the cultural adjustment they have to make. Maybe the



academic environment is quite different from what they would have experienced at home. Also, very practical things like the weather. Many of them are coming from much warmer climates, so they would find the weather quite challenging. They start in October and before they know it, we're in the middle of winter, and it's quite cold, and it's dark, and a bit miserable, and maybe they're feeling a bit homesick. In ICOS, we would have tried to prepare them for those challenges in the Programme.

In terms of relationships, there are a lot of stakeholders in the Programme. The Department of Foreign Affairs and the Irish Aid Unit are critically important in terms of the policy development for the Programme, managing and deciding on the budget. Then the institutions have a huge role because they have a lot of pressure in terms of places, not just from Irish students, but they have quotas that they have to fill in terms of international students, and some courses are more attractive than others, so that relationship has to be worked on a lot. We had a lot of liaison with institutions, and we also would have liaised a lot with the embassies abroad. We were in the middle of all that, and very often we were managing the information on the Ireland Fellows Programme. If anybody wanted information on the Programme, they were directed to ICOS. We would know in any year how many Fellows were on the Programme, what countries they were from, what courses they were studying. If an embassy was interested, we'd know, we'd have contact with the embassy because they might be organising an event or something, and they would want to know what Fellows we were in touch with from that particular country.

Even when Fellows go back these days, that liaison work continues because a big aim of the Programme these days, which was just beginning as I was about to leave ICOS, was putting a lot of focus on Alumni connections. It used to finish when we organised the plane ticket and said goodbye at the airport. That used to

be the end of our role in ICOS. We had safely, hopefully, and successfully got the Fellow through the whole Programme. But nowadays, that's very much changed. The Government and the embassies and all the stakeholders involved very much want to keep in touch with the Fellows, even going back over many years for all sorts of benefits, just in terms of the networking building that can be done, business, diplomatic relationships. The possibilities are endless, really, in terms of availing of those connections in the years following the Programme.

When I started in ICOS, the Programme was quite limited to what were called at the time the 'priority countries', which were a number of countries, largely in sub-Saharan Africa, where Irish Aid focused its aid programme. Countries like Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, I remember Lesotho at the time. All the Fellows would have come from those limited range of countries. But it began to change towards my later years in ICOS when a new big Programme was started with South Africa. It was called the Kader Asmel Fellowship Programme, and quite a substantial number of South African Fellows now come to Ireland every year. Another was the start of the Programme in Vietnam. That added another dimension as well. The numbers are increasing, but as well as the numbers and the diversity of the countries, I would have seen that the number of colleges involved in the Programme has also increased. In the early days, it might have been limited to the universities, and maybe one or two of the colleges of technology, as we called them at the time.

Now a majority of colleges in Ireland would have had some relationship with the Programme. They would want to have Fellows on their campuses. There's a vast array of new Master's programmes that have been developed. It's the nature of education now that it responds to what's needed in the world, like programmes around climate change, more human rights, various strands of business. The diversity of the courses on offer is amazing.

Yet there are additional challenges that Fellows face that are not faced by local students. They have largely to do with cultural adjustment, with homesickness. This becomes a bigger issue because many of the Fellows are not moving directly from school to college in Ireland. They actually often have a few years of work experience. They're more mature. Many of them have families, so it can be quite difficult for them to manage their family arrangements at home, particularly for women. I always admire the women who come on the Programme. I certainly met many over the years who left small children at home to avail of the Ireland Fellows Programme. Such was the attraction of the opportunity for themselves personally and professionally, that they were willing to make those sacrifices. The extended family became very important in those respects. I think the motivation to go on the Programme is both personal and professional, largely speaking. For many, it will be the only opportunity they would get to travel abroad to study, to broaden their horizons, because studying in Ireland for people coming from poorer countries, particularly, would be far too expensive and unaffordable unless you're on a fully paid scholarship. The Ireland Fellows Programme is generous and it funds every aspect of the stay as necessary.

The benefits of the Ireland Fellows Programme for both the Fellows and for Ireland broadly are huge. From my observations, the Fellows gain hugely in terms of not just the qualification that they go back with, but from the actual experience in Ireland. I think most Fellows who get through the Programme successfully, and they are largely very successful and very good students, often coming out at the top of their classes. They would be very ambitious people, generally speaking, so they gain hugely, but I think it's not just the certificate, it's in terms of their personal development. Their confidence, I think, is built up a lot by the Programme. Probably underestimated as well is the fact that their English language skills, depending on their country of origin, they gain

Fellows with President of Ireland  
Mary McAleese  
**2008**







**“We are living in a very, very global world, and we need to be connected with people.”**



hugely such that when they go back and when they have to communicate with international aid organisations or work in any international environment, as many of them do, whether it's business or aid or whatever sector they're in, their confidence to communicate in English, they have gained hugely from their experience of the Programme.

For Ireland, when you look at the institution level, there's a huge gain. Many of the institutions have their own Alumni networks and keep in contact with their students. Many of them go on to do great things in their own countries. Some of them are invited to go on to do PhD programmes, and many of them come back to contribute to seminars, maybe get involved in joint research projects. There are all sorts of institutional networking opportunities that are opened up as a result of the personal contacts and networks that are developed during the Programme.

I worked in ICOS in the 1980s when Ireland wasn't a very diverse country. I worked initially as PA to the then Director of ICOS, a woman called Maureen Clough. There were few foreign students roaming the streets. In fact, there weren't many foreigners at all on the streets of Ireland. I think the Fellows brought that diversity already to the colleges. Ireland is a very diverse country now, so we don't need a Programme as such to contribute to that diversity in a numeric sense or in a diversity of culture

sense. However, I think the Fellows who come on the Programme contribute in their own small way. Obviously, they contribute in the colleges, but they're all living in communities across the country. You can say they get lost in the crowd in Dublin a bit, but you can imagine a Fellow going to Sligo or Waterford. There would have been Fellows down in Waterford. They would get noticed. Depending on the Fellow themselves, obviously, they bring the richness of their own culture to any grouping there, whether it's inside or outside the college.

Many of the Fellows would say themselves that they enjoyed the extracurricular part of their experience and the social life that Ireland offered. I think Ireland certainly gained because there is nothing like sitting down beside somebody from another country and being able to ask them questions about the culture and their experience. It hits home an awful lot more than reading an article in a newspaper or looking at a programme on television about somewhere. I think many people, individually and in groups, have been impacted by the Fellows over time. There would have been probably thousands at this stage.

I won't be around to see what the future holds for the Ireland Fellows Programme. It would be my strong hope that it continues. There's every indication from the Department of Foreign Affairs and looking at how the Ireland Fellows Programme has grown, particularly in recent years, that it's upwards and onwards for the Programme. We are living in a very global world, and we need to be connected with people. No more so than now when there's so much conflict in the world. I think if people can relate to each other, maybe there's some hope for peace and a better future. We have to keep going. I speak from my experience having worked abroad myself in Africa, even though we can communicate freely with people over the phone and by email, there is nothing to match the personal experience and the connection that it gives you, to a country and to the people that you have met in that time. I would be very optimistic for the future of the Programme. I hope ICOS continues to be involved as well.



Irish Aid Seminar for Fellows  
**2011**



Liz Keogh  
**Ireland Fellows Programme**  
**Coordinator 2019-2023**

I'm Liz Keogh and I joined the Ireland Fellows Programme in the Global Programmes Unit at a really exciting time in 2019 when we just completed the review of the Programme. My role was working very closely with the ICOS team, with our colleagues in our diplomatic missions, and with the HEIs to bring the Programme forward and implement those changes.

The review included the expansion of the Programme, increasing the number of eligible countries and geographic areas, and defining the aims of the Programme. These aims were to develop in-country capacity to achieve national SDG goals, to nurture future leaders, and to build positive relationships with Ireland, and also to expand the opportunities under the Programme. I worked very closely with the ICOS team and with my colleagues in putting together the range of opportunities for Fellows, which included the Cultural Immersion Weekend, a Volunteering Programme, Training and Development, and of course the Alumni Programme.

We're continuing to break new ground in terms of geographic distribution. In 2020, we welcomed Fellows from small island developing states in line with our commitment in our strategy for partnership with SIDS and in 2023, students from Latin America. I worked closely with ICOS and our diplomatic missions in putting together the SIDS Programme, focusing on areas that our partners had defined as important to them.

The Programme is aimed at early to mid-career professionals who have studied or are working in areas linked to meeting the SDGs, and the application process takes into account their education and their work experience in those areas. There's a wide range of courses in the directory linked to meeting the SDGs that include climate change, engineering, education, medicine, science. And there's always, of course, gender and human rights.

Access to learning is of fundamental importance to ourselves in Ireland and also as part of our international development programme. That's why we're increasing the number of places and opportunities under the Programme and also in our work on the SDGs. The skills that Fellows learn in the Irish third level institutions make a real difference to communities across a range of areas and all are linked to meeting the SDGs. The Fellows are all working or have studied in areas linked to meeting the SDGs, including candidates who might not otherwise have had an opportunity to study at third level.

We absolutely recognise the high calibre of the Fellows who come to Ireland. Our ultimate aim is to build a cohort of people who will go on to become leaders in their respective fields in their home country, in this outstanding level of talent among the Fellows and Alumni, and really recognise their tremendous achievement in their chosen field. We also hope that that experience of study in Ireland and the skills and training and qualification might then enable them to advance in their area of expertise on their return to their home countries.

One of the really nice parts of working on the Programme is having the opportunity to meet with the Fellows at the seminars and range of events during the year and hearing about their research and their plans of how they're planning to put it into practice on their return home. Another really nice thing is that Alumni have joined us in seminars to share the research that they're working on back home, their areas of work with Fellows, with our colleagues, which is really why we want to develop a strong Alumni network for the Programme so that Fellows keep links with Ireland. and become part of the wider Irish family.

I think our partners in ICOS and in the Higher Education Institutions really support the Programme. ICOS do a lot of work in supporting the Fellows work during their time in Ireland, in putting together the Training and Development Programme. There's the new Volunteering Programme that really helps to develop those links with the host communities and our partners in the HEIs that welcome the Fellows. I think there's a great opportunity to exchange research and ideas in the Programme.

The 50 years of the Programme has developed a real relationship between our diplomatic missions and the Fellows who have returned home, which I think has helped spread the word, and we do rely on our Fellows to become ambassadors for the Programme and to share the opportunities available for people to come and study in Ireland. We hope while they're here as our guests in Ireland that they have a positive experience, and get to know a bit of Ireland's heritage and culture and make some lasting friendships

Education has always been a strong part of international development policy, which is why we're committed to developing the Programme and expanding the opportunities. The relationships we built over the 50 years of the Programme have been really key, enhancing Ireland's reputation and building those important links with Fellows on their return home, building on work that embassies have done to keep engaged.

# Alumni





“We were supported  
all the way through  
until I finished my  
stay in Ireland.”



Tokelo Shai,  
Fellow 2017-18  
**South Africa**

My name is Tokelo Shai, and I’m from South Africa. I took part in the Ireland Fellows Programme in the year 2017 - 2018. I studied a Master’s in Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security at the University of Galway

When I applied to the Programme, I just completed my Bachelor’s in Chemistry and Applied Statistics, and I was doing an internship at a non-profit organisation that was focused on climate development. That internship itself was quite life changing for me because it opened up an interest for me in the climate development space. I was interested to learn more after that internship. I started looking at various programmes that could help me learn or strengthen my skills and expertise in that area. I started searching around for various Master’s programmes around climate change, but also with the connection to agriculture because I was involved in a project in particular that provided that link between the impacts of climate change in the agriculture space.

