Career Paths into International Development

MPP Professional Paper

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ABSTRACT: *Public Policy graduate students in the United States are very interested in international development and global issues. However, students know little about how to take steps towards careers in it despite their significant interest and close study of international development and global policy in the classroom. For example, 26.5% of all applicants to the Humphrey School of Public Affairs in 2010 applied to Global Public Policy or Masters of Development programs, but data on alumni shows that only a handful of Humphrey graduates actually obtain jobs related to development or work overseas. This paper seeks to shed light on the numerous paths into international development, and what professional life is like in various sectors (bilateral and multilateral organizations, and NGOs). It also addresses gaps between classroom learning and the pursuit of a development career.*

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
-Robert Frost[1]

Travel. Adventure. Difference. Many careers in international development involve each of these elements. The last stanza of Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" provides an excellent metaphor for the career paths of international development professionals. Such individuals often choose the professional road less travelled to make a difference in the lives of people around the world. But how does one find this road?

While professions like medicine or accounting have prescribed paths to follow, international development workers can enter the field in any number of ways. This means that there are fewer roadmaps for budding professionals to follow. As a result would-be development practitioners are often uncertain of the steps they need to take to land their first international development job.

I am writing this paper to you, the current student or recent graduate eager to begin your development career. This paper serves as a guide. It is not a critical review of development

[1] Frost, from "The Road Not Taken"

careers, but rather offers insight and advice on how those who are committed to pursuing development careers can gain entry into this broad but nebulous field. Much of this advice will be useful to undergraduate and graduate students alike, though it is my hope that public policy graduate students find it particularly useful.

Public policy graduate students are very interested in international development; many hope to pursue development careers. Yet, given the breadth of the field and the focus on theoretical aspects of development in the classroom, many students are unsure of the steps necessary to find international work after graduation. For example, 26.5% of all applicants to the Humphrey School of Public Affairs in 2010 applied to Global Public Policy or Masters of Development programs, but data on alumni show that each year only a handful of Humphrey graduates actually obtain jobs related to development or work overseas.[2]

I highlight ways that would-be development professionals might gain entry into the field in this paper. The suggestions offered are not my own, but rather the collection of experiences, insight, and reflections of development professionals around the world, whom I interviewed for this project. These professionals graciously shared their stories and advice for the benefit of students or graduates planning to pursue international development careers. They discussed what development work looks like on a daily basis, and suggested ways that someone might begin a career in a number of sectors.

Before turning to their advice it is important to understand the events that caused international development to become a major industry. Knowing how development evolved, where its origins lie, and recognizing the differences between the kinds of organizations will help budding practitioners makes sense of why international development is what it is today.

[2] Assistant Dean Greg Lindsey to HHH Faculty, February 15, 2011, Background information for discussion of hiring.

Understanding development's history may also help someone identify his or her place in its future.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MODERN DEVELOPMENT

Defining Development: International development is both a broad field and a broad concept. While there is no universally accepted definition of development, the Dictionary of Human Geography indicates that the term "is most used in a holistic and multi-disciplinary context of human development – the development of a greater quality of life for humans."[3] A description offered by Oxford University's International Development master's program is slightly more specific. It adds that development encompasses "foreign aid, governance, healthcare, education, gender equality, disaster preparedness, infrastructure, economics, human rights, the environment" and issues associated with these areas.[4] Books for budding development professionals define development in loose terms as well: the movement of "people, information, and sometimes supplies across national borders for educational or humanitarian purposes—to establish more effective communications, to tackle global problems, and to build the web of human connections so critical to survive in the 21st century."[5] Highlighting these various definitions helps to explain why there are so many development agencies, organizations, and paths to development careers.

History: Development as it exists today is a relatively new field. Arising from the geopolitical changes that followed World War II, international development has its roots in the decline of colonial powers, emergence of new nations, and shifts in the way that the world thought about poverty. These events, and the policies, programs, and institutions that arose during the post war period shaped and defined what it is today.

[3] Gregory, p. 155-156
[4] Oxford Department of International Development
[5] Mueller and Overmann, p. 2

Colonial empires collapsed around the world during the first half of the twentieth century. Although many colonies and territories did not succeed in their fight for independence until many years past 1945, large geographical and political changes occurred during World War II and subsequent years. Between 1945 and the 1970s over 60 new countries emerged from the turmoil throughout Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and Near East.[6] As colonies disintegrated, areas and countries now known as the developing world emerged.

World Wars I and II accelerated the decline of colonial powers by significantly weakening countries' ability to rule their territories. The collapse of stability and control during the interwar period and widespread destruction and conflict of WWII all contributed to the decline of colonial rule. Japan, Germany, and Italy, the losing countries in the war, lost their colonies immediately, while other European countries steadily lost their ability to exercise control over their colonies. The United States also began to relinquish direct colonial control during this period, focusing its energies on building Cold War alliances and influence instead.[7]

The United States came out of World War II as "the economic giant of the world" and as such played a large role in launching some of the first modern foreign aid efforts. The first was the Marshall Plan, which began in 1947 and ended in 1951.[8] The plan was a US initiative to rebuild and strengthen European economies following the war, and one of its goals was to open more markets for the United States. An additional objective was to prevent the spread of Soviet influence, or international communism, through promoting market economies.[9] The popularity of the Marshall Plan waned in the late 1940s when the threat of communism, with its "supposed appeal to the world's poor," grew.[10] Economic leaders doubted that market driven development

[6] University of Hawaii
[7] Ibid
[8] Atwood et al
[9] Encyclopedia of the New American Nation
[10] Escobar

was effective enough at dispelling communism.[11] This encouraged the shift away from a purely market driven development approach to one that was even more interventionist in an anti-communist stance.

President Truman introduced the Point Four plan, a program designed to "help [the people of underdeveloped nations] realize their aspirations," through combining technical assistance and private investment from the United States.[12] The plan included language about strengthening "freedom-loving nations against the dangers of aggression," a clear indication of US desire to support like-minded nations.[13] Patterson, an academic who has researched the Point Four Plan extensively, notes that while it began grandly, the Plan "whimpered through most of its life."[14] In spite of both the Marshal and Point Four Plans' apparent generosity, the reality was that developed countries received much more aid and assistance (including military assistance) than the developing world. The developing nations that the U.S. had strategic interests in (natural resources, for example) or that were perceived to have pressing communist threats received the most assistance.[15]

While policies like the Marshall and Point Four Plans illustrate how countries may give aid with ulterior motives, it is important to remember that development assistance is also given out of feelings of empathy and goodwill towards others. Bertin Martens, a development scholar, writes that when a wealthier nation or potential donor encounters individuals who are deprived of essential resources that the donor has, it may "generate empathy and cognitive dissonance in his [or her] mind: the observed situation of the deprived does not correspond to his own perception

[11] Cooper and Packard p. 7
[12] Patterson
[13] Ibid
[14] Ibid
[15] Encyclopedia of the New American Nation

of how the world should be."[16] These feelings trigger a reaction, and may be a catalyst for giving aid to "alleviate the dissonance" that the more advantaged party feels.[17]

The United States' Cold War agenda influenced the delivery of international aid, but so did the changing social discourse on poverty. Colonizers believed that even if natives could be "somewhat enlightened" by their presence not much could be done to alleviate their poverty because native capacity for economic, scientific, and technological progress "was seen as nil."[18] As former colonies gained their independence and became new nations the social discourse of the post World War II era challenged traditional colonial beliefs regarding "native capacity."[19] This discourse increasingly emphasized poverty as a social problem, one that required new kinds of intervention in society.[20] Arturo Escobar, a renowned development scholar, opines that mass poverty was being "discovered" in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as former colonial territories in these regions became new nations. This "discovery" during a time when poverty was being discussed as a social problem called for intervention. This had important implications for the developing world.

In the 1960s just as the Johnson administration was declaring a "War on [domestic] Poverty" in the United States, the reality of poverty abroad was becoming apparent to Americans. Harvard poverty scholar and influential voice during the war on poverty, William Julius Wilson, writes that "eloquent facts were adduced to justify this new war: 'over 1,500,000 million people, something like two-thirds of the world's population, are living in conditions of acute hunger, defined in terms of identifiable nutritional disease. This hunger is at the same time

[16] Martens p. 645
[17] Ibid
[18] Escobar p. 22
[19] Ibid
[20] Ibid

the cause and effect of the poverty, squalor, and misery in which they live.'"[21] In sum, many development scholars hold "that the essential trait of the Third World was its poverty and that the solution was economic growth and development became self-evident, necessary, and universal truths."[22]

History of Development Careers: Many development organizations were already in existence or arose during the post World War II era. The United Nations (officially founded in 1945), World Bank (1944), World Vision (1950) and Compassion International (1952) were all born during the post-war era. Additional organizations gained prominence in the following decade, with the establishment of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1961, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1965.

