

## Counting on you

The number and size of international Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) like Oxfam has grown immensely over the last twenty years. They handle more funds than ever before, helping people in developing countries all round the world. Just like any big, complex enterprise, they rely on high quality, professional financial management to make sure their funds are used as effectively as possible – so they can help as many people as possible. That means they need accountants like you!

For example, in the UK, 13 of the largest NGOs increased their combined income for international work by 18% from £640m in 1999 to £758m in 2001 (Jacobs, 2006<sup>1</sup>). This impressive level of sector-wide growth was taken to a new level by the unprecedented response to the 2004 Asian Tsunami, which brought well over £500m into the UK NGO sector.

### What NGOs do

These organisations play a significant role in delivering important welfare services, including emergency humanitarian aid and assisting with international development, as a complement to government action, especially in regions where government presence is weak such as in post-conflict situations. For instance, tens of millions of pounds are being spent at the moment running refugee camps in Darfur, Sudan. NGOs also help hold national governments to account – for instance supporting greater transparency around how revenue from oil reserves is used in Angola, supporting local campaign groups to analyse governmental expenditure and press government to meet their basic rights. And of course, NGOs also play an important role in the UK, raising awareness of development issues and mobilising popular campaigns like Make Poverty History last year. While of course poverty is not yet history, the campaign led to unprecedented levels of debt relief for developing countries.



### Effectiveness and accountability

Questions about the effectiveness and accountability of NGOs, however, remain. Various factors make it difficult for NGOs to improve their performance: in short, managing NGO work is very complicated; many difficult issues (and stakeholders) have to be considered and balanced against each other. Helping people on an appropriate and sustainable basis is essentially difficult. And growth has in many cases stretched NGOs' existing organisational systems, particularly in relation to financial management.

### Finance staff play a crucial role

With offices in up to seventy different countries, NGO finance staff are responsible for establishing and running financial systems, reporting to managers and trustees, supporting audits and meeting legal requirements. Just managing the cash between Cambodia, Cameroon and Colombia can be challenging. Finance staff also importantly support the NGOs' values and culture, relationships with partner organisations and their relationships with beneficiaries, the people they aim to help. Good financial management helps NGOs to use resources effectively – and you can get involved.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Jacobs, *Helping People is Difficult*, in *Social Entrepreneurship: New Models of Sustainable Social Change*, OUP, 2006

## **Mango helps NGOs to recruit finance professionals all around the world**

Mango, a UK-registered charity, was founded in 1999, specifically to help NGOs strengthen their financial management. It is an area that is growing in importance in the sector, as donors become more and more concerned with issues of transparency and accountability. Mango provides support, training and resources to NGOs all around the world. It also maintains a register of finance professionals who are willing and able to build local capacity in developing countries and contribute their skills to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of aid:

“We look for qualified and experienced accountants who have the appropriate interpersonal skills to work effectively with relief and development NGOs, says Mango’s Recruitment Director, Lucy Markby. “We have about 350 accountants on the register---and are always looking for more to satisfy the high demand and needs of an increasingly professional NGO sector.”

Members of Mango’s register are placed with NGOs in the field and in head offices, building capacity in financial management for NGOs, resolving specific finance issues, running finance systems for NGO projects and programmes.

Some of the accountants on the register take sabbaticals to work on projects, while others leave their jobs to take on 6-12 month ‘field’ assignments.

“It’s often difficult, especially with accountants’ annual cycle being quite fixed, to find short term work that coincides with the slow time in the cycle,” says Markby. “Increasingly though employers are recognising the benefits of releasing their finance staff to work on short term projects with NGOs”.

“Many accountants want to make a difference,” she says. “There’s an enormous opportunity to make a significant impact on effective aid delivery by improving appropriate financial management support.”

## **Helping Liberia recover from conflict**

Richard Dwerryhouse is one of a special breed of accountants, who was prepared to go it alone and refocus his career specifically on the relief and development sector, leaving his home in Cheshire for his first international aid assignment in Africa.

Richard’s commitment to NGO work is impressive. He recently married but with the support and blessing of his wife, he has taken up a short term contract with a mines awareness organisation in Liberia, West Africa.

Previously, he worked as Project Manager with Raleigh International in Borneo, responsible for supervising a team of 40 people. It was partly this experience that gave Richard the impetus for change:

“I realised that I need a job that gives me the sense that I have helped others less fortunate than myself....I joined Mango’s register as the best way to access a range of finance job opportunities with a broad range of international NGOs and charities.”

Within the space of 2 months Mango gave me lots of opportunities to consider. Landmine Action was looking for someone at short notice to go to Liberia for a month or so, and I leapt at this opportunity to contribute my skills and gain that all important first experience”.

Landmine Action works to save lives and livelihoods through the elimination of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. Richard’s role was to provide additional support to their team, to assist the day-to-day running of the finance and administration functions in Liberia and provide a review and analysis of current procedures and controls.

Mango can help anyone interested find out more about working with NGOs. There are case studies and a full discussion of the issues on their website: [www.mango.org.uk](http://www.mango.org.uk). More and more employers are offering staff the opportunity to take leave or a sabbatical to develop new skills in different professional environments – while also supporting vital humanitarian or development work.

Visit the Recruitment section of Mango's website for further details: [www.mango.org.uk](http://www.mango.org.uk).