



**JPO  
STORIES**

Young Generations  
Supporting Development

## THREE QUESTIONS TO A JPO...

1. In what area are you working as a JPO?
2. What do you consider your most important professional achievement during your work as a JPO?
3. What has been the most challenging situation from a personal point of view?

### ... Motoko Seko

Motoko is a Japanese JPO working with UNFPA in Cambodia since May 2000.

Under the supervision of the Representative, I am responsible for issues related to HIV/AIDS and our office's resource mobilization activities. I'm responsible for making sure UNFPA programmes are contributing to HIV prevention, and I also work jointly with other UN agencies as a member of the UN technical working group. I am also working on the advocacy sub-programme as a programme officer. We have just finished the Preparatory assistance project, and a new advocacy component project (on gender and reproductive health) is expected to commence quite soon.

It has been the learning experience of working together with different kinds of partners, namely local Government, other donor agencies, and international/local NGOs. Actually "feeling" the well known fact that the same development goal could mean different things to various players, rather than "reading about it", made me much more sensitive to seeing issues from a holistic point of view.

Work wise, issues that I've been working on sometimes make me feel depressed, sad, and pessimistic. Meeting with people living with HIV/AIDS not only gives me power to work for the further prevention, but it also makes me realize the helplessness of myself in bringing about better lives for those in desperate need. Seeing poverty and gender inequality does the same. However, aside from occasional anxieties for the personal security, my personal life has been fulfilling. Of course, it's hard to be away from what I'm very much used to live with, (movie theatres and McDonalds to start with!) but the extraordinary experiences and excitement I gain from work and life in Cambodia make everything enjoyable.

### ... Amparo Tomas

Amparo is a Spanish JPO working with UNDP in the Philippines since October 2000.

I'm working in the area of human rights and gender mainstreaming. We're focused on strengthening the human rights dimension of development by supporting the human rights and justice systems in the country and by bringing human rights dimensions to development programmes focused on the disadvantaged. We aim to develop national capacities for the realization of human rights. In order to do so, we bring human rights frameworks to the analysis, definition, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes addressing poverty eradication. We view gender from a human rights perspective and gender equality as an entitlement, which achievement is crucial for a meaningful impact on any development programme.

I can't really answer that question, as whenever I think something has been my most important professional achievement, another new challenge appears. I guess it could be to feel the support of the whole country office to the goal of bringing human rights to development, and their willingness to reconsider their previous assumptions in the light of new dimensions they had not used before. I admire the people I work with, and they believe in my work even though it is quite new to them; that is professionally very satisfying.

Working in the field of human rights and development is a constant challenge, both professionally and personally, because I am a human rights advocate here in the Philippines and elsewhere. But pursuing the cause of human rights can easily frustrate anybody. My personal challenge appears everyday when I get up to go to work. There are always moments when I fear I may be wasting my time and my efforts in a lost cause, especially these days when the call for human rights is seemingly being silenced in the name of national and international security. Believing in the possibility of advancing human rights is a personal choice. To decide to do something about it is also a personal choice. So when frustration comes, I know it is within my reach to avoid it, and that does not make me feel any better.



### ...Janis Majors

I am Norwegian and work as a JPO for UNOPS, United Nations Office for Project Services, at the Copenhagen Office concerned with large and complex procurement. I divide my time between 1) contracting Nordic consultants to global UN projects, and 2) special projects, such as our new web site. My plan is to work as a JPO for a total of 3 years, the first two in Copenhagen and the last one in another UNOPS location, preferably in Asia or Africa.

I want to gain a thorough knowledge of UN and UNOPS operations, as well as an extensive international network. More specifically, I hope to be able to contribute to the ongoing streamlining of UNOPS operations through the various special projects I will be assigned to. My role will be somewhat detached from normal operations in order to focus on improving our services.

Having to deal with many different projects at the same time, each of them requiring detailed input from different stakeholders. It was also a challenge and a really good experience to co-represent UNOPS in Turkmenistan for follow-up and formal inauguration of a project we have funded there.

### ...Fabiana Issler

Fabiana is a Brazilian-Danish JPO working with UNDP since September 1999

My responsibilities at the UNDP Country Office in Mozambique are within environment area, dealing with GEF projects, agriculture and water resource management.

Definitely learning. This means to have been able to learn and to draw important lessons about what is at stake in different complex processes, especially negotiations and politically loaded processes. These are skills one cannot learn at university, but which are acquired with hands-on experience.

