

Careers in development: an interview with Frédéric Jeanjean on the AusAID grad program, AYAD and working for the UN

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Frederic: My name is Frédéric Jeanjean and I'm currently in the second year of the [AusAID Graduate Development Program](#). I'm currently working in the World Bank and Results Section and am in pre-posting for a short-term mission to Washington DC where I'll be working on the [World Bank Spring meetings](#).

Jonathan: *And where were your rotations last year?*

Frederic: My first rotation was with the [UN Development Cooperation Forum](#) Task Force, working on a Symposium in the lead up to the UNECOSOC [Development Cooperation Forum](#) that took place in New York last July.

I then moved over to the Humanitarian Response Section, working on disaster preparedness in the lead up to the Pacific cyclone season. It was a particularly busy and interesting Christmas period with Typhoon Bopha hitting the Philippines in late November and Cyclone Evan hitting Fiji and Samoa in December.

Jonathan: *What was your background before getting started at AusAID?*

Frederic: I started my tertiary education at the University of Wollongong. I was doing law at the time, but halfway through realised I wasn't really enjoying the content and finished a degree in European Studies and moved on to a Masters in Development Studies at the University of Sydney.

At the same time as studying I was cognisant that I needed to get some experience on the board, so I was doing a lot of volunteer work with Austcare, now [ActionAid Australia](#). They gave me my first break by sending me on a six month paid mission to Aceh, Indonesia, working on disaster risk reduction and the re-integration of ex-combatants into communities.

While in Aceh I applied for an [Australian Youth Ambassador for Development](#) position with the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Laos. I was on the plane on my way home when my phone rang and it was my dad letting me know I'd been offered the position.

It was a fascinating experience as a few months into my role the Head of Office went on maternity leave and wasn't replaced. So I got to head the Office and manage half a dozen local and international staff and work really closely with the UN Resident Coordinator on a daily basis, working on Laos' mid-term [Millennium Development Goals report](#) and responding to the 2008 Mekong floods.

After my year as an AYAD I stayed on as a consultant in Laos with the [Mekong River Commission](#), working in the international partnerships section doing resource mobilisation. In the 9 months I was there we raised

\$40 million from bilateral and multilateral donors.

I then finished up in Laos and went to Cambodia for a one year [UN Volunteers](#) position working on aid effectiveness for the UN Country Team. During that time I was also doing some work for the UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok, conducting two country analyses on climate change financing through an aid effectiveness lens.

Jonathan: *And UNV is quite similar to AYAD?*

Frederic: Exactly, they are both paid volunteer positions. UNV is probably a little bit more competitive, but there are a few ways you can apply. You can submit your CV and application to the global UNV roster and then they will try to match you with upcoming UNV opportunities. They'll shortlist 3-4 applicants, which they'll then interview and then have the Country Office choose a preferred candidate.

Alternately there are often UNV positions being offered from the national offices that offer positions locally or regionally. I went down the second route, applying directly via the Cambodian UN website. The UNV is definitely a great way of getting into the UN system, as is any Australian sponsored volunteer opportunity.

A bit of a word of caution regarding the UN: you should know what you're getting yourself into. Don't be romanticised about the image portrayed of the UN by media.

The analogy that I have is that development is like a theatre and the main actors are the ones that you see delivering services in refugee camps or in communities. That's a highly important role in development, but as in theatre there are more people behind the scenes making sure the production can take place. There's a lot you can (and will likely) do without being the cavalier and the main actor - the person delivering services 'in the field'.

Jonathan: *Heading back to Cambodia...*

Frederic: After Cambodia I was asked by the UNDP regional office to apply for a role in Pakistan. It was a 9 month mission as a Technical Assistant to the Government of Pakistan's Economic Affairs Division. The role was to assist the government in putting together the first foreign aid policy for Pakistan.

I was there for about 9 months and it was a pretty tough period. The champion for the policy at the time changed portfolios and once she left there was no one really left in the government of Pakistan to move it forward. It lost all political traction and sadly it still hasn't been released.

During that time I was applying for a number of positions in Canberra. I was offered a few roles with AusAID and ended up taking up the graduate program because I wanted to get a broad experience of what AusAID does.

So far the graduate program has been great and allowed me to look at development through a variety of lenses. Once the program's finished I hope to stay at AusAID for the foreseeable future.

Jonathan: *Following up with the grad program, could you describe your current cohort?*

Frederic: There are 40 of us in the grad program from highly varied backgrounds. Development is highly interdisciplinary and you can come from basically any background and make it fit. And that's reflected in the intake. We've got some grads that have just come straight out of undergraduate degrees. We've got others who have completed PhDs. We've got a number of lawyers and others from the private sector who have gone through a career change to work in the development world. We've also got economists, health specialists, education specialists, you name it.

Also, a lot of us, probably just under half, have done a year as an AYAD at some point. Whether working for a local or international NGO, a UN agency, a partner government – the best experience is getting overseas.

And volunteering opportunities like AYAD, [AVID](#) and UNV are great for that. It also really helps you build your networks and create opportunities. Most AYADs I know that wanted to stay on in Laos have found roles locally through networks and jobs that are only advertised locally.

Jonathan: *Would you have any additional advice for people who would like to get into the UN system? Should they do what you did or should they go through the proper processes?*

Frederic: I understand you can now go through the [Young professionals program](#), which sounds highly competitive. I've always used a scattergun approach to applying for jobs, which means not always adopting a linear path. AYAD is definitely a good way of applying for postings in UN agencies. If you perform well there's always the chance of moving that contract over to a UNV or a short-term consultancy. After that your networks start to kick in.

Jonathan: *Do you have any last bits of advice you'd like to finish up with?*

Frederic: Networks are key. You also need to be able to sell yourself. Being in the international workplace you have to shrug off the Australian tendency towards tall poppy syndrome. Finally, always make sure that in whatever job you are doing make sure you've got some outputs for your work so that you will have something to show you worked on and delivered at the end of your assignment. The development industry is working towards more accountability and demonstrating results, which should be reflected in your CV.

At the time of the publication of this blog Frédéric was on posting in Washington DC.

This is a part of our blog series 'Careers in Development'. The rest of the series can be found [here](#).

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