

ALUMNI PROFILE

Joint Japan/World Bank Graduate Scholarship Program

“Pragmatically solving global complex environmental problems must be challenging, but pursuit of systemic impact in such fields must be very rewarding too if I manage to orchestrate the effort of diverse experts and multi-faceted stakeholders.”

—TAKEO TOKUNARI

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What motivated you to pursue a career in a development-related field?

“Pragmatically solving global complex environmental problems must be challenging, but pursuit of systemic impact in such fields must be very rewarding too if I manage to orchestrate the effort of diverse experts and multi-faceted stakeholders.” I reached this hypothesis when I was finishing up my first master’s degree in Isotope Geochemistry in my local hometown Kanazawa, Japan. Despite no English fluency, international friends or overseas experience back then, I knew my impact would be limited if I stayed in Japan throughout my career without knowing the real complexity of global interdependence that structurally generates problems from poverty to climate change. I ended up spending eight years at a Kenya-based environmental consulting firm and a cleantech in my hometown, both aiming at harnessing technologies to tackle poverty-driven environmental problems mainly in Africa. This is how I solidified my belief that the afore-mentioned hypothesis is worth spending lifelong effort to verify.

What has been the most rewarding and challenging parts of your study abroad experience?

The most rewarding part was the interdisciplinarity of my program. For the Master’s in Design Engineering, you can choose electives from any schools at Harvard and MIT, from leadership and branding to data science and fabrication, each with differently inspiring faculty and students. The collective intelligence and network of like-minded future/current leaders would be a strong and joyful asset that remains effective years after graduation. The challenging part was COVID-19 that forced my first year to be completely remote, although it taught me that you could be still creative (I participated from Mexico and conducted field

research for a semester, taking full advantage of the virtual format).

How will the scholarship help you to advance in your professional career?

The JJWBGSP scholarship is my purpose reminder because it was designed to grow leaders who tackle development-related issues. Without this generous financial help, I would have had no other means to fully fund my two-year study at Harvard. Now that I graduated, I am aware that the only way to really “pay back” is to maximize the value of my existence to create tangible and lasting impacts on social and environmental issues, no matter where I work. I know it will take all-team effort so I am eager to collaborate with my fellow JJWBGSP recipients one day—hopefully sooner than later.

As an alumnus, what advice would you offer to others who are considering applying for the JJWBGSP?

- 1. Prove your passion.** Because of the unique nature of JJWBGSP, having and showing your coherent passion, backed by proof of action, in solving development-related problems is the crucial key to success. There is no shortcut to build such profiles as it takes years of commitment often away from your home. In other words, if you believe you satisfy this requirement, you are already ahead. Believe in your atypical career!
- 2. Be sure about your theory of change.** What are you working on? What have been the achievements and challenges? Why do you want to go back to school now and what would you do after graduation? A tip is that you do not have to hide your vulnerability—in my case, I became interested in the Master’s in Design Engineering after facing challenges when I was leading projects to mobilize technology for drought-affected agriculture in Africa. Be authentic to yourself.