INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC SECTOR RECRUITMENT

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Riding a wave of goodwill

Sarah Murray on the increasingly high profile of aid agencies and their private partnerships

As the ability of governments to solve social and environmental problems is increasingly questioned, high expectations are placed on the non-profit sector.

At the same time, companies are forming partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and institutions such as the United Nations to apply business techniques to issues such as poverty reduction and environmental protection. The challenge for global NGOs and multilateral institutions is to capitalise on both trends.

Public awareness of the sector and its activities has rarely been higher. Disasters such as the Asian tsunami of 2004 gave renewed prominence to the activities of large relief agencies and NGOs, while the unfolding world food crisis is focusing public attention on the work of organisations such as the UN World Food Programme.

The 2008 Trust Barometer produced by Edelman, the communications firm, found that in 13 of the 18 nations polled, public trust is moving away from government and towards business and NGOs. They are benefiting from a wave of goodwill not only from donors but also from the new generation of graduates entering the workforce – many of whom are drawn to helping fix social and environmental problems.

Moreover, companies are lining up to form alliances with non-profit organisations. In a recent survey by Dalberg Global Development Advisors, 61 per cent of respondents had engaged in partnerships with social organisations over the past three years, while 88 per cent expressed an interest in doing so.

As they move centre-stage, multilateral banks, foundations and charities are coming under new levels of scrutiny. Donors are becoming more engaged in how their money is spent. At the same time, web technology can put any perceived misbehaviour or failure in the spotlight. This means donors, beneficiaries, trustees or board members have greater powers to assess the impact of their grant-making.

In the same way that companies have been exposed by web-based activism on issues such as pollution and sweatshop practices, the flow of information online means public sector organisations can no longer rely on the old command-and-control approach to communicating with their stakeholders.

Yet while business has had to embrace greater transparency, the non-profit sector has been slower to move in this direction. Research shows that confidence in these groups' ability to deliver effectively and spend money wisely is falling. A survey conducted by Paul Light, professor of public service at New York University, found the percentage of those who said charitable organisations do a very good job has fallen from 34 per cent in 2003 to 25 per cent today.

The question for the sector, then, is how it can build on the current wave of goodwill to improve the way it delivers services and bring greater transparency to its activities.

As the relationship between business and NGOs becomes more pragmatic, partnerships can give new impetus to programmes and bring increased efficiency to non-profit and public sector organisations through management techniques that have been tested in the private sector.

But if growing involvement by the private sector in issues that were once the preserve of aid agencies or charities is beefing up the non-profit sector's capabilities, cross-sectoral partnerships are not always easy to manage.

"This is a new landscape and we're all grappling with what this means," says Daniel Runde, head of partnership development at the International Finance Corporation, part of the World Bank. "It requires a different set of skills to work across institutional boundaries."

Above all, the sector is starting to recognise that improving employee development lies at the heart of its ability to deliver lasting solutions.

Savvy organisations are looking to tap into the skills of those, such as business school students, who might once have considered a career only in business but may be looking for jobs with more meaning.

While it is often hard for non-profit organisations to compete on salary with the private sector, they have other advantages when it comes to recruiting talent.

However, in many cases global public sector organisations and NGOs have yet to develop a strong culture of performance management or an ability to attract people early in their careers and create the opportunities that will allow them to rise through the organisation.

Only about one-third of public sector organisations have a formal process for identifying leadership potential, compared with 60 per cent of private sector companies, according to Hay, the human resources management consulting group. It found only 25 per cent actively manage the careers of future leaders.

At the same time, the sector needs to come to terms with the fact that the job-for-life mentality, which left the private sector many years ago, is also disappearing from the public and non-profit arenas.

"Many public sector agencies still think of recruitment for full-time internal staff with the idea that they'll be there for 20-30 years," says Raj Kumar, president and co-founder of the Development Executive Group, a Washington DC-based group that provides online recruiting to the development community.