To ensure that stress and little bits of dissatisfaction at the workplace do not interfere with my private life.

### ... Fabrice Boussalem

Fabrice is a French JPO based in Guinea

I arrived in Conakry in September 2000. It coincided with a series of attacks on Sierra Leone and Liberia, which has dramatically changed the humanitarian context in Guinea throughout 2001. Consequently, with regard to my own previous humanitarian experience and to the office needs, I have been appointed as Programme Officer in charge of humanitarian affairs.

My work embraces a wide range of activities, from coordination to the design of projects in the frame of transition strategies, community based rehabilitation and capacity building. I would point out that the national capacity building project in humanitarian assistance management and coordination has been my main achievement as a JPO. The project is funded by USAID to the tune of USD 545.000 and it places UNDP as key player in humanitarian affairs in Guinea, which plays a major role in the sub-region stability.

During these few months I spent in the UN system, I consider UNDP as "potentially" the most challenging and exciting agency. This is also why current life in UNDP is terribly frustrating: it is a permanent challenge, especially as a JPO, to achieve something in such a bureaucratic system. Finding one's own way through the procedures and hierarchy is a daily struggle.

In a more proactive approach, I tend to think that UNDP should be more coherent. I would suggest remembering the recently-coined word "chaorder", which originates from the words "chaos" and "order". Modern organisations definitely need more "chaorder" to survive, which means that you need both human creativity, inspiration and motivation as well as basic framework rules to avoid absolute chaotic situations. The challenge is to find the right balance between the two extremes.

I would also mention the intercultural challenge, which has been very vivid for me. But I was lucky enough to enter UNDP with a certain maturity, which was very useful to face complex human situations at all levels: institutions, hierarchy, culture, etc.



## WORDS FROM A DONOR

1. When, where and in what area did you work as a JPO?
2. Looking back at your time as a JPO, what do you consider your biggest achievement at the time?
3. What role do you think JPOs should play in the development sector?
4. What advice would you give to the newly-recruited JPO?

... Claudine Tavel

is a former JPO and is currently responsible for the Promotion of Potential at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

I look back at my experience as a Junior Professional Officer (JPO) working in the UNDP Office in Cotonou, Benin, from 1981 to 1983, as one of the most captivating experience. I was in charge of projects aiming at the development of the national human resources in the fields of education, professional training, health and employment promotion. It was the first step in a career oriented towards development, which had been the focus of my university studies.

My JPO assignment was a privileged daily learning opportunity thanks to a particularly dynamic Resident Representative, who gave meaning to the unfolding events in the country and had a talent for visualising future trends and innovative associations. I was particularly proud to contribute to the preparation of the Round Table of Partners in Development, which greatly improved the dialogue between the various national and international actors active in Benin. It was made all the more easier thanks to visits to ILO, WHO and UNESCO before taking up my assignment and frequent contacts with project staff during my stay in Cotonou.

Today, the role of JPOs is crucial. They will bring their field experience and their understanding of the societies in which they have lived to the organisations they will work for later. They are the best examples of what solidarity between nations and people can bring to a world torn by many conflicts. And they will become opinion leaders or decision makers able to balance national versus global interests in a long-term perspective.

My advice to newly recruited JPOs is to first capture all opportunities to learn from others, in particular from national UN programme staff, and to share experiences with other JPOs working in the region; furthermore to be creative, making the best use of their own skills, while learning the approaches and methodological tools to successful team work; and finally to always keep in mind that their goal should be to plant seeds for sustainable human development.

... Stephanie Bleeker

is a former JPO and is currently a Programme Manager of the JPO Programme at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

From 1998 until 2000, I worked in Rwanda as a programme officer for UNFPA. I mainly worked in the field of reproductive health, population issues and advocacy. Furthermore, I was involved in different fora and working groups (gender, HIV/AIDS, humanitarian interventions, security) and was member of the core team working on the Common Country Assessment (CCA)/United Nations Development Framework (UNDAF).

That despite the amount of activities, difficult environment and lack of manpower, the country office managed to implement the UNFPA Rwanda country programme and actually achieve results.

In my opinion, a JPO, who is a young professional, can contribute towards the policy formulation and implementation of the programme of the international organization and therefore can play a role in development-related issues.

When starting an assignment as a JPO, one should keep the level of expectations realistic.



## QUESTIONS TO A FORMER JPO:

1. When and where did you work as a JPO?
2. Looking back at your time as a JPO, what do you consider your biggest achievement at the time?
3. What role do you think JPOs should play in today's UNDP?
4. What advice would you give to the newly-recruited JPOs?

