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### Citation for published version:

Oelberger, C, Fechter, A-M & McWha-Hermann, I 2017, Managing human resources in international NGOs. in J Word & J Sowa (eds), *The Nonprofit Human Resource Management Handbook: From Theory to Practice*. Public Administration and Public Policy, Taylor & Francis.

### Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

### Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

### Published In:

The Nonprofit Human Resource Management Handbook

### Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in The Nonprofit Human Resource Management Handbook on 16/6/2017, available online: <https://www.routledge.com/The-Nonprofit-Human-Resource-Management-Handbook-From-Theory-to-Practice/Word-Sowa/p/book/9781498738170>

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## **Managing Human Resources in International NGOs**

Carrie R. Oelberger, University of Minnesota

Anne-Meike Fechter, University of Sussex

Ishbel McWha-Hermann, University of Edinburgh

May 12, 2016

*For The Nonprofit Human Resource Management Handbook: From Theory to Practice,*

J. Sowa and J. Word (editors), CRC Press/Taylor and Francis

## **I. Introduction**

The “associational revolution” and the ongoing proliferation of nonprofits translates to increasing numbers of individuals working within the third sector across the globe (Salamon, 1994). International aid is a multi-sited, multi-level phenomenon that cannot be fully understood based on how it appears in any one location or particular level (Gould, 2004). The “aid industry” includes both long-term international development work that attempts to address structural inequalities like poverty, corruption, or environmental degradation, as well as shorter-term humanitarian relief work that serves communities in need following natural or civil disasters (Hancock, 1989; Van Rooy, 1998). The industry exists largely in lower-income contexts, and is comprised of individuals from a wide range of occupations (e.g. education, agriculture, health). Aid is carried out through nonprofit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that range in size from small community-based organizations (CBOs) to multi-national international NGOs (INGOs), both secular and faith-based, as well as multilateral and government agencies (e.g. United States Agency for International Development [USAID], the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development [DFID]) and for-profit companies (e.g. Chemonics, Development Alternatives Incorporated).

Within the spectrum of NGOs, INGOs represent the most transnational aid organizations, and are the focus of this chapter. INGOs are formal organizations with operations in more than one country, the majority of which are headquartered in the United States or Western Europe, and which work on projects within lower-income contexts. Examples of INGOs include Oxfam, CARE, and Save the Children. This chapter focuses in particular on the human resource management (HRM) issues INGOs face, especially with respect to the diversity of the INGO

workforce. The most obvious dimension of staff diversity is nationality, but as we will explain, employment status also varies considerably between international staff and national staff, as well as between those with at-will employment, multi-year contracts, short-term consultants, and interns/volunteers. As this chapter illustrates, a key challenge for HRM in this sector arises from the fact that nationality and employment status do not always map onto other relevant dimensions, such as experience, local and linguistic knowledge, and pay. This chapter sheds light on some of the fissures and tensions arising from this situation, which have implications for both employee motivation and successful implementation of INGO work.

The term “expatriate” is often used to refer to staff working outside their country of origin, often limited to European or American workers who are employed on international-level contracts with commensurate salaries. It is useful to bear in mind that within the aid workforce, a key distinction is made between those who are “national staff” (that is, employed in their passport country on “national” contracts) and those who are considered “international staff” (that is, originating outside of the country where they work). In the context of INGOs, international staff may include workers from the wider region, such as Kenyans working in Sierra Leone, or from other parts of the Global South, such as Brazilians working in Mozambique. We utilize the terms “national staff” and “international staff” within this chapter. Furthermore, effective management demands an understanding that the positionality and experience of employees is not easily captured by these formal classifications.

Such fuzziness of categories also holds for other central concepts in this chapter. For example, as discussed below, “headquarters” often refers to an office located in the United States, and “field”

to a “Southern,” “developing,” or “lower-income” country. In the context of middle-income countries such as India, however, headquarters may well be in the capital city, while the field is defined as geographically remote, rural areas. It is important, therefore, to be alert to internal differentiations within a category – such as the poorer parts of a country’s population in contrast to its urban middle class – to avoid overly simplistic perceptions of both the national workforce and recipient groups. Furthermore, such nuanced understandings help identify the variable and heterogeneous motivations of INGO employees across multiple differentiations, not only national and international staff, but also volunteers, interns, and contract-hired consultants. Across all categories, while the desire to support resource-poor populations is often present (either from a sense of solidarity or personal experience), this may be combined with professional career aspirations. For international staff, it may also include the desire to live and work abroad in culturally diverse contexts (Fechter, 2012; Roth, 2015), while members of the national workforce may need to make a livelihood in countries that often lack a diversity of formal employment options. As suggested above, however, belonging to a particular national or employment category does not imply a fixed set of motivations or interests.