Niko Canner, a co-founder of Katzenbach Partners, the New York-based consultancy, believes that, for organisations that can accommodate it, a movement of talent between non-profit and private sectors is an advantage.

"It gives them access to people who understand how to work with the business world and enables them to create new kinds of partnerships," he says.

"It also helps them articulate the value of what they do in terms that a lot of their foundation funders will respond to – so it's breaking down the barrier between two languages."

Queuing for food: Afghan women wait to receive wheat donation bags from the World Food Programme Reuters

Inside this issue

Education is the way forward

Jumping for books: Unicef distributes notebooks to Iraqi school girls AFP

PROFILE

Stephanie Gray surveys the work of the United Nations Children's Fund

Last year, worldwide infant mortality dipped below 10m – to 9.7m – for the first time in history. The fall to single digits was due in large measure to the United Nations Children's Fund's immunisation programme.

Established at the end of the second world war, Unicef was created to provide food, clothing and health care to European children facing famine.

It became a permanent part of the UN in 1953, when it started a global campaign against yaws, a disfiguring disease affecting millions of children and one curable with penicillin.

The fund operates in 164 countries, where it is cranking up emergency supplies to cope with global food shortages, most of them in conflict zones. Its $2.2bn annual budget is raised by national committees, voluntary government donations and, increasingly, private-sector partnerships.

In 1961, after more than a decade of focus on health issues – in which it often secured ceasefires in civil conflicts and immunised the children of both sides – the fund expanded into addressing the needs of the whole child, beginning its abiding concern with education.

"More children – and many more girls – than ever before are receiving an education," says Geoffrey Keele, Unicef's chief spokesman in New York.

"One of the biggest lessons we have learned in emergency situations, whether it be conflict or natural disaster, is the importance of schooling."

Classes "restore order and structure" to a child's life, he says, and can be conducted anywhere, such as under a tree or in a tent.

Unicef supplies teachers with blackboards and children with notebooks, pencils, erasers, crayons and rulers. "A learning environment provides a feeling of normalcy," says Mr Keele. "It's an environment in which we can identify children who are isolated and withdrawn and might need more support."

It serves other purposes too. "It can be a great launch pad for tracing family members and treating malnourishment."

Unicef's activities have led to greater acceptance of the rights of the child, as governments recognise the importance to their country's economic well-being of nurturing the next generation.

But, remaining problem areas include HIV-Aids in sub-Saharan and west Africa. Of the 62 countries making little or no progress towards the Millennium Development Goals on child survival, nearly 75 per cent are in Africa.

The other big issue is the sexual exploitation of children, mostly in eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America. Mr Keele says the ability to traffic children has become much easier with the growth of the internet.

Another area of exploitation is child labour in developing countries, often by multinationals and particularly in the sports goods and textiles industries.

"We have been in close discussions with corporations such as Nike looking at the best way of eradicating child labour," says John Winston, head of international and corporate alliances for Unicef.

"Entire industries rely on child labour... But we don't just close the door on companies. We realise the complexities, and are always looking at ways to engage with them."

Mr Winston says the fund started building relationships with the corporate sector in the 1990s, long before social responsibility became a big influence on companies' behaviour.

A campaign with British Airways in which passengers donated spare change has been one of the most successful, he says. "It was as a result of the partnership with the airline that, when the*tsunami* happened in 2004, it chartered 747s for our operations in Indonesia."

Unicef's relationship with Barcelona football club is also effective. Barcelona, whose players wear the Unicef logo on their shirts, have pledged €1.5m a year over five years and show a keen interest in sports programmes in the field.

"Sport can be a fantastic way of teaching the values of life. It can also be a reuniting activity in areas of conflict," says Mr Winston.

Working for an organisation such as Unicef requires passion and commitment, says Dash Joshi, its head of recruitment.

"Some are in it for the adrenaline of being in an emergency situation or heading a programme as a country representative."

The highest turnover of staff is in emergency situations, where burn-out can be high. "No one does more than two years in an emergency situation," he says.

