

IFAD's Junior Professional Officer Programme



IFAD and the JPO Programme

IFAD launched its Junior Professional Officer (JPO) programme in 1980, just three years after IFAD was established, and has maintained a dynamic JPO programme ever since.

The JPO programme was originally established by the General Assembly of the United Nations as a way of recruiting young professionals for service in the field of development assistance. The programme is sponsored by Member States interested in investing in young, university-trained nationals of their own country or other countries, for employment in organizations of the United Nations system.

Who benefits from the programme?

Young professionals gain valuable hands-on experience in the area of international cooperation through exposure to development issues, at headquarters and in the field, coupled with structured training and learning activities.

Organizations are able to draw on the enthusiasm and innovative thinking of these young professionals to advance their development goals.

Donor governments can select an assignment they wish to support and provide on-the-job training opportunities to their nationals and increase their professional and technical expertise in many specialized areas.



Who are IFAD's JPO donors?

Sponsorship agreements have been signed with Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. In light of the mutual advantages of the programme, IFAD is striving to secure the involvement of an ever-wider spectrum of sponsors.

JPOs are sponsored at the P1 and P2 levels in accordance with the salary scale and allowances of the UN system on a fixed-term contract for an initial period of one year, renewable for a second year subject to satisfactory performance and funding. In some cases, a final extension for a third year is possible, if fully borne by the donor.

Who are the JPO candidates?

The candidates are professional women and men under the age of 35 who hold an advanced university degree in a relevant discipline, such as agriculture, nutrition, civil engineering, economics, political science, social sciences, business administration or international affairs. In some cases, a first university degree can be sufficient if complemented by additional years of relevant professional experience.

Candidates must have at least two years of post-degree experience in the professional world. A working knowledge of English is essential, as well as proficiency in one of IFAD's other official languages (Arabic, French or Spanish).

How to apply

IFAD's various divisions identify suitable areas for JPO assignments and formulate detailed job descriptions, which are shared with donors.

Most JPO positions are in project or policy-related work areas at IFAD headquarters or in IFAD country offices. There are also selected positions in administration, human resources, finance, legal and related areas.

The donor government will publish the job description in the form of a vacancy announcement through its own channels. Nationals of sponsoring countries who consider themselves eligible may obtain information on the vacancy and send their applications to the relevant government office. Candidates from developing countries follow the same procedure.

A list of donor contact addresses can be found at the end of this booklet.

The donor government normally establishes a shortlist of recommended candidates meeting the basic requirements of the vacancy announcement and submits their applications to the IFAD Human Resources Division for review. Eligible candidates are then invited by IFAD for an interview (often conducted by videoconference or Skype). A final selection is made and a recommendation sent to the sponsoring donor.

In some cases donors delegate the entire process to IFAD, which then coordinates the process from the issuance of the vacancy announcement to the final selection.

The Human Resources Division is the focal point for contact with donors and for the JPO recruitment process. IFAD's contact details can be found at the end of this booklet.

Training and learning

JPOs engaged in project or policy-related work are provided with opportunities to gain practical experience of the entire project cycle and lending policies. During the course of their assignment, they have an opportunity to improve their technical knowledge, increase their skills in communications and share experiences with other professionals.

By the end of their assignment at IFAD, JPOs will have:

- gained an understanding of the mandate, strategies and objectives of IFAD and how their jobs contribute to this work
- become fully integrated into their work teams
- gained practical, on-the-job exposure in a variety of divisions
- understood how field projects are carried out and how IFAD helps poor rural people
- participated in internal and external workshops, seminars or courses to enhance their competencies
- undertaken travel to the field, if assigned to operational areas
- participated in formal training programmes, such as:
 - IFAD's orientation programme
 - on-the-job training
 - special assignments
 - career orientation coaching sessions
 - training sessions to enhance competitiveness in selection and interview processes
 - other staff development and learning activities.