The emerging body of international development polices and organizations naturally gave rise to careers within those agencies. Higher-level positions in each of these organizations were dominated by upper and upper-middle class white men. This reflected the social norms and opportunities (or lack thereof) of the time. A college education (at least) was necessary for successful higher-level employment in most cases. A detailed discussion of the ways that the field has changed since then can be found in a later section.

Kinds of Agencies and Development Theories: Theoretical and ideological frameworks for development also help to explain why there are different agencies, and different kinds of agencies. A simple way of thinking about it is that the different kinds of organizations correspond with the preferences of the donors and recipients about the ways that aid is delivered, and in some cases, about the kinds of aid that is delivered. (Religious organizations may have different objectives than a government agency, for example). Briefly defining four of the major

[21] Wilson 1953, 11 in Escobar p. 22
[22] Escobar p. 24

kinds of agencies that have been alluded to is important before discussing the theoretical underpinnings of development.

Bilateral Organizations: All industrialized countries have national organizations that finance programs and projects in poorer developing countries. These agencies are called bilateral agencies since they are "two-sided:" they provide financing from a single funding country to a single receiving country. Examples of bilateral aid agencies include governmental organizations like: the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA); and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID).[23]

Multilateral Organizations: Where bilateral agencies involve two countries, the donor and the recipient, multilateral aid "is a case of joint delegation by donor countries with different interests to a single international agency."[24] Donor nations often partner within multilateral organizations to provide joint aid to countries or regions. The best examples of multilateral agencies are the United Nations and its affiliate organizations, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). These agencies provide international forums that respond to demands from donors as well as recipient actors and nations.[25]

Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs): As is evident from their name, NGOs are private, non-profit professional organizations concerned with public welfare goals. Such organizations include development agencies with religious, or faith-based affiliations like Compassion International or World Vision, philanthropic foundations, academic think tanks, and other organizations that focus on issues like "human rights, gender, health, agricultural

[23] Environmental Defense Fund
[24] Martens p. 656
[25] Ibid

development, social welfare, the environment, and indigenous peoples."[26] Non-profit agencies like private hospitals or schools, religious groups, and clubs are not considered NGOs.

For-Profit Agencies: For profit development agencies, like Chemonics, the Louis Berger Group, INC., and BearingPoint are private consulting organizations that work under contracts from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other foreign aid donors to implement development projects in developing countries.[27] Such organizations are privately held. Interestingly, some private companies that are not traditionally associated with international development have created not for profit international development divisions within their organizations. A perfect example is Land O' Lakes International Development, INC which functions as a not for profit division within the larger Land O' Lakes corporation. Similar to for-profit development consulting firms, Land O' Lakes International Development receives most of the funding for its projects from USAID or the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).[28]

Neoclassical Economic Theory: Neoclassical economic theory is noteworthy here because it has provided a dominant baseline for development theory and the delivery of aid. It is also important because it explains some of the central arguments behind the delivery of international development programs. The central premise of many aid agencies is (or historically has been) that investing in programs that stimulate Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in developing countries directly translates into a higher quality of life for citizens of that country.

The numerous changes wrought by the shifting geopolitical geography following World War II changed the politics and institutions of the social sciences during this era.[29] Since it was the discourse on mass poverty and postwar policies that gave rise to the modern notions of development, it makes sense that economics became the first discipline to be affected. As mass

[26] Clarke
[27] Wolverson
[28] Land O' Lakes International Development Website
[29] Ferguson p. 158-159

poverty became recognized as a social problem, economic growth, measured by per capita income, became a logical yardstick for measuring the progress of "modernization" in developing countries. Therefore it is unsurprising that a recognized subfield of development economics arose quickly in response to postwar initiatives.[30]

Neoclassical economics is currently the dominant theoretical framework for international development. Neoclassical economic theory, as it is applied to development, focuses on the household as the smallest unit of analysis. It assumes that each household aims to maximize its utility, or use its resources in the most efficient and logical manners. In other words, neoclassical economics relies heavily on rational choice models, which assume that individuals are rational actors who always seek to maximize their wellbeing.

Neoclassical economic growth is measured by the growth in a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—a proxy for the total income of all the residents of that nation. The model makes three central predictions. First, that increasing capital, or "the stock of equipment and structures used in production," relative to the number of workers (labor) in a given economy creates economic growth.[31] Second, that poor countries with less capital per person will have faster rates of growth with each investment in the country's capital because this will yield a higher rate of return, or greater impact than would be seen in countries with sufficient capital stocks. Finally, it assumes that all economies eventually reach a point where any additional increase in capital will create little or no further economic growth because of diminishing returns to capital (the point where capital wears out at the same rate it is being replaced, known as the steady state).[32]

[30] Ibid
[31] Manikiw
[32] Manikiw

Examining the discourse on mass poverty in the post-World War II world shows us that within market societies the poor were defined as those lacking in the standard of money and material possessions set by the rich. Poor countries came to be similarly defined in relation to the standards of wealth of more economically advanced nations.[33] The World Bank defined poor countries as those with an annual per capita income of less than $100 in 1948, and "almost by fiat two-thirds of the world's peoples were transformed into poor subjects."[34] Thinking about poverty in terms of lack of income clearly made economic growth the solution.[35]

Critiques of Neoclassical Economic Theory: A significant body of research and literature within development suggests alternatives to the neoclassical economic model. Scholars and critics have pointed out that there is often little tangible evidence that supports neoclassical economic growth theory. Critics of the rational choice model point out that human beings are not always rational actors; thus assumptions that household members will always maximize their collective wellbeing are flawed. Consider, for example, a household in which the husband and father is the primary breadwinner but is also an alcoholic. He may spend the majority of his wages on alcohol and not on meeting the basic needs of his wife and children. He is not maximizing household welfare.

Scholars like Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen, Gillian Hart, and Bina Agarwal have each argued for different ways of thinking about and delivering aid. Authors of books like *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* Dambisa Moyo, 2009) and *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Paul Collier, 2008) offer similar critiques that are important for anyone involved in international development to consider.

[33] Escobar
[34] Ibid p. 23-24
[35] Escobar

METHODOLOGY

Now I return to my central question which is: What are some of the ways that those interested in working in international development might get started? Former US Secretary of State (then retired US Army General) Powell gave a speech at Georgetown University in 1996 that explained to students the importance of established generations of professionals assisting newcomers to the field. He noted the importance of "reaching down and reaching back" to bring others forward. He meant that current professionals can pass on their wisdom and expertise to upcoming generations of international professionals.[36]

The eleven interviews that I conducted for this paper provided an opportunity for eleven international development practitioners to "reach back" and offer their insights for students interested in pursuing international development careers.[37] I prepared an interviewer's guide (Appendix III), which I submitted to the Institutional Review Board of the University of Minnesota. I conducted the interviews during several weeks of the 2011 spring semester after I received IRB approval.[38]

I interviewed people working in a wide range of positions at a variety of organizations to gain a diverse perspective. Some people had begun their careers in development as recently as a year ago, while others have been working in it for decades. I asked the professionals a variety of questions about their first steps into the realm of international development including: what advice they would give to current students and recent graduates, and what they felt were the most rewarding aspects of their careers. I also asked different questions based on their position (Interviewer's Guide, Appendix III). Each person interviewed was asked about the ways that he or she got started working in development. The individuals I spoke with work for bilateral,

[36] Carland & Trucano
[37] Ibid
[38] University of Minnesota IRB study number 1102E96053

multilateral, and non-governmental agencies ranging from the United Nations to Mano a Mano, a small Minnesota based NGO.

I identified potential interview contacts through personal connections made during my 2010 summer internship at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, contacts through University of Minnesota faculty, and snowball sampling.[39] I sent individual email requests for interviews early on in the 2011 spring semester. Nearly everyone I contacted responded positively, though several people who agreed to an interview later became unavailable due to travel or other scheduling conflicts.

I conducted the interviews in various ways during several weeks of the 2011 spring semester; Skype calls, over the phone, face-to-face in local coffee shops, and in one St. Paul organization's headquarters. The interviews lasted from 25 to 90 minutes. The average conversation was approximately 40 minutes. I recorded nine of the interviews (with permission), and later transcribed them. I took extensive notes during the two telephone interviews, because the recording devices I had access to were not compatible with my mobile phone.

After I completed the interviews I used a software program called NVivo to code and identify key themes in the transcriptions and notes. I used a hierarchical coding scheme and labeled broad categories such as "Advice and Skills" that had numerous subcategories like "Overseas Experience," "Peace Corps," and "Technical Specialty vs. Generalist". Common themes emerged throughout the interviews, almost to a surprising degree.

