



Careers in Development: Where will we be in 2015 ?

4 December 2008
Irish Aid Volunteer and Information Centre, Dublin



Welcome to “Careers in Development: Where will we be in 2015?”

Speaking prior to the Seminar, **Frank Flood**, Manger of the Irish Aid Volunteer and Information Centre, commended Comhlámh on the timely exploration of the changing skills and competency requirements necessary to address global development issues in the future.



Speakers, Organisers and Participants of Careers Seminar

Marie Therese Fanning, Manager of the Services for Returned Development Workers team in Comhlámh welcomed delegates to the Seminar on behalf of Comhlámh and thanked Irish Aid and others who supported preparation for this event. Marie Therese highlighted some current challenges facing the sector such as filling specialist posts, recruiting mid level and senior staff, lack of clear career pathways, the dearth of management and leadership training, issues of poor staff retention and a high incidence of burnout. Marie Therese explained that the purpose of the Seminar was to raise awareness about these challenges and to support people currently working in the sector as well as those interested in careers in the development sector of the future.

Careers Pathways of CEOs and senior people in the sector

Four senior people currently working in the sector gave an overview of their careers pathways. This section of the programme was designed to illustrate the various pathways by which CEOs/senior people in the sector have arrived in their current positions.

Helen Keogh

CEO of World Vision Ireland

Richard Kennedy

HR Manger of Goal

John Roycroft

Secretary General in Irish Red Cross

Nessa Ni Chasaide

Coordinator of Debt and Development Coalition

shared their personal career journeys with us.

It takes great courage to reflect in public on career pathways that are not necessarily pre-planned and that have had creative twists and turns. These presenters illustrated that indeed careers in the sector are non-linear and are often peppered with unexpected challenges – some of which lead to the development of skills, attributes and competencies that may have remained hidden in other circumstances. These presenters also illustrated that technical skills and competencies are not the only asset a person has in this field. Developing personal awareness, self management and coping skills is critical to success and personal fulfilment.

The ability to share experience and knowledge, to encourage, motivate and develop people were identified as extremely important skills. As John Roycroft, secretary general of Irish Red Cross said: “My biggest joy is working with other people, bringing them on board and developing talent and delegating as much as possible to those people and trusting them to do the job. The biggest resource that I have as a CEO is the people who work for me and unless I can develop those people and create an environment in which they can thrive I would achieve nothing...”

Strategies and planned approaches to HR management in the sector

The second part of the Seminar provided the opportunity to think about developing strategies and planned approaches to HR management in the sector. This section was chaired by **Hans Zomer**, Chief Executive Officer of Dochás – the umbrella group of Development NGOs in Ireland.



Tracy Gill-Parker , PLAN UK and Hans Zomer, Dochas

The first speaker was **Tracy Gill-Parker**, Talent Management, Diversity and Inclusion Manager from PLAN UK. Tracy presented PLAN's talent management programme, which has been developed to meet current recruitment challenges, such as the tightening labour market, changing demographics and difficulty in recruiting staff.

The Talent Management programme was devised to help retain skilled and experienced staff, to ensure that PLAN has people to fill gaps in critical roles, to create a source of leadership for the future and to ensure diversity. The Talent Management strategy focused on creating senior and functional development forums, talent assessment centres, a graduate recruitment programme and an internship programme. It also dealt with strengthening performance management, coaching and mentoring. The Talent Management programme has turned out to be a great success as all ten people who came through the Talent Centre moved to senior leadership

Philip Regan, a HR Consultant currently working with Irish Aid and Dochás made a presentation on general trends in International Development. Philip pointed out a number of changes impacting on the skills required in developing countries.

In general, there is a shift away from recruiting generalist staff. Most development agencies are now actively recruiting such staff locally. Therefore, the emphasis is on specialist skill requirements. In the Humanitarian and Emergency areas this means people with specialist skills in logistics, accountancy, medicine, etc.

In Development work, specialisations in advocacy, communications, fundraising, finance, procurement, IT, logistics and technical areas are being sought. Philip made it clear that people who are interested in the career in the sector should not be focusing on the programmes alone because "there will be less and less opportunities there."



John Roycroft, Red Cross and Philip Regan, HR consultant

Leadership and Managerial competencies are also very sought after, according to Philip. This new emphasis means that skills transfer between the private and non-profit sectors can be more easily accommodated. This provides for the possibility of short term volunteering or work contracts, with people then returning to their private sector posts.

