# International Development

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Introduction

What is international development?

“International development” is a very broad term. It is used to mean the development of livelihoods and greater quality of life for human beings and therefore encompasses many areas, including all of the seventeen sustainable development goals:

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalealities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
17. Partnerships for the goals

“International development” is by definition a process undertaken by countries and communities with assistance from other nations and communities, from international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as charities or from international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Monetary Fund or the World Bank.

“International development” is also distinct from, though conceptually related to, “disaster relief” and “humanitarian aid”. These are short-term fixes to emergency situations. “International development”, on the other hand, seeks to implement long-term solutions to problems by helping developing countries create the necessary capacity needed to provide such sustainable solutions to their problems.

This guide focuses primarily on careers with NGOs. See the chapter on international organisations for further information on the career options they offer.
I’ve heard it’s very difficult to get in – is it?

The main reason that people find it difficult to “get in” is that there is no single established route. There are perhaps four basic things you need for a career in international development:

• Passion for tackling poverty and injustice
• Overseas experience of living and working in a developing country
• Professional expertise that can range from good admin skills to advanced technical knowledge
• Initiative to create the career opportunities for yourself

The exciting, and sometimes scary, thing about a career in international development is that there is no set or linear way in. This means you will need a lot of initiative to open doors and make your own career path. It also means that wherever you are starting from you can work towards getting a job in this sector, if you really want to.

Careers Adviser

Types of jobs

Field-based work

A word of warning here - almost everyone who comes to see us at the Careers Service wants to do “field based work”. For paid work “in the field” you need to be highly trained in a specific skill and have substantial amounts of relevant overseas experience. If you are such a person you probably do not need this guide!

If you are an undergraduate or recent graduate with no professional specialism to bring and little overseas experience then you have a long haul ahead before you can earn a salary “in the field”. You will need to be strategic about getting relevant professional training (probably by working in the developed world first) and gaining overseas experience (almost inevitably by volunteering). Wherever possible, organisations will want to employ local people (who may be very highly qualified) because they speak the language and understand the culture. You need exceptional levels of expertise if you want to do solely field based work.

So it’s worth saying at this point that you can contribute to the relief of poverty by doing non-field based work. Fundraisers, Campaigners, Programme Officers (who oversee projects from a distance) can still be very effective – and often make frequent trips to the developing world.
Ways to make a difference whilst based in the UK

You don’t have to live in Africa to make difference for people living in the world’s poorest communities. Before you hop on the next plane it’s worth considering the many ways that you can make a real difference by working within the UK. Unless you are a highly trained water engineer or primary healthcare specialist you might make a more immediate contribution if you consider one of the following areas:

i) **Development Education** – educating and informing people here in the UK about the causes of poverty and the injustices that keep people poor. This might involve working in schools, writing material for use by voluntary groups, writing brochures/material for a UK-based NGO.

ii) **Campaigning** – mobilising the public/lobbying Government to change the unjust structures that keep people poor. Campaigning organisations need experts in certain fields but they also need communicators who can translate the mass of information available on climate change, for example.

iii) **Fundraising** – raising the money that enables vital emergency aid or long-term development programmes. You might raise money from the general public, from trust funds or from major donors such as Comic Relief and the Big Lottery Fund. Many students who visit us at the Careers Service don’t want to work in fundraising. They want to do something more “worthy” than asking people for money. It’s worth unpacking your prejudices about this. Raising money for disaster relief or a micro-finance scheme in one of the world’s poorest countries can be very fulfilling and exciting. If you might have talents in this area don’t ignore them!

“As a health worker people seem to think I must feel permanently positive about what I do. But it’s such an exhausting job, and things go wrong all the time. There are so few resources to do things properly and the bureaucracy is horrendous. The constant travelling messes up my social life, I long for an internet connection that works, and to turn a tap on and have clean water come out! But, that said, I still can’t imagine doing anything else.”