This chapter provides an overview of the role of INGOs in international aid and, specifically, the human resource considerations for those organizations. We first provide a historical overview of organizational approaches to international aid provision, focusing on the division of knowledge within the sector, where the work occurs, and how it occurs, with a focus on the division of labor. The second part of the chapter then highlights the specific human resource considerations for INGOs, with attention to challenges with staff selection, the complicated nature of compensation, perspectives on performance management and professional development, the

delicate nature of staff well-being, and the intricacies of managing staff with frequent travel and expatriation.

## **II. INGOs and International Aid**

### History

The current organizational and institutional structure of international aid originated in the aftermath of World War II, when major multilateral agencies involving three or more countries, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, were established to carry out reconstruction. World society scholars have also noted the ideological underpinnings of international aid are rooted in this period, when a world culture emphasizing progress and justice was on the rise, contributing to a rationalizing discourse about international aid (Chabbott & Ramirez, 2000). As reconstruction ended and the Cold War period began in the 1950s, international aid organizations turned their efforts towards the Global South, otherwise known as the “developing world” (Gardner & Lewis, 1996). Since that time, a growing number of faith-based and secular NGOs have participated in international aid, with well over 35,000 NGOs involved in international development and relief efforts today (UIA, 2008; Lindenberg & Dobel, 1999). This blossoming of NGOs has been accompanied by two simultaneous processes: one of *professionalization*, i.e. the increasing formal structuring of these organizations (Chabbott, 2003; Hwang & Powell, 2009; Bromley, 2010) and another of *localization*, i.e. an attempt to shift the design of activities from international actors to those within the local context. In addition to these two processes of differentiation, INGOs are being challenged by three interrelated sets of changes in the external environment: 1) economic globalization, 2) the reform of foreign aid, and

3) the evolution of NGOs indigenous to the developing world (Edwards, Hulme, & Wallace, 1999). As a result, some scholars claim INGOs defend social change values at the same time they operate inside a framework that drives an increasingly formalized, professionalized field further into the marketplace (Edwards, 1998).

INGOs are also subject to more general trends affecting the entire global landscape of work. Our analysis of international aid is rooted within the understanding that contemporary work across all industries is increasingly technical, transnational, and temporary (Oelberger, 2014). Work is increasingly scientific and professional, focused on abstracted, portable technical solutions (Habermas, 1970). This portability of skills combines with processes of globalization to result in a transnationally transferable workforce increasingly accustomed to bridging geographic distance with both physical travel and technology (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995; Dicken, 1998; Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Given the portable nature of work commitments, work relationships are also increasingly temporary, with short-term contracts prevailing over career-length organizational commitments (Kunda, Barley, & Evans, 2002; Barley & Kunda 2006; Barley & Kunda 2011). Taken together, these features result in a highly mobile, portable modern workforce within a structure of work that favors connections with occupations and skills over connections with organizations and places.

### Division of Knowledge

Within international aid, a variety of knowledge and skills are necessary to plan, manage, and implement complex work. Prior to professionalization, this need was predominantly filled by American or European staff who took on generalist roles. The cost of air travel prohibited

frequent international flights, and even until the new millennium the ability to communicate by phone or email was extremely limited, resulting in isolated staff who were largely based “in the field” (ie, within country offices). With rising professionalization, skilled “national” staff, born and raised in the country in which they are working, began undertaking pivotal roles within local, national, and (eventually) international organizations. Their labor costs far less than that of international staff, they often have better cultural and linguistic knowledge, and they make inroads into assuaging the criticism of international aid as white and neocolonial (Escobar, 1994).

