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Careers: So You Wanna Change the World? An Express Guide to a Career in Development

June 1, 2006—Good news for all you budding humanitarians out there—the field of international development has grown tremendously since the concept first emerged after World War II.

Today, there are hundreds of organizations with global development as their mission—from large multilateral agencies such as the UN to smaller NGOs and think tanks. So there are plenty of options for anyone considering a career in the field.

First off, what is development? Although there's no universally accepted definition, broadly speaking it means **reaching an acceptable standard of living for all people by improving economic and social conditions** (visit youthink.worldbank.org/development).

Not bad for a job goal.

But unlike common misconceptions, development work is not glamorous. It is not about traveling to fancy conferences in five-star hotels, and, unlike what Hollywood would have us believe, it does not involve James Bond-like missions against corrupt regimes.

Development work is serious and has a huge impact on millions of people. It can be rewarding, but also extremely challenging.

Take the example of Deniz Baharoglu, senior social scientist at the World Bank. Her job is to prevent any potentially negative impacts that projects might have on communities around the world. This involves travel—and a lot of it.

"It's not unusual to stay in tents without electricity, with malarial mosquitoes buzzing everywhere, no running water," she says. "On one recent trip, I had to use a bucket to take a shower where the workers were washing their clothes."

Development Work Can Be Done Anywhere

If you live in a developed country, there is a lot you can do from there too.

In fact, some argue that you can contribute even more from the developed world, where you can make an impact on policy, investment, fundraising, and other key matters. One

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Development Work Can Be Done Anywhere (continued)

organization that researches how wealthy country policies can impact people in the developing world is the Center for Global Development (www.cgdev.org).

Either way, if you are determined to get involved and make a difference, there are many ways you can do that, no matter where you are based.

How Do I Get Started?

International development is an extremely broad concept that encompasses governance, healthcare, education, infrastructure, economics, human rights, environment and many other issues. If you are serious about a career in development then your first step should be to read all about it (for instance, at youthink.worldbank.org/issues).

For those who are at an undergraduate or postgraduate level, it's important to specialize in a particular aspect of development, such as nutrition, microcredit, or water and sanitation. Qualifications in a key area will set you apart from others with less relevant skills.

The best way to figure out what you want to specialize in is by getting some volunteer or interning experience (find resource list at youthink.worldbank.org/getinvolved/resources.php). This is also a great way to prepare for a career in development because most organizations prefer candidates with some prior experience in addition to relevant qualifications.

What Does the Work Involve?

Development priorities keep shifting, and there is no fixed career pathway—many people transition along the way from one area to another. For workers in developing countries, the roles usually comprise advisory, educational, technical, or administrative and planning skills. For example, you could be an economist, a health worker or an engineer.

For those working in developed countries, major roles include fundraising, lobbying, research, media and public awareness, or financial administration.

The World Bank, being one of the world's largest sources of development assistance, has people working in pretty much all of the above areas. So, it can provide a valuable overview on development work. Find out what the World Bank is all about (at youthink.worldbank.org/about/inside.php).

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Experience Development

Updates on development news and careers
www.experiencedevelopment.org

Aid Workers Network

Practical advice and resources from professionals in the field
www.aidworkers.net

Directory of Development Organizations

A listing of development agencies by region
www.devdir.org

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