

My job in international cooperation

Jens Engeli



Age

44

Current position

Programme coordinator, Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, Bern

Education

Agricultural Engineer FH; Master in Governance and Development

Most significant jobs to date

Internship, Bhutan (6 month) ; Private sector Switzerland (6 years); International Advisor im Kyrgyz Swiss Agricultural Programme, Kirgistan (3 years); Regional coordinator, Helvetas, Mocambique (3 years); Programme coordinator, HEKS, Lausanne (6 month); Senior Advisor Helvetas on Governance, Bangladesh, (2 years)

How I started

I studied agronomy with an international focus and completed an internship in Bhutan while studying. However, it was still difficult to get into international cooperation (IC). I worked for three years for an agricultural accounting business and for a further three years as a flight attendant. Only then did Helvetas recruit me for a junior position in Kyrgyzstan and I've been employed in IC since then.

«I'm a pragmatic man with my heart abroad.»

My motivation

I was always motivated by things international and hoped to contribute to positive global development. In my current job, I want to bring my own experience from abroad to the headquarters and shape the strategic direction of the organisation. I would like the field perspective to find its way into the different processes at the headquarters.

My daily work

I'm responsible for the management of projects in partner countries, which requires a lot of travel. I work on the strategic direction of projects, am involved in quality management and participate in issues related to the development of the organisation. But I also have a lot of administrative work, be it financial administration, staff management or maintaining relationships with donors.

The rewards and challenges

I love moments when I can think strategically and innovatively, and those times when strategy and practice come together. I also enjoy interpreting financial reports, as well as improving monitoring systems when it leads to an easier and more strategic management of projects. What I find challenging are difficult human resource decisions, like laying-off staff, and those times when financial interests dominate.

My personal situation

I think that the many different jobs abroad cost me a long-term relationship. However, in the meantime, I'm happily married. I travel less in my current role than previously, resulting in a better balance between work and family.

What I've learnt

In the last years, I've learnt to sometimes say no and to set limits to my engagement. I'm learning everyday, because self-reflection is very important in my role; I have a great influence as a coordinator on the motivation of my team and the respect the team shows me.

My future

In five years, I would like to work abroad again for Helvetas for a certain period. What happens after that, I don't know. I'm interested to see where my curiosity leads me in ten to fifteen years.

My advice to people interested in working as a programme coordinator.

I think that the door to IC is open to young people today through internships, thematic specializations, interpersonal skills and good language skills. A good way in can be through an internship, at home or abroad, followed by a thematic placement at headquarters. Young people must be aware that an international career can be a challenge for a relationship, because often both are trying to build their careers at the same time.

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