

Interview with Juvencia Deschamps Raylay Harisoa from Madagascar working in the Public Relations Group, Administration Department, of GPSS Holdings Inc. in Japan

Learning Management Will Help Bridge Madagascar & Japan

By Japan SPOTLIGHT

Juvencia Deschamps Raylay Harisoa from Madagascar talked about her experience in Japan through the ABE Initiative, the “African Business Education Initiative for Youth”, and her work with a Japanese renewable energy company, GPSS Holdings Inc., following her studies. She also discussed her plans after she returns to her country.

(Interviewed on July 17, 2019)

Self-Introduction

JS: Could you please briefly introduce yourself and tell us why you became interested in studying in Japan, and why you decided to stay and work in Japan?

Deschamps: I was born and raised in Madagascar where I had all my formal education. I worked in Madagascar for around nine years before coming to Japan, mainly in sales and marketing, and most recently quality management. That position brought me to Japan for two reasons – firstly, I was training people about the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle and the Ishikawa Diagram, and also the theory of continuous improvement, and secondly, I got a scholarship from JICA to my current company. I chose Japan because I wanted to deepen my knowledge about leadership as part of my MBA. I was looking at different scholarships in various countries, but received a scholarship to Japan and that is what brought me here.

JS: Could you explain a bit about the Ishikawa Diagram?

Deschamps: This is a theory about PDCA and the 5Ms (Method, Material, Man, Machine, Measurement) as the elements of quality management in a factory, and this is something I trained employees about in my previous organization mainly when it is applied in the management field. My former CEO appreciated my work and said that I could go further, and that is why I came to Japan.



Juvencia Deschamps

View of ABE Initiative

JS: You studied under the ABE Initiative, and you are continuing to work for a Japanese company as a graduate from this initiative. How do you see the outcomes of the ABE Initiative in terms of your own studies?

Deschamps: The initiative provides more opportunities not just for Japan but for African countries too. I think I would not have had this opportunity to develop connections with other African countries if I was not in Japan. It is amazing that outside of Africa I can have the opportunity to meet people from 40 countries at the same time. The ABE

Initiative has provided me with a very valuable experience in this regard.

JS: The Abe Initiative has produced many people who are now active in Japan and other countries. Human resource development is a very important issue for all nations – and particularly for Africa – in achieving economic development. How has this initiative contributed to your country or other African countries in the respect?

Deschamps: The initiative has allowed people to gain experience and training in Japan and then go back to Africa to address the lack of human resource training there, particularly in developing countries. It may take a little more time for change to take place, but in a few years it will come.

View of TICAD

JS: You must be familiar with the TICAD process. How do you assess its achievements so far, apart from the Abe Initiative, and what do you expect from TICAD VII in Yokohama this year?

Deschamps: TICAD has strengthened the relationship between Japan and African countries not just in terms of economic development but also in cultural and social relations. There are a lot of improvements in contracts between my country's government and the Japanese government, including the Toamasina Port Development Project. I think this will result in a lot of commercial transactions between the two countries.

JS: TICAD has helped bring Japanese companies to Africa. How do you think they can further contribute to African development?

Deschamps: In terms of know-how, and sharing best practices and expertise, and in terms of technology and innovation, Japan can make contributions to African countries. When it comes to PDCA, there are things that Japan can learn from Africa, and that Africa can learn from Japan. It would not work to just take the methods from Japan and try to apply them to Africa, nor vice versa, so there needs to be an element of adaptation when sharing best practices. PDCA can work very well – when people see the results they are convinced and want to apply them effectively to achieve their goals in many fields, such as their businesses and their daily lives. As long as people know where we are going and what it is about, they tend to respond favorably to it, so I think it can be applied successfully across borders.

Current Working Experience in Japan

JS: Your company is involved in renewable energy, which is very important for Japan especially since the Fukushima disaster. What lessons learned in your company in Japan could contribute to the renewable energy situation or development in Africa?