The involvement of international staff, however, has not declined. On the contrary, their participation has both grown and shifted (Comoretto, Crichton, & Albery, 2011). Rather than employing international cultural experts familiar with a particular region, aid organizations increasingly hire international staff based on their technical expertise (e.g. scientific or legal expertise) for short-term contracts to design technical solutions to social problems (Moke & Stoll, 2010; O’Flaherty & Ulrich, 2010; Walker, 2004; Walker & Russ, 2010). International staff are largely represented within headquarters positions, doing technical or managerial work that can be applied across geographic settings. They use internet technology, smartphones, and frequent travel to support programs around the globe. Headquarters positions often have leadership responsibilities for communication with donors, as well as providing financial, administrative, and technical support to field offices. Rather than posting international staff in the field for long periods of time, organizations are more likely to use short-term consultancies, trainings, workshops, and visits in order to convey information from the central artery to the field. Against this backdrop, only a few international staff continue to be field-based, often in



managerial roles as country directors, often remaining in one position for three or four years before moving on to another assignment. International staff also work within INGOs on volunteer contracts through volunteer-sending organizations like United Nations Volunteers, the British Voluntary Service Overseas, the United States Peace Corps, or independently through direct relationships with the organization. These volunteer or internship positions are often support or advisory roles, sometimes to facilitate the process of localization, and other times to assist with a particular project or strengthen skills in a particular area.

Recent scholars have argued that international aid has moved beyond the traditional dichotomy of Western international staff and staff native to the Global South. Rather than the conventional North-South axis of development partnership, a distinct and potentially impactful model is that of South-South cooperation (Chisholm and Steiner-Khamsi 2009; de Renzio and Seifert 2014). This concept is based on the assumption that Southern actors, including emerging donors and residents of the “BRICS” (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), are able to relate differently and more effectively to INGO clients than traditional Northern donor staff. This belief is partly based on a sense of shared colonial history, greater social and political mutual understanding, and Southern solidarity (Mawdsley, 2014). The extent to which these assumptions are justified and produce improvements in aid delivery remains to be seen.

### Place of Work

In light of these trends, critics have discussed the relative distance between international staff and the “field”, geographically as well as culturally and linguistically. Kothari (2006), for example, notes how the colonial officers of the past often possessed greater cultural and

linguistic knowledge than contemporary development professionals, whose periods of stay in a particular place are often much shorter, and thus whose familiarity with the social context is less extensive than their colonial-era predecessors (on the role of cultural knowledge, see also Pottier, Bicker, & Sillitoe, 2003). It has been argued such distance may have detrimental effects on the conceptualization and delivery of aid. As one possible antidote, some have proposed “immersions,” that is, short periods in which aid workers are exposed to the living conditions of the resource-poor communities they aim to support (Irvine, Chambers, & Eyben, 2004). The underlying rationale is that first-hand exposure to the realities of poverty provides aid workers with a renewed sense of urgency, as well as a better understanding of the problems they seek to solve. Immersions have traditionally been advocated for international staff who may rarely leave their office in the United States or Western Europe, but could easily be argued to be useful for country nationals who have lived a middle-class lifestyle in their country’s capital, with little understanding of what life is like in the rural areas where many projects are based. While immersions have been implemented by some agencies (e.g. ActionAid, 2010), it remains to be seen to what extent these remain a symbolic rather than a substantial exercise (Fechter, 2012).

The issue of distance from the field, and its effects on aid work, has been articulated especially in relation to humanitarian crises and conflict zones. Collinson and Duffield (2013) point out that the tendency towards a “bunkerization” of aid has significant implications for the way aid is carried out in these high-risk contexts. Such a bunkerization is a response to the increased insecurity faced by aid agencies and their staff operating in volatile environments. It becomes manifest in the higher prevalence of fortified aid compounds, for example, as well as in ‘remote management’ practices. Among other challenges, however, such distance can lead to a less-

informed workforce whose analysis and decision-making may be impaired as a result of their remoteness from the affected populations. Furthermore, they argue being spatially separated as well as heavily guarded – often by private security firms – weakens social relations between aid workers and local communities, leads to mistrust, and ironically may actually contribute to a lack of security for the workers (Autesserre, 2014; Autesserre & Autesserre, 2014). In addition, such “bunkerization,” especially where it provides security measures for international but not national staff, reinforces structural inequalities between staff categories. Such a “dual security” system becomes particularly visible in the context of emergency evacuations, prompting the question of whose lives are considered more valuable. As Bettina Scholz discusses in the case of *Médécins sans Frontières*, the organization does not always fulfil the moral obligations to its national staff that may be expected of them. While international staff is often committed to informally ensure the safety of national staff, in many instances, such as fleeing Rwanda or Darfur, national staff are left behind, to be massacred at the hand of local militia (Scholz 2015: 123).