*Field coordinator, International Rescue Committee*
Types of jobs in a UK-based charity

Support roles
The jobs on the left of the organogram focus on fundraising, marketing and campaigning to raise money and awareness of the issues that keep people poor. For these positions you generally need some experience of the function (e.g. charity fundraising whilst at university or being involved in some campaigning work). They will also usually require you to have spent some (but not a lot of) time in a developing country e.g. a summer of volunteering.

Programmes work
The jobs on the right of the organogram are termed as “programme” work. Here a Programme Officer will be responsible for a number of projects in a certain area of the world. They will support the local project staff through regular visits and training – and will monitor and evaluate the success of the project to ensure the charity’s money is being well-spent. For jobs in this area you are likely to need substantially more overseas experience.
Breaking the experience trap
Getting overseas experience
If you haven’t already spent time in a developing country you need to – and sooner rather than later. It’s by far the most important experience to get early on. Employers in the sector generally value experience overseas more highly than academic qualifications. You’re a risky investment until ‘tried and tested’ in the field. So, if you are thinking of spending time and money to kick-start your career in international development, voluntary work overseas is likely to be a more useful starting point than a course of further study.

The experience might lead you to decide development isn’t a long-term option for you – so the postgrad course might have been a wasted investment. People working in the sector often benefit more from further study later on, once they have some experience under their belt.

Visit Vacancies & Opportunities on the Careers Service website to search for opportunities to volunteer abroad – and don’t just look at current opportunities (with the deadlines still open) – look at the vast number of past adverts for organisations to approach. Don’t forget to look at Vacation Opportunities (current and past) as well.

http://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/CamCareers/Vacancies.aspx

Use the long summers at Cambridge to go abroad – our Careers Service Summer Bursary Scheme can help fund this:

www.careers.cam.ac.uk/bursary/index.asp

Going overseas will give you a reality check and help you appreciate the complexities and challenges for people working in this field. A period overseas will also help you decide whether this is really a career for you.

See the following example CV of someone who went abroad straight after Cambridge, then gained professional experience.

“My experiences in Bangladesh were unforgettable and highly influential for me. They have confirmed my aspirations to enter the humanitarian sector and take up a career in health research.”

Volunteer funded through the Careers Service Summer Bursary Scheme
Working your way up from the bottom

Another tried and tested route is to apply for a non-graduate job with an organisation you really want to work for (PA, admin, data entry roles). These jobs may not be glamorous, but can give you valuable insights into the international development world – and how the organisation functions. You will also have access to any internal vacancies that may come up. Be aware, though, that if you take one of these less exciting jobs you have to keep motivated – keep impressing people and seizing any opportunities it creates. Be willing to take menial, non-graduate jobs. Keep your eyes and ears open. Learn – and work your way up.

See the following example CV of someone who worked their way up within the sector.

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“\[quote\]
*I was doing some pretty boring office stuff: preparing tender documents, maintaining databases, writing proposals – there was plenty of opportunity to get to understand the development business and see how things worked. After six months I had talked my boss into an overseas trip: they had some spare budget to spend and needed someone who knew how to use a database so I put my hand up and went to India. Within another six months I had persuaded my boss to let me start some new programmes work...*\n
Cambridge alumnus
Getting in by working your way up

**Career path** (most recent first):

**Currently:** Head of Campaigns, WaterAid, England
12 months: Regional Campaigns and Policy Manager, Oxfam (based in Dakar, Senegal)
  • Managing campaigns and policy work across Oxfam’s 8 countries in West Africa
12 months: Campaigner, Oxfam, focusing on the Arms Trade Treaty and humanitarian campaigning on Chad and Darfur
12 months: Media Manager, Global Call to Action against Poverty (Make Poverty History in the UK), secondment
  • Managing media for this global version of Make Poverty History, especially at the G8 in Gleneagles in 2005 and at the UN World Summit in October 2005
24 months: Communications Officer, Global Movement for Children, based at Save the Children UK
  • Management of the joint HIV-AIDS campaigns of this global coalition of children’s charities
12 months: Marketing Executive, Raleigh International, England
12 months: Recruitment Coordinator, Raleigh International, England
12 months: Business Manager, Varsity Publications Ltd, England

**Education** (most recent first):

BA (Hons) English, Newnham College

**Volunteering**
Getting the experience you need usually means volunteering. Teaching in a developing country is one of the tried and tested ways to get overseas experience – and make a genuine contribution. This will usually mean paying your own way, but as you accumulate experience expenses, pocket money and other benefits tend to come your way.

