Early Career Members

Avenues for International Collaboration and Impact

by Davie Kadyampakeni

Is it time to make an impact on the international stage? This is a question that many early career members might be asking themselves. Some may assume that the time for contributing to international research programs will come towards their retirement or when they have secured tenure or a more permanent position. Really, the best time for international collaboration is immediately after completing your Ph.D. In the following article, I’ll share my own experience taking advantage of international opportunities.

Postdoctoral Opportunities

Immediately after earning my Ph.D., I had the opportunity of working for the University of Florida (UF) as a postdoctoral research associate. The postdoc position helped me improve my grant writing and publication skills and furthered my oratory skills in presentations at multiple conferences. It is important for early career members to realize that once you earn your Ph.D., you need to go out there and show your skills, sell your resume, and tell the world what you know. Thus, early career members could take a postdoctoral position as a way to elevate themselves to the next stage of their career by improving their visibility through publications in refereed journals, helping to mentor graduate students, and submitting an abstract to ASA, CSSA, and SSSA meetings to take advantage of networking opportunities. More importantly, within a year of working in a postdoctoral position, one needs to start looking for a permanent job because, as a rule of thumb, you cannot be a permanent postdoctoral researcher.

My Role with CGIAR Centers

Two years into my postdoc position at UF, I had the opportunity to work for the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), a member institute of the 15 CGIAR centers available worldwide, and collaborate with multiple international institutes including the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), International Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and the World Vegetable Center (AVRDC). I also worked with multiple nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the International Fertilizer Development Center, Conservation Alliance International, and several other NGOs and national institutes and universities in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ghana. These collaborations gave me the opportunity to network with other researchers, local partners, smallholder farmers, and the private sector. More importantly, I had the opportunity to supervise graduate students from local universities working on my projects. I realized it is important early in your career to get out of your comfort zone and explore the future.