Supervision and performance evaluations

The aim of the JPO Programme is to provide guidance and supervision so that the JPO benefits from the professional development opportunity represented by working at IFAD.

Therefore, supervisors will:

- brief JPOs on arrival and meet with them on a regular basis to discuss work and give constructive feedback
- assign duties and responsibilities, taking each JPO's education and experience into account
- provide supervision, with particular emphasis on guiding and coaching, to make the assignment a valuable experience and a worthwhile investment for donors and IFAD alike
- create a positive and inclusive environment for the JPOs, which will enable them to contribute effectively to IFAD's work
- monitor each JPO's progress systematically, using IFAD's Performance Evaluation System, which is a valuable tool for the JPO and the donor in evaluating the success of the assignment.



Future career opportunities

IFAD has, through the years, recruited many former JPOs as IFAD staff members. In some cases, they have risen to senior or managerial positions.

Near the end of their assignments, JPOs are strongly encouraged to apply to IFAD vacancies. Their applications receive high consideration in light of the experience and potential they have gained.

From the beginning of the programme, JPOs benefit from career orientation support to help them understand the complexity of career development and how to proactively prepare for future steps. Towards the end of their assignments, JPOs attend an interview preparation session to ensure they are clear on the guiding principles of interviews and how to present the value of their experience.

In addition, JPOs are eligible for other types of contractual arrangements at IFAD, such as consultancies and short-term or temporary professional employment.

Former JPOs have found their experience at IFAD to be an asset in securing employment with other development agencies, governments and NGOs and the private sector.

Retention rates

IFAD has one of the highest retention rates for JPOs, with more than half of its former JPOs staying on in a regular IFAD position after five years. If regular employment in other organizations of the UN common system is also considered, the retention rate of former IFAD JPOs is about two thirds.

What our JPOs say of their experience

Annely Koudstaal (Netherlands)



The JPO programme is a highly competitive programme, and as a result, IFAD is giving me the full responsibilities of a partnership officer, just like my colleagues. The JPO programme is providing an exceptional opportunity to gain experience in an international organization, and because of IFAD's hybrid nature as a UN agency and international financial institution, the programme has allowed me to broaden my career profile and better define the direction that I want to pursue professionally.

By providing strategic and policy support to a corporate initiative that aims to improve IFAD's future financing model, I am working with the finance, legal and operations departments, and directly with members of senior management, thereby gaining a valuable insight into how corporate strategy is defined and how decisions are made at the highest level. Through this experience, and through my other work stream focused on brokering partnerships with the private sector, I am specializing in what for me is the future of development cooperation: new development finance models and partnering with new actors. My JPO training was dedicated to scenario planning, studying the concepts of possible futures, system changes and global transformations, a skill that I could immediately apply in my day-to-day work.



The JPO programme is not only worthwhile from a professional perspective, but also on a personal level I am developing, especially because of the inputs of my highly committed and dynamic colleagues and being supervised by an experienced and dedicated director. Being based in Rome, and with regular missions to countries across continents, I am getting to know the world a bit better. The most rewarding parts of my work as a JPO at IFAD are the concrete outputs that we are producing as a team, cross-departmental work with amazing colleagues, and the dynamics of working with people from all over the world. The JPO programme is a unique and rewarding experience that I would not have wanted to miss.



Na Eun Choi (Republic of Korea)



The JPO experience in IFAD has offered me opportunities for genuine professional growth, as JPOs are given important responsibility and visibility in the organization. As my duties were primarily concerning procurement and administration, I was given opportunities to proactively participate in a number of strategic initiatives in the Procurement Section and the division, such as revision of administrative manuals including the Procurement Guidelines, implementation of contract review meetings, and negotiation with international companies for goods and services contracts, etc.

I was able to systematically and significantly develop my experience and knowledge of procurement throughout my JPO experience, and also acquired accredited certifications in public procurement with the support and guidance of my supervisors. I have had great mentors and colleagues who have guided me through my professional development, and performance was recognized and appreciated, offering further room for growth.



