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# WFP Women Reflect on our 50 Years



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# A Female Perspective on WFP's 50 Years

In April 1992, **Catherine Bertini** became executive director of WFP. At 41, she was not only the youngest to hold the post – but the first woman and the first American. She arrived at a time of significant challenge in WFP's operating environment: natural disasters, aggravated by climate change, were rapidly rising along with war, civil strife and ethnic conflict. Demand for food aid spiraled upward. Yet internally, much was static. WFP was a hierarchical, top-down institution run largely by men in Rome.

When Bertini convened her first meeting of senior staff, she was surprised to find herself the only female in the room. "Where are all the women?" she asked. There were just six women at the P5 level and above, she was told – none of them in Rome at the time. "When I asked why there weren't more women, there was no good answer," Bertini recounted in a phone interview. "I was told things like how that was natural because WFP did 'guy things' like move trucks and planes and ships. And I said: don't worry. We'll find women who can do all of these things and do them well."

And she did. Bertini's 10-year tenure marked the pivotal turning point for female staff, especially for professional women and for women in any category from the developing world. Targets were set: for example, 50 percent of hires should be women, and 40 percent developing country nationals. Because Bertini believed "the heart of our work is in the field," she pushed hard to hire more women in the field to interact with beneficiaries. She also mainstreamed the policy that was pioneered in the early 1980s to distribute rations directly to women.

Soon women were moving trucks, planes and ships alongside the men. **Judith Thimke** (see p. 8) was hired in 1993 as one of the first female logistics officers, along with **Catharina Bergstrom** and **Sheryl Fuller**. In 1996, Sierra Leonean **Sitta Kai-Kai** – then running a sub-area office for UNOSOM in Somalia – responded to Bertini's call for African women to apply to WFP. Within a few months Sitta found herself managing the ultra-remote Karagwe sub-office in Tanzania; she was one of the first female professionals to run a sub-office (see p. 9). By 2002, the ranks of senior professional women had expanded from six to more than 60, while the female percentage of international professional staff rose from 16 percent to 39 percent. It has hovered around 40 percent ever since.

This seismic internal shift was effective – if not smooth. "She (Bertini) decided that WFP needed more women professionals and no one was going to stop her mission," says Judith Thimke. "She stuck to her word, no matter how many comments or confrontations." Bertini recalls her first re-assignment exercise meeting shortly after taking the job, when they were seeking a new deputy

Cover photos clockwise from top left: Azeb Asrat, Purnima Kashyap, Irene Ursic-Ruisi, Judith Thimke, Sitta Kai-Kai.



Senior professional women 1992 (l-r) Valerie Sequeira, Rihanna Tanwir, Mona Hammam, Catherine Bertini, Judy Katona-Apte, Maria Grazia Iuri, Zoraida Mesa



Senior professional women 2002

## Jane Pearce, chief, contingency planning and operations, Australian

Starting as a G2 clerk in 1993, Jane managed to bridge the gap to a professional posting by taking temporary information officer jobs in hotspots like former Zaire until hired as a P2 reports officer in Baghdad in 1996. Jane says a defining moment for her was when then-ED Bertini addressed staff at an International Women's Day celebration in Rome in

2002: "First, she invited all the women who were working as P5s or above when she started as ED to come on stage. Five or six women came up," says Jane, who was in the audience. "Then, she invited up all the women who were currently working at the P5 level or above. The stage was full. That was really striking for me." **The senior women then gathered outside for the photo above.**

director of the Middle East bureau. A few men were proposed, none of them fitting all the specifications, so Bertini turned to her list of six women. On paper, **Mona Hammam** looked like a fit: born in Egypt; trilingual (Arabic, English, French); degree in development economics. Wouldn't she be perfect for the job, Bertini asked? "She does 'women in development,' she wouldn't be interested," came the answer. Mona was, in fact, interested and got the job.

"We ultimately got the percentages we did from placing hiring goals in the performance plans of hiring managers," Bertini says. Gender was in the budget as a line item for some of those years and gender advisers sprinkled around the field. **Joyce Luma** (see p. 9), now chief of the Food Security Analysis Service (VAM), recalls that on her first assignment in Pakistan in 1999 – two of six professionals were women, and one of the two was a gender adviser. "I knew gender issues were a priority for WFP," Joyce says. Bertini promoted the message that any organization is "more modern, flexible and effective" with a diversity of workforce. "Increasing female staff becomes

absolutely essential when the majority of our beneficiaries are women." Most staff came to appreciate that perspective, she said: "Some of the guys who were initially the most skeptical, were the ones who helped sustain the progress we made on women – helped us reach critical mass ... but we also learned that progress needs sustained leadership to carry it through."

The Bertini era was rich in significance for women at WFP – and yet women staff have played key roles throughout WFP's 50-year history. See, for example, the story at right on **Louise Sobon-Latiolais**, WFP's first woman in the field. Or, the late **Maria Grazia Iuri** (second from right in top photo), the first female to attain a D2 grade when she became director of finance. In keeping with the spirit of the 50th anniversary, **Pipeline** interviewed more than a dozen veteran women staffers who reflect on their successes, challenges and significant experiences. Our cover feature is not in any way a definitive history of women at WFP – but rather a collage of female perspectives on our five decades of existence. – **Jennifer Parmelee and Anastasia Way**



Evaline Diang'a speaks with Kenyan farmers who graduated from WFP food aid and are now selling their produce through a WFP-supported Food for Assets project.

## Evaline Diang'a, business analyst with Performance and Accountability Management Division, Kenya

For Evaline Diang'a (left centre), the costs and benefits of being a female staffer hit home when she made the transition from national officer to international professional with a posting in North Korea in 2001. With scant prospects for work, her husband Alex stayed behind in Kenya with his NGO job.

At the same time, she found an immediate entrée into the rigid and closed society through female-to-female chats with a national staffer who also taught her piano during lunch breaks. "We discussed 'safe topics' like how she got to work or what she cooked for her children," Evaline says. "Through these conversations I developed empathy for her, for women, for the society in a difficult environment that other colleagues could only look at as a problem. She has a dear place in my heart to this day."

A decade later, Evaline is in Rome and again separated from her husband and his work in Kenya. This time, however, her 2-year-old son keeps her company. "We

make my career decisions as a family," she says. "I have turned down promotions because they wouldn't have worked for my family. That's where the trade-offs come in." She is ever mindful of a phrase from a 2002 WFP "Commitments to Women" document published in 2002: "Family policy issues cannot be separated from the fact of WFP staff's personal expectations. Nowadays, younger women staff tend to have higher expectations, whereas older women staff have had to make choices and sacrifices."

Challenges aside, she is as convinced of WFP's essential "humanity" as when she entered from the private sector in 1998. A case in point, she says, is how the deputy executive directors intervened at the highest levels with the Italian government on the issue of legalizing household help for P1-P4 staff – a still unresolved issue that mostly impacts women with young families, especially moms on their own. "Coming into WFP, you immediately felt the focus on people and how your job was impacting people – not just the bottom line. It kept us attuned to what really mattered."



# Welcome to Our New ED

WFP/Giulio d'Adamo



On 5 April, **Ertharin Cousin** began her tenure as WFP's 12th executive director, replacing Josette Sheeran, who assumed the role as vice chairman of the World Economic Forum at the end of her five-year term at WFP. Cousin brings with her more than 25 years of national and international non-profit, government, and corporate leadership experience focusing on hunger, food, and resilience strategies.

She launched into her first day on the job with a global All-Staff Meeting at which she fielded questions, including one in which she was asked about gender equality at WFP – and whether “affirmative action” might be an option to close the gap. “We’ve been stuck at 40% [proportion of workforce that is female] for quite some time,” she answered. “This gives us an opportunity as well as a challenge. I’m not about putting people in jobs to meet numbers. When we do that we don’t help the person you put in the job or the organization we serve. But I also do not buy ‘I can’t find qualified (women).’ We may have to look a little harder. And we will look harder to aim to break that barrier.”



Irene working as a general secretary at WFP in 1962.

## Irene Ursic-Ruisi retired, Italian

Each year, Irene creates an elaborate homemade Christmas card for the many friends she made in her 34 years at WFP. “It was my second family” she says, a sentiment echoed in the many hugs and warm greetings she receives when she visits WFP 18 years after retiring. Born and raised in Egypt, Irene came to WFP in its infancy, in 1962, starting as a secretary on a one-month contract. It was close-knit, with just 30 employees at Rome headquarters. But for many of those first years, she came to work with a heavy heart, carrying a secret she feared would jeopardize her job: a disabled child at home who suffered from uncontrollable seizures. For seven years, she spent all her vacation and sick leave on the child’s treatment, until finally telling her boss. Her boss, shocked she had kept this pain inside, offered full support and guided her to people who could help.

Opening up to her fellow employees proved life-changing not only for Irene, but for her autistic son, Oliviero. A WFP colleague suggested she see a professor at a London hospital specializing in autistic syndromes; the hospital referred Irene’s son to a rehabilitation center in Switzerland, where he received appropriate treatment and still lives today. “You tell a friend these kinds of things immediately because they will understand. It took me a while to realize that WFP would understand,” Irene says now. “When I think of the Christmas card, I think of my time at WFP, the friends I made, and how they helped me. The WFP mission in the world, devoted to the defense of human dignity and support to the weakest, has been a life lesson that has helped me overcome the difficult parts of my life.”

