

## **Reflections on my participation in the International Swiss Talent Forum (ISTF26)**

Dear Fundación Educación team,

Before returning to Peru, you kindly asked me to share a brief reflection about my experience at the International Swiss Talent Forum (ISTF26). I am very happy to do so, as the experience has truly marked a before and after for me.

The forum, held in Switzerland under the theme “Water - Elixir of Life,” brought together young people from different countries and disciplines to work collaboratively on global water-related challenges. I was part of Team 2A, working on the challenge presented by Roche: How to increase access to clean water in health care facilities?

The first afternoon was mainly dedicated to getting to know our teammates and setting the foundations for teamwork for the following days. It was a very important moment because we all came from very different cultural and academic backgrounds, so building trust and communication within the team was key.

During Cycle 1, the first working day, our main task was to define the specific question we wanted to tackle within the broader challenge. Our team focused on the question: “How can we counteract heavy metal contamination to reduce infection risk for patients in low-income countries?” This helped us narrow down the problem and guided the direction of our work during the following cycles.

On Cycle 2, the focus shifted to ideation and creation, where we explored possible solutions to this problem. While the scientific side is not my strongest area, I was very happy that the initial idea of creating a simple and easy-to-understand device that could indicate when something was wrong with the water stored in health facilities in low-income countries came from me.

Thanks to the teamwork and the different perspectives within the group, we were able to refine this idea and eventually develop our project: using clams as bioindicators to detect heavy metal contamination in hospital water systems. Because clams react to changes in water quality, they could serve as a natural early warning system when filtration systems fail, helping prevent contaminated water from reaching patients.

During Cycle 3, the focus moved to preparing and communicating our project. This involved structuring our idea, writing the narrative behind it, and learning how to present it in a compelling way. I contributed especially to the writing process and to filming our elevator pitch.

The final day of the forum was filled with nervousness, excitement, and also a bit of sadness. We were very proud to have completed the challenge, but it also meant saying goodbye to people with whom we had shared several intense days of collaboration and learning.

Throughout the forum there were several networking spaces where I had the opportunity to meet incredible people from all over the world. I formed friendships that I know will last well beyond the forum (I now have a reason to visit Nepal thanks to my friend Deepti!). Getting to know people from different cultures, with very different personalities but also many shared experiences as young people, was truly one of the most meaningful aspects of the experience.

Beyond the forum itself, the days I spent in Zurich before and after the event were also very special. Dani, Ángel and I were warmly welcomed by the Fundación Educación team, and it was wonderful to get to know you better and learn more about the important work behind the foundation. Our conversations were deeply inspiring and helped reaffirm my commitment to the purpose of the scholarship.

Coming from the family and the reality I come from, traveling to Europe (let alone Switzerland) once felt like something very distant. Being able to represent my country there at 21 years old is something that still leaves me speechless and, at times, even emotional. In many ways, it feels like crossing a barrier that reflects the reality faced by many talented young people.

Because of this, I truly feel that through experiences like this, the foundation's motto becomes real: "We empower talent for change." Thank you for believing in me, for trusting me with this opportunity, and for helping me become more aware each day of the potential that education and opportunity can unlock. I am waiting for be able to give back and contribute as a benefactor, continuing this virtuous circle that Fundación Educación is building.

Thank you again for everything. Please know that you can always count on me.

Warm regards,

Damaris Vasquez