If you already have overseas experience (or are planning to go overseas soon) you can get valuable insights into the workings of an international development organisation by volunteering at Head Office.
Getting in by volunteering

Career path (most recent first):
Currently: Governance Adviser, Department for International Development (DfID), Ghana
3 years: Economic Adviser, DfID, South Africa
2 years: Economics Adviser, DfID, England
3 years: Economic Adviser, DfID, Zimbabwe
4 years: Economic Adviser, Overseas Development Administration (ODA)/DfID, Kenya
3 years: Senior Economic Assistant, ODA, England
2 years: Senior Economic Assistant, Employment Department, England
1 year: Teacher, Pakame Secondary School, Zimbabwe

Education (most recent first):
MA Economics, University of Kent (Canterbury)
BA (Hons) Economics, Emmanuel College

Getting business or professional experience first
This sector wants and needs to employ highly skilled people – and yet tight budgets often mean charities and agencies will struggle to train you. For these reasons you need to bring some professional expertise and experience to the sector. For a first relatively junior admin job (that you are hoping will be a platform for working your way up) this can simply be basic office skills that you picked up during a summer of temping.

Other UK based jobs will require you to bring finance, project management, marketing or fundraising skills that you can learn elsewhere. For jobs that have more direct contact with the field you will often need highly specialised, professional expertise.

So if you have an idea of what kind of role or function (Project Manager, Marketing Executive, Fundraiser, HIV/AIDS Adviser etc) you would like to fulfil in the international development sector you might want formulate a plan to gain some experience/qualifications in a parallel sector – and transfer in. This will make you more valuable – you can come in at a higher level – and make a substantial contribution.

Find and download job descriptions for the kind of posts that you might head towards and use these to identify skills and expertise you need to acquire. It’s very common for people to gain professional expertise in other sectors of work – and then transfer into the international development sector later on.

See the following example CVs of people who gained professional expertise first.
Getting in by professional experience

**Career path (most recent first):**

**Currently:** Strategy Specialist, World Vision UK, Washington, DC
4 years: Strategy Consultant, Accenture, London
  - Most recently I spent one year setting up Accenture’s Sustainability Practice, with particular emphasis on helping clients respond to Climate Change
  - Prior to this I was on secondment for one year to the World Economic Forums. I worked for the Global Health Initiative, managing their HIV/AIDS projects in Africa.
  - My first two years focused on advising Consumer Goods companies

**Education (most recent first):**

Masters in International Development, Harvard Kennedy School, USA (Fulbright Scholarship)
BA (Hons) Economics, Jesus College

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Getting in by professional experience

**Career path (most recent first):**

**Currently:** Global Risk Assurance Manager, Save the Children UK
4 years: Audit Manager, Save the Children UK, London
  - 30% overseas travel, primarily Asia, Africa, including DRC, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Colombia
  - 50% overseas travel
  - Managed internal audit team
5 years: Assistant Manager, Food & Agriculture Group, Deloitte, Cambridge
  - Accountancy qualifications
  - Worked in small business advisory looking at accountancy, tax and audit
1 year: Freelance translation (French, German and Russian to English) for private company

**Education (most recent first):**

BA (Hons) Modern and Medieval Languages (French and Russian, Linguistics), Newnham College.
Year abroad as part of degree - studied in Angers, France
Getting in by professional experience

Career path (most recent first):
Currently: **Senior Project Manager, Adam Smith International**
1 year: Fund manager, Political Participation Fund, British Council
1 year: Deputy Editor, Middle East International
1 year: Founder, Where We Stand (UK NHO promoting British Arabs in public life)
6 months: Researcher/Assistant Project Coordinator, Foreign Policy Centre
6 months: Legal Adviser, Egyptian organisation for Human Rights, Egypt
1 year: Junior Investment Banking Analyst, ARC Associates