WISDOM FROM THE EXPERIENCED : INTERVIEW FINDINGS

How do you get started in international development? With the seemingly endless number of development agencies and complexities of the field, where do you start? How do you

[39] Asking the individuals I interviewed to refer me to their colleagues

know if development is right for you? How is it changing? What did the professionals have to say? Many of them gave remarkably similar answers to my questions.

I gave the individuals that I interviewed the option of complete or partial confidentiality (see Appendix IV). Most of the people that I spoke with were comfortable being identified, but at the advice of my faculty advisors I replaced all names with pseudonyms. In some cases individuals also wished for the organizations they work for to remain confidential. I described those organizations in general terms so the reader will gain a sense of the kind of work each person does, but will not be able to identity specific organizations.

GETTING STARTED IN DEVELOPMENT

International Interest: Nearly every person whom I interviewed noted that his or her career began with an early interest in international relations and (or) different cultures. This interest was often sparked through exposure to foreign language or international experiences in high school or college. Many professionals indicated that they were not planning on pursuing development careers when they began pursuing international interests.

Chad Schmidt, a recent graduate of the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire works at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) near Cali in Southwest Colombia. He notes that his interest in development began through studying Spanish. He said, "I never had any intention of pursuing development. In fact, in high school I was set on a career in business administration…" Schmidt explained that he took several Spanish classes about Latin American culture, and that he saw clear links to politics, development, and poverty from studying culture. Schmidt described studying abroad in Costa Rica and Nicaragua in college to learn Spanish and

"instead [being] struck by the development inequalities."[40] He said that this study abroad experience was what really shifted his career focus.

Leslie Smith, a Deputy Mission Director for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and a development practitioner for 30 years, credits studying Chinese at a magnet high school with a very dynamic Chinese instructor as the catalyst for her interest in international affairs. Jennifer Johnson, who works for the United States government, noted that studying French in high school and college and studying abroad in Senegal through an International Development study abroad program during her junior year of college laid a foundation for her future career. Her study abroad experience involved living in a remote Senegalese village for seven months researching rural development. Others said that it was simply an interest in other countries and other cultures that initially drew them to field, or led them to pursue programs like Peace Corps.

Amanda Peterson is a mid-level professional at a large multilateral financial institution.[41] She recalled her experience in the Peace Corps:

> I was stationed in West Africa—in Guinea, but I didn't know that this would be a career choice. At that time, and I'm sure you can relate to this at some point or another, I didn't know exactly where my career path would lie, and so I knew I was interested in other countries, I knew that I was interested in other cultures, but I didn't really know very much about development or the field of development.

Following Themes—Turning Interest into Action: The easiest step of a job search process is generally identifying an interest. The steps needed to move from interest to a related career can be much less clear. It is often the case that graduate students who are interested in development feel that they have little practical information about how to find their first job.

[41] The name of this institution is not disclosed at her request

Jennifer Johnson described her process as "following themes", or deep personal interests. She said that she has always been interested in "international travel, environments and experiences, and that her jobs have really revolved around that." She explained that the first theme that she followed was trying to define community. She said that pursuing things like economic development or human rights or migration have "all been various aspects of responding to this question of what is community and what is sustainable?"[42]

Johnson knew she was interested in development after her study abroad experience in Senegal. She worked for several years and then returned to graduate school for a master's degree in public policy. She completed her degree and received a Presidential Management Fellowship (PMF), a leadership fellowship from the US government that sets young professionals on a fast track to management within the federal government. Johnson found her first international job through the fellowship.

Peace Corps, the PMF, and Other Opportunities: Many of the professionals that I interviewed said it was programs like the United States Federal Government's PMF program or Peace Corps that helped them first get their feet in the door of development agencies. Leslie Smith; Scott Robertson, a Program Manager at FAO; and Amanda Peterson all got their start in development through Peace Corps. Jennifer Johnson and Leslie Smith were fellows through the PMF program.[43] Scott Robertson, a Minnesota native and a University of Minnesota graduate shared his opinion that:

> Peace Corps is an excellent stepping-stone. If you really want to work in this field and you don't have other alternatives or … a mentor who's already in the mix then it's probably the best way to get your foot in the door.

[43] Incidentally both are Humphrey alum. Smith did Peace Corps before graduate school and later received a PMF following her Humphrey graduation.

Many of the people that I spoke to echoed this thought. Robertson's foot in the door through his Peace Corps experience in Madagascar translated directly into a job after he ended his Peace Corps service. Robertson participated in a Peace Corps program called the Masters International program. The Master's International Program is offered at a number of universities around the country. It couples master's level graduate work with a Peace Corps assignment.[44]

In Robertson's case, he studied Forestry at the University of Minnesota in a Master's degree program, and completed a lot of his thesis work in Madagascar during his Peace Corps assignment. He extended his two-year overseas assignment by one year and then returned to the U of M to finish his degree. After that, he went back to Madagascar to a job that he had arranged before he returned to Minnesota.

Peace Corps and the PMF were frequently cited as excellent ways to begin a development career, but they are far from the *only* ways to get started. François Dubois, a consultant at FAO, proves that this is the case. Dubois, who is from Belgium, completed a master's degree in Amsterdam and knew that he wanted to gain some work experience at a development organization when he graduated. Knowing that he was interested in agriculture and climate change, Dubois searched various organizations' websites for the email addresses of people who worked in departments he was interested in. He planned to send email inquiries regarding work opportunities. The first person he emailed was at FAO, and this person offered him a volunteer position (a common entry point into the UN system). Some time afterwards he was hired as a FAO consultant. He admits: "Yes, there was a bit of randomness there."

Mid-career professionals often enter development through a very different route, drawing on technical skill sets developed through other professional endeavors. Amelia Anderson was working at the Minnesota Department of Health in the mid 1990s when her husband, then a

[44] More information about this program can be found in the resources section of this paper

Police Lieutenant in the Twin Cities, called one day and asked her if she would like to go to Bosnia. She remembers:

> …And I just said 'Yes'. I didn't think about it—it was just like he was asking me to the movies. But then we talked about it more seriously.

Her husband had been offered a position to work for a year in Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of the international police task force to help teach democratic policing to new police officers following the conflict in the region. Initially Anderson thought that she would accompany him as a volunteer, but then decided that she should look for paid employment.

She recalled thinking about whom she might like to work for, and realizing that she would like to work for the World Health Organization (WHO). She did not know anyone at WHO but put a resume and cover letter together, and sent it to the organization, explaining the kinds of things that she could do. Two weeks later she got a call from someone at the WHO who asked if she would be the head of the field office in Mostar. She took the job, with the intention of taking a year-long leave of absence from her job at the health department. She was not aware at that time that she was embarking on a development career that would take her to many interesting places over the coming years.

After a year or so of heading the WHO field office in Mostar she returned to Minneapolis to resume her job at the health department. She worked there, and also in Kuwait for WHO concurrently (traveling back and forth), before ultimately deciding to leave her position at the health department and work for the WHO full-time. This time she worked in Thailand as the border health program officer along the Thai-Myanmar (Burmese) border. Anderson is now retired. You can read more about her experiences in Thailand in later sections of this paper.

Chad Schmidt is yet another individual who entered a development career without first beginning in the Peace Corps or PMF program. When I asked him about the way that he got his first job he was straight to the point: "Networking!" he chuckled.

> So my mom's boss, William Jenkins, started work in Italy at FAO during my senior year of college… I didn't know what to do after graduation, so I sent Will a message trying to see what the situation was like in his department…I had visited the FAO website beforehand and read up on the volunteer program.

Jenkins helped Schmidt find a volunteer position in his department. Schmidt moved to Rome shortly after graduating from college and spent five months volunteering at FAO. Schmidt had originally planned to join the Peace Corps following his stint in Rome, but his plans changed during his volunteer-ship. He decided to pursue additional opportunities at FAO. His volunteer position was converted to internship status so that he would be eligible for immediate hire.[45] Shortly afterwards he was hired as a consultant in a different department, and spent another six months or so working at FAO.

Schmidt found out about his current position while he was working at FAO. He saw a circular for a position at the Center for International Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), headquartered near Cali, Colombia, during his FAO consultancy. He applied for, and received a visiting researcher position there, and had been there for a week at the time of our interview.

Amanda Peterson sums up these sorts of job-finding experiences succinctly: "networking, luck, I think both of those in equal doses [are needed to land a development career]." While these three stories may be slightly unusual, they demonstrate the importance of taking initiative in pursuing opportunities. They also show how varied the process of finding a development job can be.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PROS

[45] FAO HR policies: one of the main differences between volunteers and interns is that interns receive a small stipend, and are eligible for immediate hire at FAO following completion of an internship. Volunteers must wait six months before they are eligible for hire.