... Jan Mattsson,

UNDP Assistant Administrator, Director of the Bureau of Management

1 I was a UNIDO JPO in Colombo, Sri Lanka from the fall of 1982 to the spring of 1985: 30 great months!

2 I really felt it was possible to contribute to development in Sri Lanka and to the great UNDP/UNIDO team. I was proud to initiate and start up some energy projects, the first such projects in Sri Lanka, and also of my role in the Staff Council.

3 Contributing to development teamwork with specialized knowledge, enthusiasm and youthful energy.

4 Take full advantage of the experience; learn as much as you can about the country and about development. Don't hold back on your contributions. Have fun!

... Deborah Landey,

Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau of Management  
Director of Human Resources

1 In 1978-1981, in Senegal.

2 Supporting UNDP's programme in Senegal on environmental and gender issues. Learning about the organization and broader UN system.

3 JPOs should support transformation of UNDP into a practice organization. Use recent academic knowledge in the practice areas and continue to keep substantive areas of focus up-to-date. Provide good leadership and managerial practices in the office.

4 Exercise humility in all you do.

... Alan Doss

Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Sierra Leone / UN Resident Coordinator / UNDP Representative in Sierra Leone

1 I was sponsored by the UK to work in the UNDP Office in Nairobi, Kenya beginning in October 1966.

2 I was drafted to do all kinds of jobs ranging from registering to refugees to project backstopping. My most notable achievement was to work with Professor Hans Singer on technical assistance programming. He came to Kenya for several weeks to lead a UN team that drew up a balance sheet of technical assistance and identified key priorities for future technical assistance. At the time, it was considered quite a pioneering effort and the first step towards country programming.

3 Over the years, JPOs have made an indispensable contribution to the work of the UNDP offices. They are still needed. They provide energy and creativity and invariably bring enthusiasm and commitment to their work. JPOs have proved to be a great source of talent and many have gone on to successful careers in a wide variety of national and international organisations.

4 Work hard, don't lose your idealism and get out and see the country where you are assigned. Being a JPO is a marvelous opportunity. Use it fully.



... **Christian Lemaire,**

UN Resident Coordinator / UNDP Resident Representative in Burkina Faso

In Sri Lanka from 1975 to 1978, as JPO programme officer in charge of the UNDP Programme Support Unit (PSU).

Setting up the Programme Support Unit and the financial monitoring and reporting system for all UNDP-supported projects in the country.

JPO's are of a different profile today: they already have some working experience and therefore start at a more senior level (P2 usually). They are therefore better able to contribute to substantive work in UNDP offices, in addition to the training element of their assignment. As such the term JPO has become somewhat of a misnomer. The World Bank term of Young Professional is more appropriate.

Remember that the JPO programme remains primarily a training programme, although the ultimate objective for sponsoring countries is to provide trained staff to the UN system. It should be made clear to JPOs that the programme does not secure employment later, and that the experience provided, although very enriching personally, is not necessarily marketable in the private sector. Nevertheless, adapting and listening, in a sometimes very unfamiliar, if not difficult, environment remains the condition for success.

... **Antonio Vigilante,**

UN Resident Coordinator / UNDP Resident Representative in Egypt

I was a JPO in the period 1981 to 1983. During that period, I first attended the Administrative Training Programme in New York, followed by a short period in Ethiopia, and then I was assigned to UNDP Bolivia.

To have become well acquainted with UN and UNDP policies and procedures which allowed me to assume smoothly a managerial position as Head of Administration in Bolivia. I could refine my supervisory skills. The knowledge I acquired at that time is still helping me today, in many managerial functions. In addition, I could compare development reality on the ground with development theory and development cooperation literature and that by itself was a great learning opportunity!

I believe that the situation is different from country to country, but in general JPOs are seen today as valuable colleagues bringing in relevant knowledge for immediate application. The profile of the JPOs is higher today than it was 20 years ago; they are better prepared, more skilled and have already acquired relevant experience. As they normally require less training and induction, this shortens the learning period and allows for smooth and fast insertion in the UNDP office team. They often provide a professional and enthusiastic contribution to UNDP's policy work.

To undertake their job with a lot of enthusiasm and commitment, to look for both professional and human inner reward. UN development work is not just a job, it is a bit of a mission, a vocation. I would also recommend to take an active role within the office, looking out for opportunities to learn and contribute.







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