You can reach Irene at: ireneursic@vruisi.net

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## Our First Woman in the Field: Louise Sobon-Latiolais

For the first decade of WFP's existence, the prevailing wisdom was that life in the field was too rough and rigorous for a woman. Then came **Louise Sobon-Latiolais**, who had worked three years with the U.S. Peace Corps in Africa before getting hired in 1972 as WFP's first woman in the field – as assistant project officer in Swaziland. By 1978, there were six women officers serving in the field out of a total of 120 posts. Louise, who has since passed away, was interviewed for the WFP internal newsletter's April-June 1975 edition, excerpted here:

### How is it that you're the only woman project officer in the whole of WFP?

I really wish I knew. I think women are a bit reluctant to get into this type of work because, well, once we do we're not encouraged to continue. They put us in our little corner, and there we stay.

### How is the status of women in Africa?

Generally speaking, Africa is coming forward a lot more than your so-called developed countries as far as women are concerned. In Swaziland I find women much more active in government affairs, in policy-making decisions. I find myself very well accepted by government and even by the traditional Swaziland chiefs – after their initial shock of seeing a woman officer.

### What do you think a woman project officer can do as well if not better than a man, and what not?

I think administratively we can do the job as well as a man, but obviously jobs we couldn't do as well would be

physical labour, unloading trucks, etc., but I'm not doing that. What we can, I think, do better is in our dealings in developing countries. You find most of their nurses, teachers, dieticians and so on are females. In developing countries the male is held in esteem, so I think the women would tell a man what she thinks he wants to hear, as opposed to her real problems. I think that she would be more inclined to give me the real picture.

### Has your work caused any problems with your own family, your husband or baby daughter?

No, it hasn't to date. I think I'm in a very enviable position. I have got a very flexible family. Before I got married, my husband and I talked over the whole situation. My husband is a mathematics teacher and, fortunately, very much in demand in any country to which I am likely to go. He can move from place to place, whereas I think if it were up to me to follow him, I would have more difficulties finding a job.

### Do you think women are reluctant to take field positions for fear they might be uncomfortable or unsafe?

I think the reason why women aren't getting in the field more is because they're not even aware the job exists. I've been told there have only been two applications from women to WFP (for a field job) – my own and someone else's. I don't know what happened to the other lady.

### Are there any mental reservations among your colleagues because you are a woman?

I think a small minority of my colleagues in Swaziland have some reservations because I am a woman. Not as far as thinking is concerned or mental capacity – but physical – “Er, Louise, you really shouldn't go to this place because you've got to walk up a mountain,” or “You've got to drive through three inches of mud in order to get there,” which of course just spurs me on and I go all the more.

### What advice would you give to other women to help them along this trail that you have blazed?

I'm still blazing the trail and don't think I'm in a position to give advice. I'd tell women to just go out and try it, whatever it is, whatever field they're in – not to be influenced by the old wives' tales that you should not do this and that because you're a woman.



## Rita Bhatia senior regional programme advisor in Bangkok, Indian

Rita has been working in public health and nutrition for more than 30 years, and believes her gender has given her a leg-up in the traditionally male-dominated field. “In Pakistan, I could talk to everybody, walk with everybody, go into anybody's home. But men could only talk to men. This was important especially when we were working with cultures where social situations were divided by gender.” Although she finds women have a special advantage in the field, Rita doesn't think they should get special treatment in hiring. “WFP should not hire women because they are women, but on their qualifications,” she says. “However, sometimes I go to country offices and am dismayed when it's all men and the country director is a man. So many of our goals revolve around raising the societal standard for women, I think we need to do that at WFP. It's a balance that can be achieved.”

Special thanks to communications intern Anastasia Way for her invaluable work on our women's issue.

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# Staff Awards of Merit 2012

## "Papa Charlie", a Logistics Pioneer

By Leighla Bowers

"Papa Charlie" – it's the kind of nickname your colleagues give you when they see you as a pillar, someone essential. That's what **Pierre Carrasse's** team calls him, and the dedication and teamwork that he's helped instill in Logistics staff is a big reason why this pioneer of WFP aviation received the 2011 Tun Myat Award for Excellence in Humanitarian Logistics, at a ceremony in Rome on 23 March 2012.

In his near 20 years of experience with WFP, Pierre has coordinated vital air assistance to some of the most remote and conflict-ridden countries on the planet, beginning with his very first assignment to deliver aid to a tense and pre-genocide Rwanda. Shortly after, Pierre landed in a strategic airbase in Kenya called Lokichokio, the gateway to South Sudan. Pierre came to coordinate passenger flights and nearly 40 airdrops a day to more than 300 locations under 'Operation Lifeline Sudan'.

In the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's largest, longest running humanitarian aid operation, "Loki" was an example of not only fantastic teamwork,

but of the days when WFP worked without email, GPS tracking systems or mobile phones. "We used to organize all flights by writing times and flight numbers on a big, white dry-erase board," recalls Pierre. "It was a fantastic atmosphere where we worked 14 hours a day, but we had fun doing it."

Aviation Officer Nigel Sanders worked with Pierre in Loki: "Pierre's dedication to the work he does so well, and the support he provides to the team to benefit those in need, has never diminished since I first worked with him in Lokichokio in 1994," says Nigel.

Within a year, Pierre was called to bring his field experience to headquarters. Arriving in Rome, Pierre remembers working with a bunch of 'characters' and some of the pillars of today's logistics, including the likes of Amir Abdulla, Ramiro Lopes da Silva, Martin Ohlsen, David Kaatrud and the legendary Tun Myat. "It was a bit intimidating at first," admits Pierre. "The wealth of knowledge among this group was incredible. They were all very passionate people who lived and breathed WFP. Even though we were all very different, we had one thing in common: we had the same spirit."

It's easy to see that the feeling between Pierre and his team is mutual. Like any manager, he realizes the importance of his teammates, especially during an emergency. One example was during the Christmas holidays in 2004. "I was on vacation in Switzerland, putting on my ski boots," explains Pierre, "when all of a

sudden I received three different text messages from team members saying, 'I am ready to go'. Pierre couldn't respond before he knew what had happened. Rushing to see the news, he discovered it was the Asian tsunami. That same day, he was on a plane back to Rome, and arrived to the office on 26 Dec. to find everyone already there. "I'm lucky to have such a team," Pierre says. Although an immense void will be left in logistics when Pierre, a.k.a 'Papa Charlie', retires at the end of 2012, no one will say he hasn't earned it after 45 years. "I will finally know what it's like to live without a BlackBerry," Pierre says with a smile.

Pierre receiving his award from Josette Sheeran



## Libyan National Staff's Courage Under Fire

By Abeer Etefa

In the wake of political change that swept through Libya's North African neighbours in early 2011, Libyans took to the streets to oust the regime of Col. Moammar Gadhafi, launching a long and bitter struggle. WFP's national staff, recruited to manage a logistics corridor for operations in Sudan and Chad, had to swiftly change course to help their own people survive the upheaval. The first sparks of the Libyan revolution started in the port city of Benghazi on 15 Feb. 2011, leading to clashes with security forces that fired on the crowd of demonstrators a few blocks from WFP's Benghazi office.

The clashes expanded to full-fledged conflict as the Libyan regime's tanks and soldiers surrounded Benghazi to choke off the opposition stronghold. At the time, only a handful of national staff were stationed in Benghazi to run the operation that trucked food south across the Saharan desert to our operations in Sudan and Chad. After WFP's international staff were evacuated, these five men became the front line for an emergency operation in a country where WFP had never assisted the Libyan people before.

**Ramadan Al Haddad**, a national officer who had worked with WFP since the Libyan operation was set up in 2004, described the first few chaotic days with the outbreak of violence in Benghazi as nerve-wracking. "We didn't know what was lying ahead or what to expect – especially with the security situation deteriorating throughout the whole country," Ramadan remembers. As pro-government forces attacked the outskirts of Benghazi, our Libyan national team moved their families to a safer part of the city and – despite the many dangers from the escalating conflict – continued to hold the humanitarian front. "Our obligation was not only to ensure the safety and protection of our families, but also our warehouses in the port and offices," Ramadan says. "So we had to leave our loved ones to make sure that WFP food and equipment were safe."



The heroic actions of this team throughout the whole crisis allowed WFP to address humanitarian needs and become the lead agency for providing logistics support to the humanitarian community. For this courage under fire in support of WFP's mission, the Libyan national team was presented with a 2012 Award of Merit in Rome on 23 March.

"We couldn't have done it without this team," said Logistics Officer Matthew Dee. "They were on the frontline from the first days of the crisis. It was through their good relations with all partners on the ground that WFP was able to offload vessels while the city was under attack and secure warehouses for storing food, medical and other humanitarian supplies to help thousands of desperate people trapped by the fighting."

Although reinforcements of international WFP staff arrived to scale up the operation, they relied heavily on the national staff, who could go where international staff could not. Their role was crucial to the success of the emergency operation – both for WFP's response as well as for staff of other UN agencies. "We have been moving food for years through this logistics corridor to bring food from Libyan ports through the desert to WFP beneficiaries in Chad and Darfur. Now that our own people unexpectedly needed help, there was nothing different that we could have done," Ramadan said. "It felt strange and very emotional at times to be suddenly helping your own people."