Starting an international development career does seem to require a certain amount of luck, but there are many ways that current students or recent graduates can improve their chances. Each of the professionals I interviewed offered advice about the kinds of skills, experiences, and strategies that can be employed to get employed. A lot of their advice is applicable to finding a job in any sector of development and some of it is more specific to certain kinds of development organizations. Both types of advice are very useful and I will discuss them below.

Network, Network, Network: In their book on finding international careers, Mueller and Overmann remind us that, "Most everyone agrees that we ought to network, but we rarely reflect on how to do it most effectively and with the most positive results."[46] Fortunately, nearly everyone I interviewed highlighted specific examples of how he or she networked effectively, and the ways this helped their careers. Many also offered creative suggestions for would-be professionals who may not have established networks, suggesting ways that they might make first contact with potential networks.

Amber Hill, a mid-level professional at Compassion International, described the way that she wound up at Compassion and offered networking advice during our interview. She said that one thing she had learned in her own job search process was that finding "people who are very well connected" and getting to know them was a great way for her to "glean insight" about the kinds of jobs she was interested in. Hill explained that she talked to a lot of people in ministry and non-profit work while she was looking for a job several years ago. She described her networking process:

> I found time to meet with *lots* of different people just so that I could listen and learn about what they did, and tell them about what I was interested in, and would ask them if they had any connection points that they felt they could connect me to.

[46] Mueller and Overmann, p. 22

As it turned out, one of her pastors "was one of those very well networked people." She got him and his family fairly well over several years, and when he started an executive position at Compassion International's headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colorado he kept her in mind. He emailed her and told her, "Amber, this place has you written all over it." He invited her to come up and interview for several open positions. Last November she found one that she said is a great fit.

Scott Robertson offers similar advice about networking. His first piece of advice for someone new to the field or interested in it was that as soon as you are not certain of what you are interested in, or as soon as you have an idea of what you are interested in, "start somehow meeting people or contacting people that work in the job that you think you might want, and then ask them for informal interviews or informational interviews." Robertson said in his experience people are very happy to do that. He also noted that:

> …frankly, very often somehow these contacts, interviews, usually end up leading toward actually being in the field if that's what you continue to want after the interview. Like some people actually get offered a job after an informational interview—rare circumstances, but if I find somebody in my profession now, if I'm impressed with their work or their presentation or their demeanor, just their level of confidence, things like that, I'll actually consider providing them contacts where they might actually get their foot in the door somewhere or potentially offer them something if I'm in a position to do that.

Informational interviews can be extremely beneficial, as Robertson illustrates. Even if they do not end up turning into a job, simply gathering more information about the field can help you determine where you would like to focus your job search, and also helps to get your name out there. Christina Meyer, who works for the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in Uganda, remarked, "… they always say it's who you know but really it's who knows you. So the more you talk to people the more they know you."

Attending conferences is another way that students can network. Jennifer Johnson, a Humphrey alumnus, pointed to a conference in Washington DC that she attended as a graduate student as an excellent way she expanded network. She connected with a Czech woman whose mother was the director of the UN office in the Czech Republic while she was at the conference. This woman helped her get a summer internship doing grant work and going to refugee camps in the Czech Republic.

Several professionals commented that the development world is a small one—that once you've gotten in the door, you're in. It is all about "getting that first one, getting that first experience." Chad Schmidt informed me that in his experience at FAO "opened up a massive network, and was the reason I'm here in Colombia."[47] He also provided a great example of how small the development world can be when explaining his work at CIAT. Here is an excerpt from our conversation:

> CS: Yeah one thing leads to another [on networking]…and in development you're constantly drawing on colleagues for their networks as well. For example, I'm working on climate change adaption costing at CIAT. François [the same François interviewed for this project] is developing a climate change modeling toolbox that assesses the impacts of agricultural policy at FAO. I'll be utilizing his model developers and potentially his software to run the empirical data for cost benefit analysis here at CIAT.
>
> EM: That's great! Former roommates and professional buddies.
>
> CS: Yeah, it's fantastic. My first day here my boss asked me about MOSAIC, wondered if I knew what was going on with the project. I said, "Well, I can call my old roommate and tell you. He's the program coordinator."
>
> EM: [laughs] Nice. What did your boss say?
>
> CS: He laughed, but I had instant credibility and could be useful immediately.

These examples and experiences provide some great suggestions for ways that students or recent graduates might effectively network. Informational interviews and attending conferences

[47] Chad Schmidt Interview

are great ways to increase your number of contacts in the field. Talking to people that you already know like professors or others who may have experience in the things that you are interested in (and asking them for more contacts) is another important channel of communication to explore.

Internships, Volunteering and Why You Need to Leave the Country: It may be intimidating to some students to attempt cold calling (or emailing) a professional for an informational interview. Martin Freudenberg, who works for Mano a Mano, a Minnesota based NGO, and several other interviewees talked about the ways volunteering or interning with organizations can be another way to network effectively. Freudenberg noted that volunteering can be a great way for someone to explore his or her career interests. He has taken part in hiring volunteers into full time positions in the organizations that they volunteered for. Freudenberg said that he finds hiring volunteers appealing because volunteers have already been well trained by the organization and understand an its politics, structure, management, and issues at hand better than someone coming in from the outside. He stated, "it's really cost-effective for an organization…it's a win-win situation for everybody.

Christina Meyer recalled that she had several different internships when she was a student, and that each served her well because she gained a lot of experience and made a lot of professional contacts. She explained that it was all "just kind of by luck" and networking that she ended up in a number of her development positions. She ended up on the Thai-Burmese border for an internship because she knew someone; she received a fellowship at the Population Council in Washington DC because no one else applied for the position; and then received a job in Uganda because she was the only applicant who had worked or lived overseas, which is why she was chosen.

Meyer's example highlights how networking, luck, and overseas experience often help in finding a job. It is often the case that overseas internships or volunteer experiences are unpaid. Several of the professionals addressed the possible difficulties of this for students and talked about other ways they could build their resumes domestically.

Amanda Peterson suggested that if you cannot travel or get an internship in a developing country, seeking out exposure to international experiences is useful: "Universities have lectures, talks, films, and so on that focus on development or international issues… that would be one way to at least plug into an international community and maybe a development community." Jennifer Johnson, a Minnesota native, offered:

> …in terms of international development building on local domestic experiences can also be really important. So, working in a community in northern rural Minnesota or working on native tribal issues…tribal issues come up all the time, so looking at a diversity of experiences beyond just having to leave the states is also really important.

Peterson discussed the ways that students could develop their technical skills if there is a particular aspect of development that they might want to go into. She said, "If it's education, then work at a school, if it's banking, do banking in the United States…" and listed several other examples.

It might also be possible for students to get experience with international organizations that have domestic offices. For example, Mano a Mano relies on volunteers in the Twin Cities to package the medical supplies that the organization ships to its clinics in Bolivia.

These ideas are all good ones, but it is important to note that nearly all of the professionals that I spoke with, including those who suggested domestic options, said that experience in developing countries is critical.

Many professionals provided example after example of the ways that getting experience in a developing country is a key to landing a development job. Amanda Peterson explained that

there is a "very clear distinction and understanding of what might be possible and what might be feasible and realistic versus what is just theory." She went on to say that:

> I think that for a career in development, for *most* careers in development, you, at least for Americans, this may change for some other country nationals because they travel more, because they've had more experience, but I think for Americans they've got to go and spend some time in developing countries…

Peterson also noted that she thinks that it is much easier to travel or live in a developing country as a young person, because there are fewer family responsibilities, and fewer things tying you down during that stage of life. She said that she had much more flexibility to spend time abroad when she was younger, and highly recommended that students or recent graduates find ways to have experiences in developing countries.

Miranda Moore told me that she does not even consider hiring someone unless the person has had overseas experience: "The word international has to appear on their CV or I'm not interested." Like Peterson, she suggested that the length of time spent abroad was not as important as the things that you do when you are there. She also noted that overseas in this context does not mean countries "like Switzerland or France," but rather developing countries.

Scott Robertson also talked about what he looks for when hiring, and explained that he prefers to hire former Peace Corps volunteers or people who have some kind of field experience. He said that he "likes the Peace Corps part" because it shows him a certain level of dedication—that someone is "willing to go do it for free." He said that knowing someone has been in Peace Corps also tells him that the person has probably learned a lot about other world views and that he thinks this knowledge is extremely beneficial in the field.