Then I started doing my research, mapping all scholarships that were out there, I came across the Ireland Fellows Programme. It seemed really great from what I read on paper. It felt too good to be true, to be honest. It covered everything. The other scholarships I was looking at were either just covering tuition fees and then you had to cover either your accommodation while you were there as well as your flights, or your living expenses, so the Ireland Fellows Programme just had the full package! Everything from the start of the application, even the English language test. That on its own was something that was covered, which is not usually the case in an application process. It just felt like this is really not the real deal because you don’t see that in a lot of applications, at least from what I was seeing at the time. We were supported all the way through until I finished my stay in Ireland, it was just great.

I didn’t know a lot about Ireland as I was applying. I only found out more once it started to become a reality that I would be going to Ireland soon. There is a send-off event organised by the Embassy before you go, and that is where we got to connect with all the other current Fellows and ask them about the experience, what they enjoyed and

what they didn’t enjoy. Everyone kept talking about the weather, which was one of those areas where I was slightly concerned, because I’m like, okay, I’m not looking forward to cold weather. But otherwise, everyone mentioned how friendly the Irish people are, which I think is something I’ve often heard before, and it was confirmed by a lot of the Fellows when we were at the send-off event. Also, just the nature. Everyone loved how beautiful it is. At least those that studied in Ireland were talking about how green it is. It was just really great to hear that. That was where I got a sense of what to expect before going to Ireland, and it was just affirming that it would be a really interesting experience.

I’m originally from Limpopo. It’s a very small village in the northern part of South Africa. I grew up there and moved to Cape Town to study for my Bachelor’s. It’s not normal for where I come from. Even just having left home to go study in Cape Town alone was just a shock to the system, even for my parents. Let alone leaving the country was just something that was not really familiar and quite terrifying, I think, for them. It was not my first time leaving the country when I went to Ireland, though. So I think at that stage, it was slightly more familiar to them because I did an exchange semester when I was doing my Bachelor’s. My mom was very worried at the time, but I think because I went and came back, the sense that you’d be safe and you’ll be able to immerse yourself was something more reassuring for her. I realised that when I went to Ireland, because I went with other Fellows from South Africa, it was a completely different experience from when I did my exchange semester, where I was all alone, didn’t know anyone, and had to fend for myself.

The main priority for me was to develop my expertise in the climate space. And I think the great thing with the Programme is that it had a much more holistic view from what I read on paper. And also just getting to be in an international environment again, because obviously I’ve been there before and I enjoyed my exchange semester and what I got to learn about myself from having been abroad. I was keen to actually go again, knowing that I’m going to be in a space where I get to connect with people from different cultures and to



learn new ways of thinking. And get to be in a completely different environment where I then get to get a sense of who I am as an individual. I think that's also what being abroad does. You get to now question who you are, question some of the things you're learning and have to unlearn as a result of the experience you're having there. It was a whole mix of things, but also what was nice is that Europe allows you to move around to other parts of Europe. Even just that mobility to get to see other parts of Europe while I was there was something I was looking forward to. Just to get to discover more.

I think the Programme was great. What I liked about it was that it was very practical. I often struggled in my Bachelor's because it was very theoretical, and I struggled to actually identify what a day to day job in that kind of degree would look like. But our Programme was very practical in the sense that they brought a lot of industry experts in to give guest lectures. You got a whole field of industry experts that came in from Teagasc for example. They would come in and share some of the work they were doing in the agriculture space. Ireland itself has quite a lot of agriculture happening. We also got to be exposed to that and then compare that to our own experiences. I think what was great as well was that the class itself was also very international. You got to get all these local contexts as we're going through different aspects of the course. The most amazing part of it was we got to do a research internship, and we all got to travel to a different country and do an internship and actually do a thesis in the industry or on a specific project that gave a view of the practicality of what you can expect you'll be going into once you complete the Programme.

I think it was really great in that you had a good sense of what you can expect finishing, and even just the connections themselves. I find that in my career currently, I'm still connected to the people I met through the research internship. They're all still quite happy to be working with me. Those connections that I made as part of the Programme were great. On the personal side, I did some of the events that ICOS organised where we got to meet other Fellows from

other countries. From Vietnam and some from Kenya. I remember there were other Southern Africans as well. It was just great to have those events where we got to mingle and get to know other people. For example St. Patrick's Day, where you get to just experience the culture of Ireland and what the people enjoy doing there. I think it offered quite a lot from meeting other people. The Programme itself, allowing greater connections, even just the friendships that I made along the way, were really enriching.

I'm still in touch with some of them as well. When I do go to Europe, I'm always letting some of them know that I'm around or if we are potentially meeting at certain events. Now that we've left the Programme some of us have gone into roles that are still connecting us, and getting to connect on that level is just one of those things I take away from the experience.

I think studying abroad offers a lot. You are exposed to people who don't experience a day to day that you experience and have different political and cultural views. Getting to know the people is a big advantage that you won't access from being in your own country. On top of that is the knowledge that they bring from an industry level, knowledge about who they are and the values they hold. I think that just being in a new environment where no one knows you, no one has a view of who

they think you are is really beneficial. I often said that what I enjoyed about being abroad is that I get to now be whoever I wish to be. There's no one who actually knows me. So I can decide I can be a whole different person. I think that environment on its own offers you just so much to learn about yourself. Which you do think you get in your own country, but it's an environment that's familiar and there are people that know you. Now in a new space, you get to discover more. It's a whole adventure on its own. I would recommend everyone studies abroad just for that reason.

I'm currently working for the Institute for Human Rights and Business and I work as the Just Transitions Programme Manager there. I recently started this job, three months ago, but my journey since finishing the Master's Programme has always been in the climate space. I think it was much more difficult coming back to get into a role in the space because no one actually understood it at the time. There wasn't a sense of urgency around the need for these kinds of expertise, which has now completely changed.

I moved from studying agriculture, which was more personally driven because my grandmother was a smallholder farmer and it more intrinsically impacted me in terms of realising that climate change is actually going to affect livelihoods of people like my grandmother. This is where this interest



Fellows from the 2017-18 cohort at the Orientation Day

started when I did my Master's. Now I'm at a point where I've become more people-centered, where I was very sectorally focused in my previous jobs. I'm looking at what the impacts of nature and climate are going to mean for the people on the ground, and how you ensure that their livelihoods are not impacted as a result. This is essentially what I'm currently doing in my role, which I feel has brought all of my experiences together from studying and from the various roles that I've held. And now I feel like I'm in the right position with the right level of interest.

I think it's beneficial for society in general for people to study abroad. Especially if you do get to bring it back home because then you're bringing the expertise and value of what you learned with you. You're bringing a whole flavour around your ability to adapt and navigate various challenges, to be more open minded. You then bring that into your country where some of the challenges we experience in the country require people that are not very narrow-minded but have been exposed to something different from their comfort zones and have been challenged to actually question some of those things. A lot of industries value that because they can already see who you are from the fact that you studied abroad and have navigated that space. For you to even take that risk to leave your home country is something that I think is valued.

I think what I also learned from studying abroad is that you get to appreciate certain parts of your country because you get to see a whole different way of living. You get to question whether this is what you want to go into this is or whether it's not. One thing that I often tell people is that I enjoyed the freedom in Europe of the safety element, which is often not the case in South Africa. And then I tell them, oh, but the cost of living in South Africa is so much cheaper. The quality of life you have in South Africa, at least on the affordability side of things is something that you should appreciate because you live in countries where you pay so much rent. And you get to be in those environments and experience the challenges of the people in those countries and then go back home and reflect on the basis of what mattered to you at the time when you left versus when you come back. It's completely different.

For [the Fellows] that are there at the moment, my main advice is that they should try and be open-minded and get outside of their comfort zone. I can imagine if this was the first time I went abroad, it would be very easy to just connect with other Fellows. That could easily exclude me from trying to immerse myself into the Irish culture and make friends with people from Ireland. There's just so much that being abroad has to offer. Yes, it's great to think about the current moment, but also thinking about what do I want to take with me when I go back home? And part of that is thinking, have

I been involved in some, some of the student societies? Have I been trying out different clubs and getting to know other people? Because, yes, you're getting your education, but there are also things you can learn from being involved in some of those social clubs, even if it's taking up leadership roles in those spaces, exploring conferences within Europe or Ireland that you can attend.

I think there's so much beyond just going to class and being friends with people, you create a whole experience out of it. I think it's about being fully immersed into what the environment has to offer and what the experience has to offer. One year seems like a long time, but it actually isn't. So make the most of it. I remember meeting some of the students that came back last year, and some of them were telling me they were working in clubs in Ireland on weekends or things like that. It's just whatever excites you, go for it. Why not? You were there for a year. You might go back, you might stay. Some of us didn't, but we still made the most of the time we were there.

There's one thing I remember in terms of what I learned, which I didn't realise I learned. In my previous job, I had a performance review, and one of the guys was like 'Tokelo, you're very calm', like whenever some issue happens, you're the most calm person. I didn't realise that I had become someone who's okay in the face of challenges. I'm not. But I think it's because I've been in environments where I had to navigate it myself and figure things out, that over time it has allowed me to just know that things will be okay, I will make it through. I think it's one of those things that studying abroad does for you. Having to face a lot in a short space of time makes you adapt quite quickly. It was one of those areas I hadn't realised until I heard it in a performance review that this was a new lesson or a new area of self-discovery.

I think it's also worth sharing for Fellows who are maybe feeling like it's a bit overwhelming at the moment, it can be the course, and some people struggle with the language and the accent itself, that you will be okay at the end of it and you'll make it through.





Lady Justice Jane Francis  
Adobo, Fellow 2015-16

**Uganda**

I was in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) for 19 years, and I told myself that I will retire as a prosecutor. But after my Master's [in Ireland], I said, no, I can do more. When I came back they advertised for judges. I applied, and that confidence carried me through the interviews and I did so well, I was appointed as a judge. I think when you do the same job for a very long time, it tends to become like a routine. But when I got that break, it really gave me a spark and by the time I came back, I was really raring to go. When I was appointed as a judge, I did my work, I was really happy doing my work, and two years into my job as a judge I was appointed as a Director of Public Prosecutions.

I know for sure that the Master's I did in Ireland is why I'm here today. Because if I had not done that, I don't think I would have dreamt to get out of the Office of the DPP. I think that really propelled me, and that's why I say, actually, I'm Irish, half Irish. Ireland is my second home, because it really took me on a journey into myself. I think I had not really known my potential until I went out there. And the fact that I actually did so well, even in my Master's, I felt I can do anything. I forever thank the Irish people because it is them that really propelled me to be the person I am today.

I enjoyed the Ireland Fellows Programme. The best memories were just that walk to take a coffee, because when we wanted to have discussions, we would do it in a bar, even with our lecturers. I loved Ireland. I still do. To Fellows undergoing the Programme now I would tell them that this is a game changer, taking part in the Programme. If you are lucky enough to be chosen, please take advantage of it. It's a gateway because it opens up endless opportunities. You can do anything.

I am 100% born, bread and buttered from Karamoja. Ireland is one donor that has stuck with us for a very long time. Because when I look back at Karamoja 20 or 30 years ago, when I was there growing up, it was a different place. It has grown so much, now you find students in almost every university. When I came back from Ireland in 2016, I went to the village, my mom's village in Karenga. And when I went there, I saw the village school. I found it fenced nicely and I realised Irish Aid had given us money to renovate the school. I had just come back from Ireland and I was really excited to see what Irish Aid had done.

