



Susan Rachel Banki

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Twenty years ago, almost to the day, I had a decision to make – where to go to graduate school?

One choice would have put me in enormous debt.

The other was funded by SYLFF, at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

I chose the second, and because of the generosity of the SYLFF program, I was able to pursue humanitarian work because I didn't have crushing debt after graduate school.

And I had the unforgettable chance to study under JCP, who sends a message to everyone here today, and his personal wishes to you, Mr. Sasakawa. Here he is with a photograph of the SYLFF Fellows just a few months ago.

My life was changed irrevocably by SYLFF

I have had the chance to work in microfinance in West Papua

I have lived with, worked with, and learned from refugees around the world, including refugees from Myanmar living in Takadanobaba.

And today I am at the University of Sydney, where I teach on topics about which I am greatly passionate: human rights, refugees, and social protest. None of this would have been possible without SYLFF.

But this isn't about me alone. I am proud to say that my work has influenced others and improved lives, the way ripples move outward from a pebble in a pond. One refugee has created jobs for thousands of others. One former student has created gender equality videos that have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times in Nepal. We can trace all of this back

to SYLFF.

And if that weren't enough, I am now part of this amazing, vibrant group of SYLFF leaders who have come together to grapple with the profoundly important issue of food production, food security, and food sovereignty. We will not solve hunger by 2030, but harnessing the power of this group will, I believe, move our overstretched planet in the right direction.

It is impossible to separate out food justice from our natural environment, and I'd like to focus for one moment on that: the environment, and specifically, on trees. We are increasingly learning that trees are miraculous organisms. Their roots – invisible to the casual observer – run underground, and stretch far beyond what was previously understood. It turns out that these symbols of mother earth are capable of communication. They protect each other when threats emerge. And they share resources, somehow using chemical reactions under the soil to feed one another.

It's not too much of a stretch to say that the SYLFF leaders remind me of these trees. Our networks spread far and wide, in quiet and powerful ways. I can only hope that, as with trees, our collective roots grow longer and stronger as time passes.

I'd like to close with a poem:

The SYLFF Twenty

We are twenty, diverse aplenty
SYLFF's programs give a helping hand
From Australia to New Zealand

We are twenty, we laugh aplenty
We hail from Poland Brazil UK
Italy Greece and the USA

We are twenty, we eat aplenty
We're Slovaks, Serbs and of course the Swiss
We're Chinese, Germans, and also Spanish

We are twenty, we work aplenty
Nigerian, Mongolian, Bulgarian too

Canadian, Indian, and a South African crew

How very lucky, we twenty are
To gather as friends from so very far
Our thanks are due to one special man
We bow in gratitude, Sasakawa-san

“We are honored that the Foundation chose Fletcher as the first recipient of a munificent grant establishing SYLFF. It is enriching the lives of many of our ablest students and we are ever grateful to have been the first among the many institutions that followed. The Foundation is to be greatly praised for the range and depth of its global philanthropy.”

John Curtis Perry, April 2019

