

A **FORCE** FOR **CHANGE**



PHOTOS: UNDP

Four years ago 189 heads of state signed the Millennium Declaration, from which the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emanate. The MDGs set measurable targets to address extreme poverty and hunger, health and education, gender discrimination, the environment and other challenges. Globally, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is tasked with helping countries achieve the Goals by the deadline of 2015. In some countries that means preventing conflict and building peace; in others it means providing policy advice to national governments or advocating for development vis-à-vis donor governments.

Four alumni from DESTIN, the School's Development Studies Institute, tell of their inspiring work towards these aims – **Jamshed Kazi**, **Vibeke Risa**, **Kjetil Hansen** and **Claudia Melim-McLeod**. ▶

The leadership development (LEAD) programme is highly competitive. In 2003, approximately 4,300 candidates applied and 15 were selected for a fast-track management career at UNDP.

Jamshed Kazi

MSc Development Studies 1996, MSc
Environmental Assessment and Evaluation 1997



Jamshed Kazi from Bangladesh is currently based in UNDP Ethiopia

Most mornings while I negotiate my way through the erratic traffic of Addis Ababa (a city with the unfortunate distinction of having the highest number of traffic accidents per capita in the world), I find myself grappling with a dilemma I've had since joining UNDP in Ethiopia, through the LEAD programme, in January last year.

How do I, as a development practitioner working under the auspices of the UN, contribute to the development of a country with an annual per capita income of US\$110, a country which continues to experience recurrent famines, has an infant mortality rate of 118/1000 live births, 36 per cent adult literacy, 60 per cent unemployment, a three per cent population growth rate, and over three million people living with HIV/AIDS – the third highest prevalence anywhere in the world? To say that these challenges are daunting would be an understatement. On the other hand, despondency and nonchalance are not an option – particularly at a time when virtually all the countries of the world have committed themselves to achieving the landmark Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

The MDGs are a very simple but powerful idea. They are the UN's effort to set the terms of a globalisation not driven by the interests of the strong but managed in the interests of the poor. MDGs are fast becoming the yardstick by which development results are measured. From Cameroon to Cambodia, presidents are already starting to run on platforms to achieve the MDGs, and in many more countries, opposition parties are developing policies based on the failure of

sitting governments to take action. Donors are realigning their support around the MDGs; development agencies are doing the same; so is much of civil society.

But there is no denying that the international community and the UN have a monumental challenge if poverty is to be halved within the next decade. This is a challenge that we must meet, and we can do so, provided that we invest half as much of the energy and resources into addressing socio-economic development imperatives in developing countries as we channel into combating terrorism, flexing military might and unearthing weapons of mass destruction. There can be no greater WMD than absolute poverty and denial of the fundamental right to development. There can be no better remedy for stemming the growing tide of terrorism and discontent than accelerating sustainable and equitable human development.

During my MSc in Development Studies in 1996, I was highly critical of the UN and firmly believed that development was being championed by civil society and non governmental organisations who took action on the ground while the UN appeared to be incessantly preoccupied with debate and dialogue. On my first UN assignment in Thailand in 1999, I initially despised of the bureaucracy, endless meetings and multilateral consultations that preceded most activities I carried out.

It has since dawned on me that, for all its shortcomings, the UN and its multilateralism are the means, not the end, and that there is no body more multilateral than the UN. ■

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Vibeke Risa

MSc Population and Development 1997



Vibeke Risa from Norway is currently based in Nairobi working for UNDP Somalia

I started working with UNDP in 1998 to address deprivations which arise from gender issues in the Bangui country office in the Central African Republic. Five years and two post-conflict countries later, I have learnt a great deal about being realistic, managing expectations and not losing hope that people's livelihoods can be improved.

