

**“My job is like being in a kitchen
since it is where all the action is.”**

This is how Ms. Ayodele Hippolyte, a national staff of JICA St. Lucia office, describes her job. This time, I interviewed Ms. Ayodele, who has a diverse background, about how she got into the field of international cooperation, her passion for JICA, her work at the St. Lucia office, and her goals for the future.

Ayo san's Profile



Ayodele Hippolyte (Ms.)

JICA St. Lucia

She was born in Jamaica, and she moved to St. Lucia at the age of sixteen. Since her father is St. Lucian, and mother is Jamaican, Ms. Ayodele says that she has two nationalities and two identities. She spent her school life living back and forth between the two countries. For her bachelor's degree, she majored in French and Spanish, and for her master's degree she studied French and Caribbean Literature focusing on Haiti as well as media communication. After graduation, she worked as a French and Spanish teacher, a program manager at St. Lucians first public service broadcasting channel, got PhD for media and communication at UK university, worked as a senior project officer for communications at CARICOM in Barbados, a political officer at the British High Commission etc...

JICA is the place to make my dream of development work

I love what JICA does. I love their approach to Development Cooperation, especially the very important term, called “GEMBA”. “GEMBA” is a Japanese word that means

being in the field, and this is used among international staff as well. I love the Co-creating aspect of what JICA does. I have worked for a variety of places before JICA, and I have found that my main interest and passion is working for the development of small societies like St. Lucia and civil society. So, for me, JICA is the place to pursue and achieve my dream.

Sympathize with JICA's approach that addresses the needs of grassroots people

« You mentioned that you have experienced many diverse types of work, but I feel that when it comes to the way you approach the job, for example, the British High Commission and JICA have completely different approaches. How did you feel when you worked in both fields? »

Yes, I can be very straightforward with you. The work in the British high commission and JICA are completely different. However, through working as a political officer, I found myself wanted to get into the field of development. I really wanted to get my hands dirty, get into projects and programs that actually change or that the ideas to change the lives of people, raise their standard of living, their quality of living, provide things like bridges and roads and technical expertise that we need to build our nation. I wanted to work with an agency that could really work along with St. Lucia Nation building. I've always admired JICA since many, many years ago. I have always admired how JICA got interested in agriculture, fisheries, those kinds of industries or sectors that touch grassroots people.

Works as a national staff ~Always back and forth between kitchen and boardroom?~

As a JICA national staff, my job is to support the implementation of all the projects on St. Lucia and 10 CARICOM countries. For example, my role is to check the administrative procedures for the implementation of Grant Aid agreements and Loan agreements and ensure that they are completed on time. This might sound quite simple but working across countries and regions means that I am constantly bumping up against diverse cultures, which is a challenge. My job is like being in the kitchen where everything is cooked and prepared.

As a liaison who bridges St. Lucia (GEMBA) and Japan

Another job is being a liaison between the recipient country, St. Lucia, its government officials, and Japanese government officials to make sure that agreements are signed and dealt with, and then the projects can launch. I also ensure that whenever a project is launched or wrapped up, I make sure that milestone is marked. For example, I was just in charge of producing a 15-minute television video that features on the Cul-de-sac Bridge project because of my PR background, my communication background. Also, helping JICA to understand the development priorities of the of the countries that we cover is my job. I analyze the sectoral priorities of development in the recipient countries, analyzing how the sectors that JICA wants to strengthen or focus on for development fit with local needs, so that we can understand the development priorities of the recipient countries from the local perspective.



What distinguishes Japan as a development partner in international cooperation

What I think distinguish Japan as a development partner is that their approach is not done by a top-down manner but bottom-up. I like how the Japanese will come into the island, do a need survey. They come and they get a practical look at what's happening on the ground and to actually interact and engage with the actors who are involved in whatever the program or project is. Whatever the area of Development Corporation is, it's hands on. What I think is unique about Japan's International Cooperation, is its locally embedded approach.

Future vision – Ms. Ayodele's mindset

“All work is only valuable if it improves people's lives.”

I would love to end up working for either a regional or multilateral development agency that implements practical livelihood enhancing programs to create a world where no

one is left behind. My job is like being in a kitchen, I said. But at the same time, I always want to be at the frontline of the field of international cooperation. This is because there is much more work done by so many people to start off a single project and I do understand each piece of the work cannot be missed. So, I would like to be in the boardroom where we produce the programs, and the projects, not forgetting to be in the kitchen.

Interviewer:

Misuzu Kanda

Intern at JICA Central America Caribbean Division

Internship Period: February 8th, 2023-March 24th, 2023