Notably all but two people that I interviewed had some sort of experience in developing countries that helped them start their careers. Robertson, Amanda Peterson, and Leslie Smith

each found his or her start through Peace Corps, as mentioned earlier. Peace Corps was frequently referred to during many of the interviews as one of the best ways that an American can move towards an international development job. Miranda Moore noted that at her first development job at a large consulting firm, Chemonics, over half of the staff had gotten their career started through Peace Corps. Many of the other professionals that I spoke with echoed this sentiment, even if they had not personally gotten into development work through Peace Corps.

However, as Amanda Peterson stated, there are many other ways that someone might gain experience in a developing country:

> Peace Corps is one of those ways, but there are a lot of others, internships and other kinds of experiences with volunteer organizations, and things like that could give experience without a two year commitment, for example.

Martin Freudenberg is a perfect example. His interest in development was sparked through volunteering to lead Habitat for Humanity home building trips at his church. He explained that these trips helped him to become familiar with domestic poverty, and this eventually grew into an interest in international poverty. When he was a seminary student he and a few classmates organized several three-week trips to the Philippines because he and the other student wanted to explore their faith in a global context.

On the first trip they spent time living with people on the streets and in shanties whom he said shared "everything they had with us." He commented on the life-changing nature of the experience, telling me that, "It was one of those trips that—how do you go to a developing country and come back and try to be the same person that you were when you left?" Others like Christina Meyer, Chad Schmidt, and François Dubois, started through internships and volunteering, as noted in other sections of the paper.

Education: Specialties and Languages: One of the most important aspects of finding a career in development is making sure you have the skills necessary to get started. Nearly half of the professionals I interviewed talked about why being a generalist is important, while the other half stressed the importance of having a technical specialty. I did not find a conclusive answer to this issue.

The professionals who emphasized general skills talked about how broad the field of development is, and noted that traits like flexibility and adaptability are more important than having very specific technical expertise. Advocates of technical specialties commented that having expertise in subjects like finance, engineering, health, the environment, etc. would lead to more interesting work and more opportunities to work in developing countries. They indicated that generalists would be more likely to find work in an organization's headquarters, which are often located in cities like New York, Geneva, or Washington DC.

Many of those who discussed the importance of technical specialties work in areas that require technical expertise, such as financial analysis, business development, and economic analysis. Conversely, the people who emphasized the importance of being a generalist worked in positions that drew more heavily on a wide skill set that was not as focused in one specific subject.

It is likely that the tension between what the professionals said illustrates the need for both technical specialties and general skills. This might be determined by the nature of the position(s) being sought. Though no one best fail-safe graduate program emerged in the interviews, most people agreed that graduate school was critical.

Similar to the mixed responses about whether a technical or general focus is best, the professionals whom I interviewed had a variety of things to say about the importance of foreign

language. Their range of responses is useful in illustrating the diversity of international development careers.

When I asked her whether learning the local tongues was important while she was working for WHO, Amelia Anderson said:

> … In Bosnia-Herzegovina, when I was first offered job I began working very hard on learning Serb or Croat. I proudly told my boss I had tapes and I was working hard on it, and he said, well you can learn it, but don't speak it.

Her boss explained that whichever local language she spoke would show political favor to one side or the other, and told her that it would be wisest just to stick with speaking English. Even though the conflict had ended and the two languages were similar enough to be understood by either group, hostilities still ran high between the Serbians and Croatians. A foreigner speaking only one of their languages might have caused an inflammatory response. Anderson explained that in order to be politically acceptable all of WHO's mailings were sent out in four languages, and that even the signs in WHO's building indicating which floor was which, etc. were labeled in two languages to avoid indicating political favoritism. Anderson added:

> Now, I used an interpreter. She spoke in her language, which was—my main interpreter spoke in Croat. But they knew that's what she was and that was ok.

However, Anderson explained that her experiences with foreign languages were quite different when she was working on the border of Myanmar and Thailand because the languages were not as politically charged. She said that Thai was a difficult language to learn because it is tonal. She often used translators when she and her staff were traveling throughout border regions. Sometimes three or four interpreters would be involved: one interpreter who translated from English to Thai, another translating the Thai to Chinese, and a third translating from Chinese into a local dialect. Anderson learned to appreciate the time it took for all of that translation, because she said it gave her time to think about what she wanted to say.

Christina Meyer has had very different experiences. When I asked her about languages she said:

> I wouldn't say [it is important] to the extent that Peace Corps pushes it. If you're going to go to Mozambique you should know Portuguese and if you're going to go to Congo you should know French… you should know their main language. … I'm in Uganda [where English is an official language], and they speak Luganda, which is a version of Swahili…and I don't know it fluently… I can barter and things like that, but it doesn't matter that I don't know it. It helps that I can greet people…but I can still [do the] work.
>
> In Sierra Leone….I didn't speak Creole until I was there for awhile, and because I picked it up it was to my advantage for two reasons. One: I could understand what they were saying about me and about the project when they didn't think I could understand, but two: I got a little more respect because I tried…[I wouldn't] have gone and take[n] Creole classes…. If I would have gone and taken a class and then gone there they would have laughed at me. It's more about doing your time than whether or not you actually know the language.

Miranda Moore offered a third perspective, saying that she thought language skills, particularly French or Spanish, are important. She said she thought that Portuguese would "probably skyrocket your chances of a job" because there is a need for Portuguese speaking development workers in countries like Mozambique. She also noted that Arabic is a very desirable language.

Each of these people provided different examples of the ways foreign language affected their work. Other interviewees also commented on foreign language. While there are some (somewhat rare) situations, like Anderson's in Bosnia, where speaking the local tongue may not be wise, there was a general consensus that having foreign language skills will provide job seekers with a competitive advantage. This is particularly true of languages that are spoken where development work is currently in high demand, as Moore's comments illustrate. What's more, being able to speak the language of the country where you are living, or the language of your international colleagues if you are working domestically, allows you to have a greater understanding of a country's culture, facilitates more meaningful (and in some cases, more

culturally appropriate) communication, and helps you navigate daily life with much more ease if you are living abroad. While picking up a more obscure local dialect may not be as critical, the majority of development jobs (based in the US or abroad) require *at least* one language other than English, and often speaking two or three other languages is desireable.

Growth Areas: Regardless of whether you prefer to be a generalist or technical specialist or if you are already in the midst of completing a graduate degree, it is important to be aware that there are currently several large growth areas in development work. Climate change was mentioned the most often. Gender mainstreaming, agriculture, and health (particularly malaria) were also mentioned, but not nearly as frequently as climate change. It may be a coincidence, but the two people I spoke with who have started work within the past several years are working on climate change issues.

So, whether they are specialists or generalists, people with expertise in these areas may fare better in their job searches. However, several people also commented on the mercurial nature of funding dollars in development. In other words, if you happen to be an expert in malaria, that's probably great news today, but a few years down the road attention may have shifted to some other hot topic.

On Your Mark, Get Set, Go! But Be Ready to Compete: Once you have done the necessary background research about the kind of development career that you would like, gained some overseas experience, and have added that graduate degree to your resume, get ready to put yourself out there. Remember the development field has become increasingly competitive. Jennifer Johnson reiterated this when I interviewed her. She said, I think it's incredibly competitive. I think that people need to be realistic about what they need to bring to the table in order to get into to the field." Johnson said that she did not think that a commitment to help is

good enough in this economy, and echoed Peterson's opinion that gaining as much field experience as possible when you are young is a good idea. An ability to communicate your interest and ability quickly and authentically was something that she thought was important. She also talked about the importance of being able to articulate transferable skills:

> For instance, somebody who worked on microfinance in India, for example, could talk about how that experience speaks to broader development. You know there's a lot of transferrable skills and being able to frame any skill that you bring to a potential employer…

Miranda Moore, who works at Land O' Lakes International Development, also talked about how competitive development can be. She talked about beginning her career at Chemonics with a bachelor's degree in international relations and relatively little overseas experience about ten years ago. When reflecting on her career and the ways that the field has become increasingly competitive, she doubted that someone applying to the same position with the same credentials that she had then would even be considered.

CAREER CONSIDERATIONS

The professionals whom I interviewed offered a lot of advice about getting your foot in the door and building your resume while you are still a student. We also discussed important things that people should keep in mind before they get started and good things to do once you have found your first development job.

"The 30,000 Foot View": Suggestions for finding your niche: It should be very evident by now that there are a wide variety of international development careers. Headquarters work and life looks very different than work and life in the field or in the national offices of developing countries. While it may seem obvious to some, it is important to note that there are significant differences between working in a developing country and working in development domestically. Working abroad means living abroad: nearly every aspect of your life would be

affected by your decision to work overseas. Electing to work from the United States may require significant travel duty to other countries, but would not affect all other non-work aspects of your life to the degree that living overseas would. The kinds of work might also differ dramatically depending on where you chose to work and live.