## For 50th Anniversary, New Way to Share Your Stories

WFP is bursting with wonderful stories. Spend any time with current or retired staff and you'll quickly discover people full of rich memories and experiences. As we mark our 50th anniversary, Internal Communications has created a single spot for staff to share their best stories. While the blog isn't available to the general public, we'd love to involve as many staff and retirees as possible. It requires no special access, just a simple password. The password prevents the site from being publicly searchable, but allows former employees access. You can visit at <http://50years.wfp.org>. The password is 50years, with no space. – **Devin Gangi**



Alix Loriston (left) on a mission to Afghanistan in 1989



## Japan Special Ops Team Cited for Bravery, Character

When Japan was hit by a devastating 8.9 magnitude earthquake and tsunami on 11 March 2011, WFP swiftly launched a four-month special operation that deployed more than 30 staff, half of them Japanese nationals who rushed to assist their home country. The catastrophe, Japan's worst natural disaster, claimed 19,000 lives and caused crippling damage to the affected areas. Sixteen of the more than 30 deployed staff were Japanese nationals, rushing to assist their home country – one of the world's most generous humanitarian donors.

**Kojiro Nakai** was at his post as head of the Zalingei, Darfur, sub-office when he heard the news from his boss, Sudan Deputy Country Director Tito Nikodimos: "Kojiro, switch on your TV now! Your country is in a disaster!" Kojiro, like many compatriots working for WFP, volunteered to help and left for Japan as soon as possible. After reuniting with his family in Tokyo, Kojiro began work as a volunteer and deputy team leader for the special operation in Japan.

Some two weeks after the disaster, he drove to one of the worst-hit areas, Sendai, just 100 kilometres from the damaged Fukushima nuclear plant, and the biggest city in northern Japan with a million inhabitants. "I found a ghost town. The streets were empty, the gas stations devoid of fuel and the hotels without heat or hot water," he remembers. "When I saw the affected areas, I lost all words to express my shock. I was devastated by the unparalleled damages resulting from the tsunami. I promised myself to employ maximum efforts to support Japan's recovery."

Kojiro and his teammates fulfilled that mission, working long and emotionally draining hours in a context that included an unprecedented complication for WFP: the threat of nuclear radiation. For their valiant and steadfast work, their "bravery and character" in rushing to support Japanese relief efforts after the disaster, the Japan Special Operations Team was presented with a 2012 Award of Merit in Rome on 23 March.

The WFP response took place after the Japan government requested its help in recognition of WFP's logistics expertise. It was the exemplary and collective team effort that made the four-month operation a singular success. From those who stepped forward to help, team members were selected based on their individual expertise – much of it in logistics – and whenever possible, for Japanese language skills to facilitate a smooth entry into the disaster zone.

**Kazuhiko Yamazaki**, team leader of the Japan special operation, explained that WFP's contribution in terms of donations was limited; instead, he said, WFP made its most significant contribution by helping deliver goods donated from other countries and organizations. WFP installed 45 WiikHalls (collapsible structures often used as warehouses) and 36 prefabricated offices, delivered 900 tons of donated non-food items from overseas and 625,000 food items donated by private donors.



This was the first emergency operation funded solely by private sector donations, about half of which came through the Japan Association for WFP. "Matching the needs to the rations was one of the biggest challenges – but we did not leave a single food item in the warehouse," says Kazuhiko. "All items were delivered."

As if a massive earthquake and tsunami were not enough to deal with, the special operations team was confronted with the threat of nuclear radiation. Triggered by the earthquake, explosions and leaks of radioactive gas took place in three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, releasing radioactive material directly into the atmosphere.

Dr. Sergio Arena, chief of WFP's Medical Service, said it was the first time WFP had to work in a possibly radioactive environment. From his computer in Rome, Sergio monitored the Geiger counters worn by all staff working in the affected areas; the staff uploaded their counters online every night. Thankfully, Sergio says, all recorded radiation levels were well below the safety threat limit. But he praised staff for overcoming their uncertainties to help Japanese citizens.

"Unlike all other WFP emergency situations, we have guidance for guerrilla attacks, malaria, banditry, child-soldier confrontations, but nothing for radiation and entering a contaminated environment," Sergio says. "When you have so much uncertainty – your employer says it's safe and the media says it isn't – and when you have kids, a spouse begging you not to go, it's a rather frightening and a tough position to be in. It really shows the bravery and character of the team."  
– **Anastasia Way**

along with other WFP staff who trickled in throughout the morning. But the UNMIS cavalry, still waiting for the government's clearance, never arrived. Towards midday, with shells falling all around the town, staff decided to evacuate themselves, their dependents, and another nearly 50 NGO workers and their families who had sought refuge at WFP's sub-office. The trip to the UNMIS compound, which would normally take 15 minutes, took two terrifying hours. Saad drove the next-to-last vehicle in the 12-vehicle WFP convoy, which was transporting 109 people. "Just as we left the sub-office, we got stopped for an unknown reason," says Saad. It turned out this was one of many stops eventually made by the SAF and SPLA to inspect the convoy.

Saad and the convoy made it to the UNMIS compound safely, and their risky decision to move everyone despite the fighting saved lives: the Kadugli sub-office was attacked and badly damaged within hours of their departure. Eventually fellow staffer **Ahmed Fadul** made it to the UNMIS compound too: "After two or three days, the fighting calmed down a bit. I made sure my family could safely go off to Khartoum, and then I got on a rickshaw motorbike and went to the UNMIS compound." Five WFP staff opted to stay behind at the UNMIS compound for three additional weeks, including Ahmed, Saad and **Selamawit Ogbachristos**, who hadn't been based in Kadugli but arrived at the UNMIS compound two

## Unbeatable: Lourdes Ibarra and the Dadaab Team

By Rose Ogola



Lourdes Ibarra

When the Dadaab camp in northeast Kenya suddenly received a huge surge in Somali refugees in the second half of 2011, the camp unexpectedly went from receiving an average of 8,000 refugees per month to some 10,000 refugees a week. The refugees, who were fleeing conflict and famine

in Somalia, were hungry and malnourished, especially the children, some having walked for up to 30 days with barely any water or food. Their urgent need for attention required a drastic change from the usual way WFP assists newly arrived refugees. Under normal circumstances, the refugees receive food assistance after registration, a system that was not going to work with an average of 1,500 people arriving daily.

"We had to quickly change the modus operandi," said **Lourdes Ibarra**, who heads the Dadaab sub-office, providing food to the world's largest refugee camp now hosting more than 465,000 people. After consultation with the U.N. High Commission for Refugees and the government's Department of Refugee Affairs, it was agreed that the refugees would receive immediate attention upon recognition. They were issued ready-to-eat, high-energy biscuits and a two-week ration (which later grew to three weeks) to ensure that they had food as they awaited the registration process.

For their valiant work, long hours, personal sacrifices and steadfastness in a difficult security context – all of which saved the lives of many Somali refugees – Lourdes and her Dadaab sub-office team were presented with 2012 Awards of Merit in Rome on 23 March.

Many of the children who arrived needed special food designed to address malnutrition for those under five years old. "Other programmes such as the recovery and the country programmes came to our aid by lending the refugee programme the crucial commodities required for the supplementary feeding programme," Lourdes said. The flexibility of the team and partners to adopt a new way of working fuelled the operation's success. "Apart from adjusting the strategy we had in place to assist the refugees, we also had to adjust our working hours to cope with the increased workload, which people did without complaining," said John Munene, senior programme assistant in Dadaab.

## Kadugli Team Evacuates Others, Then Stays Behind

**Saad Yousif**, a senior programme assistant, walked from his home to WFP's sub-office in Kadugli, Sudan, followed by his children. But this was no ordinary walk. Saad's children were moving low to the ground, as he had instructed them, and loud noises could be heard in the background. "Are those guns, Daddy?" they wanted to know. "Yes," said Saad.

It was the morning of 7 June 2011, and fighting had broken out between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in Kadugli, capital of the South Kordofan State. WFP staff and their dependents, nearly 60 in all in Kadugli, had to navigate the fighting and get from their homes to WFP's sub-office in the centre of town. There, peacekeepers from the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) could come in with a military escort and evacuate them to the UNMIS compound outside of Kadugli.

Saad made it safely to the sub-office with his family,

weeks after the fighting broke out. Despite the security risks, they worked to maintain food distributions to the people affected by the fighting. "These were poor people who couldn't afford a car or a bus to get away," says Ahmed.

For their brave decision to evacuate themselves and other NGO staff, and for staying behind at the UNMIS compound, continuing to help 200,000 people affected by the fighting, WFP awards the Kadugli sub-office team the 2012 Award of Merit. – **Devin Gangi**



(l-r) Selamawit Ogbachristos, Josette Sheeran, Saad Yousif and Ahmed Fadul

# In Northern Afghanistan, the Voice of Mazar-e-Sharif

By Assadullah Azhari

When you land in Mazar-e-Sharif, in northern Afghanistan, and get into a WFP car, her voice is the first thing you hear on the radio. Although the crackle of static and clipped messages reporting locations over high-frequency radio provide constant background noise when travelling in Afghanistan, hearing a female voice is rare. Meet **Diana Sarwary**, who found her calling as radio operator after years of living as a refugee and struggling to get an education.