The concept of mobility, then, is a key lens through which hierarchies among differently categorized aid workers become visible, not just by employment type, but also by nationality, ethnicity, personal migration history, education, and international status. Warne Peters (2013) highlights that some aid workers, in her case in Angola, who may be employed as “local” staff, may have a complex personal migration and education history, and therefore might strategically present themselves as “international” or “expatriate” in some contexts and as “local” or “national” in others. Presentation allows them to manage perceptions of their expertise, conveying cosmopolitan or local knowledge respectively. Some research also suggests that international workers on a “national” contract, including volunteers, might be better positioned to

build relationships with local colleagues and communities, and in turn might facilitate more effective aid outcomes (Devereux, 2008; McWha, 2011).

International staff may also experience malleable categorization related to their positionality and mobility, especially in light of varying definitions of the “field” where they work. Oelberger’s (2014) study of international aid workers found that international staff who are “in the field” may feel just as disconnected from their project beneficiaries as those working in headquarters positions in the United States. For example, Ajay is an Indian citizen on an international contract who is technically “field-based” in the urban setting of Lilongwe, Malawi, but his daily interactions are all with other office-based staff. He often feels just as disconnected from the “actual work on the ground” as headquarters staff based in Washington, D.C. might feel. Therefore, when he speaks about going “to the field,” he may be referring to travel in remote villages. By contrast, when Julie, a headquarters-based employee of the same organization, speaks about going “to the field,” she may be traveling to Bangkok, Thailand for meetings with staff based in that office (Oelberger, 2014). The work of INGOs occurs across all of these settings: U.S.-based headquarters, urban offices around the world, and more remote, rural offices where projects are based. As a result, INGO staff are located across these various locations, with patterns within the division of labor. It is to this topic that we now turn.

### Division of Labor

Within international aid, there are a multitude of types of workers and a hierarchy of tracks. At the top of hierarchy are managerial and policy advising positions. Second in line are technical positions, increasingly including those with methodological training, expertise in monitoring and

evaluation, and the ability to conduct experimental analyses. Third in line are those with operations, logistics, or middle-management skills. Finally, at the bottom of the hierarchy are those with geographic, linguistic, or cultural expertise. Importantly, this hierarchy overlays with typical expertise of international versus national staff, in effect conferring greater value to international staff.<sup>1</sup> McWha (2011) found the labels given to workers (volunteer, consultant, expatriate, and local) were implicitly underpinned by power and status, wherein expatriate workers were at the top of the hierarchy with the most respect and status, consultants next, still with status but less respect, then volunteers, and locals at the bottom. These perceptions held regardless of the professional experience the workers brought to the assignment.

Mirroring the overall rise in the use of consultants and contractors in modern work (Barley & Kunda, 2004), many leading INGOs have reorganized to include outsourcing, subcontracting, and short-term organizational positions as key features of international aid staffing (Stubbs, 2003). With the rise in these practices, international aid workers avoid the emotional commitments to other people, communities, projects, and places that develop with long-term work, focusing on service delivery, rather than partnership. Initial research in this area notes that long-held, trust-based partnerships remain vital for development, and that the contract-based relationships implicit in consultancies make this trust more difficult to achieve (Fowler, 1998). Moreover, the impact of these practices on both the private lives of aid workers, as well as the organizations in which they work, remains understudied. Following global trends towards

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<sup>1</sup> The most critical analysis of the professionalization of international aid work argues that scientization of the sector is a rebranding attempt, so that those who have invested their lives in this industry can finish careers that would otherwise hold little opportunity to transfer to another industry. The reaction is in line with the research on threatened employment due to immigration trends, and with Michels' (1911 [2009]) analysis of social change organizations.

contract relationships, it will be interesting to investigate the future impact of this reorganization towards an increasingly technical and decreasingly relational approach to the work.