I really want to thank Ireland from the bottom of my heart on my own behalf and on behalf of all the people from my village. Ireland has stuck with us and has made a difference, and we thank you for your continued support. I want to encourage the Irish people, to let them know that whatever you give makes a huge difference, and I pray that you continue making that difference.





Hikmet Abdella,  
Fellow 2003-04  
**Ethiopia**

My name is Hikmet Abdella and I'm from Ethiopia. I studied at the Michael Smurfit Business School, UCD at Blackrock, and I finished in September 2004. I studied a Master's in Business Studies, specialising in information systems.

I was working at the Embassy of Ireland, which hosted Irish Aid at that time, and I was one of the first Ethiopian employees to be hired because the embassy was new. This is back in 2004. After I got hired I started supporting the expatriates that came to establish the embassy at administrative level. I grew very quickly as Irish Aid expanded its operations in Ethiopia. I helped engage with the Government at that time, agreed on the interventions that Irish Aid will be helping on, for example in the health sector and the education sector. So I moved from one role to another very, very quickly.

I was working with the embassy for nine years, and the Ireland Fellows Programme kicked in during that time. I remember sending 20 or more Fellows to Ireland for five years or so before I thought maybe this is something that I could do. The processes went through me, all the applications, so we used to screen them and then assign them and then see them off and, and follow their progress from afar. I used to hear how nice it was and how the Irish people were so nice and accommodating and obviously I felt from working with the Irish themselves that was true. And to be honest, I didn't think it would work out, but I applied anyway and said, seeing that I have worked at the embassy for so long, do you think it's something that I could benefit from? So that's when it started. I started applying and there was a positive reaction from the Department of Foreign Affairs because they knew me, they knew me as someone that's been stable and it's been with the embassy for so long. My application was quite different from those that we used to screen. But when I had positive reactions I applied to UCD. I very much wanted to go to Blackrock and UCD.

I really wanted to have that experience of actually going there and proving it to myself. There weren't many educated people from a small community that I'm from in Ethiopia. And then when I finished my first degree, I remember my supervisor asking me, look, would you continue to do your Master's? And I said, actually I don't because I'm not going to find a husband if I have a Master's degree. It was the talk of the university at that time, because I was very serious coming from a small Muslim community in Ethiopia. Like I said, there weren't many educated women there, so I thought I wouldn't be eligible to get a husband. Having said that though, I always, always, always wanted to do my Master's at some point.

When I met my husband while I was working at the embassy, one of the things that we discussed is, would he allow me to do my Master's when the time was right, not necessarily in Ireland at that point, because I didn't know that's what I would do, but a Master's anyways, because I wanted to upgrade my skills through education. And he said yes. So one of the prerequisites, I think, in our marriage discussion was that. I never thought I would travel to Ireland to do so, but I just thought I would study here. I had my first kid and then my second-born was one year, two months old when I left to do my Master's. It's not the usual story. Often it's the man who leaves his kids with his wife and travels to do his studies. This time it was actually the other way around. He got a bit of a flak from his friend saying, how could she leave you with two kids and she goes to study? We did it with agreement.

To be honest, it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy to convince my parents that I would leave two kids behind to do a Master's degree. Once I got to Ireland sometimes I'd get lonely on the weekends and I used to say, why did I come? I had food on the table, why was it necessary to actually study? But obviously it transformed my life for the better when I came back. So no regrets there. It was a joint decision between myself and my husband.

It's quite different I think doing your Master's after having long years of experience at work. There's a big debate whether what you've learned in school is what you use in your actual job, but really it's because of my Master's I'm where I am today. It was obviously very challenging to study, leaving my family behind, but it was worth it for all the knowledge that I gained formally and informally. I used to attend a lot of skills development part-time at the student union, like communication skills, political discussions etc. The skills that you develop by just being exposed to these programmes is underrated, I think.

Even a small, small amount of exposure outside of your country helps you broaden your view of life in general and the world. It exposes you to many different aspects of culture, multinationalism, you know, working together for a better world. And since the time that I did my Master's, I mean, the world has just become one, right. In this global village, you have to understand where people are coming from depending on the different cultures they come from. So myself coming from the private sector and the donor community, and then going into the private sector and now Government has given me a 360 degree view of this. It gives you a sense of giving back to the community because you have this knowledge in terms of how you engage with stakeholders and donors, international or local. It's really given me an advantage to give back to my country right now where I am.

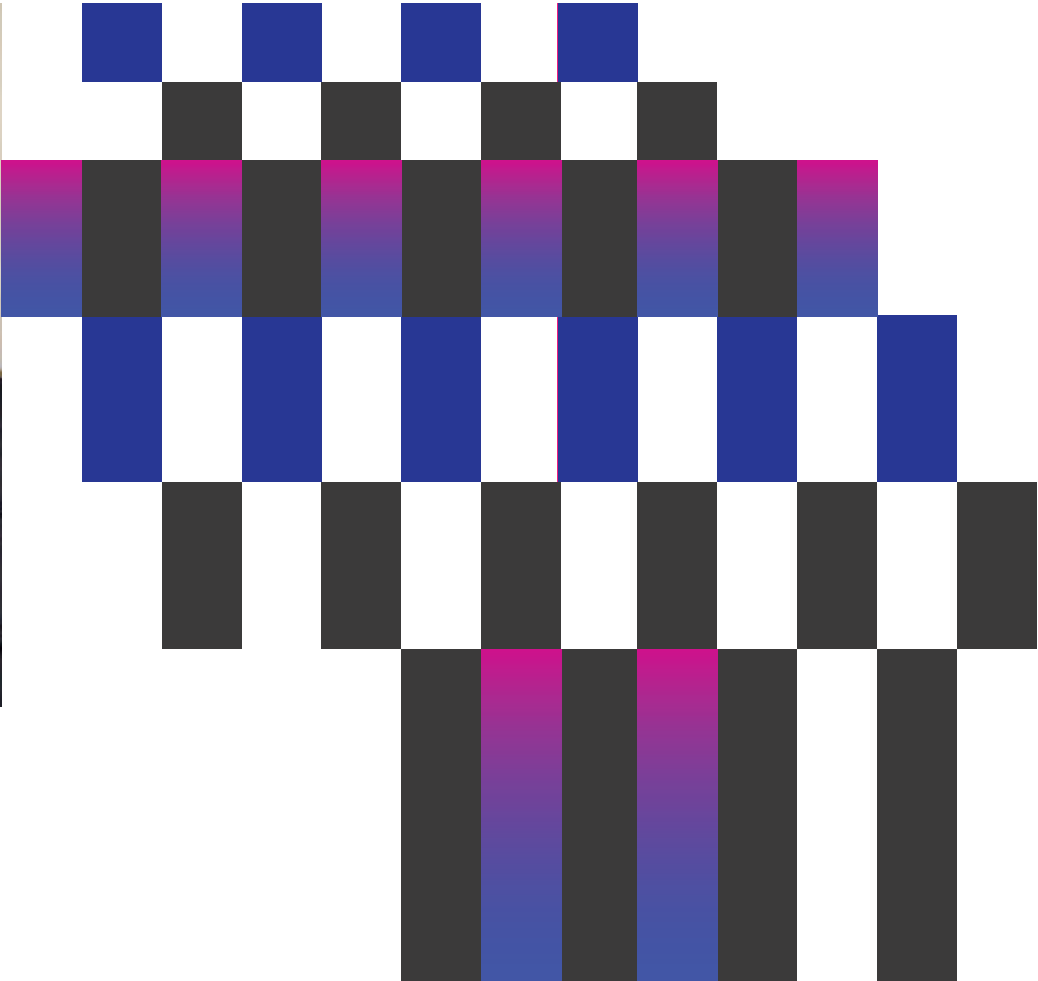
To any current Fellow I would say they're very, very lucky to be on the Programme. There are a lot of people sitting at home or in organisations that would like to have this opportunity but don't know how to access it or just don't have the opportunity to access it. Make the most of it. I think our tendency generally as human beings, is to stick with each other, with the people that you know, you know, if I'm from Ethiopia and I find an Ethiopian, then I kind of stick with them. But

I think you can use this opportunity to learn languages, other cultures, expose yourself to different kinds of training, not necessarily just academic. Make the most of your time outside of your country, would be my message, because it will really benefit you in the end.

I have three children now. My first-born, insisted on going to the East to study rather than the West because he wanted to understand how dynamics in China and Malaysia work. He went there to study. But my other two sons are studying in Canada right now. I think in the environment that we are in at the moment, if you get a chance to study abroad, all the kids want to do so. They were one of the few lucky ones that had the opportunity to study abroad. On your CV if you have a Master's that you've studied abroad you have a competitive advantage over those that haven't.

I would like to thank the Irish Government and the Ireland Fellows Programme for where I am today. It's important that these opportunities are available for upcoming leaders in developing countries.

“Make the most  
of your time  
outside of your  
country.”



Paulo Selemene,  
Fellow 2011-12  
**Mozambique**

My name is Paulo Selemene. I am from Mozambique and I am a beneficiary of the Ireland Fellows Programme. I studied in Dublin, at Dublin City University, at the business school, where I attended a Master’s in Business Studies and Human Resource Management. My Programme was from 2011 through 2012. It was a very enjoyable experience, especially given that when I attended the Programme I was turning 37. This was a critical moment for me as a man, as an adult, as a father of a family and as a professional. So being part of this Programme, having had the opportunity, was really a bonus. I remember that one of the questions that was asked when I was applying for the Programme was the reason why I wanted to go to Ireland to study and why I wanted to do that specific course. I felt I needed the opportunity to get exposure to a society like Irish society, because it has given me tremendous opportunities to interact with different people, not just Irish people, but from different people from various walks of life.

The colleagues at work, at the position I was in, would say, you have everything. You have a decent salary, you have a brand new company car, you have influence. What else do you need? I said, my problem is that I’m panicking because I was in my thirties. I’m panicking because if I try to project myself into the next ten or fifteen years, I’m starting to think that maybe I run the risk of only being able to perform at this company, which is very, very dangerous because there are changes all the time.

Because if I’m lucky enough to have many years of life ahead, I can’t just be the same person. There must be something else. And I think I’m a better person as a professional, as a brother, as a friend. My friends encouraged me tremendously. There’s one that I always talk about. Because I had the opportunity at the same time to go to South Africa, which is next door. He said to me, you’ve always been a brilliant student here. I think you should give yourself and us a chance to go improve your worth at the Champions League, as we call studying in Europe and the western world in general, going to the Champions League.

I remember developing a list of different nationalities of people that I’ve met, 50 altogether. I benefited immensely from the interaction with the lecturers. I still recall their names and I still have contact with them through LinkedIn. And in terms of the Programme itself, the people who were running the Programme at the time were very helpful from the beginning, during the application process, clarifying doubts, giving insights and tips. Something that I would like to commend is the induction package that is sent to all the Fellows. I believe for me it was very useful to read a bit about Irish culture, the society, the do’s and don’t do’s. Because coming from a different context, you tend to see the world based on your frame of reference. You think the things that you consider normal will be normal in a different setting. That was tremendous, as was the continued support I had while I was in Ireland.

There was an extension of this type of support at the university itself, because there was the international student centre, who catered for the different needs we had. At the very beginning especially, I would go and meet them and talk to them, and it was very good in terms of settling in. In addition to that, we had emergency contact numbers, people always on call if there was a need to troubleshoot anything. Luckily enough, I didn’t have any issues. They organised some excursions to guide us through some of the key places in Ireland, and then some tips, where to buy groceries, where to buy clothes, and some tricks on how to manage money. I was already an adult, however, all those tips proved very, very important. And when I look back, these were really survival guides for Fellows in Ireland, and that was very useful, and it gave me a sense of protection, a sense of confidence that I just had to do what took me there, which was actually to study, to take the most out of the interaction with people, because it was not just the academics, but also the social interaction and understanding how the society is organised.