Deschamps: Right now I am learning how to utilize sustainable energy, and I think that Japan has achieved local community collaboration to leverage energy use and bring it to the grid. This is something totally new to me. We can learn from this and implement it in Madagascar and also in other countries in Africa. Local community collaboration is very important and is one of the most important lessons to be learned from Japan when it comes to leveraging renewable energy. Another is reducing the use of nuclear



power. To achieve real sustainable energy we have to move away from nuclear, which is not at all easy. At the least, we have to raise awareness of this situation and bring together people who are interested in it, including policymakers and the political sphere. We need to promote the issue among the population.

JS: In Madagascar, what kind of renewable energy sources offer the most potential?

Deschamps: Solar and wind energy. There is geothermal but it is still limited – very little is used to generate electricity in Madagascar. Solar and wind are still under-utilized in terms of their potential. Since we have so much sunlight throughout the year, we can get solar energy very easily. The challenge lies with batteries, as we cannot store the energy yet, so we need to protect the environment, to use fewer batteries, and instead rely more on wind and hydro electricity, in the appropriate combination.

JS: As far as solar and wind power are concerned, do you think Japanese technology offers some advantages?

Deschamps: Yes, especially in terms of turbines. Japan has somewhat similar climate conditions to Madagascar – we are both islands and we face similar challenges. We have cyclones and this is a big challenge in terms of making turbines that can withstand the impact of cyclones, and this is something we can learn from Japan. I should also mention biomass. This is already ongoing and various organizations from Japan are in Madagascar to teach about biomass.

JS: You studied management rather than technology. For a renewable energy resources company, what



kind of management techniques would be useful? Not in terms of leadership, but for example, mathematics can be applied to renewable energy to handle all the data coming from the energy sources. Managers need to maximize the profits so I imagine that some mathematical techniques might be useful for achieving efficiency.

Deschamps: I am not sure if there is one thing that we have to follow. I would like to emphasize the point that if Japan wants to go to Africa or another country, there is no one singular route that it needs to follow. Management is one tool, but leadership is the key to opening it. We need to inspire people, and so I am not sure if a mathematical or theoretical approach is the most relevant. Rather, people and talented management might be more important in this respect.

Life in Japan

JS: How many years have you been in Japan so far? What is your perspective on living in Japan?

Deschamps: In total, two and a half years. What I love about the culture is that people are humble and polite, and very organized. Japan has a culture of excellence, which I really like, although it can be very difficult to achieve. Something that I do not like so much is that sometimes Japan puts too much emphasis on perfection instead of humanity.

JS: Working for a Japanese company, are you very conscious of the existence of a hierarchy?

Deschamps: Not really. While my company has a hierarchy, it is not like a typical Japanese company: the CEO is open-minded, and this extends to the employees also. I can share my ideas and can take initiatives at any point.

Talking About the Future

JS: How do you see future relations between Madagascar and Japan?

Deschamps: I foresee a very positive future for relations. Japan has been very active in the economic and social development of Madagascar over the last decade. There are projects with JICA, including the development of the port, and these will allow a lot of two-way traffic and transactions between the two nations. There will also be many opportunities for sharing knowledge and know-how in the future.

JS: In the future, you may wish to go back to your country to contribute to its economic prosperity. How do you view your future at the moment?

Deschamps: My plan is ultimately to be able to have my own company and to inspire the youth in my country using my experience in Japan. If my company can build some links with Japan it would be great. In the end though, I would like to run my own company. I do hope that we can create some business opportunities that benefit both countries.

JS: Will your company function as a bridge between Japan and Africa?

Deschamps: Not necessarily, but I think that the future is a very long time. It could start tomorrow or in several years. It might not be limited to Japan, but I am not yet sure exactly what kind of company I would like to create. I will try to use my networks in Japan to build up a company and then to facilitate some transactions between businesses in Japan and Madagascar. I am steadily growing my human network in Japan which will be very important for opening doors in future, and for uncovering new opportunities and potential markets. People management will be key, and I think I can achieve this through networking.

JS

Written with the cooperation of Joel Challender, who is a translator, interpreter, researcher and writer specializing in Japanese disaster preparedness.