



2016

FAO's Associate Professional Officer Programme

Offering young graduates and professionals an opportunity to obtain professional experience and skills in the United Nations Agency specialized in Food and Agriculture

ASSOCIATE PROFESSIONAL OFFICERS PROGRAMME



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Improving the dietary intakes and nutritional status of infants and young children through improved food security and complementary feeding in Malawi.

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The APO Programme

FAO's APO Programme is one of the oldest and largest within the United Nations system. It started in 1954 and gives nationals from several countries experience in the field of international cooperation, contributing to FAO's mission of building a world without hunger.

Each APO is assigned to a supervisor who provides technical advice and career guidance. Furthermore, APOs undertake duty travel in order to have a first-hand experience of FAO's field work. They also participate in seminars, workshops and training programmes within and outside the Organization.



FAO Rabies vaccination programme in Bali, Indonesia. ©FAO

What are the benefits?

For Resource Partners: By funding an APO, resource partners invest in the skills of young professionals, grooming them for a future in international development. Many former APOs go on to make significant contributions to their own countries as well as to the developing world. By supporting an APO, resource partners invest in FAO programmes. As APOs complete their assignment and advance in their career, they extend the reach of resource partners' investment beyond FAO.

For the APO: The APO Programme offers a structured learning experience to young graduates as well as exposure to international cooperation activities in a highly specialized and challenging environment.

For FAO: APOs are highly qualified and motivated young professionals. Most APOs have a university degree at M. Sc. level or at B. Sc. level with minimum two or three years of relevant professional experience. The highest gains of the APO Programme are achieved when the skills and competencies of the APO are utilized to their fullest.



Rural woman from Mutimbuzi, Bujumbura, Burundi, receiving seeds donated by FAO in the aftermath of torrential rains in early 2014 that destroyed their crops.

©FAO/Gustave Ntaraka

Who are the Partners?

Our Partners are governments that allocate funds for FAO's APO Programme. Presently, governments offering their citizens sponsorship to the APO Programme in FAO are: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the Republic of Korea and the United States.

Nationals of a developing country can be sponsored by some resource partners.

Interested candidates must apply for a specific position funded by one of the partners that sponsor candidates from developing countries. It is to be noted that there are few such positions and that the process only takes place over a limited time period every year.

The government pays the APO's salary and benefits usually for a period of two to three years.

For countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands, FAO handles directly the selection of APOs, while for other resource partners, interested candidates must apply directly for the APO positions advertised by their own governments.



Integrated pest management training at a farmers' field school: collecting pest specimens in the field. ©FAO/K.

Who can apply and how?

Ideal candidates are young professionals with a strong commitment to food and agricultural development issues and a genuine interest in working with people from across the world.

The eligibility criteria are the following:

- Age, academic qualifications and work experience: these may vary according to resource partner's criteria (see link below).
- Language skills: working knowledge of one of FAO's official languages (English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese and Russian). A limited knowledge of another language is an asset.
- Family members: Candidates must not bear any of the following relationships to staff members of the Organization: son, daughter, brother or sister.

For additional information, please consult the following link:

<http://www.fao.org/employment/opportunities-for-young-talents/associate-professional-officers/donors/en/>



A group of farmers participating in a Farmer's Field School near Nabeul, Tunisia, share their views about citrus diseases and how to protect the crops.

©FAO/Daniel Beaumont

Training

APOs receive from their government an allocation for formal training courses. The amount is determined by the resource partner. In consultation with their supervisor, APOs may use these funds to attend training that will improve their knowledge and skills. Training can either take place in-house or through external courses offered by universities or international institutions.

Supervision

Supervisors provide continued guidance on technical issues as well as on FAO environment and the institutional framework. When APOs come on board, their supervisor provides a thorough briefing and a work plan in consultation with the APO. The supervisors make themselves available to the APOs throughout the course of their assignments, providing feedback and mentorship.



Results of the APO survey

The 2015 survey conducted by the APO Unit, Office of Human Resources (OHR) revealed a good level of satisfaction with the Programme by the APOs and the hosting offices.

A large part of APOs expressed satisfaction with the quality of their assignment and declared their interest in continuing to work either at FAO or within the UN family after the end of their assignment.

The survey also showed that the majority of APOs were highly motivated by the nature of their assignment and by the opportunity to participate in field missions. Working for the United Nations is also a strong motivator, albeit secondary to the job itself.