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Generation Y seeks work with a mission

NOT-FOR-PROFIT SECTOR

Sarah Murray looks at the rewards outside corporate business

Many in the recruitment business agree see young people as globally connected, technologically savvy and hungry for a broad range of experiences.

Crucially for the public and not-for-profit sectors, they are also keen to help solve the world's problems.

This represents a unique opportunity – if organisations can tap into the pipeline of talent.

In some ways, big not-for-profit organisations or global public sector institutions have a head start in attracting Generation Y. With missions of protecting the environment, reducing poverty or improving healthcare in developing countries, such organisations appeal to young people.

In addition, the range of candidates considering a career in the non-profit sector is broadening. A growing number of business-school students are attracted to courses addressing social and environmental issues, and some are forgoing a career in banking or consulting for one in a multilateral agency or a not-for-profit organisation.

"We are well placed to attract them, because they are looking for meaning in the jobs they're doing," says Malte von Putbus, global recruitment manager for the International Finance Corporation, part of the World Bank.

And as many not-for-profit organisations become more businesslike, they become more appealing as employers to young professionals.

"The innovation around the work happening in the not-for-profit sector is exciting for young individuals who want to be part of market-based solutions to help the poor," says Deepti Doshi, talent manager at the Acumen Fund, a not-for-profit organisation using entrepreneurial techniques to tackle global poverty.

However, the challenge for global public-sector organisations and NGOs is less about attracting these young recruits than keeping them.

In a world where salaries are generally lower than in the corporate sector, candidates are looking for other kinds of rewards – the chance to gain a diverse set of experiences and a career that allows them to move around rapidly, both functionally and geographically.

While development agencies and others can certainly offer employees a broad set of geographical locations, not-for-profits and others traditionally have not focused on people development.

> Candidates are looking for the chance to gain a diverse set of experiences

This is partly because many organisations, particularly those in areas such as emergency relief, move from one crisis to the next, with little time to spend on employee development.

"Everyone wants to spend every dollar and moment of time in meeting human needs," says David Simms, managing partner of Bridgestar, a not-for-profit organisation that offers executive search services to charities and not-for-profit outfits.

Donors often insist that funds go directly to the needy, leaving organisations little income for staff training, mentoring or coaching.

"The non-profit sector is a bit behind on this," says Ms Doshi.

"The danger for non-profit organisations is that young people can go into the sector and be productive for the first six months, but if no one is managing or mentoring them proactively, they will feel they are no longer growing, and they may seek other options."

This has serious implications for the not-for-profit sector.

Over the next decade, not-for-profit organisations with revenues of $250,000 or more will need to attract and develop 640,000 new senior managers (about 2.4 times the number currently employed), according to research by the Bridgespan, Bridgestar's parent. By 2016, they will need almost 80,000 new senior managers a year.

Yet, one survey* of almost 6,000 people working in not-for-profit organisations across the US found that a lack of mentorship and support over a career path were frustrations for many.

Only 4 per cent of respondents said they were explicitly being developed to become their organisation's executive director.

"Career management is important," says Mr von Putbus.

"We have to put more emphasis on this... In the past, careers evolved naturally. But with this generation, you need to give them more opportunities so you have to manage them more carefully."

Ms Doshi agrees. "We know we need the people to fuel our growth," she says. "And for us, it's about proving that there's a sustainable career here at Acumen and one that's equally as challenging as that in the private sector."

**Ready to Lead? Next Generation Leaders Speak Out, produced by CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Meyer Foundation and Idealist.org*

The thrill of achieving more than making money

CHIEF EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW

Howard Davies explains to **Seb Morton-Clark** what motivates him

Howard Davies: "I like running things" Bloomberg

In our frenzied capitalist culture where lives are devoted to notching up the zeros on the monthly pay cheque, Howard Davies, a chief executive for just over 20 years, makes for refreshing listening.

"I like a decent income," he says, "but I don't have any ambitions to be seriously rich."

Such reflections may be suitable for the director of the London School of Economics.