I had an opportunity to experience firsthand different perspectives of doing things. In terms of interaction with Irish society, I was given the option to stay in two different





accommodation centres on campus. There was one which was mostly international students, but I chose to stay at the building where they were mostly Irish because I wanted to get first-hand experience of interacting with them. And I became friends with all of them. I got the chance to meet their parents because I was sharing an apartment with four other students. Their parents would come over at the weekend every now and then. So, we became acquainted. All these small things added a lot in terms of my understanding of the Irish people and Irish society. I know there's that saying, Irish are friendly. I remember one of my apartment mates saying, if you ever want to come to Ireland, you have a place to stay. I'll host you in my house. So it was really an enjoyable experience because I tried to take the most out of it academically, as a human being, and professionally. I also enrolled in the intercultural society because I wanted to see if I could get a mixture of perspectives and that was possible through the intercultural society. Through the intercultural society, I was able to attend a few excursions, one of which was to County Cork. At the time, it was a long weekend and it was International Students Day, so we were received with open arms. It was really something powerful that added a lot in terms of my understanding of the Irish culture, society, at least in the environment that I was given the opportunity to interact with.

I always had a very good impression about Ireland. There's something about the Celtic sounds and the landscapes. At the time, I decided that I needed to pursue further studies. It was exactly what I needed that came through the Ireland Fellows Programme. I applied, I was accepted, I succeeded. I said, this is it, this is a sign. The first thing I needed was to pursue further studies at a Master's level in a different context and setting. I wanted to get exposure and I wanted to test my abilities, to explore my potential and expand it further. And from the little that I knew about Ireland, I had this knowledge that it was a very organised country, well developed. So I wanted, and I needed, exposure in that environment. What I got from my experience confirmed that, yes, I went to the right place. It met my expectations and even exceeded them.

When I went to Dublin, I left the position of head of the administration department, which catered for human resources, procurement, assets management and fleet management. Upon my return, I was assigned to a different department. I was then working for an international corporation because I have a Bachelor's in International Relations and Diplomacy. So I worked for the international corporation for about eight months. But in the meantime, there was a project which was sitting somewhere, and they gave me the responsibility to run the project. It was a project on climate change. The objective was to mainstream

climate change and adaptation strategies in the planning process of institutions in the country. I was working for the Minister of Public Works and Housing, specifically at the National Directorate for Water. The interesting thing is that what seemed to be the beginning, like boring work, actually was the stage that gave me the opportunity to really unleash a significant part of my potential.

I learned that I was actually capable of doing a lot of things because of the experience and exposure that I had in Ireland through this Programme. The countries were all English speaking because this was a Programme implemented in eight countries. So I had to travel extensively throughout these countries, Tunisia, Zambia, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Sweden and South Africa, which were the places where the funding entities of the Programme were based. I have no doubts that what I was able to contribute to and what I was able to achieve in this three-year project was due to the exposure and experience that I had in Dublin through this Programme. After that, I decided to go back to HR. I applied for the position of human resources director in an international NGO. For me, it was a major step forward. This NGO is called Jhpiego. It's affiliated with the Johns Hopkins University in the US, and the headquarters is in the US, in Maryland in Baltimore. I was their first Human Resource Director. I stayed there for almost four years, and the results were just amazing according to the feedback that I received from my supervisors, one based in Mozambique and two in the US.

From there on, I can tell you in a nutshell, my career went in a crescendo. I left that position because the project ended. It was funded by different projects and my salary was very high. I have also participated in several seminars as a speaker or as a moderator. I have done some consultancy, but then I applied for a United Nations agency, the International Labour Organization, and I succeeded. So I worked there for about two and a half years. What I was able to show, contribute, participate, deliver and learn, I have no doubts they have a lot to do with the experience that I had in Dublin, the opportunity that I was given through the Ireland Fellows Programme, and the possibilities that I had to interact with these different people.

After the United Nations, I applied for a position in the private sector, which is where I am now. It's a game reserve, which caters for conservation, wildlife, tourism, hospitality, research and data collection. I have been in this company for about eight months now. I'm the Chief Administrative Officer. I'm part of the C suite, which is a progression for me. And I believe all this is due to pursuing further studies and the opportunity that I was given through this Programme. I think I'm a source of inspiration to my friends and to some of my peers, because most of them keep asking me, how were you able to leave your family behind to go study. I said I think I needed it. There was a higher purpose and I could not have made a better decision at the time. I did use this experience to inspire my kids, and the result is that my eldest daughter, she's 22 now, she's studying abroad. She's studying in Canada. She's doing her second year at university. My youngest son also wants to study somewhere else to get exposure, to try and bring a different blend of perspectives and experience and see if he can contribute somehow.

Since then, I've been participating actively in events organised by the Irish Embassy in Mozambique. Recently we had St. Patrick's Day, so I attended an event. There was a group of performers who came from Trinity College. The Irish dance with those instruments was very enjoyable and it was very good to reconnect.

If you ask me if I would recommend this Programme to others, definitely I would. But I would say to them, don't just go there for the craic. Go there to really embrace the full experience as a student, as a human being. And more than that, learn from the society, how they organise themselves and maybe explore other opportunities where you can contribute.



Event hosted by ICOS and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI)  
**2011**



Nguyen Ngoc Hung,  
Fellow 2008-09  
**Vietnam**

My name is Nguyen Ngoc Hung. I am the Vice President of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations. I am also the Vice Chairman of the Committee for Foreign NGO Affairs. I come from Vietnam. I completed a Master's degree in Development Studies in Ireland at University College Dublin from 2008 to 2009.

Before I applied for the Ireland Fellows Programme, I was working as a Programme Coordinator of the People's Aid Coordinating Committee or in short, under the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations. I held a Baccalaureate degree in International Studies from the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam and also a Baccalaureate degree in Economics from the Hanoi National Economic University. I worked a lot with foreign NGOs in Vietnam who support Vietnamese people in difficult situations. During that time, we were still a very poor country. So I applied for the Programme to enrich my knowledge and my skill in order to serve the foreign NGOs and serve the country better.

Studying in Ireland and getting on the Programme was an honour and also an opportunity for me. It was an honour because many people would like to study abroad and I was among them. Winning a scholarship is something very special. It was also an opportunity for me because I had the chance to go somewhere I hadn't known before and an opportunity to understand more about a new country, culture, people, and to be equipped with knowledge and skills.

I enjoyed the Programme very much both in its academic aspects and also the social aspect. There are many good memories. When I first came to the school I was welcomed very warmly by volunteers, by students on the orientation week. And everything during the week made me feel

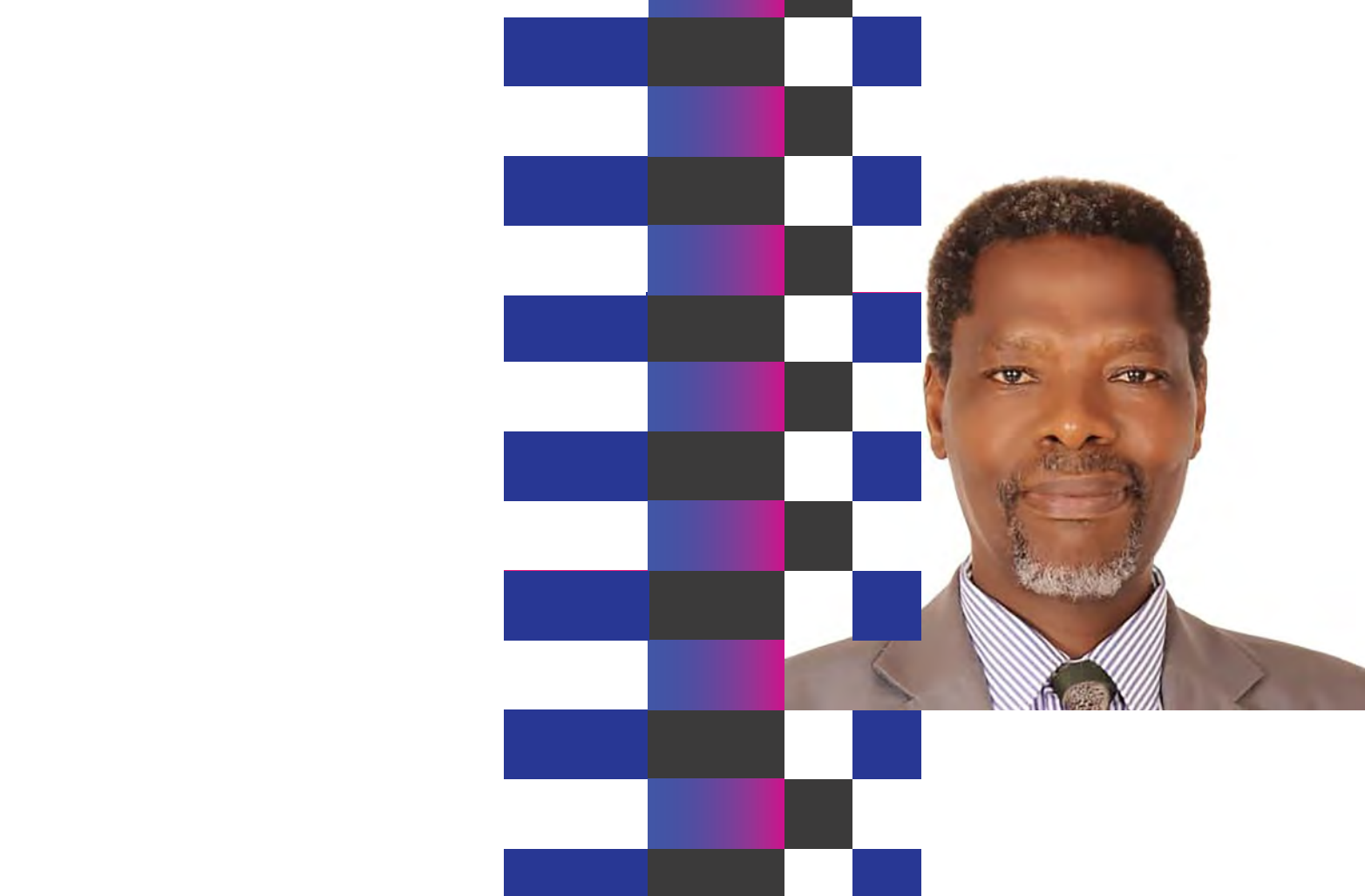
very comfortable. Another good memory that I sometimes share with my friends and colleagues is that during the first few weeks when I was there, I went to the Guards to get the residence card. I asked a lady on the street where the Guards were and then I followed her instructions. Just two minutes later, she followed me and said, 'hey, I was wrong, please go this way'. I was very surprised. What I had read before about the hospitality of Irish people was true.

What I learned was very important. I think the course in UCD planted the seeds, and now today I have the fruits of that. I think cultural exchange is very important. Studying abroad is a good chance for people to enrich themselves with knowledge, with skills, with cultural values. You can still do it in Vietnam, work a lot with foreigners, including Irish people and improve your skills and understand the people themselves. However, going abroad will give you some time to be away from what you are facing day by day. You enjoy it and you study much better.