As a young woman who grew up during times of conflict and instability, Diana, 23, has seen more than her share of challenges and problems. "When I was in sixth grade, my family had to leave Mazar," she recalls. "I had to stop going to school, and we moved to Pakistan." She managed to find work to bring in money to support her family and to pay for school fees, so that she could continue studying – and also attend English and computer classes.

"I didn't want to be a burden to my family, so I always worked while I was studying," she says. "It wasn't easy and I had to work hard. But I was lucky: even though I was living in exile, I managed to get the jobs I applied

for." Her first job was as quality control officer with a textile company, followed by a two-year stint as a fashion designer and other work with the British Training Consultancy and Pakistan International Airlines.

When her mother died in 2009, Diana once again had to cut off her education, leaving her job and returning to Mazar. She kept at it and managed to complete her last year of high school, and soon started working with the government's Department of Agriculture. When she heard WFP was looking for a radio operator, she consulted her family and decided to apply. "Some of my relatives were not keen on the idea," Diana says. "They'd never heard of a girl talking on the radio before. But my own family had no objections and supported my decision."

With training and support from colleagues, she quickly learned the ropes. Mahbub Alam, head of the Mazar area office, is impressed with Diana's language skills and determination. "Diana is a self-made career woman," Mahbub says. "She went through many struggles in life to support herself and her family. We need to encourage and support female staff like her."

What challenges do Afghan women face if they want to work outside the home? "There are two main barriers,"



Mahbub says. "Firstly, restrictions from the family due to cultural reasons. Secondly, a lack of opportunities for women. Less than five percent of women in Mazar work, and the majority of those who do are teachers. It's not easy to find a job like this, so I think there is a need to create more opportunities for women to work."

For her own part, Diana is eager to continue her higher education and move forward in her career. At the end of the day, it all comes down to a question of attitude and courage. Diana humbly concludes: "Obviously there are many girls out there who are more educated and talented than me. But they are not brave enough to work in an office."

## Somalia Security Duty: the Mission Keeps Her Going



For some, the challenges of working in UN field security in Kosovo, Somalia and Sudan would suffice. But for **Brenda MacGregor**, there's always another mountain to scale, another human puzzle to solve. A world-class endurance athlete with degrees in sociology and criminology, she reaches her stride where many of fainter heart would give up. Now stationed in one of the most daunting security environments on earth – Somalia – Brenda doesn't take R&R too literally, using it to work on her Master's, run marathons and cross an item off her list of the world's great adventures. Caught in Rome during a weeklong training in medical trauma, Brenda sat down to discuss her life and career with WFPgo's **Jennifer Parmelee** before returning to the field. "The trick is to keep smiling and remembering that life is good," she says, her wide hazel eyes sparkling. "Of course, anywhere looks good when you come from one of the coldest places on earth."

### So where do you come from?

I grew up in a small town in northern Saskatchewan (Canada), where it can hit minus 50 degrees (Fahrenheit) in the winter. I was one of four kids from a farming family – so it is funny, and familiar, to deal now with grain commodities. My second language was Cree Indian.

### How did you wind up in your career in security?

I graduated from college with degrees in sociology and criminology, and worked as a law enforcement officer for 10 years with the Prince Albert Police Service in Saskatchewan. That gave me a strong foundation and a specialization in forensics. It was also through my police work that I learned to talk to everyone and treat people equally.

The specialty in crime scene investigation led to jobs with the Royal Cayman Islands Police and the UN, when I was hired by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to work on forensic anthropology for the Special Investigations Unit in Kosovo. I then worked for DPKO as investigator and security operations officer in Sudan. In 2009, I was first hired by WFP as a field security officer in Lokichoggio, Kenya, followed by a stint in Juba, and my current job in Somalia (where she is posted to Hargeisa and Berbera in Somaliland, but also covers operations in the rest of Somalia).

### Tell us about security work in Somalia.

Somaliland is generally peaceable, especially in contrast to the south, and to Mogadishu, where there are threats from every direction. But it is not immune to violence. In 2008, there was a car-bomb attack on the UN compound that killed two UN staff. Terrorism and extremism are still prevalent – and the UN is unfortunately a target because of its high profile. My job is primarily to oversee the safety and security of WFP staff and assets (compounds, cars, food, etc.), and a lot of my job is preparing staff to look at their own safety. I do analysis of current political and security situations to detect and assess risks, which includes going into the field and making those assessments. I also support staff in the field – for example, accompanying staff on assessments.

### Could you describe a typical day's activity?

A recent example was going into Las Anod, in a volatile area, to accompany an assessment team for a hospital feeding programme. There, if they don't do an evaluation every three months, the programme will be

shut down. You know you're part of something important. Not long ago, I accompanied senior officials to a distribution site in Mogadishu. It's common practice not to stay longer than 15 minutes, otherwise militias come around and we can become targets. My job is to enforce the rule and hustle everybody back into the convoy.

### Any close calls?

One time, through our network of informants, we learned just in time of a plot by Somali pirates to kidnap WFP staff on a specific date when we were due to visit Gelkayo (in Puntland, the heart of pirate territory). Another time, in Mogadishu, I was out running in the morning on the path between the airport and the sea, when a plane crash-landed nearby, taking out the line of trees right next to me. It almost ran me right into the sea, but I just chalked it up to: "Well, this is Mog!"

### And yet Mogadishu is your favourite place to run?

Let's call it the "yin and the yang" of the conflict zones. You've got this beautiful seaview to one side and a bombed-out city on the other. At night, you've got an unobstructed view of the stars from the roof of your bunker, while hearing gunshots in the distance. There is not one bit of this experience that is not a challenge. I really enjoy it, but I know it's not for everyone.

### Where do you draw your strength and resilience?

From the national staff I work with – and from keeping in physical shape. I am indebted to the national staffers, who are the real eyes and ears of our operations – our teachers. They're the ones who live in the communities, know what's happening and can guide us through it. Also, I admire how their first priority is always family; they're very generous and kind people. I have confidence that, as Somalis, they can solve their problems in their own way; we're just there to assist them. I find inspiration from the people who touch my life daily.

### High points of the job?

Problem solving. I love looking at thorny issues and trying to solve them – like unresolved cases in police work. It's the thinking that makes it interesting. I want to help make a difference in the world, and I feel at the end of the day that I do. If you've ever been a part of seeing someone die of hunger, you just can't turn your back.





## It's All on Her Head

A new photo collection, "It's All on Her Head," showcases women from WFP's work over five decades. The idea for the photo exhibit took root after Rome-based IT staffer **Fabio Giraldi** returned from Uganda with a stunning collection of photos featuring women and girls carrying varied items on their heads and backs. He entered a few of the photos in the 2010 staff communications contest with the theme "The Power of Women" – and won first prize. As we looked through his full collection of photos, the words "It's all on her head" sprang to mind. In English, this phrase has a double meaning beyond the obvious physical burden of what these women were carrying around – to the invisible weight of responsibility, especially for their families, women in the poor world shoulder every day. Photo Editor **Rein Skullerud** was inspired to dig through the photo archives over the past decades to curate a stunning collection of 127 photos illustrating the theme that reach back to WFP's early years. See them at this link: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/75851876@N06/sets/72157629533048745/>

Fabio was moved and humbled by the strength of the women he saw and photographed in Uganda. "They really seemed to be the pillar of the family and, at a larger scale, of society," he said. "They carried out any kind of job – even the tough physical ones like road construction, quarrying rock from the mountains, transporting heavy fodder and firewood. I saw women plowing the land with their children on their backs – thus assuming a dual role of mother and breadwinner." At the end of his trip, Fabio learned his wife was expecting a baby. And as it happens, it was to be a girl. "Having learned from the example of Ugandan women," he said, "I hope we'll be able to impart to her the strength and the will to overcome the obstacles in her life with tenacity and pride." – **Jennifer Parmelee**

# Aminat Advances Our Work With Warmth and Kindness

by **Jordan Cox**

Aminat Hussien works in and around Beyahle, a kebele (neighbourhood) in Ethiopia's north-eastern Afar region, where she helps WFP boost the nutrition of pregnant women and lactating mothers. For women in Beyahle – a nomadic, pastoral community that moves with the seasons – the severity of floods and drought can be the difference between a healthy baby and a malnourished one.

Aminat was nominated by her kebele to be a member of the local food distribution committee because of her skill with people – she's trusted, well-liked, and literate – and can speak both Afari and Amharic, Ethiopia's official language. While she receives no salary from WFP, she does get training and a *per diem* during post-distribution meetings. For WFP, finding trusted, well-liked people who help us access communities is about more than just making people happy – it makes our work more effective, too.

Aminat was born in Bati, a town in the nearby Amhara region. There, she met her late husband and moved to his hometown of Dubti to start a family. "I was married at 15 and had my three children by 20," she says. "I was planning to start elementary school again" – she had completed up to the fourth grade – "when my husband got sick. He died eight days later." She was left to raise her three boys alone.

She has since become a role model for her community. "Society here has seen how I've raised my children, and they've seen how a woman, by herself, can manage a family like this," she says. "If I had raised boys who were badly behaved, the community would have insulted me, and would have said it was due to the absence of a father," she says. "I really cared for my children, so this wouldn't happen."

Last summer, Aminat helped WFP reach Fatuma, a 30-year-old pregnant woman. In a normal year, Fatuma would have left Beyahle during Afar's rainy season to seek



out better pastures, along with her husband and their animals. Instead, because she was just a few months away from giving birth, she stayed put – but a shortage of nutritious food left her anemic.