Working for a large government organization is very different than working for a small non-governmental organization. Working for a multilateral organization like the United Nations is very different from either of these. Given the rich variety of the field, knowing how things work together, or where you would best fit, can be very confusing. François Dubois suggested that you should be thorough in your research about the kinds of development career options, as a way of narrowing down the areas of development and/or kinds of agencies that you would be interested in working for.

Jennifer Johnson added that it is important to know yourself, what kinds of things you would be comfortable doing, and knowing which level of development you would like to work in (i.e. if you would prefer to work in a small village in a developing country someplace or work at a large organization's headquarters in Washington DC).

Johnson described her position with the US government as taking "a 30,000 foot view." She said that a lot of her work focused on influencing policy at the macro level. She is able to influence policy about how development assistance is provided to countries around the world; either by making sure that the viewpoints of recipient countries are taken into account or that those countries are actually in the leading roles, or making sure that projects are being coordinated with others. She said her influence is often subtle but she sees ways that her work affects policy decisions, which can affect millions of peoples' lives.

Johnson added that her job would probably not be the perfect fit for everyone, and like Dubois stressed that doing some research and self-reflection will help you find your niche.

Moving on Up: Be strategic once you find your first development job. This was advice given by several of the professionals that I spoke with. Scott Robertson described it this way:

> Whenever you get a job…the only thing you should be doing is doing that job [well] and working towards your next job. That's the advice somebody gave me once. …Don't worry about anything you've done in the past, but figure out what's the job you want, and this is in addition to doing your job well. You should also be thinking about what's the next job you want, what the skills are that are going to get you there and who you have to know to get it [the next job].

Christina Meyer said something similar, stating that having a longer-term goal is important. She said that she thinks that it is often the case that when people get started in development, often in their twenties or earlier thirties, they may not be thinking about what it will take for them to move up "the ladder of development" as she termed it. She gave the example of a twenty-something starting out as a program manager in a developing country, who knows that they would eventually like to work for the UN. She said that she thought that people are not necessarily taught to think about how they might move up; that they do not necessarily think about the steps needed to advance to other positions. She said:

> …People forget that development is an industry just like anything else. They forget that because it's also supposed to be for altruistic purposes but it is an industry and still has its own kind of games, issues, and politics.

Several others gave similar advice. Many people also mentioned you should also consider the ways that working in development, if you chose to work abroad, will affect your personal life. Many of following examples are from people who have spent a good part of their careers living overseas. I spoke to many people who are based in the US too, but thought it more important to highlight considerations about living abroad since working in the United States is likely more familiar to most readers.

Amelia Anderson told me about a Norwegian family that she and her husband met while they were living overseas. The family consisted of a couple that worked for WHO and their son, who was a teenager when Anderson met him. She recalled that he could hardly read or write in Norwegian, "his native tongue," because he had grown up abroad and had only been to Norway for visits.

Anderson's anecdote illustrates one of the ways that a working in development can affect a person's family. A career in development living overseas will affect your personal life in many ways. When I asked what students or recent graduates should consider before pursuing these careers, many professionals, particularly those who have been at it for a while emphasized how this type of work affects your life outside of work.

On Love, er…Life in the Field: Christina Meyer has worked in developing countries for the past ten years or so, and provided the following insight on how living abroad can affect personal relationships:

> You know, I was really lucky. I met my husband when I was in Liberia and he does development work and we can move together. But even then it's not always easy to get a job in the same place. You know, we travel a lot, we don't see each other a lot, you don't see your family a lot, and you know, I think that's hard for some people.

She also reiterated what Anderson said about it being difficult for some people to go back. She said that when she worked at the Population Council someone had given her advice about not staying too long in the field, because it would be really hard to come back. She said that she thinks that advice is really true.

Meyer also noted that she has friends who have been working abroad for ten years or so, who are now in their late thirties and early forties and realizing that they would like to get married and have children. She explained that there are:

> …two problems with that…if you're moving all the time to different missions doing one or two year postings…it's not always easy; and, some of them have gone back to the States, and now you've had all these experiences and you're trying to find somebody who has had the same experiences and it's really hard. I'm not saying that people should give that up, but I'm saying that it might impact their personal life more than they think it will.
>
> I've seen people struggle having to live apart from their significant other. Or having missed funerals, or weddings, or births or….getting so used to the lifestyle that when they try to go back they can't, or … I'm over generalizing, but I think that's a real challenge, and that most people don't necessarily think about it when they start out. Because when you start out you're single, or most of us are single and you just kind of go for it.

Meyer was not the only person who brought up the difficulties of transitioning out of work in the field. Several people remarked that it is wise when you begin to also think about how you will get out.

Have an Exit Strategy: Scott Robertson explained that he thought the first thing you should do if you end up working overseas is to decide how long you want to live abroad. He said that if you spend 10 or 15 years living internationally it can be very challenging to transition back. He suggested that having an exit strategy, or plan for transitioning back to work and life in your home country can make leaving overseas work much easier when you are ready to do that.

Amanda Peterson also talked about having an exit strategy and provided an example during our interview. When I asked about the kinds of things someone should consider or think about before starting she said:

> Is the skill applicable should you change your mind and decide you want a domestic career? So, for example, if your specialty is a certain kind of pest control around soybean fields in East Asia, that may not be as useful in the United States …The reason is that as people get older their willingness to travel changes; as people have families their ability to travel changes, and sometimes their focus changes. So that's one thing that I do see as a drawback. …Something to definitely consider is how transferable the skills that you're using are...

Robertson echoed this sentiment, saying, "it's very hard [for people] to head home with no job skills suited for the United States." Amelia Anderson talked about how it can be difficult for

people to head home at all after spending many years in the field. She gave this example of a retired American ex patriot that she and her husband met in Thailand. He had worked for the WHO for a long time and commented to Anderson and her husband, "You know, I can't go home. I've tried, I have gone back, and I just don't fit in anymore." She recalled that:

> In a way he seemed like a person without a country. I think when we were there about five years he said to us, "I think you've been here long enough that you won't be able to go home."
>
> And I said to my husband, "We've got to get out of here!"

She and her husband are now happily retired in Minneapolis.

Don't Kid Yourself: Change Doesn't Happen Overnight: Many people chose to go into international development work because they are committed to making a difference, or driven by the desire to do something to improve the lives of others. Driven by idealism, many people find that their expectations may not necessarily match the day-to-day realities. While important change can and does happen through development work, it is often at a much slower rate than someone with little field experience might anticipate. A number of the professionals also commented on this, and stressed the importance of having realistic expectations. In many cases, the results of a project may take years to see. In other situations immediate change might be visible but may not last beyond a few months or years. Amelia Anderson thought that reading about other peoples' experiences and trying to establish realistic expectations is important. She said that she knows a lot of people who are disappointed in international work because their expectations for what could be accomplished were unrealistic. She said that she thinks that, "this is sometimes their error—and really the local people—you have to come in and look back, look at them, look at their situation and see what it is you think you can do to help them. And that will vary from place to place."

Non-Monetary Rewards: While waiting to see the fruits of your labor can be difficult, everyone that I interviewed easily came up with examples of how their development work had been rewarding. All of the people that I spoke with talked about the sense that they were making a difference in people's lives. Many also highlighted the benefits of continual learning, always being exposed to something new, and meeting many interesting people.

In order to contextualize "making a difference" here are four stories that people told me during the course of the interviews. Also note that these stories demonstrate the different kinds of development work currently being done around the world.

Undocumented Migrants can Sing Karaoke to: Amelia Anderson told a story about a kind of stakeholder meeting that brought various groups from along the Thai-Burmese border together when she worked at the WHO. She explained that the Thai Ministry of Health, local people, and NGOs did not interact much when she first arrived in Thailand. Anderson began holding coordination meetings, in spite of some initial resistance. She held meetings on topics like malaria or tuberculosis, or other health issues that were affecting the population. She planned a large-scale general coordination meeting once a year where various organizations had a chance to set up displays about the kinds of work that they did.

Anderson said that she realized the greatest benefit of these meetings were the interactions that they created between groups that might have not communicated much otherwise. She recalled that at one of the last coordination meetings she attended:

> I was at a dinner that we had on the first night and I looked up and [saw]—Thais love Karaoke, so there's always karaoke at these events—and I looked up and there on stage was the head of [a local] university's School of Public Health, and there was an official from the Myanmar Ministry of Health, and there was someone from the Thai Ministry of Health, and an illegal migrant. And they were up there all singing Elvis Presley's "Kiss Me Quick". And I thought, yeah, that's it. When they start interacting like that, then it spreads to working together in other ways too.

Anderson noted that the Thailand Ministry of Health took over the coordination meetings when she left because they valued the ways that they brought people together and fostered cooperation. Other programs that she had helped initiate and implement are also still up and running.