Strategies and planned approaches to HR management in the sector

Frank Flood, Manager of the Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre pointed out that Irish Aid plans to actively seek opportunities for Irish nationals to be posted in UN organisations such as IMF and UNV.

Despite our consistently high levels of international aid, Ireland is not represented in these agencies to the same extent as other European countries.

Frank suggested that we might follow the Swiss model developed by CINFO which offers extensive career support to Swiss nationals. The main programmes of this organisation comprise: UNV Interns, Junior Professional officers, regular visits to target agencies, inward recruitment missions, career information and advice, networking with nationals in agencies and seeking to fill strategic positions.



Tracy Gill-Parker, PLAN UK and Frank Flood, Irish Aid

In 2009, the Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre would like to expand its role to focus more on careers and to select Pilot International/UN Agencies to focus on. It will also build a network of candidates for key positions and seek to re-start the UN Junior Professional Officer programme.

The last presentation in the Careers Seminar was from **Paddy Reilly**, Executive Director of Kimmage Development Studies Centre (KDSC). Paddy's presentation started with the consideration of how difficult it is to predict the future.

Despite this, it is important to set some development priorities and consider what competencies will be required in the future. Paddy presented the ideas of Jeffrey Sachs who sees four great challenges ahead of us, namely: environmental degradation, population change, extreme poverty and global problem solving.



Paddy Reilly, KDSC and Helen Keogh, World Vision

Sachs believes that these problems can be solved once all the 'stakeholders of change' (private sector, PPPs, NGOs, universities, governments, UN) take action.

Quoting Robert Chambers, Paddy pointed out that "development professionals", tend to be male, have higher incomes, located in urban/metropolitan settings, their working experience is controlled, standardised, and simplified, and their approaches tend to focus on measurement, reductionism, and precision.

Reflecting on the key competencies and increasing specialisation required by Development Workers. Paddy suggested that education providers should not ignore the need for the so-called 'softer skills' of human interaction, creative facilitation, leadership, group dynamics, etc, which emphasise values of respect, open-mindedness, mutual learning, and overall, critical reflection.

Paddy concluded by quoting Albert Einstein 's contention that The significant problems we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them.

Facilitated Sessions

Following the presentations, participants worked in four groups to consider the topics raised by all the speakers and discuss what can be done to prepare the sector and the people in it for the coming challenges. Each group was asked to propose three priorities for short and medium term actions that could be undertaken by the Dóchas task force. **Hans Zomer** chaired the plenary session where the groups presented their proposals for action.

The first working group pointed out the importance of transparency in agencies. New posts should be advertised in a wider public so that more people could gain access to new opportunities and new posts. The group suggested that Dóchas could work on putting in place new HR policies that would require giving feedback to applicants after interviews. Moreover an internet port could be created to enable people to connect and share with each other the opportunities arising in the sector. Entry level requirements should be mapped and made clear. Dóchas could also work with government on creating more volunteer experience opportunities.

The second working group recommended that the difficulties around funding for campaigning activities should be tackled in the medium term. Additionally the group spoke about the importance of promoting Irish people for positions in multinational organisations. While concentrating more on technical and practical skills one should not forget about the significance of development education. This group also suggested making it easier to transfer the skills from one sector to another.

The third group also suggested that sharing and learning between sectors could be very beneficial. One should recognise the professionalisation of the sector and the focus on technical skills. The group discussed the issues of work life balance and burn out. It should be considered how to give appropriate support to people in the field, how to provide people with the time out and debriefing they need.

The fourth working group raised the issues of sector switching and recommended that this process should be made easier, because the development sector can only benefit from people with different backgrounds working together. The group pointed out how essential it is to map career pathways and that organisations should share with the public how their people have progressed to there where they are at the moment. People in the sector should have the possibilities to develop their careers in the long term.



Deidre Kettlewell, Comhlámh, Sheelagh Biggs and Kamila Gawronska, Comhlámh

Alongside the careers seminar Comhlámh offered participants brief 15 minute sessions with two very experienced career counsellors – both of whom work with Comhlámh to provide sector specific advice and support in relation to career planning. Both Sheelah Biggs and Sheelagh Cullen have extensive experience in working with people in development sector. Those who availed of this service commented on how useful it was and found the advice relating to CV presentation particularly useful.

Honorary Patron, Mary Robinson.

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