With flooding a constant issue, it's not just food that becomes scarce – even Aminat had trouble getting from her home in nearby Dubti to help with distribution. Aminat made it in time, though, and Fatuma was able to receive fortified food from WFP before her health deteriorated further. "The pain is still with me, but I'm getting stronger," says Fatuma. "And my baby is healthy."

Volunteers on local food distribution committees are essential elements in WFP's field operations. "Aminat has a warmth with people," says Field Monitor Tesfaye Lakew, who works directly with her in the field. "She came to this community because of her marriage, and her husband's family and tribe were fond of her. She developed a sympathetic and caring nature for them, too." She tries to pass this gentle spirit on to her youngest son. "Wherever I go, he comes with me, even to my training sessions. He's full of sympathy for others and wants to be a teacher when he grows up," she says. "The social relationship here has a high level of resource-sharing. It's part of the culture. You cook, you look for supplies, and the society works and lives together." But this kind of approach doesn't arise spontaneously – it takes individuals like Aminat to really make it work.

## Lessons at Sea, Smooth Sailing in Field



**Veronique Barbelet**, a consultant with the Humanitarian and Transition Service in the policy division, has taken on challenging assignments from Burundi to Haiti, but she's got a secret weapon she says makes her resilient to stress and adaptable to almost any assignment: her lifelong experiences sailing the world with her family. From her impressive skills in packing lightly, to coping with isolation and risk, the lessons she's learned from sailing have paid off in the field. Every summer since she was a child of three, Veronique, her parents and her three older brothers packed up a sailboat in their native France and took to sea, navigating their way around Europe for three months.

In 2007, two years before she joined WFP, she completed her longest voyage when she crossed the Atlantic Ocean. Starting in the Canary Islands and ending in St. Lucia, Veronique, her father and four of his male friends spent 21 days on board her father's

50-foot Bavaria Cruiser ship (see photo at left with **Veronique at the helm. Her father, Francois, is at the far left**)

Not surprisingly, many of her seaborne skills involve water, vitally important in sailing not just for keeping the ship afloat, but for drinking, cooking and washing. For the entire Atlantic crossing, for example, the boat had just over 450 litres of water – 100 litres for emergencies, 100 litres for washing, two litres of bottled water per person each day and a water pump for cooking. Today in the field, Veronique astonishes colleagues with her ability to bathe with just a washcloth and two small buckets – one to hold clean water and the other to rinse her towel in.

"Sailing was really good training in terms of adapting to the field, even though I grew up in the developed world," says Veronique, raised in Brittany, France. – **Ellen Kobe**

## Staffer Aims to Conquer World's Highest Peaks

When Rome-based Emergency Simulation Training Consultant **Edita Nichols** and a six-person team set off to conquer the summit of Tibet's Mt. Cho Oyu, the world's sixth-highest mountain, she didn't realize she was starting a 43-day adrenaline-packed adventure that would take her through an earthquake followed by an avalanche, rope-climbing across dangerously crackling ice, and the unsettling discovery of two other climbers who had died trying.

A native Lithuanian, Edita's passion for climbing mountains began at age 16, after her older sister returned from an expedition to the highest peak of Russia's Altay Mountains. After hearing her stories, Edita was sold on the idea of high-altitude adventures (she also admits to a bit of friendly sibling rivalry).

The final ascent of Mt. Cho Oyu took nine hours, on oxygen, and when it was done, Edita stood as the very first Lithuanian woman to reach the summit of an 8,000 metre mountain (photo at right shows Edita atop Cho Oyu, with Everest behind her).

While it's a lifetime achievement for anyone, she already has her sights set on Cho Oyu's more famous neighbour: Everest. "The unpredictability of climbing mountains as large as this can really test your mind and body," Edita

says. "Physical strength is only half of what you need to succeed. The other is mental perseverance." – **Leighla Bowers**





# Women in the Field and at Home: The Balancing Act

By Anastasia Way

Starting in 1993 as WFP's first female land-side logistics officer and now serving as deputy chief of shipping, American-born **Judith Thimke** is a beacon for women who have climbed the ranks of WFP from the ground up. Maintaining the difficult balance of not only a career professional but also as a wife and mother of two sons, Judith notes the choices she's had to make along the way: "My whole career, I've always been extremely clear that I'm actually a mother before a WFP employee. But that balancing is what you need to be good at. And knowing that you're working for an organization that needs you in a time of emergency – there is tremendous responsibility in that."

Before she came to WFP, Judith worked for six years in the port of Dakar, Senegal, in the commercial shipping business, a field that is historically male-dominated. She believes the job prepared her to enter WFP at the start of an era of dramatic change for women at WFP. When she arrived, she was the only woman among eight colleagues in shipping. "In the start of my career, it was just me and the guys. Lots of men in ties and suits – and then me," she said. "I felt welcomed as a professional from the beginning though because I was well-prepared. But at every level of shipping, I found myself navigating through a man's world."



**Judith Thimke with her 'men in suits' – a regional logistics meeting for the Great Lakes emergency in 1996.**

Today, in general logistics meetings, the percentage of women hovers between 40-50 percent, according to Judith. She says the rise in WFP's female professional staff was due not only to changing times, but especially because of former Executive Director Catherine Bertini, who led WFP from 1992-2002.

As many WFP employees can attest, it's not easy finding the middle ground between developing a career and maintaining a healthy family life. Judith says she's been fortunate to enjoy the support of her musician-husband, Charley Anderson, who has adapted his career to their moves with the family, starting as bass player and founding member of the UK group *The Selecter*. "He has his own world, his own life," says Judith. "He accepts change in a positive way. As a woman, it is very important to have that kind of support behind you."

On her part, Judith says she is "fiercely protective" of her life with her two sons, Jonathan, now 14, and Danny, now 12. She emphasizes the importance of attending children's parent-teacher conferences, birthdays and activities like sporting events. Missing just one or two of these important events, she says, can start to add up in a harmful way.

"I have done everything possible to ensure that I am there for the important moments," she said. "If these single moments slip away, next thing you know they start accumulating. I think you have to pull yourself out of the intensity of what we do. It's not easy, but you don't have to be apologetic about it. I have made a number of choices regarding my career and family, and I take full responsibility for these choices."

Judith believes her adamant protection of her family life has had a positive outward influence on male colleagues; she has noticed more of them stopping to reflect on their own family values. "I have seen other men begin to realize that they should be doing the same thing," says Judith. "They too can have successful careers but still be there for their children."

There was a time where being a mother and working for WFP had a painfully paradoxical twist for Judith. She recalls working in rebel territory in Liberia during the '90s when, in a heart-stopping episode, her vehicle was blocked by a group of child soldiers armed with guns. They were noticeably drugged, and circled the car in a menacing way that Judith suggests was an attempt to act tough. "They had no concept of life or death," she said. "I felt an incredible sense of vulnerability and saw the irony as a mother – where your life depends on the choices of child soldiers. This is a tragedy in itself."



Judith believes female staff often bring some unique strengths and empathy to the work they do for WFP. "There are many, many situations in WFP work where being a woman and being a mother has that extra 'click'." When she was deputy country director in Colombia, she visited a group home and clinic for women and girls, many of whom had been abused. Run by women, with a WFP-supported mother-child health and nutrition intervention, the facility offered a safe haven to give birth and recover. On a tour, Judith passed by the crib of an infant who was crying. Picking him up, Judith met the 13-year-old mother, a victim of sexual assault who was clearly still in shock. "I noticed immediately that she had little connection with the child," says Judith. "I asked if the baby had a name. He didn't. It was a very intense moment, showing the absence of the mother-to-child bonding that we take for granted. Her circumstances of violence and poverty short-circuited that connection."



**Mariann Corigliano**  
chief of corporate payroll,  
Canadian

Mariann joined WFP in 1984 and has witnessed a lot of history, including the major shift from programme development to emergency response. In her own way, she's also made history – making the leap from support to professional staff as only a minority of women has managed.

Starting in secretarial and clerical work, Mariann graduated to a P-2 accounting officer post 13 years later, and eventually worked her way up the ranks to her current P-5 status. Only half-joking, she says she doubts she would have been hired in the first place without her typing and shorthand proficiency. At the time, she says, WFP was not inclined to hire women for the professional positions she would later assume. Times have changed, although Mariann points out that women still fall well behind men at the senior professional levels. "Generally speaking, however, I think men at WFP don't see us as inferior or 'one of the boys', but as a necessary component to the work we do here."

## Georgia Shaver, retired, American

Georgia, who retired in 2011 after 31 years at WFP, credits Catherine Bertini with not only hiring and promoting women, but enabling their professional growth through measures like the Spouse Employment Policy and budget allocations for developing of female employees. Unfortunately, she says, Bertini's departure left a vacuum: the promotion of women "wasn't actively pushed and we just weren't hitting the targets anymore. I mean, it's not intuitive ... We even had to remind women to hire women." She adds: "When it's not a permanent way of thinking, it tends to fall off the radar screen. It's time to address the issue forcefully and transparently."