Not that anyone supposes the LSE has Mr Davies on a meagre package, but the highly-regarded manager, who could have carved out an affluent career at any number of private companies, has chosen to devote the majority of his working life to the public sector.

"I've always had in mind that my interests lie more with public-sector management," he says.

"In the private sector you have a fairly clear ultimate objective: grow the bottom line. But I've always found that the task in the public sector of balancing different objectives is intellectually more interesting.

"A university is like a company in that you have to manage it so that at the end of the day you are in surplus.

"But a university is not just about delivering a larger surplus, you have to balance what you need to invest and what the priorities are – which is more complicated to work out. I find the challenge more exciting."

There has however been some to-ing and fro-ing on Mr Davies' CV: Foreign Office, Treasury, McKinsey (when, he says, he underwent a "personal privatisation"), the Audit Commission, the Confederation of British Industry, the Bank of England and the Financial Services Authority.

He explains that he has taken jobs not so much for remuneration as because they have chimed with his personal convictions.

"I like running things. I take the view that if you're going to be an effective manager, then you need to get experience in a range of different places."

This was part of the reason for his first foray in the private sector at McKinsey in 1982.

"And probably, at that time, management techniques were more developed in the private sector than in the public sector.

"I found McKinsey exciting in the sense that there were fewer constraints.

"You could go to a company and tell them that they should be doing something totally different. That sort of ability to think out of the box was exhilarating."

Ultimately though, Mr Davies wanted to do more than be an ideas generator.

"I prefer to have responsibilities of a continuing kind – to engage with implementation and not just come up with the bright ideas."

Having worked in both public and private spheres, he has had the opportunity to understand the significant differences in their operations.

"The degrees of freedom you have [in the public sector] are less. You undoubtedly have less flexibility to hire and fire.

"I couldn't decide here at the LSE, where I have 1m sq ft in the middle of London, to just turn it into retail space.

"But in big companies, if you've got a good idea, good strategy and the support of shareholders, then you can switch the direction of a company pretty drastically.

> 'I've always found that the task in the public sector of balancing different objectives is intellectually more interesting'

"In the public sector, you're constantly trying to optimise in a sub-optimal framework.

In spite of these restrictions, Mr Davies has confidence that the public sector can perform as efficiently as private companies.

He believes that social markets can create beneficial competition between schools, for example, as already exists with higher education.

"I think the best examples are when you create quasi-market mechanisms that encourage public sector bodies to behave in a more agile way.

"That way you can create conditions that encourage better management."

In terms of public recruitment, he has reservations regarding certain aspects of governmental policy.

"I don't believe that the private sector has a monopoly of wisdom about how to manage things," he says.

"But the previous government, and indeed this one, seem to talk as if a really good button-down private manager can make everything fine.

"Actually, history tends to show that this is not the case. Private sector managers going into the health service have by no means been universally successful.

"It's not obvious to me why companies are thought to be able to run schools better than people who know something about education.

"I worry about the government handing over problems it can't cope with to the private sector. I don't think it's particularly fruitful."

During the past decade, Mr Davies says he has noticed an improvement in public sector recruitment.

"I think that people are more comfortable with the idea that they have a diverse set of entry points into their organisation and not just from the graduate milk round, which certainly used to be the mind-set at the Treasury when I was there.

"Back then, no one would come into the Treasury at the higher levels, but now it's completely different.

"I think the public sector is getting much better at being able to integrate people from different background and with different experiences."

Creaky edifice in need of repair

UNITED NATIONS

Reforming UN recruitment is a slow process, reports **Harvey Morris**

Pen pushers: for every office-bound worker in New York there is another in the field striving to help the needy Bloomberg

The bureaucracy that runs the United Nations is, by its own admission, as creaky as the post-modern pile on New York's East River that houses it.

The UN's 192 members have agreed to put up $2bn over five years to refurbish the 58-year-old complex that houses the UN Secretariat and General Assembly. Pessimists fear fixing the bureaucracy may take longer.

