Royal Academy
of Engineering

Faces of
Frontiers:
Harry Chaplin

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"I'm a massive believer in local action and local design."

Harry Chaplin

Overview

Through the Frontiers programme, Harry Chaplin connected interdisciplinary experts with local communities in southern Madagascar. Together, they worked to address challenges in local development such as access to water and women's empowerment. Harry aims to keep building local capacities and involvement in development projects.

About Harry

Harry, with a background in engineering, moved to Madagascar in 2015 to launch projects on rainwater harvesting with local involvement and action. However, his goals grew when he attended the 2019 Frontiers Symposium in Mexico. He met people from across different regions and disciplines, running various development projects worldwide. Underlining the role that the symposia had for him, Harry says "It lit a fire under me to build and grow what we started here [in Madagascar] because both symposia were really empowering from a local and contextual level." The same year,

Harry turned the work he was doing for a water supply NGO into a social enterprise focused on empowering women through improved access to clean drinking water in southern Madagascar.

After participating in the 2019 symposium, Harry worked with the Frontiers team to bring the next meeting to Madagascar. Seeing the benefits and successes of the symposium format, Harry also adapted it to bring rainwater harvesting experts together from across the globe while focusing on local settings. He also used the experience to develop a platform for local community members, students, and experts in Madagascar to collaborate in a 'think and do tank' and put community members at the center of development policy discussions. The project, MADLab, received Frontiers Champions funding.

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Lessons learnt

Despite the success of his projects, Harry has also faced challenges along the way. For instance, the MADLab and Frontiers symposia brought together people from different fields, regions, and contexts. While this encourages rich discussion, it can also be difficult to unite experts with local community members. Even within Madagascar, Harry encountered big differences between experts from the capital city and local communities in the south. However, he learnt that it is crucial to get everyone on board from the beginning and handle expectations.

Another lesson Harry learned through his work, is that while interdisciplinary collaboration is exciting and eye-opening, it is important to channel that energy into specific ideas or problems. He is currently working on understanding ways to bring these different perspectives and expertise together around water accessibility and community development.

Ambitions

Harry is passionate about local development and women's empowerment. His most recent work has focussed on his social enterprise *Tatirano*, which provides employment and development opportunities to local young people. On this, Harry highlighted, "The Frontiers programme has been an enormous part of where we are at in our project." Harry is also developing a new symposium showcasing rainwater harvesting across the globe, also supported by Frontiers Champions funding.

Harry encourages others working in development and engineering fields to go after every opportunity and build their network. He emphasised that to connect with people from whom you can learn the most, you need to overcome your own psychological barriers. "Just reach out to them and remember people are human and, for the most part, if you're interested, they will be interested in sharing their experiences.

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