

Webinar on Work for Social Good – Careers in NGOs and International Organizations

26 November 2020

Webinar Summary

Ms. Jo Hayes, CEO of Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong:

Dispel Myths of Charitable Sector

- Working at charitable sector is more like two full-time jobs, because you will be purpose-driven – always thinking how to help people and make their lives better. It is hard work but very rewarding.
- “Working at charitable sector is badly paid” is a misconception. We are not greatly paid, but have decent salaries.
- For-impact (Non-profit) organizations also need skilled people, and the range of roles are massive, including HR specialists, and specialists in data analysis and research.

Career Tips

- You can discover your purpose and whether the values of an organization match you by ways such as volunteering, internships, and short-term contracts.
- Do not hesitate to ask about the values of the organization.
- Avoid job hopping.
- “Working for a for-impact organization can be a stepping stone to a corporate job, but for so many people, it can be a so meaningful and purpose-driven destination.”

Miss Queenie Law, former Gender and Social Inclusion Support Officer (UN Volunteer) of UNDP Lao DPR

- Joined UNDP through Hong Kong Agency for Volunteer Service: UNV- Hong Kong Universities Volunteer internship Programme
- Managed and oversaw projects such as Rule of Law, vocational training for women, and promoting Lao products to overseas markets
- Part of COVID-19 Crisis Response Team

Career Tips (For International NGOs)

- There are a lot of options. Do not limit yourself to the UN/renowned institutions only
- The sector is competitive – You need a master’s degree plus working experiences.
- The current trend is hiring more specialists (as to generalists) and valuing evident-based policymaking.
- Prepare for an unstable life – usually you do not stay in the same country for more than four years.
- There is not a clear job ladder.
- Be open-minded and be prepared.
- Research on work of different organizations. Use LinkedIn to connect with people working there.
- Explore an area to be specialized in and become an expert, while open to other perspectives, so to possess qualities of both specialists and generalists.
- Specialized in other languages can be a bonus.

Miss Karen Lau, UNV International Specialist (Country Functional Review) at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

- Went to a service trip to India for women empowerment when studying Pharmacy at HKU
- Pursued in a Global Health master's degree in London
- Worked in Health In Action in HK: served refugee asylum seekers, and advocated policies on e.g. healthcare access of poor families in HK
- Joined Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office (PICO), HKSARG as Policy Analyst: coordinated difference departments on advance directives in relation to medical treatments
- Currently working at WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean in Cairo, Egypt.

Recommendations

- Take any opportunities that would open your eyes – go overseas
- It is important to learn historical and political concepts because we are situated in a wider society.
- Quote from Alexander Fleming: “One sometimes finds what one is not looking for.” – Stay open-minded for opportunities and find your own path.
- Two useful Public Health Frameworks which could also be useful career frameworks – the Social Determinants of Health and Upstream & Downstream.
- Quote from Bill Foegen: “Life plans are an illusion. Have a life philosophy that will guide you in your career and life decisions.”

Career Tips

- Go volunteering – engaging with different people's lives, to understand the context and needs of different communities.
- Look at Job Descriptions of job posted, then you might know what skills you want to start acquiring.
- Subscribe to the newsletters of the organizations you are interested in.
- Reach out to working professionals.
- “Be out there” -- not every opportunity is available online.
- Read a lot and widely. Employers look for diverse knowledge and awareness, as the trend is moving from a vertical and specialist approach towards a more horizontal and integrated approach.

Prof. Annie Tam, Chairperson of the Executive Committee of New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, and former Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare, HKSARG

- Success Criteria and Factors of NGO/NPO Governance: 5Ls (Locus, Logic, Logistics, Luck, Love) +8Rs (Right people, right time, right place, right attitude, right strategy, responsible, responsive, respectable)
- Two main functions of NGOs: Advocacy or operational
- Every NGO has to be guided by mission (what they are doing), vision (what they are aiming to do in the long term) and values.