I think many people like myself have benefited from the Programme, and when we are back we can work better. That is very important to contribute to the development of Vietnam. And of course, we have also contributed to improving maintaining the good relationship between Ireland and Vietnam.

To current Fellows I would ask them to study like they have no more chance to study. I would ask them to enjoy the time in Ireland like they will never be back to Ireland. And I would ask them to keep the good memories of the country as you may never have a second opportunity exactly the same. Make full use of it and enjoy it.





Yunus Mgaya,  
Fellow 1991-95  
**Tanzania**

I am from Tanzania, a country in East Africa. I come from the Kilimanjaro region. That's where I was born. But I live in Dar es Salaam, which is the commercial capital of Tanzania. I became a Fellow in 1991, when I was offered a scholarship to pursue PhD studies at the National University of Ireland Galway where I spent nearly four years. My PhD was in Marine Aquaculture, and specifically I worked on a marine gastropod mollusk.

It was 1991, over 30 years ago. It was a year after I came back to Tanzania from my Master's, which I did in British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. When I came back to Tanzania in 1989, my employer at the Department of Zoology at the University of Dar es Salaam put me on the list of people who were supposed to proceed to their PhD within a year. So in 1990, I was told to start looking for a scholarship to pursue my PhD the following year. I applied for a Programme in Sweden at SIDA, the Sweden International Development Agency. And then we had a loose link with the Germans through the DAAD, which is a German academic exchange Programme. They were also supporting Tanzanian university candidates to pursue their PhD.

Very fortunately for me, the Irish Government through the Ireland Fellows Programme had a slot for a Tanzanian to do a PhD on aquaculture. That PhD was earmarked for University College Galway at a marine laboratory called Shellfish Laboratory in Carna in Connemara, in the western part of Ireland, situated 75 km from Galway city. At that time, I had already married and I had a child who was ten or so months old by the time I left. So I naturally opted to go to Ireland for two reasons. Number one, it's a Programme done under one roof. You go, you do your work, you finish, you come back. Number two, Ireland. I was informed by people who studied in Ireland that the Irish are very nice people, socially, very accommodating and just nice people. Secondly, Ireland is not that big, so people get to know each other. You are not so anonymous when you are on campus or even outside the campus. I weighed my options and finally, I decided to go to Ireland. So in September 1991, I left for Ireland to start my Programme.

When I went to Ireland, I spent a day or two days in Dublin at ICOS. It was like our orientation. I spent a day or two on the main campus at the Department of Zoology. Then I headed to the West, deep into the Irish western coast, to Connemara. The first two or three days I was in a bed and breakfast, a family home with an old couple. And I remember I was just by myself. My family was in Tanzania and they came and joined me in 1994 until I finished my Programme in July 1995.

I can now comfortably say I enjoyed my Programme. With a PhD you are expected to generate knowledge, which must be vetted by peers through publications. By the time my thesis was being subjected to examination, I had actually overachieved because by then I had already published three papers. That for me brought a lot of good feelings.

There are situations where pursuing studies locally is most appropriate and preferred. In my case, as a natural scientist, whose work would require high-tech equipment, exposure to methodologies that can only be easily available in developed economies, there was every advantage. I looked beyond the national borders for my PhD, because I knew the kind of study I wanted to do would require equipment which we did not have. It would require human resources in terms of supervisors, which, again, we did not have. And I could only get that sort of support from a university abroad. For me, I would say I had no real choice. It was most appropriate to do it abroad. Secondly, which I also encourage some of my students to do, is when you go abroad, you cross fertilise your ideas with others. You get exposed, you get to know the culture of other people, you develop tolerances, you appreciate what we have achieved as a country, as a people and you appreciate what others have achieved as a people, as a country, as an economy. So there's a lot to learn, and it transforms you.

My experience in Canada, where I spent 26 months, and my experience in Ireland put together is six years of studying abroad in two different countries. I would say they changed me significantly and it was probably another success factor in my studies.





My region is called Kilimanjaro. It's not by accident that our region is named after Kilimanjaro. Mount Kilimanjaro, which is the highest single-block mountain in Africa, has one big peak, with a smaller peak in Tanzania. The whole mountain is in Tanzania, in our region. Where I come from, you can actually see it on the horizon. I come from an ethnic group or a tribe called Pare. The Pare are people who live in Tanzania, in the Kilimajaro region. We have relatives in Kenya across the border from Tanzania. Four to five thousand people are in Kenya, but in my country we are over five hundred thousand as a tribe.

We are known for agriculture, for passion, and for education. We have people in Tanzania who went abroad to do degrees in the UK and the US. If you had ten people who went there to do their degrees, in the colonial times, maybe in the forties or fifties, there would be a Pare or two in the group. We've always valued education and families would sell cattle to pay for fees for the kids. Families would do what it takes to make sure that a kid is sent to school to become, hopefully like somebody else's kid who went to a university somewhere and became successful. There were success stories in the village of people who went abroad, came back with their degrees, got good jobs and became very successful, built good houses in the village. That became very iconic for people or neighbours to emulate. So it's through that that drives people of my tribe to continue investing in the education of children.

In 1995, I came back from Ireland and continued my work as a lecturer. With a PhD, you get promoted. Early on, as early as the year 2000, I stepped into administrative duties. Of course, the mainstream is that I'm a lecturer, I'm a teacher. But then you'd be assigned extra administrative duties. I became an Associate Dean in the Faculty of Science, and as an Associate Dean, you assist the Dean on matters. For me, it was administrative matters, projects, etcetera. But then in the year 2002, a new faculty was established at the university, specifically dealing with aquatic issues, and I was the first Dean of that faculty. I did that job for four years, and in 2006 I became a full Professor and that put me in a very strong position when they were considering who should be appointed. And so I became a Deputy Vice Chancellor for eight years, that is two terms which came to an end in 2014. When that came to an end again, I was lucky. I was appointed to join a quality assurance institution for universities. Then in December of 2016, I was appointed as the Director General of a National Institute for Medical Research. That was a presidential appointment, where I spent six years until I retired in October of 2022.

So now, after my retirement from Government and having turned 65 years old, there's a requirement that once you turn 65 as an academic staff, you retire, get a pension, and then if the university needs you, they will take you on under some arrangement. Currently I'm associated with the University of Dar es Salaam, where I still have students at postgraduate level that I supervise. I don't teach undergraduate currently, but I should also add that my involvement in higher education post-retirement is not only with the University of Salaam. Last year around February 2023, I was appointed the Chancellor of Kampala International University in Uganda, based in Uganda. So I have an office in Uganda as a Chancellor at that university. And that investor, by the way, is number two in the rankings in Uganda after Makerere University in Uganda, and as Chancellor, a Chancellor is a titular head of an institution.

