

Masakatsu Okumoto reflects on his secondment with UNDP and welcomes his successor, Yoko Yoshihara



By: Masakatsu Okumoto

From November 2017 to November 2019, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) seconded me to the Japan Unit of the Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Throughout my secondment, I served as a collaboration advisor for UNDP-Japan relations to enhance development partnership. A few weeks ago, I finished my secondment with UNDP and returned to JICA HQ for my new assignment. Although the two years at UNDP passed by very quickly, I nonetheless feel very grateful for the opportunity to have been able to work closely with incredibly talented UNDP colleagues.

Throughout my secondment, I made some unexpected realizations about the scope of UNDP's work. For example, I learned that despite each goal having its own significant challenges, the UNDP is conducting an initiative to reach the SDGs under its "Integrator Role" to handle global challenges holistically with stakeholders, including UN agencies and private companies, rather than in isolation. While pursuing this integrated approach, the UNDP is also simultaneously undergoing its own organizational restructuring as part of the UN development system reform.



Masakatsu Okumoto (far left) attending a meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Kono Taro

Therefore, I learned that the UNDP is working diligently toward not only addressing the SDGs through an integrated approach, but also addressing its own organizational management challenges at the same time.

While these realizations were unexpected, I was glad to see that I was correct in my assessment that UNDP and JICA would share many qualities in terms of their staff and overall mission. Like JICA, the UNDP staff are highly motivated and work with the common goal of helping to create a better, more prosperous world. The staff also operates under the principle of collegiality and respects the viewpoints and mind-sets of everyone. I am very thankful for the kindness and support exemplified by my UNDP colleagues toward my work. Their kindness and patience provided me with the confidence and determination to enable me to contribute as much as I could during my stay with the UNDP.

As a member of the Japan Unit, I was happy to witness the strengthening of the UNDP-Japan partnership. During my secondment, the UNDP Administrator visited Japan twice, once in November 2018, and again in August 2019. The visit in August pertained to Japan's successful hosting of the Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development

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(TICAD7). In addition to the Administrator's visits, UNDP also successfully conducted two missions to engage in dialogue with Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and JICA in October 2018 and November 2019. In addition to these partnerships, the UNDP also succeeded in developing new points of contact with Japan's Ministry of Justice and Japanese private companies. In fact, UNDP is now hosting a Japanese secondee from the Ministry of Justice and a secondee from a Japanese private company.

In the 10 years since the UNDP and JICA signed their MOU to enhance collaborations, UNDP-JICA field level partnerships in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus have become very active across Africa and the Middle East. In particular, UNDP and JICA engage in frequent communication regarding the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and on Human Security. Furthermore, UNDP signed a new joint-partnership with JICA and JETRO in August on the sidelines of TICAD 7 to enhance collaborations with the Japanese private sector.

I recognize that none of these accomplishments would have been possible without the cooperation of colleagues across UNDP, and I feel honored to take part in these experiences. In understanding that UNDP and JICA engage in similar operations, I strongly believe we can learn from each other's work to accelerate progress toward achieving the SDGs. While I have finished my secondment with UNDP, I seek to share my valuable experiences with my JICA colleagues to further encourage UNDP-JICA collaborations. In order to strengthen our partnership, I also hope to stay in touch with my UNDP colleagues.

Although I have returned to Tokyo, my colleague, Yoko Yoshihara, will replace me as JICA's secondee to the UNDP. Ms. Yoshihara has already been proactive in looking for opportunities to strengthen UNDP-Japan collaborations and is very excited to work at the UNDP to continue developing this partnership.

Introducing Yoko Yoshihara, JICA's current UNDP Secondee

By: Yoko Yoshihara

As someone whose career has revolved around development partnership, I am very excited to work at UNDP as a collaboration advisor. Before joining UNDP, I worked at the JICA France office in Paris where I worked in a coordinating capacity for JICA's partnership with counterpart organizations, including with AFD (the development agency of France) and the OECD. I also have experience working in the Philippines conducting a policy review on disaster risk reduction to enable the donor community to coordinate their work around a shared cooperation policy.

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Yoko Yoshihara, JICA's current secondee to the UNDP

JICA and the Government of Japan (GoJ) view UNDP as one of its essential UN partners. In particular, JICA and GoJ support UNDP projects in conflict-affected areas in the Middle East and Africa where there are travel restrictions. Additionally, JICA and GoJ rely on UNDP's expertise in providing national and local governments with governance and capacity development assistance.

The Japan Unit of the Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy, which is the team that I work with at the UNDP, is currently exploring how we can further enhance the strategic partnership between UNDP and Japan. For example, we intend to enhance the structure of our annual strategic dialogue and explore new opportunities to collaborate in areas such as the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and the UN Alliance for SDG Finance. I look forward to sharing updates about our progress with you in the future.