

30 STORIES OF SERVICE

JOINT JAPAN WORLD BANK Graduate Scholarship Program

**MEET DR. SHAHEEN ASHRAF SHAH,
PAKISTAN**
UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE (2005),
UNITED KINGDOM

How has the JJWBGSP help you contribute to your country once you have completed your program?

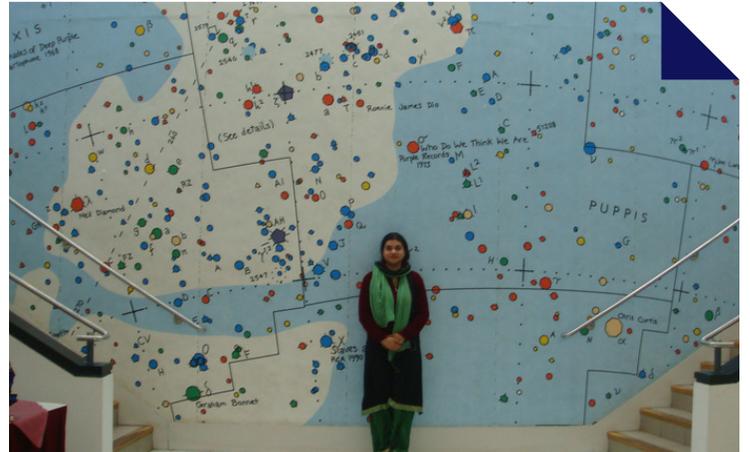
A thrust to contribute to others especially the most marginalized groups of society whose voices are often ignored in development discourse took me to the development sector. I left my university teaching career and joined Pakistan's largest Rural Support Programme in terms of outreach, staff and development activities. I was impressed with the organization's way of participatory development and its direct interaction with communities. Since then, I have been working in this sector mainly as a social and gender specialist occupying important positions in various national and international organizations like but not limited to, UNWOMEN, UNHCR, MSI, USAID, Creatives, ADB and others.

What did you learn about yourself during your experience?

I learned that the sky is the limit. You can achieve what you set your mind to.

Why do you think you were awarded a JJWBGSP scholarship?

Outstanding academic achievements and extensive grassroots, professional experience in the development sector played an important role in getting this scholarship. Furthermore, I provided WB four admission offer letters from universities in UK, USA, Netherlands and Australia with my application proving to be the strongest candidate.



How has the JJWBGSP help you contribute to your country once you completed your program?

I immediately went back to Pakistan and joined water sector. My work for the water reform program was a major breakthrough in Sindh province of Pakistan. I was the first female professional hired

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for a highly male dominated water reform program. What truly inspires me is the impact that my research has made on the lives of the rural poor. My field based research work and advocacy efforts led to critical policy and program changes from introducing inclusive irrigation infrastructure to engaging women farmers in water management that benefited particularly women farmers. Later, due to my outstanding efforts and research work, my profile was featured in a book, 'Women Managing Water, inspiring stories from South Asia' 2010 ZED India.



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What was the most rewarding and challenging part of your study abroad experience?

The most rewarding was learning about the English culture, people and society as a whole, as well as the multicultural environment at the campus. And the most challenging was initially battling with a feeling of guilt in leaving my daughter with learning difficulties behind in Pakistan to achieve the goal of higher study. Though, later, she joined me after a few months after the start of my study in the UK.

As an alumnae, what advice would you offer to other women who are considering applying for the JJWBGSP?

I encourage prospective women [applicants] from all around the world especially developing countries to never give up your dreams and goals of higher studies you want to achieve. World is full of opportunities and JJWBGSP is one of them.

I was also invited as a keynote speaker at World Water Week (2009) to share my experiences in the water sector. In addition, I was also awarded by a worthy vice chancellor of the University of Warwick UK for presenting a highly commended research poster in the social sciences festival - 2009, UK. The JJWBGSP contributed in many ways towards my personal and professional development and achievements.

What role did your family, friends, and/or employer played in your study abroad experience? How has this helped or hindered your journey?

I would have never been able to achieve whatever I am today without the unquestioning and emotional support given to me by my husband Syed Ashraf Ali Shah and my adorable daughter Aleena, to whom I apologize for not being able to provide proper attention and care during the time I was studying for my MSc. Indeed, words cannot express my feelings about them. But I am happy to share that my daughter received much more support while being in England. We observed incredible development in our baby, as she received medical support while being in Scotland. So I can say that the benefits I got from the JJWBGSP go further than my personal academic and professional development.



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