## Azeb Asrat, deputy country director in Sri Lanka, Ethiopian

Azeb's husband, Getachew, had just taken early retirement so he could spend time with his itinerant wife when she unexpectedly received a call saying she was being reassigned to run the South Darfur area office (a non-family duty station). Although the posting was a wrench on the personal front – the move meant she, her husband and three kids would be scattered in five different locations – Azeb came to view Darfur as the high point of her 27 years and seven countries with WFP. It was also the most daunting assignment: her responsibilities included overseeing more than 440 staff, five field offices, a million-plus beneficiaries and the handling of some 40,000 tons of food each month. "Despite very challenging and high-risk circumstances that put me to the test, I was able to prove that female staff can also put their feet down and do the job," she said.

Azeb started in Ethiopia in 1986 as a GS accounts officer, becoming an international professional in 1993, as a reports officer in Kenya. In 1996, she was dispatched to Bosnia – her first non-family duty station – leaving her children behind. "It was painful but I could not let my job go," she remembers. Because she and her husband were working, she traveled to Kenya every two months on R&R to visit her two teenagers, Bilen and Liyat, at boarding school, and 7-year-old Frezer, who lived with Azeb's sister. "Such assignments pose big challenges, particularly for female staff, from both the personal point of view (responsibilities of wife, mother, daughter) and the professional one (you must not impose your personal issues on your job)," she says. "One is always juggling between the two. I found I had to work extraordinarily to achieve results. Only with the unrelenting support of my family, could I have managed the lonely and challenging life in the field."

Azeb says that while WFP has evolved in many positive ways in the past few decades, women's issues have been "put on the back burner." She adds: "In the UN, we keep seeing policy documents that say women will benefit from equal opportunities, but we are far behind in realizing our goals. We need equal recognition for our contributions and equal opportunities to be in decision-making positions."





### Sitta Kai-Kai Guinea country director, Sierra Leonean

When Sitta got her first WFP assignment in 1996 running the sub-office in the village of Karagwe, Tanzania, she couldn't find it on a map. It was four days by road from the capital of Dar es Salaam, and before she headed out, her country director, the late Holdbrook Arthur, offered to take her to dinner. "Where you're headed, you'll never even think about going to a restaurant," he told her. "I could see from his eyes that he was worried about me – partly because I was a female – and once I was out there, he called regularly to check on how I was doing. 'Are you sure you're going to make it?' he'd ask. It makes such a difference in a hardship post when you have a nice, caring CD."

Sitta thought she knew the meaning of "basic" before she arrived in Karagwe. "I was assigned the best house in town – it came with its own pit latrine," she says dryly, noting that one of her first acts was to drive into what was then Zaire to buy a toilet seat. There were no groceries, and the office driver travelled four days to get

supplies like milk. She started planting her own vegetables and cooked with a few colleagues for company. Calls home – her husband, son and daughter – were made in a single radio room for the community.

Sitta went on to serve in a number of hardship posts – Angola, CAR, Liberia among them – and she developed a system to cope with the pain of separation from her family. "In a way the R&R places were best, so I could really focus on work when I was there – and then exclusively on my family when I was not." Because her husband also did development work and was not always home, they sought to keep the children in the same boarding school so they didn't have to move a lot. "It can be hard," she says. "You are very alone, missing your family. I eat in front of the TV many nights ... and yet I know I am also very privileged and humbled by my position. It's a noble job."

From childhood, when she observed classmates who couldn't afford school fees, she knew she wanted to help others. "I was lucky, I got a private education. My parents keep telling me that now, unlike many others in Africa, I have the opportunity to make a difference, to be a role model." One of Sitta's passions is mentoring other women. As she was being interviewed by phone, her former assistant in Liberia emailed her with a fond hello. "I encouraged her to go back to school and get a university education," Sitta says. She is equally proud of her ability to speak frankly to ministers, business leaders and donors. "I think that's where it's a bit easier to be a woman. They find it difficult to say no to some of the things I ask."

### Joyce Luma chief of the Food Security Analysis Service (VAM), Zambian

When Joyce reflects on the most significant milestones for female staff, she notes that three of the four most recent EDs and two of the last four DEDs have been women – and how Myrta Kaulard and Alice Martin are now running two of WFP's most challenging humanitarian operations as country directors for Haiti and Chad. "Such complex operations were exclusively managed by men in the past," she says. "There has been doubt that a woman is knowledgeable and can do it." Such discrimination persists, she says, although it's subtle. It's not always clear to her whether it's because she's a woman or a person of colour. "What is clear is that women are not moving upwards at the same rate as men," Joyce says. "There are many reasons that make it difficult for women to advance during a certain phase of our lives, but I think it is not the only reason for the slow upward mobility. Having said that, I have progressed upward fairly well."

On the personal front, Joyce says it's always a delicate balance between career and family, especially as a single mother. "There is no one else to jump in and assist you when you need help, and then you still have to prove yourself at work." Joyce recalls after the 9/11 tragedy, when the US attack on neighbouring Afghanistan was imminent, WFP staff in Islamabad had to evacuate family members. This meant sending her two children and maid to live with her sister. Eventually leaving Islamabad herself, she and her children went to three different duty stations – and thus three different schools – within a year. "I look back sometimes and wonder whether I should have put my kids through that. I see why this career can be so difficult for women."

## Purnima Kashyap's Story: Go for it, Ma!



Purnima Kashyap at the launch of the Home Grown school feeding in Zambia.

### Tell us how you joined WFP and how your career evolved.

I joined WFP in 1991 as a national programme officer on a project supporting a national child development programme in India. During this period (and armed with a doctorate in nutrition), I developed the blended food "Indiamix." In 2000, I became an international professional and worked in Ethiopia, Uganda and Zambia, including as deputy country director in Zambia. Now I am head of programme in Ethiopia.

### What were your first impressions, as a female, of your new work environment?

Fortunately, my first supervisor at WFP was the best: he had great family values and helped me balance personal life and work. It was very encouraging for me to see that there are men in the world who believe that women have a place in society not only to manage households, but to be professionals in their own right. Achieving this balance is not easy. When my two sons, Yashasvat and Upamanyu, were young, I had to leave them with their nanny and their dad, Prabhas, when I went on missions.

### What do you see as significant milestones for female staff in your 21 years with WFP?

WFP corporate policies have changed a lot and are more supportive of professional women with families. In my days, maternity benefits were viewed as a burden to the organization. Whoever thought that WFP would even encourage fathers to take "paternity leave"? Two decades ago, that was an absolute no-no!

### What was one of your most significant experiences at WFP?

Deciding to become an international professional – and the choices that entailed – was the most significant moment in my career. As a female, I had to think of what would happen to my family. Would I get child care facilities in countries where I am posted? Would a decent education be available? What would my husband do? Would he join me? Was I heading to a family breakup?! He has a flourishing business – am I going to destroy his career? None of this happened. We continue to be a tightly knit family. My children, despite grumbling about leaving friends in one country and starting new friendships in another, have a richer understanding of the multicultural world. My husband did give up his business after a few years, but has always found something to keep himself busy.

### Do you find that being female has been an asset, handicap or a neutral element in your work?

WFP does not – nor should it – give any special preferences just because you are female. This way, women are not advancing their careers because they are women but simply because they are good professionals. However, sometimes being a female with family throws out particular challenges. I think it's harder for mothers to take long, non-family duty station assignments, whereas many men don't hesitate. It's a tough choice to make, because it often takes you out of the equation for advancement within WFP.

### Anything you'd like to add?

In hindsight, I think I made the best decision of my life by joining WFP. I feel so content with what I do: helping people in need. I am the envy of many non-WFP friends and family because of the opportunities I get to help the human race. I have had difficult moments in making professional career decisions and have had to make sacrifices to balance my personal life. However, I do not regret those decisions because my family is extremely important to me. I have learnt over the last two decades that whatever I decided, I have their full backing.

I remember when the Haiti earthquake took place. My children were keen to help. Amir Abdulla called asking if I would go to Haiti. I said I needed a day to consult my family. The next morning at breakfast, I asked my boys, "Are you really serious about donating something to Haiti?" Both said, "Yes, absolutely!" I asked them "How about donating your mother's time?" Without hesitating, they said, "Ma, go for it!" I got a similar response from my husband. I am so grateful and proud of their support. They have seen WFP's work and understand its importance.

### Trudy Bower grants manager, American

When Trudy was hired in 1985 as a P2 assistant project officer assigned to Mozambique, women comprised just 15 percent of professional staff. Arriving on the job, she was put in a room with secretaries and drivers; her two professional male colleagues got their own offices. Eager to escape the office and into the field, Trudy was repeatedly blocked. When she asked her boss why, he retorted, "You'll just get yourself raped or something."

Fast forward 14 years to 1999, when previously stable Côte d'Ivoire tipped into political turmoil. Trudy presided in the country office for three years, first as deputy country director, then country director – presenting another dilemma for a mother struggling to raise two daughters on her own.

"This was a hot, politically volatile period that saw seven attempted *coups d'état*," Trudy said. "It was a case of divided loyalties – trying to juggle my responsibilities for staff security, and the safety and well-being of my daughters."

Asked what changes she'd like to see within WFP for women, Trudy says: "We as women, especially senior women, need to learn how to better network and mentor each other to get better opportunities for career development."



Trudy Bower (r) dancing with a women's group marketing iodized salt in Ghana (2008).



# Too Much Stress? Staff Counselling Can Help

by Devin Gangi

Working for WFP can be stressful: we may drive through war zones, witness profound human hardship, miss loved ones while on a faraway assignment. We may worry about our careers in a mobile organization, or find some working relationships tough to handle. No matter our type of stress, WFP's staff counselling services can help.