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OFFICERS PROGRAMME

What our APOs say of their experience



Mr Andreas Thulstrup from Denmark has worked in the Climate, Energy and Tenure Division at FAO Headquarters in Rome.

“I joined the APO programme as a Natural Resource Management Officer in the Climate, Energy and Tenure Division at FAO Headquarters in Rome. Prior to my assignment as an APO I was working with NGOs and academia on natural resource management and agricultural development issues, both in emergency- and development settings. Throughout these experiences I often relied on FAO’s valuable contribution to international development as a knowledge organization and as a crucial source of data.

During my assignment in FAO, my main area of work included technical backstopping for field programmes, normative work and resource mobilization on the topic of energy in emergencies and protracted crises. Through multi-disciplinary in-house collaborations and support from colleagues and senior management in a number of divisions, this work has now become an important new area under FAO’s Resilience Agenda. The work has enabled me to support the strengthening of partnerships with other UN agencies, NGOs, partners, governments and other actors involved in supporting the energy needs of crisis-affected people.

The work I have carried out as an APO with FAO is among the most rewarding of my career. I would say that the highlights of my assignment have been the frequent travels, which have allowed me to work closely with farmers and with FAO’s country offices, as well as to witness firsthand the crucial work FAO is implementing.”



Mr. Massimo Pera worked as Programme Officer (Agricultural market Development) in the FAO Representation of Hanoi, Vietnam from 24 October 2011 to 23 October 2013.

Mr. Pera now worked as a consultant in the Rural Infrastructure and Agro-Industries Division.

My APO experience was just great. I have a degree in Development Economics with a strong focus on access to financial services and agricultural markets development, and as an APO I worked in the Country Office of Vietnam from 2011 to 2013, providing technical assistance on rural finance, agro-businesses and agricultural markets. So it perfectly fitted with my interests and gave me an effective possibility of learning and improving my experience. More specifically, I worked as a back-stopping officer on different projects, side by side with smallholder farmers who had no skills for trading their crops and for accessing markets. I spent a lot of time in the field, and through the project, beneficiaries saw their incomes increasing and their livelihood improving dramatically, thanks to the new trading opportunities for their improved quality products.

Two things contributed to make my working experience unique. First of all, I had the possibility of learning a lot, understanding the dynamics of value-chains and market trends as well as those of decision making of smallholder farmers.

Secondly, the country. Vietnam is a dynamic environment to work in: a fast growing middle-income economy, facing challenges related to its transition to open markets, especially when it is about ensuring that the economic growth has a trickle-down effect on low-income and vulnerable people. As such, it is an incredible environment to improve knowledge and skills.

Motivation and a passionate commitment is what is really needed to enjoy and maximize the APO experience. And so far it has paid out. After the end of my assignment in Vietnam, I started working in headquarters with AGS on agribusiness finance and investments.



Ms. Terhi Paikkala from Finland has worked as a Gender Officer at the FAO Representation in Lusaka, Zambia. Terhi has been recently assigned to Sub-regional Office for Eastern Africa in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia.

Before joining FAO, I worked with the Finnish Red Cross in Tajikistan, having finished Master's degree in social sciences with development studies as my major subject. Coming to Zambia was obviously quite different from my previous duty station, but as I had studied and volunteered previously in Southern Africa the region was not totally new to me.

Before arriving to Zambia, I received administrative briefings and met officers at the FAO Headquarters in Rome. It was useful for gaining understanding on the gender and forestry related work that FAO is involved in.

The APO assignment is a good opportunity for me to gain more understanding of the country level work of the United Nations, and more specifically that of the FAO. I applied for this APO position as I wanted to concentrate on promotion of gender equality – there are remarkable differences in women's and men's access to productive resources, and in opportunities for making key livelihood related decisions.

I started my work by conducting an assessment of the current work and capacities of the FAO Zambia office in promotion of gender equality. This allowed me to understand the existing good practices and gaps, and to plan how I could best support the FAO country programme to take gender considerations into account. Thereafter I provided support to programmes especially with regards to surveys and baseline information collection as well as planning and gender strategy development. Apart from being the gender focal point for the office, I had a specific task to facilitate the development and implementation of a national Forest Livelihood and Economic Survey.

During my first 9 months as a Gender Officer at FAO Zambia, I learned a lot about cooperation with the Government counterparts. Through specific training funds provided to the APOs by the Government of Finland, I was also able to attend training for gender audit facilitators at the ILO International Training Centre in Italy. Assessing and supporting organizations to take equality issues into account is something I really enjoy working with.



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