Education (most recent first):
Masters (not MEng/MSci), European Studies, Peterhouse
BA (Hons) English, Peterhouse

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Getting in by professional experience

Career path (most recent first):
Currently: **Civil Service Fast Stream**
• Currently on secondment to the Department for International Development: International Events and Policy team
• 9 months: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP): Private Secretary to the Secretary of State
• 6 months: DWP: Policy Review Secretariat
• 10 months: DWP: Pensions Protecting Briefing Team Leader
3 years: Senior Associate Consultant, Mars & Co
• International strategy consulting firm
• 4 month secondment in New York
• 3 month secondment in Moscow, followed by promotion

Education (most recent first):
BA (Hons) Mathematics and Management, St Catharine’s College
Further study

Further study can seem an obvious next step after Cambridge to make yourself more attractive to employers. But STOP! That MPhil, MA or even PhD can be very expensive – and of course time-consuming and it MAY not make you any more employable in the international development sector. When it comes to recruitment, international development organisations often favour overseas experience and/or transferable skills (such as office skills, experience in fundraising or communication, ability to juggle lots of competing priorities etc) more highly than a specific qualification. So before you embark on further study here are some points to consider.

**Do you really need that qualification?**
Look carefully at the job descriptions of the posts that attract you. What are the essential criteria? Do they require an MPhil? Or are they looking for specific skills and/or experience? Would your time and money be better invested in volunteering overseas or in the UK to gain those skills?

**Which (specific) doors would that qualification open for you?**
A vague notion that an extra qualification will make your CV more attractive to employers is not enough. Try to get a clear idea of what that qualification could lead onto. Ask the course provider what people go on to do after the course. Are they getting the kinds of jobs you are interested in? If not, this may not be the right course for you.

**Which qualification do you need?**
If you have identified that the kinds of jobs you are interested in do require further study, then make sure you check out exactly what they are asking for. This can be really important if you are hoping to work for an international organisation. Check out pages 15 to 22 for an introduction to what some of the well-known international organisations require.

**Is further study actually just a way of delaying the hard reality of needing to get a job?**
It’s worth asking that question. The need to find a job after Cambridge can be a scary step into the unknown. Further study can seem a safe and more comfortable option. Be honest with yourself about your reasons for further study. If you are serious about a career in international development you might need to be brave – perhaps go overseas or get a job to get you some of that all-important experience.

**What added value will you get from the course?**
As well as what you will learn formally from the course consider what you
will learn from the other students. What kinds of people take this course? If they are all fresh graduates like you then you might have fun but you won’t learn much from them! Try to find a course that is taken by people who have plenty of experience of working in international development. You will learn a huge amount from them – and they may well be useful contacts for your future work and career.

Would you benefit more from studying later on?
Many people working in international development benefit greatly from studying after they have had some years of working. Then you have a wealth of experience to draw on and apply to your studies. Studying later on, once you have spent some substantial time in the developing work, can then turbo-charge your career.

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**Getting in by further study**

**Career path (most recent first):**

**Currently:** Valid International
- 12 months: Constituency Manager to MEP
- 9 months: Data Analyst, Reuters
- 24 months: Policy Advisor, European Parliament, Belgium

**Education (most recent first):**
- MA Poverty, Conflict and Reconstruction, University of Manchester
- BA (Hons) Modern and Medieval Languages, Fitwilliam College

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**Getting in by further study**

**Career path (most recent first):**

**Currently:** Department for International Development (DFID)
- 12 months: Consultant at LICADHO, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- 12 months: Legal Advisor, Refugee Legal Aid Project, Cairo, Egypt

**Education (most recent first):**
- MPhil International Relations, Sidney Sussex College
- BA (Hons) Geography, Sidney Sussex College
Opportunities with international organisations

These organisations recruit globally so competition is fierce even at internship levels; many applicants therefore have significantly more experience than the basic levels quoted in the recruitment information. Most internship schemes require a postgraduate qualification. See their website for more information.