Alongside professionalization and the increasingly technical and temporary nature of the work, the “international” component of “international aid” is simultaneously becoming “nationalized” and “transnationalized,” representing a bifurcated approach to the human resourcing of international aid. Nationalization refers to the increasing practice of delegating contextualized knowledge to national staff with appropriate linguistic skills, as well as international linguistic skills and the necessary formal training to act as intermediaries between projects and donors. This practice is an attempt to respond to the critique of aid work as being externally driven, and even neocolonial. It is crucial to note that cultural knowledge is undervalued and underpaid when it is embodied by national staff, in the same way that many professions have become undervalued and underpaid with feminization (Bolton & Muzio, 2008). Moreover, national staff are often members of the elite within their country, posing an additional challenge of overcoming social class barriers while they strive to assist communities without the nuanced knowledge of culture, power dynamics, and local politics necessary to do so.

Parallel to this nationalization, international aid has also been transnationalized as international staff take on shorter-term technical assignments overseas. The projects are accomplished through two main routes: expatriation (and repatriation), and frequent international travel. Both relocation and work-related travel influence the personal lives of aid workers, as they bring both their personal and professional selves with them to other continents.

### **III. HRM Considerations for INGOs**

Given the context of international aid work just outlined, organizations working in this sphere face numerous human resource (HR) issues, issues which are different from organizations operating within the domestic nonprofit sector, for example within the United States or Europe. One of the key differences is the multitude of different staff within INGOs from a variety of cultural, economic, and social backgrounds. These different workers bring their own expectations, support needs, and personnel challenges, which HR managers need to balance. These personal differences interact with another challenge: the context in which they work – typically categorized as resource poor, often high-risk, and sometimes dangerous. In this section we review some traditional aspects of HRM within the context of INGOs, illustrating various ways that the HR decisions of INGOs can impact their workforce.

The international HRM (IHRM) literature discusses the distinction between universalist and contextualist paradigms, the former advocating a standardized global approach to HRM, and the latter arguing for adaptation to local context and conditions (for more discussion on the distinction see Sheehan, Fenwick, & Dowling, 2010). However, the majority of IHRM research has been undertaken within the for-profit, often “Western-style” context of multinational corporations, with the result that much of what is known about IHRM may be inapplicable to the NGO context. We caution INGOs against 1) applying principles of IHRM that have been developed in the context of multinational corporations, 2) applying concepts that have been developed in higher-income countries, and 3) assuming that HR systems that function well at headquarters, or in one country office, will transfer seamlessly into another. Instead, in this

chapter, we encourage INGOs to find a way to balance global standardization with consideration of local contexts and the reality of working in a complex nonprofit setting.

Investing in HRM structures can be a source of tension for INGOs. Many NGOs have low budgets and are therefore restrained in their ability to invest in sophisticated HRM. Often there is a challenge for NGOs around how to use limited funding, with the understandable desire to invest in service delivery and “getting the job done” rather than in a strategic function of the organization. As a result, HRM is often interpreted as dealing with everyday personnel issues, rather than as an important component of developing human capital in line with the long-term vision of the organization (Brewster & Lee, 2006). That said, large, well-resourced INGOs are more likely to have a commitment to HRM structures. CHS Alliance (formerly People in Aid) and Association for Human Resource Management in International Organizations are two umbrella organizations that assist INGOs in developing effective HR practices.

### Staff Selection

It is critical for INGOs to be able to attract and recruit the best talent. However, this is a complex process. Project sites are regulated by different legal compliance frameworks, and there may be complications depending on whether staff are hired under a national or international contract. International staff can be recruited on national contracts, and, though perhaps less common, national staff can be recruited on international contracts. Some research suggests that recruiting comparatively highly-paid international staff has the potential to undermine the skills of national staff, and may lead to capacity stripping, i.e. a reduced feeling of empowerment and belief in one’s skills to do the job and an increased dependency on outside assistance, rather than capacity



building, which many would argue is a fundamental goal of INGOs (Carr, McWha, MacLachlan, & Furnham, 2010). In response, some organizations have aimed to recruit locally, or at least regionally (e.g. see, for example, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development). It is essential that HR managers reflect on the context in which these jobs exist, ensuring the desired competencies and behaviors are appropriate for the culture and context of the role.

