

TAA AWARD FUND

James Brockington - Case Study

Following a BA in International Development at the University of Sussex, I completed an MSc in Agroforestry at Bangor University in 2010. Supported by a TAAF award, I was able to undertake two months of fieldwork in Karnataka, India, for my MSc dissertation.



Project farmer in his agroforestry plot (fruit orchard intercropped with vegetables).

The study involved *ex-post* impact assessment of an agroforestry extension project in the village of Channapur, which had terminated in 2004. Evidence from similar studies suggested that substantial post-project abandonment of introduced agroforestry practices was a common occurrence. We were therefore interested to ascertain whether the tree-based farming system introduced through the project in question had suffered a similar fate, or whether adopting farmers had continued to maintain and manage their agroforestry plots during the intervening years.

Mixed methods were employed including GIS mapping, rapid plot inventories and interviews with farmers. The results showed that the project had achieved highly successful outcomes, with 97% of adopting farmers found to have retained the practice and further evidence of intensification and diffusion.

I found my MSc fieldwork in India to be very rewarding and I was keen to quickly gain more overseas development experience in order to further my career. I applied again to the TAAF for a 'Standard Award', which enabled me to take a 12-month internship as a research associate with a Bangalore-based NGO. I joined the NGO in April 2011 and initially my work involved impact assessment of the



Household interview in the village of Channapur.

organisation's livelihood/ micro-enterprise development programme known as MOVE (Market Oriented Value Enhancement). The results of this assessment indicated positive outcomes of the programme but also highlighted some pressing issues in design and implementation. These findings fed into programmatic development and the establishment of more robust monitoring and evaluation protocols. I also took part in the planning and delivery of MOVE training (including a highly innovative project targeting sexual minority groups), as well as participating in a number of research projects involving national and international collaboration.

Unexpectedly, however, the bulk of my time was actually spent fundraising. Meetings with potential donors, conceptual planning sessions, background research and proposal writing probably accounted for more than half of all the hours I worked. This is not what I had imagined that I would be doing, but nonetheless it offered an opportunity to engage with development issues across a range of fields (marketing and enterprise development, education, healthcare, corruption and gender, decentralised urban planning, etc).



MOVE training workshop with sexual minorities.

Raising funds was an organisational imperative (to ensure survival) and was made particularly difficult given the global financial crisis and the intense competition from other NGOs in similarly precarious positions. Our success in securing funds was limited and this was undeniably frustrating. However, it served as an important lesson in the trials and tribulations of working in the NGO sector where major resource-constraints are commonplace.

Taken together the TAAF awards have allowed me to learn a great deal about the nature of development work in practice and the skill-set required to make effective contributions. These experiences have been invaluable in shaping my career to date and I remain firmly committed to working in the international development sector. To that end I am now enrolled as a PhD candidate at Bangor University where I am studying the drivers of a large-scale agroforestry programme in western



A successful MOVE entrepreneur running a roadside eatery.

India. Alongside my PhD, I am employed by the University as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, where I support the delivery of MSc programmes in forestry by distance learning. Many of our students hail from developing world countries and I had the pleasure of meeting this year's (2013) cohort during a summer school delivered in Budongo Forest Reserve, Uganda.

I am delighted to have been appointed to the TAAF committee and look forward to assisting future TAAF awardees benefit from the same kind of support and guidance that I have been lucky enough to receive myself.