

JPO Story: emergency preparedness in Jamaica with UNFPA

Background

I am a registered nurse with work experience in infectious diseases. and I have a Masters degree in International Community Health. As part of my Masters thesis I carried out a study in Darfur, Sudan on the sexual and reproductive health of internally displaced women.

I greatly appreciate having a job where I can use my knowledge and experience in the areas of sexual and reproductive health so that it benefits people in developing countries. A job in which I feel that I am part of making a difference for those who need it most. I find sexual and reproductive health interesting as it's so closely linked to other factors in society, such as religious beliefs, discrimination of women and cultural taboos. Working in other countries and with people from different cultures also adds a lot to my personal development. Collaborating and learning from people with other perspectives on life enrich my own perspective.



Sara Rivenes is a Norwegian-sponsored JPO working for UNFPA in Jamaica

Assignment

I started working as a JPO in UNFPA's Sub Regional Office for the Caribbean based in Jamaica in April 2008. I am the focal point for emergency preparedness and response in the Caribbean. This work includes sensitizing our partners to the need to include issues related to gender and reproductive health when preparing for or responding to an emergency. We are currently working with the Red Cross National Societies on adding a component about sexual and reproductive health and the prevention of gender-based violence in emergencies to their training programme for shelter managers in several Caribbean Islands.

I am also coordinating UNFPA's Comprehensive Condom Programme in Jamaica. Through this initiative, 1.9 million male condoms and 280 000 female condoms are being distributed to government and non-government partners across the island. I also manage programme activities related to sexual and reproductive health and youth in Jamaica.

One of the things I find the most rewarding is to see the practical results of the work that I have contributed to. After Hurricane Gustav hit Jamaica, I took part in the distribution of hygiene kits funded by UNFPA and distributed them through the Jamaican Red Cross. It meant a lot to me to get a chance to talk to some of the persons affected by the hurricane, hear their stories and to see how much our assistance was appreciated.



I have been given the opportunity to work within my areas of interest building on my professional and educational experience, both at a sub-regional and national level. This has been with an increasing amount of responsibility which has allowed me to develop and improve my skills both in programme management and in the area of sexual and reproductive health.

One of the reasons I wanted to be a JPO was to gain experience working in the UN system. The UN is highly respected but also receives a lot of criticism. After two years working for the UN I have seen many of the challenges it faces today. However, I still believe in its unique role in the world and its relevance. Reform and organizational restructuring make the UN system more effective and coordinated which in turn continues to benefit the people we are here to serve.

I think it is important to be vocal about specific areas of interest and engage in a dialogue on how these can be developed best during the JPO-ship. When I first came to the office my supervisor and I adapted my ToR to better reflect the current situation in the office and my competencies.

Advice to prospective candidates

Be patient, proactive and flexible.

Interesting, growth, patience. These are the words that come to mind when thinking about my JPO-ship.