Example 1: Hong Kong Housing Society

- “Housing laboratory” – advocating through practicing
- Has a complicated corporate structure
- Suggestions: e.g. IT Internships, joining Business Innovation Team

Example 2: New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

- Famous for evidence-based practice
- WISE (Work Integration Social Enterprise) branded 330: a vertical chain helping recovering/recovered

people with mental problems to go back to work

- We need talents of human resources, finance, IT... You can join the creative team to community services promotion. You can easily find positions that you are interested in. Students are also welcome to join our subcommittees.
- “We don’t only want people good at their work and profession, we also want people with a good heart.”
- We do receive self-nominations for internships, and we always entertain that.

Q&A Session

Q: Can Queenie tell us more about a difficult and unforgettable project that you handled during your UN position in Laos? How did you coordinate and solve the issue? Do you find data science analysis help in negotiation with other stakeholders or providing a solution and skills of solving problems?

Queenie:

- Most memorable: COVID-19 Crisis Response Team: became the leader of Tourism Sector Relief Project, coordinating a team of supervisors.
- In Laos, a socialist single-party country, persuading the government with data is easier, but more important is to give the implication to policy based on the data.

Q: (for Karen) How would you compare the dynamic of working style and operation of the HK Government and the agency of the UN system, in terms of the autonomy of initiatives, methods of cooperation, and anything related?

Karen:

- The comparison is straightforward as the mandate is very different.
- HK Government is not a national government, and PICO works on coordinating different policy bureaus from a policy perspective.
- WHO Regional Office is a step back – to support the national government which delivers and implements.

Q: Is it true that if one works in an NGO first, one could not join other industries, while there will be more chances if one does the other way round? Also, it seems Karen and Queenie seems to have a clear direction at a young age, while I am lots of interests and get lost.

Jo:

- Stepping out the comfort line is quite limiting. I would reframe it as expanding it. It would shift your mindset to make you try new things. Just say yes and try it.
- You have to be comfortable with risks and know where your limits are. Enjoy your journey.
- The skills you learn in this sector are massive.
- The corporate world focuses on social impact more and more.
- The core of what we are doing is cross-sector collaboration. Corporate and non-profit/for-impact organizations are not “them and us”.

Queenie:

- I discovered my interest on Peace and Conflict randomly when I was working on an essay and read about wartime rape.
- It might take years to find you direction. Do not stress yourself too much.

Q: (for Annie) I am a Mainland student who want to join New Life. Does New Life recruit internships or volunteers all year round, and is Cantonese speaking a must?

Annie:

- We do not recruit interns all year round, but you may drop me an email. We will try to match your interests with we have been doing, and we may deliberately come up with a project of your interest.
- Cantonese is not a must. Some of those who suffer mental problems come from the Mainland, and your language skills may help us to get in touch with them in a more natural way.

Q: Many speakers have mentioned research skills would be one of the most important skills in the job duty. What specific research skills or tools that you would need (for example, SPSS)? How can I equip myself with the research skills needed?

Annie:

- New Life treasures research so much, and has a Training, Research and Development Subcommittee.
- Students need not worry. We always have support from universities. We recruit professional research assistants. If you are not that good at research, we provide in-house training.

Q: (for Queenie) How did you prepare for the three rounds of interviews for the UNV Programme?

Queenie:

- Self-introduction; What you have done; Why you want to join; Why you are capable to join
- For UN Round: I went to the website, read through all projects, try to understand what they are doing, and I try to think about what I can contribute to the current projects, or any new perspectives.
- I use "R" for academic papers, policy analysis and data analysis. Before that, I use Google, but more important is how you gather information, analyze the data, and turn them into a report with meaningful implications afterwards.

Q: According to Karen and Queenie, a master's degree is necessary to get a position in the international NGOs. Would you recommend us to take the master's degree first after graduation, or take part in volunteering experiences so to be more familiar with the sector first?

Karen:

- Depends on your interest, because master's is an investment in terms of time and money, and a commitment, especially if you plan to study overseas.
- Take your time to explore which area you are more interested in pursuing. It is not necessary that you do a master's that early after your bachelor's. It would be more helpful as you develop as a person.

Queenie: The gap year before I took the master's gives me a clearer direction.

Jo: I am currently doing a 6-week online managerial finance programme with LSE (London School of Economics and Politics), and I am also going through an application of EMBA at Chicago Booth in association with the Hong Kong Jockey Club. It's never too late.