

## Background

I studied International Relations in Université Libre de Bruxelles, a Belgian University and I have a Master in European Public Policy from London. I wrote my thesis and all my essays on development cooperation issues, such as the role of civil society in developing countries or the human rights approach in development cooperation policies.

I think that I have this wonderful and amazing opportunity thanks to my 2 previous jobs, as I worked for 4 years previous my JPO assignment. I had some experience in the development and international relations fields and I knew exactly what I wanted. Since my graduation, I have applied every year to the JPO programme. I believe that my motivation and my years of professional experience have helped me, with of course a little luck and some cross fingers.

I always wanted to work abroad and particularly for the UN as I believe strongly in UN's mandate. Every day, when I wake up, I know that I am working for an organisation, whose values I totally share. That is the most important fact. It makes the whole difference. Working for something that you believe is amazing as it gives you the force and strength to challenge yourself because you know it is worth it.

## JPO Assignment



I am in charge of the human rights project in the Governance sector in UNDP Viet Nam Country office. I also work as Secretariat of the Governance and rule of Law Joint Programming group. In addition, I am coordinating a new project that we have developed with 2 other UN agencies: it is a great project on the promotion of the rights of People with Disability in Viet Nam. I am working for the most marginalised groups of society and I believe our work can change things for a better life.

My 2 projects on human rights and on disability are really challenging as the first is about improving expertise and capacity building on the human rights machinery and understanding how UNDP can work together with the government on sensitive issues.

The second project is for the organisations/associations of people with disability and it is great and enriching to work at micro-level for this project and to see the immediate impact of the activities. I am enriched everyday by my work as I learn about the UN's mandate and work on the ground but also I analyse and understand the world from another and different perspective. Being born in one country who can offer you social security, health care and freedom is only a

matter of luck. I believe that we should first be conscientious that many people are marginalised and second, things can get better if there is a political will and if people are aware about their rights and of course if they believe in themselves. People can make the difference if they have the tools to do so.

My most rewarding experience has been to be in charge of a new project and to lead the process of coordination and design of the project from the very beginning. The trust that my supervisor and senior management have given to me to lead that very special project for the people living with disability has been very rewarding, very intense and very exciting.

## The Viet Nam Country Office



*Deborah in Northern Mountains*

People are working really hard and are very committed in Viet Nam Country office. It is a hard working duty station! The cultural gap and the language are my main barriers because understanding the culture is key to feel integrated, assimilated and to do a good job. Listening and being in the learning mood are the best options that I have found to survive. Being humble and accepting some situations that are different from my own cultural background- are essential. That is what I have learned. It is challenging, it is tiring but it is the only way in life to get richer. You get to know yourself better and to open your minds to things that you have never thought off before.

## Motivation for working in the field of development

Working in the development field is really rewarding, and my motivation is higher every day. I work for the promotion and the protection of the rights of all, especially of the most vulnerable groups. Once we understand that the UN is created by the people who work for it, it makes things incredible. It means that everyone has the potential to develop its own skills and everyone has the possibility to give the best to the organisation. The organisation is the people.

## What inspires you?



My colleagues are the ones who inspire me every day but the most inspiration comes from my childhood where I lived in Africa and from my nanny who told how important it was me to work for a better world as she could not provide good education to her own children. She showed me that the life was not easy and not fair for everyone. Our choices in life can make a difference even if it is at the individual level, it counts.

I hope that I will stay in the UN system. When I am working, I work in accordance to my ethics and values.

## What kind of advice would you offer to new JPOs?

To believe in who they are, to value themselves but to take time to listen, observe and be humble in new situations. We are here to learn and we are the foreigners. We have to adapt and not the other way around.

“Thinking out of the Box” is a great quote as I then realised that things that seem obvious are only obvious for me, alone in my head and values!



## JPO Service Centre

The JPO Service Centre administers the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) Programme and the Special Assistant to the UN Resident Coordinator (SARC) Programme.

These programmes provide young professionals pursuing a career in development with the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in multilateral technical cooperation and international development within a UN agency.

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## Sustainable Development Goals » (</content/undp/en/home/sdoverview/post-2015-development-agenda>)



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## JPOs/SARCs Stories » (</content/jposc/en/home/how-to-join/jpo-and-sarc-stories>)

On International Day for Persons with Disabilities, a spotlight on Finnish JPO Tomi Lounio's work on Disability Rights in Africa (</content/jposc/en/home/how-to-join/jpo-and-sarc-stories/jpo-stories/tomi-lounio--2016-12-.html>)

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