

“Bringing Space to Village with Emily Adams”

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We recently caught up with Emily Adams, former DEVELOP participant and Center Lead to discuss her career path and current position at SERVIR. Here is what Emily had to say.

Tell us about yourself, Emily.

I am the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Science Coordination Lead for the NASA SERVIR Science Coordination Office. My roots are in Ellicott City (just outside Baltimore), Maryland, but I call Huntsville, Alabama, home now. I went to a small liberal arts school in North Carolina, called Elon University, where I received Bachelor's of Science degrees in both Biology and Environmental Studies.

I completed multiple study abroad sessions, spending a month in Peru and a semester in Denmark during my undergrad years. These experiences helped shape where I wanted to go in my career as a scientist.

As an undergrad, I also had a professor who I worked heavily with on some independent plant physiology and wetlands biology research studies who encouraged me to pursue a master's degree. I took my professor's advice and went on to earn a Master's of Science in Biology with a focus in Wetlands Biology from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. When I started taking more ecology classes, I was introduced to GIS and remote sensing! GIS wasn't necessarily a part of my degree program, but it was something that I took a lot of interest in and I started pursuing it on my own; that is when I found the DEVELOP program!"

I spent two terms as a participant at the DEVELOP program and then three terms as the Center Lead at DEVELOP's office at the NASA Langley Research Center. I've always had a strong interest in helping the global community and being involved in STEM, so when I heard SERVIR specialized in these areas it appeared to be a natural fit.

Please tell me a little about the projects that you were on during your time with DEVELOP.

My first project was Great Lakes Climate, monitoring the impacts of a changing climate and decreasing water levels on wetlands in the Great Lakes region of North America. Since wetlands ecology and biology is my background, I really fell in love with this project! Great



Lakes Climate was a two-term project and I was given the opportunity to lead the second term of this endeavor. The success of the Great Lakes Climate project afforded me the opportunity to present the team's research at the annual meeting held by the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative.

So how did you hear about SERVIR and how did you end up working for SERVIR?

When I first started DEVELOP, SERVIR was mentioned in the orientation slides. I remember the Center Lead telling us about NASA's capacity building programs and that we should do more research into their missions.

I kept my eyes on the SERVIR program during my time at DEVELOP and waited on an opportunity to open up in the program. The opportunity presented itself in 2016 when SERVIR did some restructuring and opened four research associate positions in Huntsville, AL. My mentors and friends in DEVELOP encouraged me to apply for one of these positions. Three of the four research associate positions opened were filled with DEVELOPers, myself included, which speaks to how DEVELOP prepares us for workforce opportunities.

When you first came to SERVIR, would you say you had everything you needed to be successful?

Yes and no! DEVELOP prepared me to be well-organized, but I did not know what I was really getting into when I started with SERVIR. The only thing that I was sure about is that my work would entail completing geospatial analysis-style projects in developing countries. I was unaware of which thematic area I would be focusing on, which region my projects would be covering, or how the office was structured. That being said, the flexible nature of DEVELOP had prepared me in this respect. I had experience across all the thematic areas and had worked on projects in various regions, which afforded me the opportunity to liaise with numerous project partners, thus providing me with the confidence to take on whatever SERVIR had planned.

Could you tell us about a typical day for you at SERVIR?

SERVIR is a joint development initiative of NASA and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). SERVIR works in partnership with leading regional organizations world-wide to help developing countries use information provided by Earth observing satellites and geospatial technologies to manage climate risks and land use. I am part of SERVIR's Science Coordination Office and I focus on the Eastern and Southern Africa region and that SERVIR 'hub' is located in Nairobi, Kenya. So, any given week, because of the time difference I am probably talking to them first thing in the morning. This hub of SERVIR has their hands in a little bit of everything. I work to provide scientific coordination, reference, analysis, and data to the hub, but the Science Coordination Office is a great team, and we all support each other to get the work done.

Could you tell me a little bit about what you are working on now?

The project that I am working most closely with right now is trying to monitor and predict frost in the highlands of Kenya where they grow tea. To provide some context, Kenya grows about 10% of the world's black tea, and tea is very vulnerable when exposed to frost. This research is important because farmers are mainly independent families and not huge agri-businesses. Therefore, when frost threatens the tea it not only places pressures on the global tea market, but jeopardizes the farmers' ability to provide for their families. This has been an ongoing project for many years. Every day is different and this is part of the reason why I love working with SERVIR!

Is there any advice that you could share with our current participants about professionalism?

Sure! Maintain those connections with your people, be aware of your limitations, but always push yourself to that next level, especially if being at that level aligns with your professional goals.