The UN has evolved from a club of 50 countries emerging from the wreckage of the second world war into a global body employing up to 30,000 people in various parts of the world, according to a 2007 report on management reform. There is a consensus that structures put in place more than half a century ago have failed to keep up with a vastly altered world.

Calls for reform, whether of the 15-member Security Council or of the bureaucracy that serves it and other UN institutions, are a constant theme of UN debate. But so are the complaints of those who lament the slow pace of change.

"The fact we have started moving is positive and encouraging," says Srgjan Kerim, president of the General Assembly that groups all member states, who has made reform a central target of his current one-year tenure. "But what worries me is the pace. It's very slow. I'm afraid there's no continuity in the General Assembly. Everything's done ad hoc.

"I have been very surprised that this organisation has elements of corrosion and needs profound reforms to make it more efficient and coherent."

When it comes to change, the questions often centre on who decides and who pays.

Insiders such as Mr Kerim say consensus-building on reform is inevitably slow and piecemeal, relying as it does on overcoming rivalries and self-interest among 192 member states and their regional blocs.

The most vociferous critics of alleged waste and inefficiency at the UN, who include the US, tend to focus on the time-serving nature of much of the work at HQ, where thousands of employees produce mountains of paper on long-forgotten mandates.

"Reports are churned out year in, year out, but we have to cut back on some things and we have to do new ones," says Mark Wallace, the outgoing senior diplomat at the US mission responsible for UN budget issues. "Many states haven't had the political will to take certain steps. It's hard to get them to do the nuts and bolts of reform."

Mr Wallace says some member-states believed in leaving management reform to the office of the secretary-general. "But then you're empowering a bureaucracy to reform itself."

For every perceived pen-pusher in New York, Geneva or other UN administrative outposts, however, there is a dedicated staffer working in often perilous conditions to bring succour to the world's needy.

It is an increasingly hostile world. The belief that the impartiality of the UN granted it immunity has faded in the wake of fatal bombings in Baghdad and Algiers, carried out by groups that view the UN as an agent of their big-power enemies.

> 'Member states, staff and management all express disappointment with the current system of recruitment'

In the face of such new challenges, Mr Kerim supports measures that would draw the best talent to the UN and its agencies. He believes the latter act too often as independent fiefdoms within the UN system.

"We need more coherence and mobility between departments and the UN agencies. For the UN to get really good people in the face of stiff competition, it has to change its system. Otherwise, people will become disappointed and leave."

Mr Wallace shares the General Assembly president's belief in management reform. "One of the [staff] complaints is that there is a managerial impunity out there," he says. "There are consequences for staff but not managers. You see middle managers stay in the same jobs for decades."

Morale among staff, many of whom face the uncertainty of short-term contracts, has not been helped by high-profile cases of corruption, stemming from the Iraq oil-for-food scandal and the operations of a number of UN peacekeeping missions.

Staff complaints have ranged from the uneven treatment of whistle-blowers to the intrusiveness of internal inquiries.

Some reforms already under way and others seen as urgent were outlined in a report last year of the so-called Four Nations Initiative on management reform, spearheaded by Chile, South Africa, Sweden and Thailand.

The report expressed concern about the lack of transparency surrounding appointments to the most senior UN posts, but added: "The recruitment to less senior positions has also been criticised. Member states, staff and management all express disappointment with the current system of recruitment."

Complaining of imbalance in the geographical spread of UN staff, the report noted: "If the recruitment process de facto is narrowed down to a few member states' nationals, there is a great risk that other more competent candidates will be missed."

Outlining other failings, it added: "At present, the UN does not have sufficient mechanisms to reward good performance by staff – nor to sanction substandard performance. In order to hold staff and managers accountable, the objectives and expected outcomes against which they will be measured must be clear and transparent."

Latin America less alluring as dollar dives

International organisations are rolling out an ambitious programme to increase positions in Latin America, both through relocation from headquarters and local recruitment, as they put staff nearer the projects they manage.