### Compensation

Compensation is closely related to the issues underpinning staff selection. The challenge here is balancing the need to compete with other INGOs for talent with the desire to adapt to local contexts. INGOs commonly use a dual salary system in which national and international staff are tracked onto different pay scales. Typically, the international pay scale is benchmarked globally, with various added benefits, (e.g. extra compensation for workers in high-risk zones or private school tuition for accompanied posts in “family-friendly” areas). By contrast, the local pay scale is benchmarked within the national market, and is therefore much lower. This system is highly divisive, and perpetuates a perception of international staff as experts and locals as novices, when in reality national workers often hold considerable institutional knowledge, as well as contextual knowledge of the area in which they are working.

The dual compensation system is often justified with the claim that high salaries are needed to attract talent internationally. However, research suggests that it is not uncommon for colleagues with similar qualifications and experience to work in similar roles, the only difference between staff being country of origin and compensation. This has been found to be demoralizing for national staff, and possibly also international staff (Carr, McWha, MacLachlan, & Furnham,

2010). Some INGOs have begun to explore different pay systems, such as pay for performance, unified regional pay scales, and single pay scales with some additional benefits for international staff based on need, (see for example, WaterAid, ActionAid, and other members of CHS Alliance's Fair Pay Forum). Still other INGOs have applied the principles of localization to their compensation structures. In this approach, international employees can earn an international salary for a limited length of time, at the end of which they can either choose to move to another country office, or to remain where they are, but under the national salary scale. This approach continues to prioritize the technical, temporary, and transnational approach to international aid work.

The dual compensation system can negatively impact relationships among staff. Good relationships are essential for capacity building initiatives specifically, and aid organizations more generally (McWha, 2011; Girgis, 2007; Eyben, 2006), and feelings of injustice and unfairness tend to result in disengagement, dissatisfaction, and potentially turnover (often returning home, for international staff) (Carr, McWha, MacLachlan, & Furnham, 2010). For national staff, global mobility is often constrained by citizenship, and organizational turnover is often not an option given socioeconomic circumstances. As a result, there is some evidence that counterproductive work behaviors such as "moonlighting" (e.g. taking a second job), or practices that may be viewed by outsiders as "corrupt," are a response to feelings of injustice (MacLachlan, Carr, & McAuliffe, 2010). In a review of moonlighting and corruption within the public health sectors of lower- and middle-income countries, Ferrinho & Lerberghe (2002) suggest that individual coping strategies such as absenteeism (including as a means to enable moonlighting), under-the-counter payments for "free" services, drug use, and other seemingly

“corrupt” behaviors, are a response to the significantly lower salaries afforded to national workers.

Moreover, research suggests national workers play a key role in the socialization of international workers, a process that ultimately contributes to the success or failure of the international assignment (Toh & DeNisi, 2007). Socialization occurs when international staff arrive at the site of their new assignment, and this is a crucial time for adjustment to the national context. The efforts of national staff to help international staff to adjust may be very important, and national workers’ feelings of unfairness regarding a dual salary system can reduce these socialization efforts and may undermine the international assignment (Toh & DeNisi, 2005). Careful design of rewards systems is therefore crucial not only for the engagement and empowerment of national workers, but also for the success of international assignments.

### Performance Management and Professional Development

Performance management is particularly challenging for organizations working across national and cultural boundaries. The impact of culture on performance appraisal has been well documented (e.g. Vance, McClaine, Boje, & Stage, 1992; Fletcher, 2001). Different countries and cultures define good performance in different ways, based on proclivities including power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and horizontal and vertical individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). As a concept, performance management originated in the United States, and at a very basic level it may therefore not be appropriate in the context of other countries (e.g. countries that are highly collectivist). The issue becomes even more complicated when individuals from multiple countries are employed in one office. Managers

should question whether a formal, standardized performance management system is appropriate given cross-national differences in what is considered good performance, as well as cultural biases in responses to rating scales, such as avoiding extreme ratings or choosing all ratings above the scale's midpoint to "save face" (Hui & Triandis, 1989).

HR managers should also consider ongoing training an integral part of performance management. Within the INGO context, there is a keen need for training in cross-cultural diversity and urgent response to humanitarian disasters. Much training is outsourced to organizations like RedR, International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC), Bond, and others. Training is important for improving the quality of service delivery, as well as maintaining safety, preventing accidents, and avoiding cultural conflicts (Chang, 2005). There are also entrenched issues concerning the language capacities of international staff. Though critics have long bemoaned the lack of local language skills of the majority of international staff, in practice language training has never been particularly emphasized or enabled by sending agencies. Given the availability in many aid contexts of capable local translators and assistants, it appears that such skills have in practice usually been considered expendable by aid institutions, notwithstanding any lip service paid to their importance.