As IFAD is an active participant in the inter-agency collaboration efforts of the United Nations and other international organizations, I was given exposure to various inter-agency activities and forums. IFAD's unique characteristic as the only international financial institution in the UN system allows JPOs to explore both the world of the United Nations and the multilateral development banks, which I believe is an inspiring professional environment for young professionals.

All in all, IFAD is a great choice for young professionals, and I would recommend IFAD to any potential JPO.



Ulac Demirag (Germany)



I joined IFAD in 2002 as a JPO with the assignment of junior country portfolio manager in the West and Central Africa Division (WCA).

During my time as a JPO and later as implementation support officer of the WCA Division, I worked closely with the regional director and the regional economist on a range of corporate managerial assignments, including the performance management of the regional portfolio, introduction of the Results and Impact Management System (RIMS), the first round of defining result-based Key Performance Indicators as well as the corresponding Divisional Management Plan.

After completing my JPO experience in 2006, I competed successfully for a position as country programme manager (CPM), and had an opportunity to gain valuable experience in managing very challenging portfolios in fragile states, such as Chad and Guinea.



With the emergence of IFAD's strategy to establish field presence in various countries, I applied for the vacant position as outposted IFAD CPM for Ghana, becoming in 2011 IFAD's first outposted CPM and accredited Country Representative in the WCA region.

In 2012, I was nominated to become the sector development partner lead and co-chair of the Agriculture Sector Working Group in Ghana. Since then, I have been leading policy dialogue, joint sector reviews, thematic and analytical work, and initiatives to harmonize the work of development partners towards greater aid effectiveness.

I believe that I have been and am part of a highly motivated team at IFAD that is strongly motivated and loyal to its mandate. We are engaging on a daily basis with all levels of stakeholders, including highest level government officials, private sector, experts and specialists in the development community, and not least the farmers and rural poor. It is very gratifying to see how our work helps these people actually change their lives. Being a manager, coach, mentor, technical expert, diplomat, administrator etc., exposes me to playing all these roles and experiencing new challenges, cultures and lessons all the time. I feel privileged to have this opportunity to continuously learn and grow – professionally and personally.



Sana Jatta (The Gambia)

“ *In the mid 1980s IFAD was busy building its image and reputation as the respectable dual international financing institution and UN agency with the unique mandate of investing in rural people and rural poverty alleviation in developing countries.*

I happen to have been then the youngest member of the management team of one of its most successful cofinanced projects. Chance would have it that I would visit IFAD headquarters in September/October 1986 as part of a Dutch funded executive training programme for young managers of development projects. The then country programme manager of The Gambia and some IFAD staff who knew me from supervision missions to my project encouraged me to apply for the Dutch-funded JPO scheme. Although I was sceptical it would succeed given the novelty of the idea at the time I, nevertheless, quickly prepared and submitted my application.

By March 1987, less than 6 months later, I had already taken up my new post as the proud first Dutch-funded African JPO (then called Associate Expert) in IFAD's less than 10 years of history. By the end of two and half years as a Dutch funded JPO I became a full IFAD staff CPM. I never turned back since. And look what I have finally succeeded in achieving as of today, Regional Director, and still counting, all with the great support of IFAD management and staff (General Service and Professional).

After enthusiastically taking up responsibilities and assignments in fifteen countries (ten in Africa and five in Asia, ranging from Cape Verde to China), plus also working in three countries in Latin America, I believe the mutual investments IFAD and I made in each other have handsomely paid off from all accounts. Yet there is more to come as there are many years left in us both to take this partnership to the next level that none of us can imagine today!

Vive le FIDA. Vive le JPO programme.

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CONTACTS

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Some donors are willing to sponsor limited JPO assignments for nationals from non-OECD countries. If your country of nationality is not listed above, you may wish to visit the donors' websites to find out more on the subject.



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