Ethiopian Goat Leather Shoes: Miranda Moore told me that one of the things that she enjoys the most about her job is constantly learning new things. She gave a recent example of visiting a goat tannery in Ethiopia. Land O' Lakes was preparing to bid on a large livestock processing plant in Ethiopia, and Moore explained that she was learning about the hide, skin and leather industry there.

She had the opportunity to tour a tannery factory. When she arrived at the tannery she saw a large pile of what seemed to be stinking dead goats but were actually only goatskins waiting outside to be processed. Moore toured the factory and learned how goatskins are turned into shoes and other leather products. She enjoyed learning about the process, and also noted that the project (which she did not specify) will help to improve not only Ethiopia's leather exports, but also the export of its meat and dairy products. She mentioned how interesting she found it that the tannery owner had to increase the cost of the shoes that his factory produced because he had to import shoe boxes to package his goat leather shoes. He could find no one in Ethiopia who made them.

Mountaintop Gardening in Peru: Amber Hill of Compassion International cited a recent experience she had visiting a child who is sponsored through a Compassion program as an example of what makes her career very rewarding. She gave the example of a child named Javier who she met in Peru last November. She said that Javier had had a terrible situation at home, "his dad was a drunk and was beating him and his mom. His mom and his brother and

sister decided they were going to move closer to his mom's sister so they could be protected… they just needed to get away…"

She explained that Javier has been in the Compassion child sponsorship program for a year, ever since he and his mother and siblings moved. He is sponsored by an Anglican priest in the United Kingdom. She said that Javier asked her to let his sponsor know that her support was making a difference in his life, and that he would love to hear from her. He told Hill that he plans to grow up to be a leader in his community. She went onto describe how his circumstances have changed. Javier now lives in a garage at his aunt's house, and the local church that he attends is working on hydroponics. The church did not have room to grow the vegetables, so Javier asked his uncle if the church could grow the vegetables on his land. Hill recalled:

> We're in Peru on the side of a mountain, and it's very steep, and there's not a lot of land at all—there's a lot of dirt but there's just a little bit of land, so he [Javier] took the leadership to go and ask his uncle if the church could go and plant there. And now the church is growing fruit and vegetables for the kids, and he helps to bring the fruit and vegetables down to the church every month or so when they're harvested.
>
> He's taking ownership… That's one thing Compassion does. Sometimes the poor don't have dreams. They can't see beyond what they are in. But Javier is a perfect example of how he's expanding his mind and starting to lead in his community. That's just—it's very rewarding to see that. Poor children should have dreams. So … I could spend all day talking about it because it's just so fantastic.

Her enthusiasm for her work and for Compassion's work on a larger scale were very clear during our interview.

Over One Hundred Clinics, and Counting! When I arrived at the St. Paul, Minnesota headquarters of Mano a Mano, Martin Freudenberg gave me a tour. The headquarters is a large house, where Mano a Mano's founders used to live but eventually donated to the organization. During my tour Freudenberg pointed out a large wall dedicated to displaying pamphlets about all the clinics that the organization has built in Bolivia over the past several decades. Mano a Mano

has constructed 108 clinics in Bolivia and is still building. The wall where the pamphlets are displayed is the wall that separates the main office from the packing area: two huge rooms set aside for packing medical and other supplies to be shipped to Bolivia, all packaged by volunteers.

When I asked him what some of the most rewarding aspects of his work with Mano a Mano had been he said, "I think there's always just the genuine satisfaction of knowing that you're helping to make a difference." Later he added he looks at Mano a Mano's work with a sense of pride, knowing that the organization has made a difference. Freudenberg said that when he sees that he's made a difference in one person's life that's his reward. He said that he gets more satisfaction from receiving a $10 donation for the organization that he knows will make a difference in someone's life than from being driven by earning a lot of personal wealth.

YOUR JOURNEY BEGINS

It is my hope that these discussions have benefitted you as you begin or continue your job search. The advice and recommendations included in this paper represent a substantial portion of what the professionals whom I interviewed said. Many people offered additional insight that was very interesting but not as pertinent to students or recent graduates looking for ways to get their development careers started.

The professionals whom I interviewed provided an enormous amount of information about the ways that you might get your start, but it is clear that there is much more useful information a job seeker could gain. The findings I presented only offer a general overview of development careers; I did not explore entry into specific sectors or agencies in detail. A student who has identified interests in a certain development topic or organization would benefit by conducting informational interviews with professionals in those sectors. They should also

consider pursuing volunteer or internship opportunities in those areas if possible. As a word of encouragement, the professionals whom I spoke with were happy to answer my questions and offer advice. I suspect that other students would have a similar experience.

There are several ways future studies might build on this paper. More development professionals in bilateral, multilateral, and non-governmental organizations could be interviewed to gather additional advice about other ways that recent graduates might find employment in each sector. Future studies could also focus on a specific area of development by topic, like climate change or literacy; by tracking a certain graduate degree across the various kinds of development organizations; or by type of agency.

A survey that asks development workers across sectors about their educational background, skills, and graduate degrees could be added to this paper or to future studies. A survey would be useful in determining the kinds of skills and degrees that are most valuable in today's development marketplace.

Limitations, Potential Bias: Because I had one semester to design a project, obtain IRB approval, find and contact development professionals, and conduct research I was only able to conduct eleven interviews. Many of the people whom I interviewed said similar things, regardless of which sector they worked in or how long they have been in development. However, it is unlikely that total saturation, or a complete picture of the job possibilities within international development, was reached.

The snowball sampling method I used to find individuals to interview was effective, but it may have yielded biased results. There were several people who refused interviews because they were unhappy in their current positions. They may have refused because when I approached them I cast international development in a positive light. To decrease this bias, a

future study might explore the topic from a more neutral perspective, or take the approach of a critical review of the different sectors within the field. The people whom I spoke to were generally satisfied with their careers, and thus willing to talk about them with a graduate student. As a result, the positive aspects of development work may be overstated.

What's more, several of the professionals whom I interviewed were either Humphrey alumni or had connections to the school. Their past and current connections to the school likely made them more familiar with public affairs curriculum. This offers a great advantage to public policy students who are reading this paper in some ways, but it could also mean that the perspectives included here have a heavier public policy focus than is actually represented in international development. Further research would need to be conducted to determine whether or not this is the case.

Finally, I must mention my own potential interviewer's bias. My limited experience working in development consists of a 2010 summer internship at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. This experience has made me more familiar with the inner workings of multilateral development agencies than I am with bilateral or non-governmental organizations. As such, I may have interpreted the interview findings through a multilateral lens.

Happy Job Hunting and Best of Luck! I wish you well as you begin your journey down the road less travelled toward an international development career. As a parting thought, here are a few more words from two of the professionals that I spoke with; one whose career has come to a close, and one whose career has just begun:

> **Amelia Anderson:** …I think there also needs to be in development work a mindset that you're leaving… Don't try to work yourself into a permanent job—think, "How can I work myself out of this job?" And how can the local people—what can I do to make sure that the local people can carry on this work after I leave?

> **Chad Schmidt:** I guess it's really about changing your perspective of development organizations…because of the stage they operate on, they can be intimidating to approach and confusing to enter…but really, this is a profession where labor is a hot commodity and the work is always there. People are hungry, displaced, sick and poor. It's the saddest form of job security. Supervisors are looking for motivated people who, even though they don't have a ton of experience, are willing to contribute.

Juxtaposing these statements demonstrates the cyclical nature of development work: work yourself out of a job in one place so that you can be available to go to work in other areas of need. While this philosophy may be easier to write about than actually practice, it was a sentiment expressed time and again throughout my interviews with development professionals.

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APPENDIX I – SELECT RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS AND JOB SEEKERS

DEVELOPMENT JOB WEBSITES

Development organizations and agencies frequently post jobs on the following websites:

- http://www.idealist.org
- http://www.devex.com
- http://www.devnetjobs.org/

U.S. GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

The agencies listed below provide opportunities for current students and budding development professionals. More information can be found on each of their websites.

- ***Peace Corps of the United States***
  http://www.peacecorps.gov/
  Telephone (Washington DC): 800-424-8580

  -*Master's International:* http://www.peacecorps.gov/masters

- ***U.S. Department of International Development (USAID)***
  http://www.usaid.gov/
  Telephone (Washington DC): 202-712-0000

- ***U.S. Department of State – Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)***
  http://exchanges.state.gov

  -**Especially for students**: http://www.careers.state.gov/student.index.html

  -*The Presidential Management Fellowship:* www.pmf.gov

  -*Fulbright Program: http://www.iie.org/fulbright*

MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS

Multinational organizations often post open jobs and information on their own websites.