The continued relevance of cultural differences to development has received substantial attention in academic research, if not necessarily in development practice. Yet, differences between INGO staff (both international and national) and "clients" (often referred to as "aid recipients" or "beneficiaries") have also been framed in other terms. For example, Rossi (2006) reminds us not to "compartmentalize" aid workers and recipients into separate worlds of knowledge, arguing for

much greater overlap. Further, Heaton-Shrestha (2006) points out while there may be significant differences between national staff and clients that run along the lines of class as well as an urban/rural divide, national staff may still pride themselves on being able to “mix” much better with local clients than international staff can due to language, culture, and national identity.

In the context of these differences, engagement between INGO staff and clients has been considered central to successful aid delivery (Eyben, 2006). This concern has underpinned the “participatory approach,” which holds that clients of INGOs should be significantly involved in program design and implementation. However, the paradigm of participation and the ways in which it has been applied may already be based on an inherently paternalistic approach to development (Baaz, 2005), and therefore the approach has often failed to live up to its democratic promise.

### Staff Well-Being

While traveling for work or living overseas, staff experience a blurring of the physical domains that separate work from home life (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). In addition, technology bridges the domains such that personal news can easily arrive at work, and work demands can punctuate what was traditionally considered leisure time. This breakdown of traditional boundaries between work and home results in increasing inter-role influence across domains. The impact of work-family conflict is increased in international work arrangements, which often involve some combination of physical relocation away from one’s social support network, intensive travel, and long hours. In such cases, the boundaries between work and home become blurred and there is often disruption of traditional family roles, causing increasing stress

(Caligiuri, Hyland, & Joshi, 1998). Taken together, these features interfere with aid workers' personal lives and often result in poor physical and mental health. Given the overlap between gender and family roles, this work-life conflict is especially acute for women (Harris, 2004). As such, research has shown that in addition to formal organizational support, informal support, such as when employees have a sense that their manager and the broader organization is concerned with their healthy personal life, is important for success in HRM (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001).

The accumulated effects of working in a range of cultural and social environments, including high-risk locations, may significantly affect engagement, job satisfaction, and turnover among INGO staff (e.g. Korff et al., 2015). As Roth (2015) and others note, the aid sector is characterized by a considerable rate of burnout and dropout. As a result, HR practitioners are beginning to address the issue of staff well-being (see also Bjerneld, 2009 and Pigni, 2014), joining broader efforts including initiatives by agencies such as CHS Alliance, InterHealth, and the Headington Institute. Well-being is particularly important in environments where the physical safety and security of staff is endangered (Fast, 2014). While the sector previously tended to classify employee stress as “post-traumatic stress disorder,” it has now been recognized that stressors encompass a much wider spectrum than witnessing conflict and violence among clients. Awareness has emerged only recently, for example, of sexual harassment and violence experienced by, but also carried out by, staff from INGOs and multilateral agencies. Appleby (2010) documents the experience of sexual harassment among female international staff in East Timor at the hands of other international staff, as well as locals. As Csaky (2008) shows, the issue of child sexual abuse by United Nations Peacekeepers is only very slowly being

recognized, let alone addressed. In relation to safety and security, as in other areas, a particular sensitivity to gender-related issues is therefore mandatory (Wille & Fast, 2011).

More generally, even though the paradigm of “gender and development” has been a key component of many aid initiatives over the last few decades, the pervasive focus on clients has somewhat occluded issues of gender-related policy and practice among INGO staff. While there have been calls by practitioners for INGOs to “get their own house in order” by promoting gender equality among staff as well as in client-facing programs, relatively little academic attention has been paid to these issues. (See, however, de Jong, 2009, for the particular positionality of female staff in Northern INGOs; Eyben & Turquet, 2013 on feminist bureaucrats; and Fechter, 2015 on the relevance of gender among “development people” more generally.) One interesting question arising from this context is whether female INGO staff, in their capacity as “internationally mobile professionals,” may benefit professionally and personally from the increased mobility that their work entails. There are indications that the availability of (often female) domestic workers in the countries where they are posted, as well as the flexible nature of consultancy work, for example, enables dual-career households, combining professional opportunities with raising a family for both male and female staff (Fechter, 2013).