Now in Somalia, working in the only country in the world which does not have a central government and in which almost half the population live in extreme poverty, it is easy to become cynical. For over a decade Somalia has found itself in a situation of civil strife, conflict, violence and lawlessness, which has made it one of the poorest countries in the world. As the security situation in Mogadishu makes it impossible for a UN agency to be based there, I have my office in Nairobi, a very pleasant and bustling city which reminds me very little of the country for which I am working. Although working conditions are more comfortable, the fact that I am so far away from the people whom I am meant to serve makes my job complicated. To assist anyone in a constructive manner, considerable amounts of time need to be spent with them. My planned missions to Somalia have often been postponed or cancelled, due to lack of security. In situations like this, it is easy to ask oneself whether the UN can play any role at all. Somaliland, located in the north-west, has declared its independence and was until recently considered relatively stable and secure. In recent months several foreign aid workers have been murdered, and despite the commitment of the



SONYA LAURENCE GREEN

Above and right: Vocational training projects supported by the UNDP in Somalia aim to reduce poverty

authorities to protect its expatriate community and humanitarian workers, it has become clear that our safety can no longer be taken for granted.

At LSE I studied population issues in developing countries, and found it fascinating how various aspects of population trends, such as famine, migration and disease, especially HIV/AIDS, impacted on people's livelihoods in different ways. Working in the Somali context, where continued conflict and violence have forced hundreds of thousands of men, women and children to flee their villages, homes and livelihoods, where lack of security makes people aggressive and suspicious, and where lawlessness creates an atmosphere of fear, the theories I was taught have been put into a real perspective. However, what I have also learnt – maybe the most important aspect of all – is that people's abilities to survive in almost impossible conditions are extremely powerful.

Somalia is currently into its 14th peace process, and is considered by many to be a country with no hope for a prosperous future. I have often heard people saying that the resources invested by the UN in these processes are wasted, as the only people who benefit are warlords. But if we consider the alternatives, there are not many. If the UN leaves, who will be left? However hopeless the situation may seem, the UN will always be there. And that, I believe, is its greatest quality. ■



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Kjetil Hansen

MSc Development Studies 2000



Kjetil Hansen from Norway is currently based in UNDP Rwanda

Arriving in Rwanda was a shocking experience. It was not simply because I was well aware of its horrific recent past, nor because I saw the paralysis of a society recovering from a catastrophic social trauma. It was because I fully realised the criminal paralysis of the international community and of all the 'responsible' bodies who are normally involved in development and in the promotion of human rights, peace and security. The world community swore 'never again' in the aftermath of World War Two. The promise was not kept. They, or we, all watched as close to one million human beings were killed, slaughtered, raped or maimed in a planned, announced and systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing. Stark monuments to failed mission are the countless memorials littering the country. So when I arrived to take up my position as the assistant resident representative for UNDP as part of the LEAD programme, and stood in front of the United Nations Memorial for the 30 UN staff killed here because of their ethnicity or because of their opposition to the violence, I could not help feeling a sense of despair and hopelessness.

After graduating from LSE with an MSc in Development Studies in 2000, I worked for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for a year before joining UNDP as a junior professional officer. My duty station was Mozambique, where I worked on a decentralisation programme for two years. I was then accepted onto the LEAD programme. I manage the Governance Unit which includes programmes of support to, among others, the Rwandan Justice Sector, the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, and the Decentralisation and Public Service Reform Programmes, and I coordinate action among other UN agencies and bilateral donors.

Coming from LSE, and pure theory, to work and practice has been extremely rewarding in ►

Claudia Melim-McLeod

MSc Development Management 1998

many ways, but not without its frustrations. Positively, the linkages between theory and practice become clearer, and what I see gives meaning to what I read and heard in lectures. Covering a sector, such as governance, also allows me to gain understanding of a wide range of issues. But management and administration give me less time to step back and look at the bigger picture. Little time is given to thinking about development theory, as my days are spent verifying financial reports, work plans, participating in meetings and so on. Links with higher level objectives are not always evident from this angle. But they are there. When I see the changes to people's lives, however slight, as a result of some of the programmes we sponsor, however difficult and slow moving, I regain the hope I had at the beginning of my studies.

