



Research work in an NGO

*Alex is working as a research programme manager with an NGO. Previously he has worked as a Teaching Fellow with a university, as a researcher an International Development Agency and for the Bretton Woods Project. Alex took a Masters at SOAS. We spoke to him about working as a researcher. **November 2006***

Work as a Primary Researcher

"The work I do currently is distinct from my previous role as a primary researcher. As a primary researcher you follow a specific process. Planning a topic, reviewing current knowledge and then carrying out the research – this could be field work such as interviews or data collection."

Work as a Research Programme Manager

"My current role contains a lot of technical support. For example Save The Children may be researching the barriers to education in Ethiopia. My role would be to set the terms of reference for the primary researchers, help define the issues that they will need to address and offer support for the consultants that will carry out the research. I would also read and comment on the draft reports. This role is broader compared to the depth you are expected to go to in primary research. This kind of work is typically found in the headquarters of NGOs.

I do want to incorporate primary research elements in my role but that will need to wait till I am more established – I have only been here seven months so far."

Skills Needed

Negotiation Skills – "much more so than in the primary research role I have to negotiate with external and internal people. This could involve, for example, ensuring that the primary researchers we assign to projects are working to the agreed focus.

Networking – "a related skill. Research in an NGO has a very practical orientation. Our emphasis is different than in 'pure' research. We are not just concerned with uncovering the facts. Our research also includes an emphasis how research can be used to have an impact on policies. Consequently if we are researching on landless labourers in Bangladesh, for example. we will be concerned with developing a network or constituency to help make a practical difference on the ground. Our research does include interviews and data collection with the landless but also we talk to organizations such as trade unions and local NGOs who are key organizations in ensuring that we make a practical difference.

Management – "My role involves a consultancy and supervisory element. I have to appoint researchers and, incidentally, help the organization tap a broader range of expertise. At some point I will also find the space to go overseas to look at the work our researchers are doing on the ground. And of course this will help me keep in touch with developing countries. I also have to be concerned with managing budgets for research projects and putting in bids to get the money in the first place.