

William Nelson on SIA

Name: William Nelson

Country of Origin: England

Completed SIA in: 2015

Current Position: PhD candidate

The SIA MSc programme was exactly what I'd been looking for. I'd just finished an internship at Oxfam's headquarters in Oxford, England, working in the Food Security and Livelihoods team and was keen to learn more about related issues as well as gain technical knowledge and overseas experience. While I wasn't fixed on a certain topic, I wanted a course that was broad in what it offered, but had the expertise to allow me to focus once I'd found a specialty. It was also important for me to be part of a dynamic, international learning environment that, while based on the fundamentals of natural science, looked at sustainable agriculture as a global responsibility and objective. The SIA MSc gave me all of this and more. I spent two years studying various courses with class mates from all over the world, from countries such as Kenya, the USA, Mexico, Switzerland, Italy, and South Korea to name just a few. As 'like-minded internationals', this has of course led to a network of friends spread throughout the world - some of my closest friendships were made through the SIA programme! Highlights of the MSc have to include the fully-funded field-work I conducted in Rwanda for four months as part of my MSc thesis, which was a rewarding experience in many ways. In addition, one year I took part in a two-week excursion to Thailand that took us from Bangkok all the way to the Malaysian border. This involved a busy schedule but the opportunity to see at least two agricultural systems a day, from cooperative shrimp farms to industrial oil palm plantations. This sort of exposure is exactly what I wanted and what makes the programme stand out and so unique.

After graduation, I was employed as a visiting scientist at ILRI, Nairobi, Kenya, where I conducted field-work for DITSL, a Witzenhausen-based organisation that works with tropical agriculture and that I'd worked with as a student-assistant during the MSc. This proved to be a rich experience that threw me into the world of northern Kenya's pastoralists. I spent a total of six months in the field over two visits and gained practical experience in yet another challenging setting. This put me in good stead for my next role, obtained through a SIA contact, working for a German-based organisation setting up a vocational agriculture school in northern Nigeria. After two years, I wanted to further my scientific knowledge and skills and so embarked on a PhD at the University of Göttingen. Now in the final stages, I've worked on collaborative and international projects in Germany, India, Israel and Niger and have developed a skill-set that has secured my next role as a post-doc in a project between Germany and South Africa.

The SIA MSc is a unique programme that offers a huge amount of freedom and a broad range of expertise from two different settings, from the organic focus of the Witzenhausen campus (University of Kassel) to the more traditional background of the University of Göttingen. The combination of the two boasts innovative and internationally renowned working groups that offer great potential for students to make the most of. Needless to say, SIA expands horizons and opens doors – I can't recommend it enough!