



Over the past several years, The WILD Foundation has provided support for students at Earth University, located in Guácimo, Limón, Costa Rica. Earth University is a private university dedicated to education in the agricultural sciences and natural resources. WILD supports the vision of Earth University, and thus provides scholarships for qualified students seeking to further their career in conservation. To learn more about Earth University, visit their website www.earth.ac.cr.

Below is the inspiring story of a WILD scholarship student, Ephraim Bonginkosi Pad....



Ephraim Bonginkosi Pad
Wild Foundation Scholarship Beneficiary



Date of birth: November 7, 1985
Address: Mooi River, Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa
Class: 2008-2011
Grade Point Average: 8.2

Native of Mooi River, a rural community in South Africa, Ephraim has been involved in agriculture throughout his childhood. He grew up on a farm, where he helped milk and feed the cattle and tend to crops during his school vacations.

He grew up with his grandfather, who, after both of his parents passed away, took on the responsibility of raising Ephraim and his little sister along with several of his cousins.

Ephraim is fluent in four languages: English, Xhosa, Zulu and Afrikaans. At

EARTH he is learning Spanish. "At first, I did not understand anything, but now, my communications skills are improving," Ephraim notes.

In Africa, he was an outstanding student in high school and college. He served as the President of the Student Council twice in high school and was the official

speaker in different debate contests. “We had a debate group that competed with other high schools. We discussed topics such as teenage pregnancy, capital punishment and political issues”.

While he was studying at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, he learned about EARTH’s program. “I wanted to pursue a Bachelor’s in Science degree in Agriculture with an emphasis on Forestry and Animal Science. When I heard that EARTH was looking for students, I decided to apply. I liked the educational system because it is more practical; things that you learn in the classroom can be applied in the field.”

He and another South African student were selected to study at EARTH. They are first students from this country to study at EARTH. “I am really proud to be one of the pioneer students from my country. It encourages me to be an example for my people. My hope is that other students from my region will come to EARTH and receive this holistic education”.



Ephraim and his classmate Simingaye.

Ephraim notes that his first year has been very exciting so far because he is learning so much. He really values the work experience course and activities such as the Institutional Day, because they stimulate social and environmental awareness. “This day [Institutional Day] was amazing because we were able to

plant many trees that will reduce of the effects of global warming. These are the types of things I would like to promote in South Africa”.



Ephraim is concerned about the problems facing his community and concludes by adding, “Most of the people from my region are poor; they work in small companies or on their own small farms. However, there are many agricultural activities, such as cane sugar production, that are damaging the environment through the excessive use of pesticides. I

would like to prepare myself in order to go back and improve some of these methods.”

In discussing his experiences as a student, Ephraim says “I knew very well that my family would not be able to finance my tertiary studies. Yet I never gave up on my dream of studying so I worked very hard during my final years of high school and as a result the doors opened when I was accepted to study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, although not very wide as I once again faced financial difficulties. But I never gave up - it was as if I knew there was something along the way for me. That something was a scholarship to study at Costa Rica’s EARTH University.

My experience at EARTH has been very exciting. On the other hand it has also been very frustrating in the sense of the language. Having been an English speaking student in South Africa and then immediately having to change to Spanish has been very hard. Not being able to express myself in the way I would’ve wanted during the first few weeks was just hectic for me, but now five months later the worst has passed as I am able to understand most of the work and the lectures in class. What I’ve really enjoyed is coming to a university with such a huge diversity of students – it’s been awesome. The professors are so different as they are able to communicate more openly with students. Lastly but not least, what I really appreciate about EARTH is the experience the university provides us with going out to the fields for practical work. That really helps us feel the working world of agriculture.