A gift to ICOS from an Ireland Fellows Programme participant

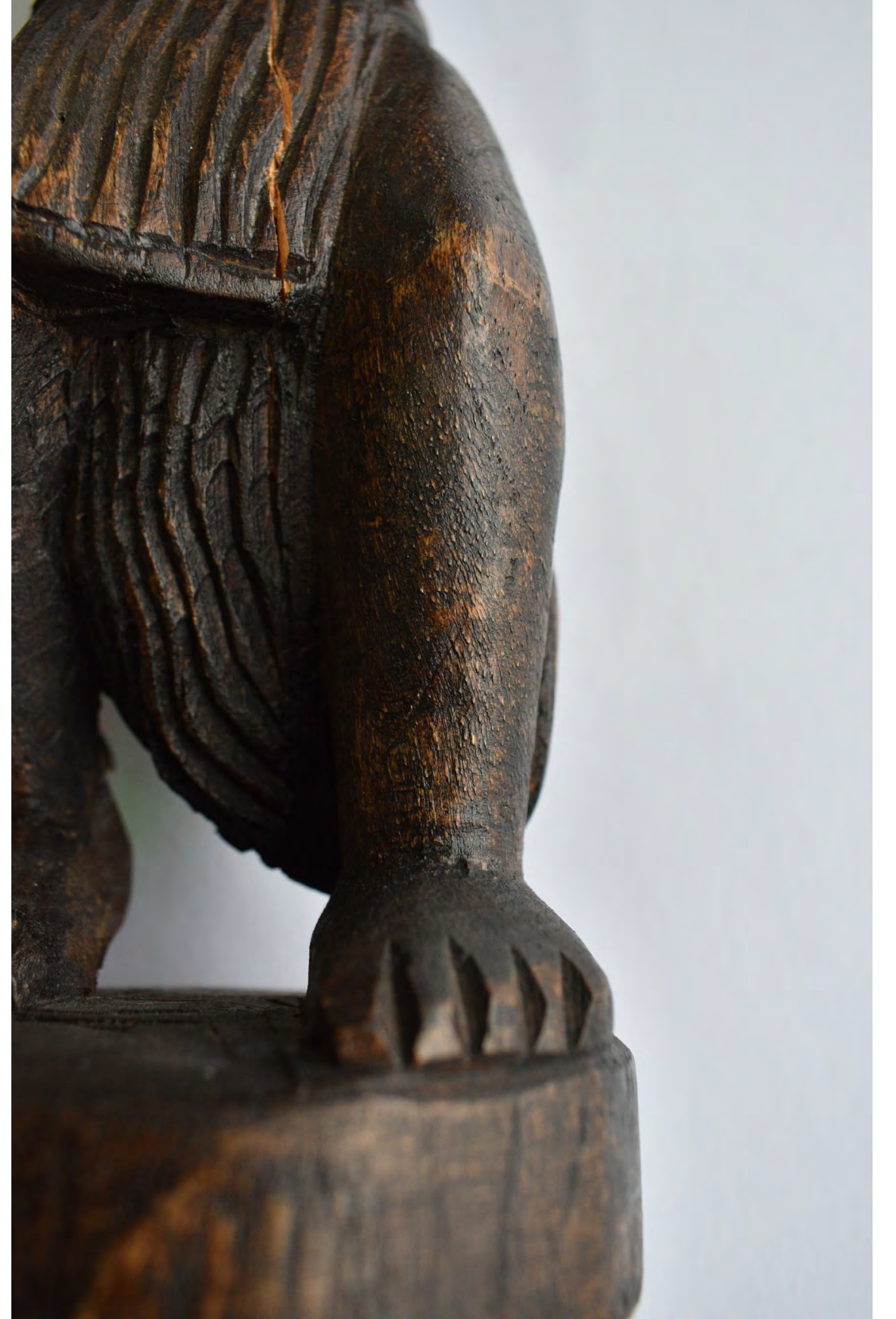




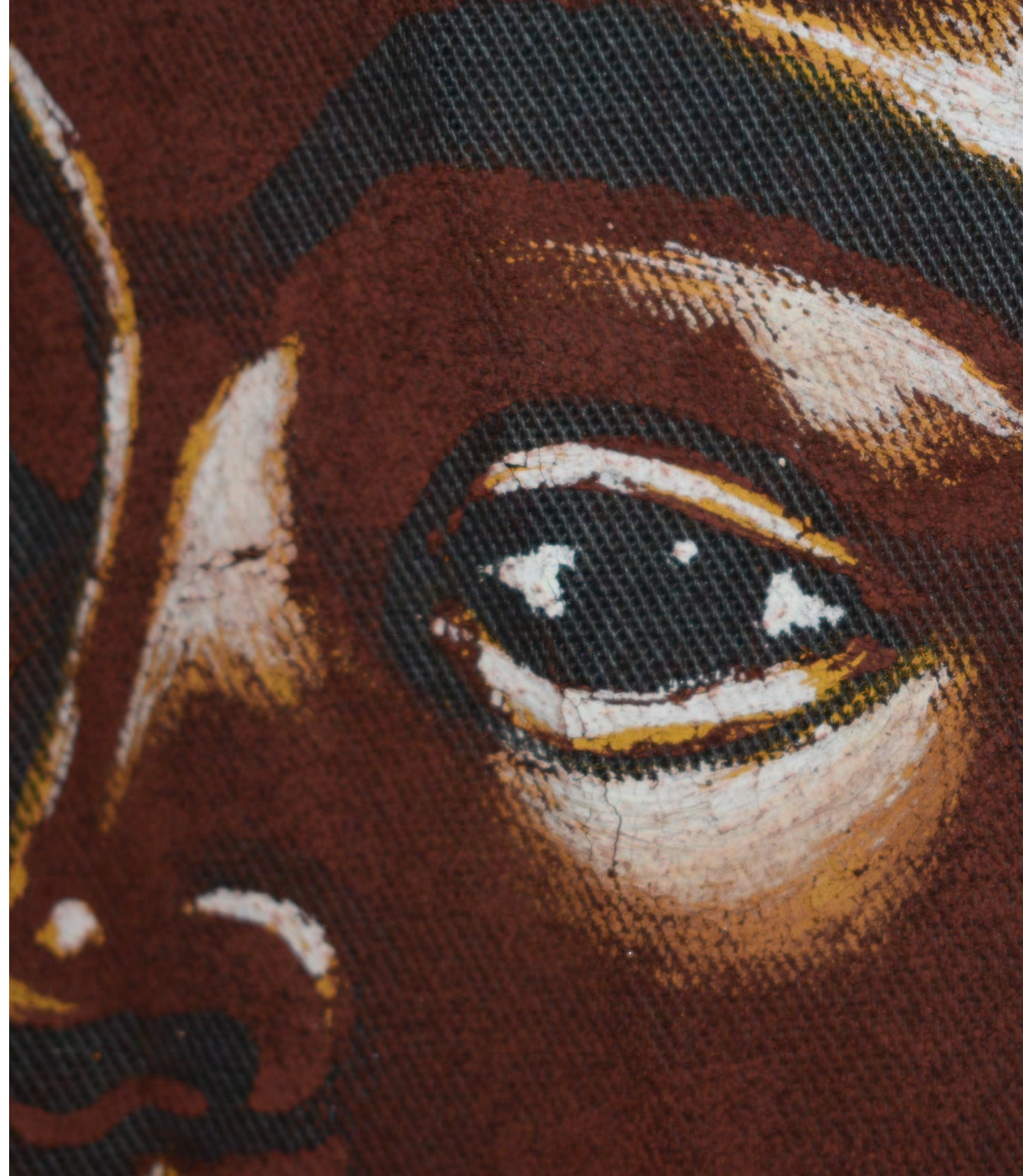
A selection of gifts received by ICOS from participants in the Ireland Fellows Programme.





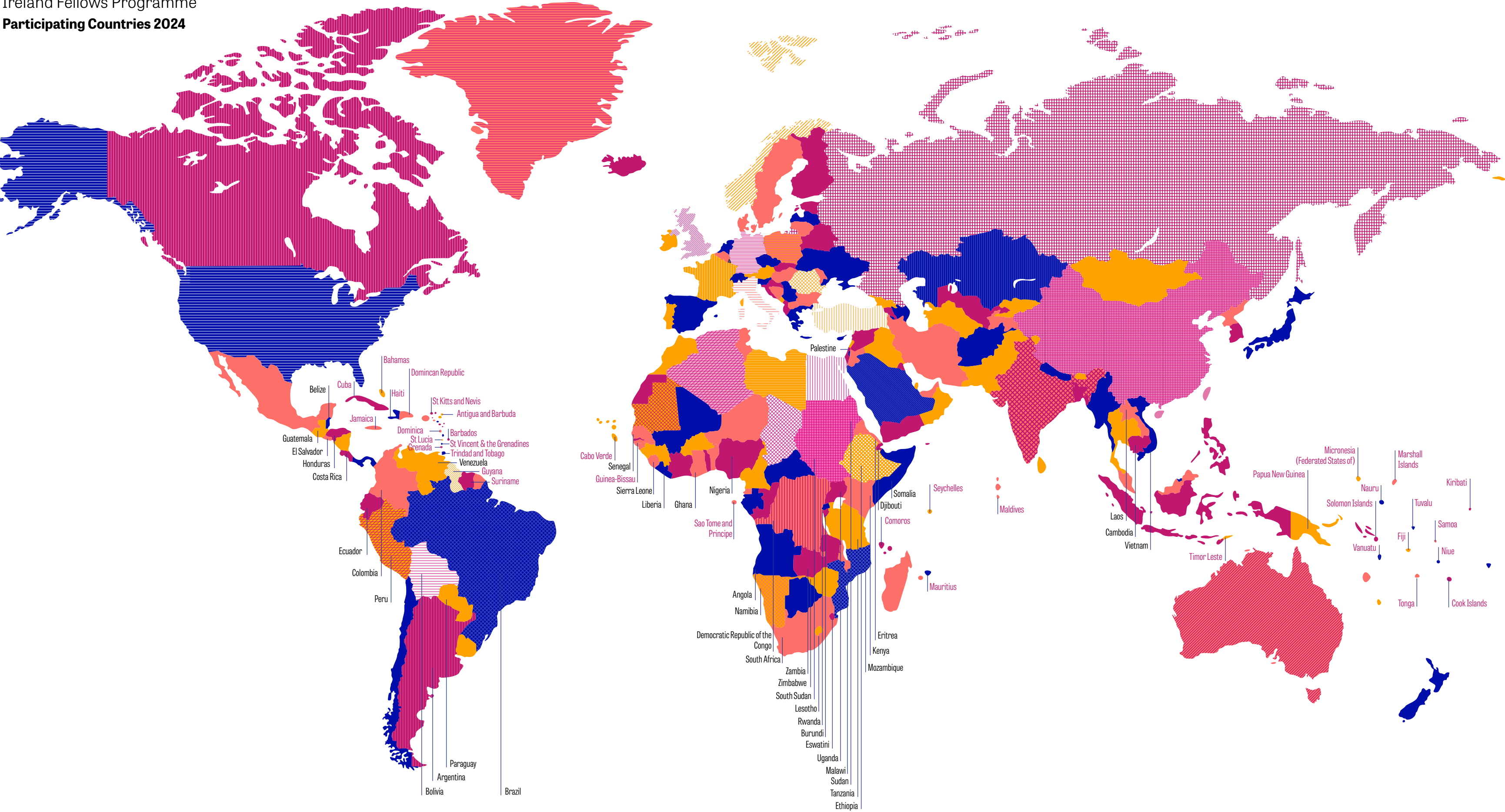






























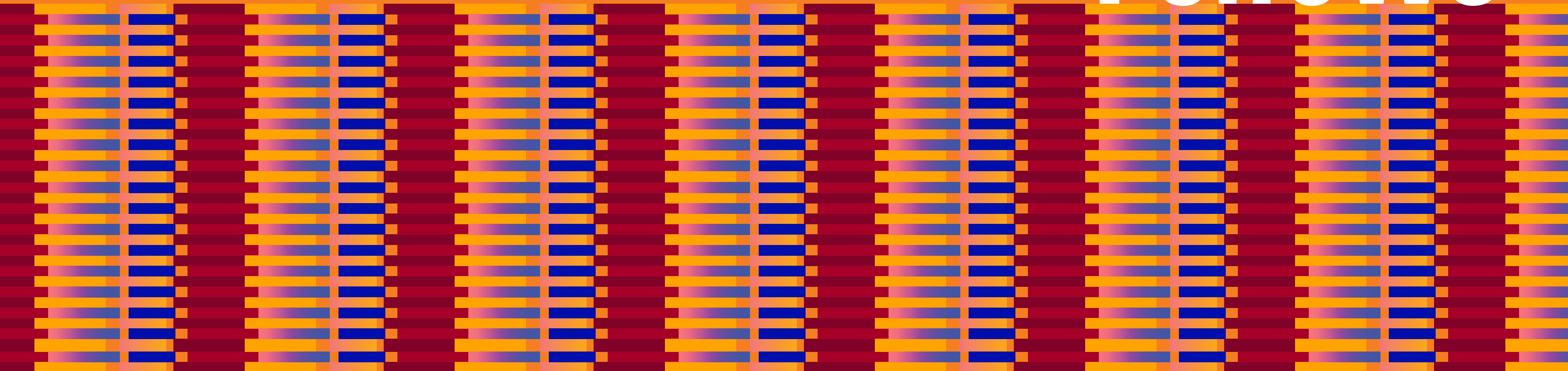








# Current Fellows







Truong Duc Thang,  
Fellow 2023-24  
**Vietnam**

My name is Thang. I'm from Vietnam. I'm currently doing my Master's in Project Management at UCD.

I heard about this Programme through a friend. He was working in the same company as me before, and he introduced to me to this Programme. At first, I was reluctant to apply because I thought it would be very challenging. We would have to compete against so many other talented competitors. He encouraged me to do, and I thought there was no cost to doing it. Either I get it or don't.

Before coming here, I was working at the United Nations Development Program in Vietnam, or UNDP. My previous role was as a Project Monitoring and Evaluation Officer. We have a lot of development projects in Vietnam in terms of poverty reduction, environmental protection, and good governance. My role was to monitor

the progress of those projects and evaluate whether the project objectives had been met or not. Is there any lesson learned? Is there anything else to improve? So that was basically my role at UNDP.

There were many reasons for me to apply for the Ireland Fellows Programme. The first and most practical reason, I needed a Master's degree to get promoted and to get a higher position at my organisation. The second thing is that I had been working at UNDP for almost five years before coming here to study. At that stage, I felt like my learning curves were a little flat. I didn't learn anything new. If I stayed there for a few more years, my knowledge would just be the same. So I thought that it was the right time for me to go and learn something new. That was I would say, the biggest motivation for me to apply for this Programme.



Many years ago, I would say seven, eight years ago, I was really thinking about whether studying a Master's in a foreign country would be worth it - worth the investment or not, comparing it to doing my Master's in Vietnam. At that moment, I thought that I could do a Master's in Vietnam at any time, at a much lower cost. I wouldn't have to quit my job because I could do a Master's in the evening and I could still do my job during the daytime. Throughout years of study and work, I interacted with a lot of people who studied abroad and came back home to work. So the difference I found between them and somebody who just studied in Vietnam is that the technical knowledge may be the same, I would say, but then they have a lot more experience in terms of soft skills, interpersonal skills, and how to work with people from different cultures. They are much more culturally sensitive than the people who just study and stay in Vietnam their whole lives. So I think that there is a very clear advantage of doing a Master's abroad, which is something that you cannot buy at any cost if you just stay in Vietnam.

It is a big advantage because sometimes when you come to work at a company, technical skills are not the only thing that you need because anybody can learn technical skills. Being culturally sensitive and being able to work with a lot of people with different backgrounds from different countries, is a clear advantage for anyone who studies abroad and has those skills.

I think it's becoming more and more common right now [for people from Vietnam to go abroad to study]. It was not very common in the past. 20 years ago, not many people studied abroad. Not many people even knew where Ireland was. Most people knew about Australia and the US, which are very common places for Vietnamese students to go and study. But now it's very common for people to move abroad and study. People are getting wealthier so that they can finance their studies abroad. That's one of the key reasons. And I think another reason is the same as mine. They observe people who study abroad and come back home and how different they are compared to other students, and they see that advantage so clearly, they decide to make

an investment and go study somewhere else instead of in Vietnam.

