An interview with Malik Ceesay, MA/SID’04.

In terms of sustainable development, what is your passion?

My passion lies at the heart of working with State and National Governments building capacities and capability agencies in areas of Sustainable Peace Building to peaceful coexistence, Reconciliation, Conflict Mitigation, and providing Humanitarian Assistance and Relief to Human Suffering mainly in ongoing and Post Conflict Nations globally. I have been with the United Nations system for more than a decade and a half, but mainly with the U.N. Department of Peace Keeping Operations followed by UNDP.

I worked in the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, Afghanistan, East Timor, Iraq, Liberia, Jordan, Kuwait, Uganda, Gambia-my native country and now Sudan. Important to note that, in some of the above assignments, I worked under USAID in Iraq as a Consultant and Head of Governance, Gender and Civil Society shortly after the invasion. I am deeply passionate working with nations recovering from civil strife to help them recover and get back on their feet, and as you have seen above, this comes in many shapes and forms.

What kind of work are you currently doing?

I am currently Head of United Nations Mission in Sudan Operations in Jonglei South Sudan being the largest State out of the 10 State that made up South Sudan. And this is the place where the late Dr. John Garang’s original birth place. I am working with the State Government, Sub-National Government and County Commissioner to help promote peaceful coexistence between the six major tribes in the State. In doing so, U.N. and the International partners is focusing on supporting the State Government in areas of Peace Building, Conflict Mitigation, Humanitarian Intervention, helping creating conditions for IDPs and out-of-country refugees to return back to their original homes. I facilitate and coordinate all the U.N. activities in this State and work closely with the State Governor who is the Chief Representative of the President of Government of South Sudan. In addition, we also help facilitate movement of both State and Government of South Sudan Peace and Security Committee Members address disputes in critical hot spots before they even turn violent. This sometimes also goes with deployment of Personnel at the State Government line Ministries across the 11 Counties in Jonglei. I am also the Chief link between UNMIS and the State Government, in addition to Chairing all U.N. Meetings. In the past we have assisted the State and GoSS in the deployment of Military and Police to areas of conflict and in some cases, we facilitate deployment of South Sudan Military proactive before even any dispute and conflict emerges. In my State, we are dealing with issues of Child Abduction, Cattle Raids, Tribal and Ethnic Conflict, Water and Grazing lands disputes.

What led you to do this kind of work?

While growing up in my native Gambia, in a small village along the River Bank of the Gambia River, my late father was a strong Community Elder whose main function was to work for sustenance and maintenance of peace and harmony in our village. He presided over local courts to resolve disputes and conflict in the community until his passing.

As a middle child, I was blessed being very close to him and the process that dominated his entire life in rural Gambia. I gradually developed interest and passion on the issues mentioned above as I grew up to become my own adult man. I always believe that the fortunate ones have a special responsibility to make lives and conditions much better for those less fortunate and suffering. And it is through our individual and collective responsibilities that we can build a beautiful planet for all regardless of geographical location/s. This is my firm conviction and it continues to guide me in my young Professional Career.

However, I must admit that having pursued my dream education in SID/Heller Brandeis, I discovered
Profession Simon who deeply harbors similar values and I learned a lot from his experience from the international community he served on several occasion. Being a Mentor for me Professor Simon, continue to inspire not just me but generation of young people to assume career such as mind to help reduce and improve human sufferings and condition globally. And frankly speaking Brandeis values and pursuit for Social Justice makes it an outstanding higher institution of learning for any youngster willing to play a lead role in the international scene.

Please tell us about any accomplishments you have had in your work.

As a U.N. Mission in the largest State in South Sudan, we have help bring much needed stability and security that allows ongoing development process take place, as well as free movement of citizens particularly unarmed civilians. These steps led to gradual improvement of trade and commerce, help built confidence in the larger general public as well. We have trained over a 1000 Police Officers in areas of Law Enforcement, Community Policing, Crisis Prevention, Crowd Control, VIP Escorts and Protection as well as Riot Control. We have provided capacity building for State, CSOs and NGOs in fields of Good Governance, Transparency, Peace Building, Project Activities, Elections Assistance and civilian disarmament process.

Please provide a brief description of your background and how you decided to study SID at Heller.

Well prior to SID, I was already working for the United Nations in a number of countries in activities such as; Community Development, Project Planning and Management issues, Income generation and Women's Empowerment issues. My career with the U.N begun way back in 1989 in Uganda as a U.N. Volunteer, since then going and back forth pursuing higher education while working for the U.N.

SID, further built my educational strength and provided me with great opportunities that helped me applied myself competently and efficiently in key Leadership Positions I tenure over the years in both serving under USAID and the United Nations system. SID is highly recognized and Reputable Institution within U.N. Circles, including the World Bank as well. The diversity of culture and rigorous education style at SID prepares me to take on challenging assignments globally with great successes and achievement, couple with ability to participate in Multilateral talks, International Forum with seasoned Professionals from all around the world. A colleague of mind recommended SID for me who works in the same department with me back home in the Gambia and I discovered the rest thereafter.

How did your Heller/SID experiences in the classroom & in the field influence you in your career/ help you to get where you are today?

As you can see most of my success today as a Senior Professional with the United Nations has been largely attributed to my success at SID/Heller. After graduation, I was fortunate to apply the genuine skills and rigor learned from SID/Heller in an International Setting, and I was given great opportunities to grow as far as I want within the U.N. system.

What's next? What are your future plans?

As far as future plans are concerned, I am enjoying the work with the United Nations Department of Peace Keeping Operations around the world. However, the down side to my sort of Profession is that, I am always away from my family and children in Kansas and because of this, I might be thinking for some kind of career break to may be something entirely new peace keeping operations in hot spots. I am willing to consider U.S. Department of State in future, as well as a (Lecturer in SID/Heller in the long-term career plans). I am with the firm conviction that, young professionals needs to join Peace and Conflict Mitigation Operations globally and Humanitarian Enterprise. It is in everyone's interest to build and promote peace, stability and security across our planet for generations to come. If in future I find myself in any academic institution/s, I will surely devote much of time coaching and motivating young professionals into assuming such noble professions and careers.