



TFD IMPACT STORIES

The Value of Working with The Forests Dialogue

The Forests Dialogue (TFD) is more than a professional engagement—it is a transformative experience that shapes careers and forms lifelong connections. TFD provides a unique space where individuals grow beyond their immediate roles. For graduate students, TFD serves as a bridge between academic learning and real-world practice. It offers opportunities to develop facilitation and negotiation skills, deepen content expertise, and build lasting relationships with mentors and peers. The impact of TFD extends far beyond the dialogues themselves, influencing professional pathways, institutional practices, and global policy discussions.

Developing Critical Skills for Future Leaders

One of TFD's greatest strengths is its ability to instill essential skills in dialogue facilitation, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative problem-solving. Through its dialogue principles, mode of co-creation with the Steering Committee (SC), and detailed preparation processes, TFD equips young professionals with the tools to bring together diverse groups for meaningful conversations and shared solutions.

Xiaoting Hou-Jones credits her time as a TFD program manager with preparing her for multi-stakeholder engagement in the artisanal mining sector at IIED: "TFD helped me understand how to engage with diverse perspectives and stakeholders with very different backgrounds, which set the foundation for me to work on a variety of issues, including supporting the development of multi-stakeholder engagement processes for artisanal mining."

Similarly, Akiva Fishman's career trajectory reflects how early involvement in TFD can lead to significant leadership opportunities. Starting as an





The Forests Dialogue Week at Yale School of Environment 2023.

intern, he later transitioned into a key role at WWF (World Wildlife Fund) managing private sector interventions in deforestation and forest degradation. “TFD played a key role in convening all these players who were acting independently to begin the process of getting everyone on the same page,” he recalls. His work at TFD directly influenced his ability to help companies implement deforestation-free commitments and led him to represent WWF on the Accountability Framework Initiative Steering Group.

The Alumni Network and Career Impact: A Ripple Effect Through Organizations

The impact of TFD alumni extends across multiple sectors, from conservation NGOs to corporate sustainability initiatives. Many program associates and managers go on to

institutionalize stakeholder engagement and multi-stakeholder dialogue principles within their own organizations.

Sarah Price’s journey exemplifies this influence. Starting as a program associate while studying at Yale in 2004, she has since engaged with TFD in multiple capacities, from NGO work to corporate sustainability leadership. “I institutionalized a stakeholder dialogue process at PEFC [Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification], where for one or two days we would bring people in to discuss and debate. I feel sure there are many like me who’ve learned from a TFD experience and put it into our own surroundings,” she explains.

The TFD network is a powerful force in shaping professional opportunities. Many alumni attribute their career growth to the



Xiaoting Hou-Jones (left) at REDD Readiness Switzerland Dialogue in Nepal 2011.

mentorship and connections they formed during their time at TFD. This sustained engagement fosters a long-term impact on organizations and sectors that benefit from experienced professionals trained in multi-stakeholder collaboration.

The Role of Dialogue in Today's World

As global discourse becomes increasingly polarized, the need for spaces that cultivate humility, empathy, and constructive conversation has never been greater. TFD exemplifies the painstaking yet necessary work that goes into making dialogues inclusive, effective, and genuinely transformative.

Xiaoting Hou-Jones reflects on how TFD instilled in her a commitment to questioning her biases and truly listening to others:

“We see the world is increasingly polarized. Too many people too often forget to really listen to each other. Building trust and lasting relationships takes time and sometimes hard compromises. TFD taught me the importance of humility, empathy, and compassion in my work and my life.”

– Xiaoting Hou-Jones, former TFD program manager



Sarah Price (right) at the Forest and Poverty Reduction Dialogue in South Africa 2006.

The skills and experiences gained at TFD are not only professionally valuable but also crucial for addressing today's environmental and social challenges. Graduates of the program carry these lessons forward, influencing global conversations on forests, climate, and sustainability.

The Next Generation of Program Associates

For students, working with TFD is an unparalleled opportunity to engage with thought leaders, develop professional skills, and think critically about their role in shaping the future of forestry and sustainability.

Luca Guadagno, a former Yale graduate student who worked with TFD, shares: "This community and all of the connections I'm able to make through the steering committee members, past and present, is just an incredibly valuable experience as a student." The mentorship and

exposure provided by TFD challenge students to think deeply and strategically about pressing environmental issues.

Navigating a Changing Landscape

As forestry issues intersect with climate, investment, and technology, TFD's role in convening critical discussions is more vital than ever. The involvement of students and early-career professionals aligns with the evolving priorities of the Steering Committee, ensuring that the dialogue process remains adaptive and responsive to emerging challenges.

Sarah Price emphasizes the complexity of today's forest issues: "Forests are now an issue of investment, brand reputation, climate mitigation, and adaptation. There are so many stakeholders involved, from private sector actors to NGOs and even social media influencers. TFD's role in navigating this

complexity is more important than ever.”

Continued student engagement ensures that TFD remains a forward-thinking organization, leveraging fresh perspectives while maintaining its foundational principles of trust and dialogue.

Students as the Future

The value of TFD is not just in the dialogues themselves but in the people it connects, the skills it imparts, and the long-term impact it has on careers and global forest governance. It serves as a launchpad for students and early-career professionals, equipping them with the expertise, networks, and confidence to become leaders in forestry, conservation, and sustainability.

For many, the experience and connections

gained at TFD have directly led to job opportunities and career advancements. As the challenges facing forests grow more complex, the role of inclusive, trust-based dialogue in finding solutions has never been more critical.

The call to action now is to ensure that future generations continue to benefit from and contribute to this invaluable platform. TFD’s legacy will endure through the next wave of students, program associates, and engaged professionals who will carry forward its principles of dialogue, trust, and meaningful engagement.

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Investing in Locally Controlled Forestry Dialogue in Kenya 2010.