### Travel and Expatriation

Efforts to situate projects within the world’s poorest regions, and staff them with highly educated workers, necessitate a significant level of staff mobility and travel. National staff are often based in large cities, and frequently travel within the country and region to visit their INGO’s projects. Simultaneously, staff based in Western headquarters will often travel to various international

locations, both in the urban capital as well as occasionally to more rural project settings. Both shorter and longer trips are pursued for a number of reasons, including accountability, monitoring and oversight, assessments and evaluations, training and skills transfer, troubleshooting or problem-solving, and filling staffing gaps. Maintaining a travel portfolio is crucial for continued advancement in the international aid world. Individuals who do not “get out” on a regular basis are branded as “disconnected.” Given the evolving nature of the sector, international staff maintain a career advantage through their technical specialization and geographic flexibility.

Travel and expatriation are a prime mechanism by which professional and personal domains intersect and conflict. For national staff with families, it is often difficult to find jobs for both individuals in rural areas, so families are split apart, often for long periods of time. Alternatively, families may live together in national capitals, but must travel frequently to rural areas for work. For international staff, similar processes are in play, though the distances between “home” and “work” are often greater. International staff engage in cycles of expatriation (and repatriation) as well as frequent international travel. For both national and international staff, relocation and travel dually influence home life and professional life as staff move both their personal and professional selves simultaneously between geographic spaces (Harvey, 1997). Travel and expatriation can therefore pose additional challenges to staff well-being.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Strong HRM is pertinent to all organizations within the global development and humanitarian relief sector, from the largest INGOs to the most local CBOs. This chapter has provided an



overview of the context of INGO work, including the history of international aid work, its division of knowledge, division of labor, and physical context. Moreover, the chapter has illuminated how these features impact both traditional aspects of domestic HRM (e.g. staffing, compensation, well-being, and training), as well as features that are more common in an IHRM context (e.g. travel, expatriation, and pay discrepancies). These concerns are all the more complex given the innumerable cultural and national differences across the various countries in which a single INGO works. The resulting HR considerations in global workforce management are influenced by myriad features of both the external environment, broadly, as well as the internal environment of the organization. We emphasize that it is the complexity involved in operating in different countries and employing people from different national and cultural backgrounds that differentiates INGO HRM from domestic nonprofit HRM, more than any major differences between the HR activities performed (Dowling, Festing, & Engle, 2008). Moreover, as international aid moves more fully into a transnationalized and nationalized model of workforce constitution, these issues will continue to evolve and change. As managers and employees wrestle with continuing global challenges, a responsive, strategic, and thoughtful approach to HRM is crucial to ensure the well-being and performance of staff and the fulfillment of their organizations' crucial goals.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are the differences between a community based organization (CBO), a non-governmental organization (NGO), and an international non-governmental organization (INGO)? How would staffing look similar or different across these organizations?
2. What types of knowledge are necessary for international aid work? How would you engage in staff selection to ensure you had all the necessary skills for a particular project?
3. Define the key actors working within the international aid sector, eg. international and national, long-term contract, short-term consultant, and intern/volunteer. How clear are these different categorizations and what are the areas of overlap between different categories? Given that these categories are related to the type of contract an employee is offered, how would you categorize a Kenyan national working in Rwanda or a Chilean national working in Peru?
4. Explain the processes of professionalization and localization within the NGO sector.
5. Consider the practical and ethical issues facing HR managers when designing a reward system for an organization with offices in multiple countries. Design a compensation system for a small office in Krong Bavet, in eastern Cambodia near the Vietnam border. They have hired: 1) a single 60-year old director from London, 2) a 34-year old technical advisor who is from Vietnam with her husband and two children, 3) a 23-year old Cambodian civil engineer from Phnom Penh, 4) a 42-year old Cambodian project manager who is living apart from his wife and children, who are based in Phnom Penh, and 5) a 31-year old woman from Krong Bavet, who acts as office administrator.
6. You are an HR manager at a medium-sized INGO with offices in 14 countries. Your organization employs mostly national staff, but some senior management roles in each country office are currently filled by international staff. Design a system for staff well-being, considering the varying needs of different staff members.

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