Being in Rwanda and seeing a society putting itself back together gives me hope that what we are doing today will contribute to peace, stability and development. The enormous challenge of rebuilding the country and reconciling Rwandan society is intimidating. But I still believe in what we are doing, or trying to do. In the end, through learning every day in my interactions with my Rwandan counterparts, I feel that I am as much the beneficiary as the provider of development cooperation. It is not a one-way street. And this is indeed inspiring. ■

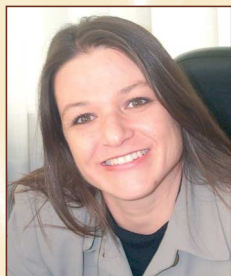
DESTIN

The Development Studies Institute (DESTIN) was established in 1990 to promote interdisciplinary postgraduate teaching and research on processes of social, political and economic development and change. It offers six master's programmes and has about 330 students.

There are five clusters of research expertise: institutional change, institutional reform and governance; war torn societies, human rights and complex emergencies; globalisation: international financial markets, trade and aid; local level urban and rural livelihood strategies; rural development, agrarian reform and agrarian change.

In 2001 the Institute established the Development Research Centre, funded by the UK Department for International Development, to pursue research on Crisis and Breakdown in the Developing World, in coordination with academic partners.

See www.lse.ac.uk/depts/destin



Claudia de Andrade Melim-McLeod from Brazil is currently based at UNDP headquarters in New York

I joined UNDP in 2003 through the LEAD programme and work at headquarters in New York as a programme specialist. My job involves working with a team to develop and implement management tools for UNDP's offices in over 160 countries and to ensure that we are in a position to help governments achieve the Goals by 2015.

Only six years ago, I was an LSE student pursuing an MSc in Development Management and I was fascinated by the opportunities offered by the School to hear visiting ministers and heads of state offer their views on economic, political and social issues. Among my mementos of LSE, I keep a picture taken with Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the prominent dependency theorist, who later became

The UNDP Courage Award was presented to Iraq staff following the bombing of the UN mission in Baghdad last year 'for their dedicated service under dangerous conditions'



president of Brazil, my native country. As a student, I was particularly interested in the role of the state as an agent of or impediment to development, for instance in countries where state-sponsored violence hindered or destroyed peace and security.

That led to my first UN assignment in 2000 with the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor, a nation- and institution-building mission led by another prominent Brazilian, the late Sergio Vieira de Mello. The bombing of the UN mission in Baghdad last year – 'our 9/11' as it is referred to at headquarters – took Sergio and 21 other colleagues away from us, dealing a hard blow to the UN.

In war, the first casualty is truth. In Iraq, the deliberate attack on the UN mission and the untimely death of our colleagues added another casualty to the list: the notion that the blue flag is enough to keep our offices from becoming targets. It does not take much for bad people in unstable countries to get ideas from others, and many of our colleagues work in volatile and dangerous environments.

From the perspective of post-war Iraq, the task of helping UN member countries meet the MDGs appears even more daunting, and as UN advocates and critics alike know, our organisation is far from perfect. Yet we must carry on, not only because we are mandated to do so, but because not carrying on means accepting the unacceptable.

We must refuse to accept that in our world, 113 million children cannot go to school – perhaps because two thirds of them are girls and education is not a priority for their families, or because where they live, more teachers die of AIDS than the government can train. We must refuse to accept that over one billion of us will continue to lack access to clean water. We must refuse to accept spending US\$300 billion a year on agricultural subsidies and over US\$800 billion a year on weapons while over one billion people live on less than US\$1 a day and 800 million go hungry every day.

Changing this state of affairs is our greatest challenge, and history shows that political will, coupled with sound policies, can make a difference. I believe UNDP is in a unique position to facilitate the former and advise on the latter. Because the problems we are up against have such enormous implications for the lives of so many people, we have to take the challenge head on. We owe it to ourselves, and most importantly, we owe it to our children. ■

For more information on the United Nations Development Programme, see

www.undp.org