I only knew a little bit about Ireland before I applied for the Programme. Because at my previous workplace, I had an Irish colleague working there. He was trying to show us a lot of things about the Irish culture, the Irish tradition of music, the tradition of dance to the colleagues in Vietnam, because we have country days where people from different countries showcase the culture of their country in the office. So I knew a little bit about Ireland. But it was only after I applied for the Programme, and I got advanced into other rounds that I researched more about Ireland.

Some things about Ireland are similar to Vietnam. We both went through civil war, which divided the country into two different parts. Back in Vietnam, we were in the war between the North and the South of Vietnam. In the North, we were following the Communist Party, while in the South, we are more like an open economy, like a lot of Western economies right now. They were fighting to see which side should take control of the whole country. The North side won the war, and they took over the country. There are some similarities to Ireland. You were divided between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the south. It was not because it was a political choice, but it was more like a religious choice as far as I understand. I also studied the Irish flag, I know that one side represents the North and one side represents the South, and the white colour in the middle represents the hope for peace, which is something that makes me feel much more connected to Ireland when I learn about this country.

There were a lot of surprises for me coming here to study because I wasn't expecting it would be this challenging, to be honest. We have a lot of work to do, but in a good way. It really challenged my understanding of what I already know so far. Before I came here to study, I worked for seven, eight years. So I thought I knew things until I came here. It really challenged me to unlearn and relearn again. I also had the chance to interact with a lot of people from different countries, and more importantly, different backgrounds, like



**“This Programme  
is a big opportunity.”**



people from working in the tech industry, software engineers and stuff. It really broadened my mindset about how to work with people. I can say that looking past one year, I really learned a lot of new things, not just technical skills, but also about working with people. And of course, I have a lot of good memories about Ireland in general.

One of the most impressive things to me about Ireland is how friendly people are. I used to go to the UK, France and Italy travelling. Those are very nice countries. But I feel like the people there are more conservative, not as welcoming as the people in Ireland, which is something that I find very different. Something new that I learned is that when you go to a bus in Dublin, in Ireland, as soon as you get on to the bus, you say, ‘Hi, good morning’ to the driver. And then when you leave the bus, you say, ‘Thank you’ to the driver, which is something that I find very nice, even though it is a very small thing. Saying hi and saying

thank you is not something that we used to do in Vietnam, to be honest. So yeah, it is a very nice thing to me.

I feel very proud studying at UCD. Not just in terms of ranking. In terms of academic reputation, it’s one of the best colleges in Ireland. I really appreciate the academic staff there, especially my Programme Director, Joe Houghton. He is so passionate about this Programme. We have a course that looks at hot topics in Project Management, which allows us to discuss the trending things about project management right now, so that we can equip ourselves with the most updated skills to increase our competitiveness when we go out to the market and find a job. Joe has been able to maintain a very close relationship with so many types of businesses. He knows what skills the employers are looking for right now. And he tried to deliver that skill to us through those courses. He invited actual business people to come to class and share

their experience. They gave us some advice on how we can make the best out of our studies, which was very helpful. I really appreciate him for doing that.

It’s not just about academic and theory stuff. It’s also about the practical stuff that we can learn from people who have done it before and share with us their experience, which is very helpful.

I am in the last trimester of my studies. So for this trimester, we only have the Capstone Project, which is more like a thesis, but we call it a Capstone Project. That was a very interesting one. Joe wanted us to do our own project and write a report about that project as a thesis to graduate from the school. We had to think about what we wanted to do right now that could make an impact. That’s a very interesting thing. A little bit about my Capstone Project. Currently, I am working with UNDP again. We are working on the

topic of how to monitor the impact of the extraction industry, the mining and extraction of minerals on the nature of biodiversity, and most importantly, the right of people to a clean and healthy environment in Africa. We are narrowing it down to Tanzania and Zambia. Currently, I’m doing a lot of research about those two countries, which is very interesting and exciting as well.

I am coming close to the end of my Programme because the deadline to submit my thesis is 16th of August, which is in less than two months [at the time of interview], and that time is going to pass very quickly, like the past year. I’m starting to feel like I’m going to miss it.

Before I came here, I expected to learn more about project management, or at least to refresh my knowledge. To see what the most trendy things are. What are the most advanced project management techniques that businesses and the world are using? While I was at an interview for the Ireland Fellows Programme, I told the interviewers that we have a lot of projects at UNDP in Vietnam, but a lot of them are getting stuck. They’re not getting approved. That means that all the money that goes to fund the project is not being used, and we have to return it to the donors, which is a waste of money. And then a lot of people in Vietnam don’t benefit from the project objective, like poverty reduction. I wanted to learn new things - what can speed up the process for approving the project, and implementing the project in UNDP in general, so that I can apply that knowledge to revise the process and make things move faster and more efficiently. That way we can do what we are supposed to do, what the donor wanted us to do, and help a lot of people to have better lives. That is my hope after studying this Programme and coming back home.

I miss a lot of people, friends, and food back home right now. This is my first time living abroad, and my first time living away from home for that long, for almost a year now. I used to live in different cities, but it’s easy to

fly back and forth. Here is far away. I really miss a lot of people back home, and I’m looking forward to going back home to share with them all the moments and the good memories I have from the past year in Ireland.

I would recommend this to anyone who wants to study abroad. This Programme is a big opportunity. You have to apply for that at least once in your life. Whether you get it or not, it’s still a good learning experience because you get to reflect on a lot of things about yourself during the application preparation process. You have to write a lot of essays which requires you to think a lot about what you did in the past, what you have achieved, and what you really want to do in the future. That is a good learning process. I would absolutely recommend the Ireland Fellows Programme to anyone. Just go for it.

I’m very grateful for the past, not just one year, but two years. I applied for this Programme back in 2022. It took one year for the application process and interview before I came to Ireland in September 2023. The past two years have been such a miracle for me. I have learned a lot of things. I’m really grateful for this Programme and all the people who made this happen. So I just wanted to say thank you.







Dina Amad,  
Fellow 2023-24  
**Palestine**

I'm from Palestine, and I'm currently studying at University College, Dublin. I'm doing my Master's in Project Management.

I found out about [the Ireland Fellows Programme] a couple of years ago. I saw it on a Facebook post and I applied two years ago, but I unfortunately didn't get accepted. So I applied again last year.

I had just graduated from my undergrad in 2019, and I really wanted to do a Master's. But the pandemic hit, and that's where I found myself in operations and supply chain management. Since then, I've been working. I applied and got accepted. And here I am.

It was fairly easy. Not too easy that anyone can apply, it took a lot of time to actually build the application. But once you get started, it was quite motivating to go to the next steps and go through the application, the interviews, and all the exams that you have to do. It's a fairly interesting process to get through. It's rewarding at the end as well.

I didn't know much about Ireland, but I knew that their universities are really top-notch. And that's why I applied to a few and got accepted to UCD. I really like UCD. It's a very big campus. I've met a lot of people from so many different places. It just shows that there's so many societies and so many backgrounds you didn't know about before. In my class at UCD right now, we have 15 nationalities. So this brought a lot of fresh new ideas to the table with absolutely diverse backgrounds. I like that challenging aspect of it. I find Dublin quite, I want to say, dynamic.

I didn't have any cultural shock here. It was quite interesting to see everyone driving on the other side. I wasn't concerned with the driving, I was concerned with crossing the road. Dublin drivers!

A memory that really comes to mind is doing day trips to different small villages, those areas where it's completely



# “It’s a really nice place to stay for a year. So I would really encourage everyone to apply.”

noise-free, pollution-free. Having that accessibility to go to a different place every weekend is really nice. It could be a random place, it could be a really well-known place. And then the next day, it could be a really tough hike. I’m not a very sporty person, so it was challenging, but it was worth it to get to the top.

ICOS has been a great support since before we even started here. They have been in constant contact with us. It was nice to have that support before we even arrived. Whenever you wanted something or you were stuck on something, you would just reach out to your assigned person and they would contact you directly and help you as much as they could.

There are about 20 people from Palestine with ICOS. I didn’t know most of them. We’re from different cities and we became really good friends here in Ireland. It’s very nice to share that with people from your home country, but it’s also really nice to share with different Fellows from different countries.

Not a lot of people from Palestine go and study abroad for their undergrad. It depends on where you’re from in Palestine, what undergrad that you have. A lot of

people who did a year abroad in their undergrad do actually continue to do their Master’s abroad. But it’s always the goal to have a Master’s abroad wherever you did your undergrad. So I would say for Master’s students, it’s fairly common to travel and do it somewhere in Europe.

I think a lot of universities in Europe and in Ireland are very accredited. At the same time, you get this experience from outside your home country and probably work for a year or so and go back home and bring new ideas to your hometown. I’m not quite sure what I’m going to do next. I have a few options. I really want to do my PhD, but at the same time, I really want to get back to work. During my Master’s, I’ve felt I’ve been on a break. No responsibilities. I’m just taking a gap year, but a stressful one with assignments. Hopefully, I’ll get back into work or go ahead with my PhD. I’m hoping to go back to Palestine. I’d really like to bring what I learned back home and try to motivate other people to go and do their Master’s here.

My friends and family were really encouraging. I’ve already done that step before, so they were really celebrating this, and they can’t wait for me to graduate and attend the graduation ceremony. It’s a bit far in December, but it’s a rewarding milestone. It’s a bit bittersweet, because you’re saying goodbye for a year, but at the same time, you’re going out to enjoy that year and achieve a Master’s.

I would highly recommend this Programme to anyone who is working or just finished their undergrad. It’s a really nice experience to meet new people, to actually get a really good education and graduate from universities that are very much accredited around the world. And it’s a really nice place to stay for a year. So I would really encourage everyone to apply.





“I am better  
equipped to work  
with the people  
who need help in  
Ecuador now.”



Pilar Hunter Estarellas,  
Fellow 2023-24  
**Ecuador**

I'm from Ecuador. I'm doing a Master's in International Human Rights Law and Public Policy at University College Cork.

I heard about the Ireland Fellows Programme as it was the first time it opened in South America and Ecuador, specifically. They were trying to reach audiences through universities. So I decided to apply, as there are not a lot of scholarships that focus on law. I was really happy to apply for international human rights degrees. I applied for different ones throughout Ireland, but I ended up choosing University College Cork. I really like studying and being in academia, and I thought that it was a great opportunity to go to another country to learn more about its culture, and also study a field which I really like.

I knew a bit about Ireland. One of my great-grandfathers was born here. Part of my family was living here. They migrated a lot throughout Europe and then America. I guess it was really interesting to come back, if you can say that, 150 years or more after they left. They were from Cork or around that area. They were working in Fota for a while. I think one generation was born there, and then they left to go to America.

I read about the courses I was applying to beforehand, and I really liked the aspect of public policy that UCC had to offer. We had a lot of optional modules, so we got to choose which modules we wanted to take throughout the semesters. One I really enjoyed was Refugee and First Displacement Law. The professor knew a lot and gave really interesting classes. It is interesting learning international human rights from a different perspective than the one I learned back home. I got to learn a lot about new things and keep developing the things I already knew with new perspectives. I got to learn from people who have worked in refugee camps or outside of Ireland or in NGOs and other important organisations.

Studying for a law degree is very different as you learn more about the jurisdictions and legal systems in your country. I did learn about human rights in my undergrad, but I also learned a lot about how to apply law in my own jurisdiction. When I chose to get a specialisation in human rights, I thought that it would be better to learn a broad variety of topics. I had a Refugee and Forced Placement Law class. I also did Environmental Law and Mental Capacity Law, Public International Law, Human Rights, and many other modules that I really enjoyed. They brought me a lot of new opinions, and I got to focus on other things that I hadn't learned before. I really enjoyed doing the Programme.