- ***United Nations Development Program (UNDP)***
  www.undp.org
- ***United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)***
  www.unesco.org
- ***United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)***
  www.fao.org

- ***World Bank***
  www.worldbank.org

- ***World Health Organization (WHO)***
  www.who.int

RECOMMENDED READING:

Working World: Careers in International Education, Exchange, and Development by Sherry L. Mueller & Mark Overmann. Georgetown University Press. Available from www.amazon.com

Careers in International Affairs: Eighth Edition by Maria Pinto Carland & Candace Faber. Georgetown University Press. Available from www.amazon.com

APPENDIX II—ALPHABETICAL DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATIONS

The following is a list of the organizations that the professionals that I interviewed work for, with a brief description of each agency. The organizations where the people who preferred to remain anonymous work are not listed.

The Center for International Tropical Agriculture (CIAT):
CIAT is a not-for-profit international agricultural research institution. It was established in 1970 as one of four original research centers of the Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). CIAT currently works if 50 countries worldwide. It focuses on scientific solutions to hunger in the tropics; specifically on eco-efficient agriculture, and sustainable methods of food production. It is headquartered near Cali, Colombia.
http://www.ciat.cgiar.org/

Compassion International:
Compassion International is a Christian child advocacy organization. Headquartered in Colorado Springs, CO, the organization has four major programs that assist children throughout the developing world. The organization works to release "children from spiritual, economic, social and physical poverty" and enable them "to become responsible fulfilled Christian adults through its programs.[1] It was founded in 1952.
http://www.compassion.com

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO):
FAO is one of the agencies within the United Nations system that works to defeat hunger. The following is the description found on the organization's website: *Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy. FAO is also a source of knowledge and information. We help developing countries and countries in transition modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices and ensure good nutrition for all. Since our founding in 1945, we have focused special attention on developing rural areas, home to 70 percent of the world's poor and hungry people.*
http://www.fao.org

Mano a Mano International Partners:
Mano a Mano is headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota. It is a 501(c)(3) organization, its mission is to "create partnerships with impoverished Bolivian communities to improve health and increase economic well-being. It donates medical supplies, and builds infrastructure for education, healthcare, and economic development in Bolivia. The organization operates largely through a volunteer network.
http://www.manoamano.org

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
The following is a description from USAID's website: *USAID is an independent federal government agency that receives overall foreign policy guidance from the Secretary of State. Its work supports long-term and equitable economic growth and advances U.S. foreign policy objectives by supporting: economic growth, agriculture and trade; global health; and, democracy, conflict prevention and humanitarian assistance. USAID provides assistance in five regions of the world: Sub-Saharan Africa; Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and Eurasia; and the Middle East.*
http://www.usaid.gov/

Land O' Lakes International Development:
Land O' Lakes International Development was established in 1981. It functions as a not-for-profit division of the Land O' Lakes, Inc. It works to assist farmers in developing countries gain access to new markets and improve the quality and quantity of their yields through sharing technical expertise and assistance. Land O' Lakes International Development has five key practice areas: Agricultural productivity and competitiveness; enterprise and cooperative development; food systems and safety; food security and livelihoods; and nutrition and health.
http://www.idd.landolakes.com/

[1] Compassion International's website

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine:
The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine is a large program within the University of London. Its mission is to: *contribute to the improvement of health worldwide through the pursuit of excellence in research, postgraduate teaching and advanced training in national and international public health in tropical medicine, and through informing policy and practice in these areas.*[2]

World Health Organization (WHO):
The following is a description from the organization's website: *WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.*
www.who.int

[2] London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine's website

APPENDIX III – INTERVIEWER'S GUIDE

1. **IRB Informed Consent/Introductory remarks**

2. **Interview Questions:**

    - **Can you tell me how you got started doing this kind of work?** (All position levels)

Questions for Junior Level Positions:

- Are/were there things that have surprised you about your job that you weren't expecting? (Or, in other words, does your job meet the expectations you had about it, what has been surprising? Expected?)

- What advice would you give to someone starting out who was interested in finding a similar job?

- What do you think are some of the most important things that someone interested in a job like yours should consider before they start (OR Is there anything you wish someone would have told you before you started?

- What do you think are the challenges that might prevent people who are interested from starting this kind of work?

Questions for Mid-level professionals:

- If you were a student again, what would you do differently to prepare for your career?

- What advice would you give to someone new to the field that was looking for a job?

- What are some of the most important things that someone planning to enter a career like yours should know (or take into consideration)?

Questions for Senior Level/Upper Level Professionals:

- How has the field/ the work changed since you began your career?

- What advice would you offer students/ recent graduates who are interested in pursuing development careers (or careers in the person's sector of development)?

- If you were a student again, what would you do differently to prepare for your career?

- What have been some of the most rewarding aspects of your career?

Wrapping up:

- Any further thoughts?
- What is the most important thing that we talked about today?

3. **Biographical Information:**

Name:

Organization:

How long have you worked for this organization?

How long have you held your present position?

What is your exact job title?

What was your highest degree in?

May I use your name and the name of your organization in my thesis?

Finally, can you recommend a colleague who might be willing to talk to me? (Snowball sampling)

APPENDIX IV - METHODOLOGY

METHODS:

1) **A Literature Review of sources on:**
    a. Definition of International Development
    b. A brief history of modern development (including brief discussions of theories behind it/behind the various types of organizations)
    c. The various sectors/types of organizations in development
    d. Finding international careers (development and otherwise); advice for graduate students searching for development careers
    e. Additional pertinent information (based on things interviewees say)

2) **Interviews (qualitative) with development professionals in a variety of organizations.**
    a. The specific organizations will in part be determined by contacts/network of contacts available, but ideally will include: NGOs, Government Agencies, IGOs (like the United Nations), Academia, and possible others.

    b. I will use existing contacts from my internship (FAO), contacts found through HHH, and snowball sampling to find more interviewees.

    c. Goal for number of interviews conducted: 10 at the *very* minimum. The maximum will depend on time, the availability of interviewees, and saturation (though unlikely given the scope of this project).

    d. Interview duration of 20 minutes minimum, 60 minutes maximum.

    e. Initial contact via email, interviews conducted in person or via Skype (or Skype Out if the other party does not have Skype).

    f. Interview topic(s): how interviewees entered a development career, possible entry points for would-be development professionals, advice they have for current students, etc. (*See Interviewer's guide*)

3) Analysis of interview findings including how findings may relate to existing literature, to students' classroom experience (based on the author's experience), and best practices for entering an international development career.

4) Recommendations for students and recent graduates based on interview findings and from literature review.

APPENDIX V – IRB CONSENT INFORMATION SHEET

Information Sheet for Research

Title of Research: Career Paths into International Development

Name of Researcher: Emily Mowchan, Humphrey School of Public Affairs—University of Minnesota

Before agreeing to take part in this research study, it is important that you read the following explanation of the project. This statement describes the purpose, process, benefits and risks, discomforts, and precautions of the study. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Procedures:
This research study is designed to investigate the ways that international development workers first enter the profession. Emily Mowchan, a graduate student at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs, is conducting this study to examine some of the various career paths that exist in international development. If you decide to participate this would involve completing one 20 to 60 minute interview about your career, and possible brief email correspondence following the interview. The interview may be recorded by the interviewer and transcribed later for data analysis. The interview will take place via phone or Skype, or in a setting that is mutually agreeable to the interviewee and researcher.

Risks and Discomforts:
There are no risks or discomforts expected from your participation in this project. Possible risks or discomforts may include feelings of sadness or nostalgia that arise when responding to interview questions.

Benefits:
The expected benefits of participation in the study are to gain information about the numerous entry points into development careers, and feeling a sense of satisfaction from sharing wisdom and expertise with the next generation of development professionals.

Confidentiality:
The information gathered during this study will remain confidential if you so desire. Your name and the name of your organization will be re-coded with made up names if for any reason you do not wish the information to appear in drafts or final versions of the project. The researcher will ask whether or not your name and the name of your organization can be used at the end of the interview. If the interview is recorded the recording will be saved on a flash drive that will be kept in a locked drawer that only the researcher will have access to. Any recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study. The results of the research will be published as a graduate paper, and may be published in a professional journal.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary; there is no penalty for refusing to participate. If you choose to participate you are free not to answer any question, or to stop participating at any time without affecting your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota.

Cost and/or Payment to Subject for Participation in Research:
There is no cost to participate in this study. You will not be paid for your participation.

Contact and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Emily Mowchan. If you have any questions later you are encouraged to contact her at 651-235-7511 or mowc0001@umn.edu. You may also contact the student's faculty advisor for the project, Professor Deborah Levison, at 612-624-3540 or dlevison@umn.edu.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher you are encouraged to contact the Research Subject's Advocate Line at D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; 612-625-1650.