African Development Bank (AfDB)
www.afdb.org

Asian Development Bank (ADB)
www.adb.org/site/careers/main

International Finance Corporation (IFC)
www.ifc.org/careers

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

International Trade Centre (ITC)
www.intracen.org/itc/about/working-with-itc/itc-career/

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
www.oecd.org/careers/

UN Secretariat
www.careers.un.org

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/operations/jobs/work-for-world-development.html

World Bank (IBRD)
www.worldbank.org/careers

World Health Organization (WHO)
www.who.int
How to get your first job

Search for vacancies

Careers Service  www.careers.cam.ac.uk/CamCareers/Vacancies.aspx
Bond  www.bond.org.uk
Charityjob  www.charityjob.co.uk
Reliefweb  www.reliefweb.int

Potential employers / organisations to volunteer for

Action Aid  www.actionaid.org.uk
AfricaTrust Networks  www.africatrust.org.uk
Allwecan  www.allwecan.org.uk
Amnesty International  www.amnesty.org.uk
Aptivate  www.aptivate.org
ATD Fourth World International Movement  www.atd-uk.org
Azafady  www.madagascar.co.uk
BioRegional Development Group  www.bioregional.com
British Red Cross  www.redcross.org.uk
Cambridge University International Development (CUID)  www.cuid.org
Camfed UK  www.camfed.org
Camvol  www.camvol.org
Care International  www.careinternational.org.uk
Christian Aid  www.christianaid.org.uk
Comic Relief  www.comicrelief.com
Concordia International Volunteers  www.concordia-iye.org.uk
Development in Action  www.developmentinaction.org
Engineers without Borders (EWB)  www.ewb-uk.org
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  www.fco.gov.uk
Centre for Global Equality  www.humanitariancentre.org
Inter-Cultural Youth Exchange  www.icye.org.uk
International Citizens Service (ICS)  www.volunteerics.org
International Voluntary Service  www.ivsgb.org
Karen Hill Tribes  www.karenhilltribes.org.uk
Oasis Trust  www.oasisuk.org
Oxfam  www.oxfam.org.uk
Peace Child International  www.peacechild.org
RedR  www.redr.org
Restless Development  www.restlessdevelopment.org
SOS Children’s Villages UK  www.soschildrengroup.org.uk
TATA Group  www.tata.com
Tearfund  www.tearfund.org
How the Careers Service can help

Visit the international development pages of the Careers Service website: www.careers.cam.ac.uk/sectors/intdev/index.asp

Sign up for CamCareers emails to receive alerts for courses, events and other information about international development related things happening in Cambridge, e.g. International Development Careers Panel and UN Careers Day: www.careers.cam.ac.uk/CamCareers/Emails.aspx

Register for Vacancies and Opportunities. Save your search (you can save up to 10) to receive emails of appropriate jobs in the sector: www.careers.cam.ac.uk/CamCareers/Vacancies.aspx

Come to the Work to change the World event, our annual not-for-profit careers fair in February, with a whole section devoted to international development.

Our Careers Service Summer Bursary Scheme can help fund valuable experience overseas: www.careers.cam.ac.uk/bursary/index.asp

Book an appointment with a Careers Adviser. Visit www.careers.cam.ac.uk/library/studentinterviews/AppointmentBooking.asp to see which Careers Advisers specialise in international development.
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Choose your areas from the menu (add or change at any time)
Sign off from CamCareers at any time

GradLink
The easy way to network

Find out what jobs are really like from Cambridge alumni by browsing their career histories
Get in touch with specific questions, hear feedback on and receive advice
Browse the career history of other Cambridge graduates

Use GradLink on our website at: www.careers.cam.ac.uk/Gradlink

“I was unwilling to network because I’d never done it and felt a bit embarrassed, but all the GradLink people I emailed were happy to give me advice or just to tell me about their work. I especially appreciated the one who told me to think really hard about it and gave me the negative side of things too.”

~ Final year student ~