I really like living in Cork. I've had the opportunity to meet people from all over the world. Here in UCC, for example, you get to meet people from other countries, not only Irish people. So I had the opportunity to learn more about other cultures and traditions and made friends from other countries such as Asia, China, or South Korea, India and Lithuania. I really want to keep in touch with them. Even though some are not studying the same Master's as me or they're in STEM, I think that we really formed a great friendship. So I hope to keep in contact and keep in touch after we leave Ireland.

I'm really happy that I got the opportunity to be in this Programme. I will be sad to leave, but I'm also really excited for the future, and I hope to come back to Ireland at some point for graduation, for tourism, or if I have the opportunity to stay here to study, whether that be another Master's, a certificate, or something else. I really liked living in Ireland. I really like the culture.

I have learned a lot of things here, not only by reading or writing essays or taking exams, but also by experiences and hearing the experiences my professors had. I am better equipped to work with the people who need help in Ecuador now. I also would like to enter academia or start working at a university in my



home city, which is Guayaquil. I think that talking to my professors about their journey was really important and it was really interesting to get to learn what they did and the tips they have to give me or other students that might want to follow the same path.

The situation in Ecuador is a bit difficult as before it was a peaceful country. We had the drug gangs in Colombia and in Peru, but Ecuador was more of a pathway to get to these other two countries. Now, there are more gangs in my territory, so it is a bit difficult, especially security-wise. If you go to certain zones, it might not be that safe. I would really like to work with human rights as I would like to help the situation in Ecuador. We also have a big community of migrants and refugees that might be not really integrated into the Ecuadorian community. I think that it's important to work with economic migrants and refugees and these communities that are trying to integrate into Ecuadorian society and help them get education, public health, housing, and everything.

My parents and my family were really happy I got accepted onto the Programme. They felt that studying human rights here in Ireland was a good opportunity for me. They were really happy for me that I got this year to go to another country and not only learn more about human rights, but also that I got the opportunity to learn about new things, make new friends from around the world, and learn more about Irish culture.



At Iveagh House



With other Fellows  
and Seán Fleming, TD,  
Minister of State





“ Going back home, my first plan is to continue to build on that relationship.”

Rashuana Adams,  
Fellow 2023-24  
Antigua and Barbuda



I'm from Antigua and Barbuda. I am doing my Master's in Environmental and Natural Resources at University College Cork.

My sister, who, as she says, has never steered me wrong, saw an advertisement for the Programme on our Government's website, calling for candidates from SIDS (Small Island Developing States). This would have been in June 2023. The application began from there. I just went through the process, and here I am. At the time, I was also applying to another scholarship in the UK, and I eventually chose Ireland.

I'd never been to Ireland. I've been to the United Kingdom before and I liked it there. I've always heard of Ireland and I wanted to explore it. I heard of University College Cork being one of the top law universities in Ireland. Knowing that I wanted to study environmental law, I was particularly impressed by their Research and Innovation department. I figured it would be nice to contribute more information on SIDS, especially in environmental matters at UCC. And so that's how I made my choice, and that's how I came to Ireland.

I was working in the Department of Environment when I applied. I'd been working with the Government since starting on a smaller role in November 2017. Then I became a consultant on a project in January 2018. Then I was brought on staff permanently in January 2019.

I did my undergrad within the West Indies, in Barbados. I always knew that once I wanted to advance to my Master's or law school that I wanted to go outside the region to experience learning outside of a Caribbean country. I always think that's extremely important. I had been working for five years, and as it happens when you're working, you tend to get a bit distracted from continuing your education. Initially, I said I was going to work for two years and that turned into five years. At the five-year mark I guess I felt as though I was in somewhat of a stalemate, and I finally decided to pursue

my Master's. Economically speaking, it would have been difficult for me on my own, so I was particularly grateful to hear about the Programme, and I applied.

I'm not aware of any other students from SIDS in Cork. In fact, since I've been here, I've only met one other Caribbean person. I think most of them are in Dublin. And and probably at UCD. I thought that was pretty special. I'm proud to say, at least from my Programme director, I'm the second Antiguan he's ever met.

I am doing my dissertation now. My coursework is completed. I submit my dissertation at the end of August, and that's it. I've loved it. I really like Cork. I don't know if it's just because I'm from a small island so I'm accustomed to something more quaint. I like the idea of maybe visiting a big city, but I don't think I like the idea of living in a big city. Cork, is obviously a lot larger than Antigua. Maybe we hit 100,000 people in Antigua, but I don't think so. But Cork doesn't feel like a big place. It just feels very quaint, and people are very friendly. Studying at UCC helps because of the place where I am and how much I enjoy it. The university itself, it's a small centre for the environment, but the law professors are so dedicated. They're so friendly, and they're really interested in your professional development going forward. It's been a lovely time. Lovely university. Lovely place.

There are issues that I think Ireland as an island faces as well as the Caribbean. We have the risk of sea level rise, probably a bit more pertinent than the small islands. I know in parts of Ireland, on the coast of Dublin you also suffer from coastal erosion. A common issue that we face is the matter of eventually, what are we going to do with people that live around the coast, and how are we going to bring them closer to the middle of the island? In Antigua, people tend to live around the coast. The middle of the island is almost uninhabited. You have to have a plan for what to do as sea level continues to rise.



How do we move these people in? How do we compensate them appropriately for local communities that have a real attachment to the land? How do we navigate that? That's something I would say we have in common that I think Ireland will eventually have to face. In the Caribbean and in Antigua, we have the risk of hurricanes every single year. In fact, we have two seasons, hurricane season and non-hurricane season. We have faced a number of high category hurricanes within the region. I think people generally hear of Hurricane Irma in 2017. I believe there was Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas in 2019 or so. It's just important that we have a strong action plan and a strong adaptation plan for the region.

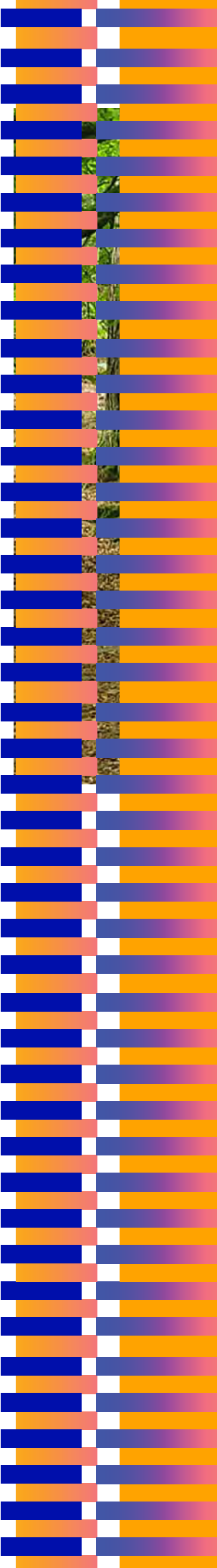
Energy is also a big factor for Antigua. Obviously, as a year-round sunshine island, we would benefit a lot from renewable energy installation, but we have been pretty slow in that area for a variety of reasons, some of which is related to costs and access to proper technologies. Then the overall theme would really be climate financing for more developed partners when it comes to implementing a lot of those Programmes. Those are big issues I would say, for SIDS in general and certainly for Antigua.

I think for me, going back home, my first plan is to continue to build on that relationship [with Ireland], especially when it comes to research. Another big problem we face in the region is we don't have enough data to support a lot of the adaptation plans, and that is linked to not having sufficient capacity, human and otherwise. Currently, I'm pleased to be working with one of my professors at UCC on a project that would build a

partnership between UCC, University of the West Indies, and a university in the Pacific Islands. Going back home, that would likely be the immediate thing, building that connection between the universities in order to increase research and environmental preservations and actions going forward.

Finishing the Programme... I'm being very generous with myself when I say I'm working on my dissertation, simply because when I submitted my coursework, I took quite a long break after a very intense second semester. Now I've got back into my groove. I don't want to be cliché and say it's bittersweet, but it's nice to know that I'm at the finish line when it comes to the Programme. I think what makes it almost bitter is that I've gotten such an attachment and love being in Cork and love the people. I guess I have mixed feelings. I'm excited that I'm near the finish line when it comes to the Programme in general. I've also grown such an attachment to UCC, to the people that I've been with throughout this entire year, and even to the general people in Cork itself.

It's nice to be finished with the Programme, but I guess the memories of those relationships are still with me. In any event, I think what's most important is that I built those networks and those personal relationships in the first place, and I will just carry them along with me.



In Glendalough



UCC Law and Environment Conference  
**2024**







# IRELAND FELLOWS PROGRAMME

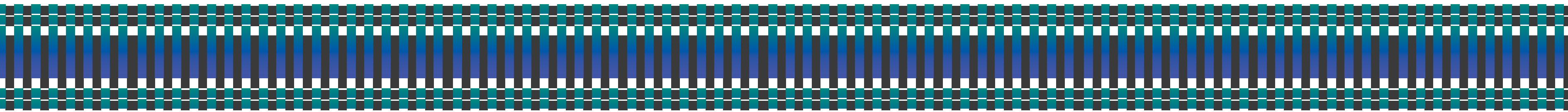
through the years





ICOS team  
**2024**

Fellows with President of Ireland  
Patrick Hillery  
**1990**



Tánaiste Simon Coveney with a group  
of Palestinian Fellows at Farmleigh  
**2019**



Fellows with President of Ireland  
Mary Robinson  
**1996**





College visits, Maynooth  
**2017-18**

College visits, UCC  
**2017-18**



College visits, NUIG  
**2017-18**



College visits, UL  
**2017-18**

College visits, UCD  
**2017-18**





College visits, UCC  
**2017-18**



College visits, CIT  
**2017-18**



KA Alumni  
**2017**



Staying Connected, bus tour group  
**2017**







Fellows from Vietnam who participated  
in the Ireland Fellows Programme  
**2013-14**

**2012**



Irish Aid Seminar for Fellows  
**2011**



St Patrick's Day  
**2009**



Seminar  
**2012**



Lesotho Alumni







Christmas party  
2008

2007-08



Croke Park  
2007



Glendalough trip  
2005-06



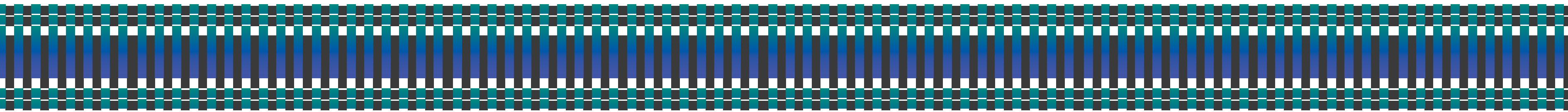
2006





Glendalough visit  
**2004**

Victoria Kisamfu (Tanz), Joyce Wamoyi (Tanz),  
Umu Nabieu (Sierra Leone), Aminata Kamara  
(Sierra Leone)  
**2003-04**



Development Studies  
**2001-02**



Bus tour  
**2001**





Christmas Party  
**2001**

L-R Rakesh Kumar Surendran, Dr Zubair Kabir,  
Ajay Pandey and Seemtan Hasin Ali, at Japanese  
Gardens  
**1999**



Above and below: DFA Reception  
**1999**

Glendalough Bus Tour  
**1994**



Christmas Party  
**2000**





