Too much stress can affect physical and mental health, so staff shouldn't hesitate to use this resource. "If your car isn't working, you go see a mechanic. If you want legal advice, you go see a lawyer. And if you're stressed, worried, or frustrated, and want to talk about something, WFP has professionals trained in psychology and counselling, ready to help," says Charles Barringer, chief of the Staff Counselling Unit in Rome. Charles joined WFP in August 2011, replacing Petra Miczaika, who retired after 11 years with WFP. He leads a unit of seven professional counsellors who provide free, confidential assistance to staff across a range of issues. Two are in Rome, and others are in Jordan, Senegal, Sudan, Uganda and the United Arab Emirates, serving large geographic regions.

A talk with a staff counsellor can be especially useful before new assignments. Due to the location and nature of WFP's work, staff can be sent to remote areas on difficult assignments, or be faced with a great deal of change. "If you're concerned about preparing for a new assignment, or coping with it when you get there, staff counsellors can teach you personal techniques in advance to minimize the stress created by those situations," says Charles.

Charles, who is from the United States, served as a staff counsellor in the field for seven years, for the UN Mission in Liberia and the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He knows the extra challenges of working in hardship locations first-hand. "One of my main goals is to bring our services deeper into the field, down to the front lines," says Charles.

To help provide counselling services in the field, WFP has nearly 300 Peer Support Volunteers (PSVs) in more than 70 countries, staff who have been trained to help colleagues: for example in March 2011, 71 staff from 25 nations gathered at a training in Kenya to become PSVs. "It was nine challenging and intensive days," says Cristina Ascone, publications manager in Rome and a PSV. "We learned the impact and importance of grief and loss, trauma, defusing, self-care and more."

PSVs have full-time jobs at WFP in their own areas of expertise, but they support the staff counsellors' work and are always ready to help fellow staff. While they are not professional counsellors, they have the core skills to help staff confidentially discuss a problem and to begin exploring ways of addressing it.



Beaujeu Andrianiranomelazaso, a storekeeper in the Toliara sub-office in Madagascar, sits with children who receive WFP-provided meals at a primary school in the region. Beaujeu also serves as a Peer Support Volunteer – a trained staff member who can offer confidential support and empathy to co-workers.

For the full list of Peer Support Volunteers visit: <http://go.wfp.org/web/staffcounselling/peer-support>



## Full Circle

By Gon Myers with Ellen Kobe

In the spring of 1990, on my first day of law school, I couldn't go home. Civil war had broken out in my country, Liberia. If I went home that day, I risked getting killed by tribal militias. I was smuggled out to Sierra Leone and the family of a Sierra Leonean classmate of mine, Arnold Chea Robinson, took in me and four others like we were their own kids (they already had six biological children). Living as a refugee was difficult, as I'd lost everything. Fortunately, WFP was providing food for the Liberian refugees and every two weeks we would get a ration, which I brought home to help out my "adopted" family. Eventually, I was able to go to the Netherlands to study on a scholarship I had earned by taking a test in Liberia before the war started. After earning my master's degree in development economics and an MBA in the Netherlands, I went to work at WFP in 1996 as a junior programme officer in Rome. When I was given this chance, I remembered vividly that when I was in dying need in Sierra Leone, this was the organization that supplied me with food. I wanted to make an impact on people in need and I'd already developed a passion for humanitarian work. My WFP career has taken me to Chad, Haiti, Italy, Kenya, Niger, Tanzania and finally – full circle – to Sierra Leone. When I arrived there in 2010, the first thing I did was head straight to the Robinsons' address at 19 Robert Street in Freetown. I saw their house had burned down, but asked around and through one of the daughters was able to find her now 90-year-old dad. When I met Mr. Robinson and he realized it was me, he cried. They had been through so much. During the civil war in Sierra Leone from 1991-2002, they found themselves in the same predicament as me, but in reverse – as refugees in my home country, Liberia. Read full story at:

[http://go.wfp.org/web/wfpgo/newsview-comments-/journal\\_content/56\\_INSTANCE\\_8V0k/10502/3875796](http://go.wfp.org/web/wfpgo/newsview-comments-/journal_content/56_INSTANCE_8V0k/10502/3875796)

# New Guidelines Help Staff on Food for Assets Projects

By Carlos Centeno and Jordan Cox

This year, more than 50 country offices are working on or about to start asset creation programmes – from soil conservation and irrigation schemes to reforestation and nurseries. Part of WFP's shift from food aid to food assistance includes supporting families as they create and restore these assets they depend on to live, like land or clean water. These programmes are all about building up families' resilience against future "shocks" – impacts from natural or man-made disasters – and an important part of WFP's strategic plan.

But field staff haven't had guidelines that reflect the nature of this shift, and the demand for guidance on how to run solid, quality Food (or cash) for Assets projects is higher than ever. Now the new Food Assistance for Assets guidance is here, and includes an easy-to-access dashboard with an eye to the often-hectic project cycle in a country office. The dashboard enables programme officers to quickly access very specific information, such as: monitoring and evaluation templates, calculations of food rations, watershed management guidelines and

other technical guidelines they can adapt according to their needs.

The new guidance has been developed using real examples of what works in the field. "The manual is really built on the local side," says James Kamunge, a programme officer in Kenya. The manual is full of illustrations and examples: agro-forestry interventions in Burundi, soil and water conservation projects in Ethiopia and the Philippines, terracing works in Guatemala, irrigation schemes in Kenya, water dams in Malawi, mountain tracks and bridges in Nepal, and feeder roads in South Sudan, to name a few. Ryan Anderson, a programme officer based in Kigali, Rwanda, says part of the guide uses a framework his team designed when he was in Sierra Leone: "It was a triangle outlining school meals, nutrition, and food for assets. It was really useful for us to get our heads around our work, to do it the right way," he says. "Before I started the actual project design for a recent activity, the guidance helped me a lot with the language. It gave me a list of things to look out for, things we could avoid, like a handy checklist."

While the previous manual, from 2003, was broader and focused on general contexts, the new one provides detailed, concrete examples based on different ecosystems and types of "shocks". It does this through the lens of people's livelihoods, allowing staff to approach and tailor their food assistance for assets (or FFA) programmes to the environments in which they're working. "We needed something that reflected the very nature of the role Food Assistance for Assets has for WFP," says Programme Adviser Volli Carucci in Rome. "Something coherent with the shift to food assistance, tailored to a variety of contexts, and based on solid field work. This is long due. Field staff need to grab it, use it and enrich it."



Check out the pages at: <http://docustore.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/webfragments/wfp240084.swf>



# Ombudsman on Building Trust, Resolving Conflict

Ombudsman **Francisco Espejo**, a 53-year-old Chilean national now one year into his role, spoke with **Devin Gangi** of Internal Communications about how he assists employees with their work-related concerns and the challenges he sees for WFP. "One aspect of work relations is trust, which may be challenged when somebody is not fair or makes mistakes. Like, if your doctor ever makes a mistake, there might be a loss of trust there, and you might try to go find a new doctor," he says. "But as colleagues, we can't 'shop around for a new doctor' – we have to face the same people the next day. And because we're all human, at some point we experience conflict almost unavoidably. When efforts to address these conflicts fail, the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services may play a relevant role to prevent or restore breakdowns in working relationships at WFP."

## Tell me about your career before coming to WFP.

I used to be a doctor, a general practitioner. Then I was a psychiatrist, and then a public health specialist, focusing on health policies, child development, and nutrition. I've also been the director of three different hospitals in Chile.

## How did you first join WFP?

I was national director of Chile's school feeding programme before joining WFP in 2005 as chief of the school feeding unit. Although Chile is still a developing country, I thought WFP was where I could help people even more. After 3.5 years as chief of school feeding at HQ, I was re-assigned to our Panama regional bureau, where I worked on capacity-building projects.

## What made you want to become the ombudsman?

When searching for alternatives within the organization, I decided to make a big change in my career. I still wanted to be loyal to the commitment of adding value to other people's lives, I have always been people-oriented, and the ombudsman looked like a great opportunity for me, where I could combine my professional experience as a manager and psychiatrist to help colleagues.

## What from your past has helped prepare you to be the ombudsman?

Well, for physicians, confidentiality is a cornerstone, and also neutrality, because to help somebody we need to see situations from an external as well as an empathetic perspective. Someone in a situation is already 'involved', so may be able to see things only from his/her position. By being neutral I can see more options to find agreeable solutions. I was also attracted to this role because it is informal, and discussions are off the record.

## What's your personal take on the role of the ombudsman within an organization?

Confidentiality and independence are two main features of this office. Nothing of what is presented to me is shared unless I perceive a significant risk of harm to somebody. I do not receive instructions. I can listen to concerns without 'the spectacles' of the organization, and I can generate a variety of options for complex conflicts. I can also identify general issues or trends where organizational change might be needed. The power of the office comes from my capacity to influence individuals and decision makers, to encourage them to use practices that are fair, just and respectful. So far both groups have been very willing to listen and cooperate.

## Can you give me an example of an issue people come to you with?

One thing I would say is that the option of coming to the ombudsman should be considered by staff sooner rather than later. Generally, the longer conflict goes on, the more rigid and distant the positions become, and adjustments people would be willing to offer at the beginning of a conflict are often not possible later on. I can also list the four most common sources of conflict I've seen so far: harassment, not receiving benefits an employee would expect, not being able to develop a career as could be expected, and task assignments that might be considered unfair or confusing.



Francisco Espejo unloads supplies during the Chile earthquake

## The ombudsman is obliged to retire at the end of his appointment. Why?

The term of the ombudsman is limited, currently, to five years (this matter is under revision following recommendations from the General Assembly), and the ombudsman is not eligible to work in any position in WFP afterwards, except for short term assignments. This is to make sure the ombudsman has no conflicts of interest with career advancement. Otherwise, he or she could be biased when analyzing and resolving an issue.

## I hear you're a vegetarian?

Not totally a vegetarian, I eat fish sometimes. And why? Simple answer: my wife and my second son are vegetarians too – so my options were a bit constricted. But I also think it's more sustainable for the world if we become vegetarians. To me hunger is a fundamental problem to solve if we want sustainable human beings, but we also need to promote a sustainable world as a system. So that's my own inner way of contributing.

## You've had a long and impressive career. Do you have any career advice for others?

I think very often people are concerned on what needs to change: 'How can I change?' To me that is the wrong question. My approach is: 'What do I want to retain in my life? What am I not prepared to lose at any cost?' Then you automatically know what you are prepared to change to keep what you want. For me, the one track in my career has been the drive to serve other people, so I am prepared to change everything else, and I have changed everything else many times, including the place where I live, and my role.



**Do you have an issue or grievance but don't know where to turn? Check out:**  
<http://go.wfp.org/web/wfpgo/where-to-go-in-case-of-workplace-conflict-or-grievances>

# Green Corner Green Corner Green Corner Green Corner

## IT Expert Keeps the Lights on in Somalia



WFP staff in Somalia depend on generators for power, but poor-quality diesel fuel in the country can lead to frequent breakdowns. To tackle the problem, Cyprien Hiniolwa, head of IT for Somalia, has devised a custom filtering system that cleans diesel fuel before it reaches the generator, protecting the generator from impurities. Deployed across the country, the system has helped to provide aid workers with a more reliable source of power. As a result of Cyprien's solution, WFP offices across Somalia are not only saving time and money on broken generators, but using diesel formerly considered too dirty to use. "We had 2,000 litres of diesel which we thought we would have to dump because it was too polluted," Cyprien says. "We put this diesel through the filtering system and we were able to use it without any problems." The filtering plants also help to reduce carbon dioxide emissions – the cleaner the diesel that goes into the generators, the less harmful the gases they emit.

– Text and photo by Mariko Hall



## Snapped: Staff in Action

When **Luca Lodi** was temporarily detailed from his HQ Payroll job to the Ethiopia country office's administration unit, he was shocked to discover mountains of discarded IT equipment in WFP warehouses. Determined to find a "green solution," Luca surfed the internet until he found a partner. Ethiopia's Computer Refurbishment and Training Center, which fixes up discarded IT equipment for schools, health centers and other community groups was the perfect way to give our "e-waste" a useful and ecologically sound second life. For more, see: <http://go.wfp.org/web/>



# Contest Winners Spotlight Our Nutrition Work



WFP/Teresa Ha

## Contest Winner:

In this winning photograph, an 18-year-old mother carries her malnourished 11-month-old boy at a mobile supplementary feeding center outside Kabul where she has received a supply of Plumpy, the fortified energy-dense peanut paste.

Photo Editor Rein Skullerud said Teresa's image of a woman in a blue burqa, carrying her visibly malnourished baby who in turn clutches his package of supplementary Plumpy to his mouth, "is arresting in its composition and color, and tells a vivid story of both suffering and hope that fits the theme of our contest". Teresa, who took the photo just a few months into her first job with WFP, said she was captivated by the resourceful 18-year-old woman, Makai, already a mother of two young kids, who spoke to her while her child was tested for moderately acute malnutrition – and received supplementary food for him. "She was extremely friendly and willing to talk and, as is often the case for women in Afghanistan, only put on her burqa for the photo," Teresa says. Makai told her that her wide-eyed but listless little son was weak and chronically sick, as she rarely had enough breast milk to feed him and had to scrape together enough money for milk powder. At the end of his checkup, a frightened Zabihulla and his mother received a two-week supply of Plumpy, the fortified, energy-dense peanut paste that provided essential kilocalories, vitamins and micronutrients for his recovery. "There is hope, thanks to WFP's nutritional support, that Zabihulla will not suffer any irreversible damage during the critical period of the first two years of his young life," Teresa wrote, adding: "I think that one visit taught me more about nutrition and WFP's work on nutrition than the dozens of reports and factsheets I'd read beforehand."

Shamir's moving story from Tajikistan documented how WFP's nutritional lifeline impacted the life of a schoolchild, Ainura, in a remote village (see story this page). "I myself was born and brought up in Gorno-Badakshan, but I had never travelled as far out as Ran Kul until I began working for WFP," said Shamir. "When we finally got to this village, even I was taken aback by how hard the lives of people there are."

David shot his winning video when documenting a partnership around nutrition between WFP and Dutch manufacturing giant DSM at the World of Life Community School in Zambia. The school is supplied by WFP's school meals programme, and organized a "Fill the Cup" soccer tournament that is the centerpiece of the video. "The energy of the 1,500 kids was really impressive and such a joy to witness," wrote David, who is a consultant with the Programme Division's Cash for Change service. "Healthy, well-nourished children will take the country forward." – **Jennifer Parmelee**

A reports officer in Afghanistan, the head of a remote sub-office in Tajikistan, and a Cash for Change consultant on assignment in Zambia won the Round Nine of the Staff Communications Contest in January for their photo, video and story entries that best captured the letter and the spirit of our theme, "Nourishing the Future: WFP, Children and Nutrition". The trio made the winning cut from many strong entries and each won 16G iPod Nanos.

**Teresa Ha**, an American consultant working with the Donor Relations and Reports unit in Afghanistan, snapped the striking winning photograph of a woman and her 11-month-old child at a mobile supplementary feeding distribution site on the outskirts of Kabul. **Shamir**

**Lalbekov**, head of the WFP sub-office in his native Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Province in Tajikistan, captured top prize in the written story category for his vignette about tiny 7-year-old Ainura, whose nutritional lifeline in her isolated mountain village is WFP's school meals programme with its fortified and enriched flour and vegetable oil. An action-packed video from a school in Zambia by **David Ryckembusch**, from France, took top prize in the video category, showing energetic youngsters children powered by their nutrition-packed school meals. To watch David's video go to:

<http://content.bitsontherun.com/videos/WDuq3plD-owG8ISvN.mp4>

## Contest Winner: Ainura Gets a Lifeline

**By Shamir Lalbekov**  
Head, Gorno-Badakshan Sub Office, Tajikistan

GORNO BADAQSHAN, Tajikistan – Ainura lives in the town of Ran Kul, one of the most remote and formidable places on earth. At 3,650 metres above sea level, it has the highest altitude for a settlement not only in Tajikistan, but in all the former Soviet Union. Here, there is no running water and the air has little oxygen. Winter grips these high Pamir mountains for eight months of the year, with temperatures holding steady at -30 centigrade. In Ran Kul, nothing green can grow.

At the mere age of seven, Ainura bears the scars of her harsh environment: her cheeks are scraped red by the relentless winds that scour the area and, like many children in the region, she is visibly smaller than she should be for her age. Whatever she and her family eat has to be brought in by truck from the regional capital of Khorog, some eight hours down the rugged Pamir Highway. Her father makes his living as a driver, shuttling people from Ran Kul to the border of Kyrgyzstan or to Khorog. If there's room in his car, he may bring home some flour or pasta for the household meals.

Ainura is one of the children lucky enough to go to a primary school in Gorno-Badakshan where WFP has a school meals programme. Not only that, the meal is a generous one – a bowl of hot soup, freshly baked bread and tea. The soup and bread are made with high-quality



WFP/Shamir Lalbekov

Ainura, a 7-year-old primary schoolgirl, tucks into her nutritional meal in the village of Ran Kul, situated in one of the harshest and most remote environments in Tajikistan. Her teacher says few children would make it to school without the promise of a life-enhancing meal.

fortified flour and vitamin-enriched vegetable oil – two food products impossible to find on this high desert plateau.

"Without the school meals programme, attendance would drop immediately," said Atekov Maqsat, principal of Shaikova school. "They come because they know, and their parents know, that after the third class they will get something to eat. Without that meal, everybody else in the family would have to eat less every day."

A joint 2009 study by WFP and WHO found high rates of iron-deficiency anaemia and growth retardation among infants and young children in Tajikistan, especially in the deprived rural regions such as the Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Province. A 2009 UNICEF study found 20 percent of children in the province between 6-59 months had severe anaemia, while one quarter of them were either stunted or severely stunted.

But because of the community's engagement in the school meals programme, parents and community members even in this deprived region contribute every day a few vegetables to the soup pot, giving even more

nutrients to the children. WFP can't help them grow fruits and vegetables here the way it does elsewhere in the country because of the altitude and climate. But at this crucial stage in their lives, our work gives these children a nutrient boost that wasn't there for previous generations.



WFP/Shamir Lalbekov

**A Long, Fragile Lifeline in Tajikistan:** the legendary Pamir Highway, a link of the ancient Silk Road A, is the main supply route to Gorno-Badakshan Autonomous Province, one of the most forbidding mountain environments on earth to live.