The trend comes at an awkward time, as the dollar touches lows against the region's currencies, making a move for US-based staff less enticing.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and International Finance Corporation (IFC), both based in Washington DC, are midway through big drives to redeploy staff. Before it started the realignment, the IDB had 1,200 in headquarters compared with 800 in-country.

Now it splits its resources evenly and is moving in Latin America's favour, says Juan Manuel Fariña, acting human resources manager.

The approach is echoed at the IFC. "We are currently reinforcing decentralisation," says Malte von Putbus, global recruitment manager. "Five years ago, we had some two-thirds of our staff at headquarters. We now have more than half our 3,250 staff in the field and I believe the ideal situation would be two-thirds in the field."

Multilaterals are not the only organisations looking to recruit more local staff in Latin America. International non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are beefing up in the region, says Patrick Shields, executive director at Global Recruitment Specialists in Norwalk, Connecticut. This creates pressure for key positions.

An increase in the number of NGOs adds to the pressure. The US claims to have more than 1m such organisations, says Mr Shields.

This explosive growth is mirrored in Latin America, where the creation of large numbers of indigenous NGOs is under way.

They are increasingly accessing funding not just locally but from North American giants such as the Gates Foundation, by submitting proposals via the internet. That is giving them more purchasing power, including for staff.

Within this strong demand picture, there are some particular hotspots. Demand for staff is particularly acute for positions such as finance directors and fund-raisers. Positions across the Caribbean are also hard to fill and the IDB is reaching out to New York City's big community to help its recruitment there, says Mr Fariña.

Another complicating factor is diversity programmes, a critical aim of multilaterals such as the IDB, which needs to reflect the 47 member countries it serves.

Salaries have not moved substantially at a time when the dollar has fallen against key currencies in the region.

The bands are $70,000-$90,000 base salary for directors and $90,000-$150,000 for executive directors, says Mr Shields.

Meanwhile, the dollar has lost almost half its value against the Brazilian real, for example, in the past five years. That's worrying HR heads.

"It's true that the weak dollar is a problem," admits Mr von Putbus. "At the moment, we don't really have a solution."

Mr Fariña is keeping a close eye on the greenback too. So far, he has not seen the dollar's fall deterring staff from moving, but fears it may do.

While more severe than usual, lower remuneration than the private sector is hardly a new problem for the public sector and broader benefits packages are being rolled out to compensate for the salary gap. They include danger benefits, and allowances for housing, vehicles and education.

Given the extra competition and the difficulty in locating staff, it is hardly surprising that headhunters play a bigger part.

"This year I am receiving 10 enquiries a week. It used to be two a couple of years back," says Mr Shields.

Jonathan Wheatley

Juan Manuel Fariña

Situations vacant in growing global club

Kamalesh Sharma: a humanitarian, a technician and a consensus-builder AFP

THE COMMONWEALTH
ANALYSIS

Democracy and development goals require specialists, says **Ross Tieman**

One, two or even three generations have been raised in Britain's former colonies since their governors packed their bags. Yet the Commonwealth, a 53-nation informal club that includes Britain, goes from strength to strength.

Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony, and Cameroon, largely French, are members. An application from Rwanda, another former French colony, is expected to be approved at next year's heads of government meeting in Trinidad and Tobago. Yemen, the Palestinian Authority, Israel and Algeria have also inquired about joining.

Suddenly, the Commonwealth looks like an organisation whose hour has come. Its work revolves around what it calls the "twin pillars" of democracy and development.

"We are working for the growth of strong, stable democracies in member countries," says Manoah Esipisu of its Secretariat.

Flawed elections in Nigeria and Kenya last year, and in Zimbabwe (no longer a member) this spring, have reinforced a widening realisation that good governance structures help avoid bloodshed and encourage development.

And though it can be difficult to reach consensus, Commonwealth leaders have shamed erring members.

The Fiji Islands has had its membership suspended since a coup in December 2006. Pakistan was suspended last November after its president declared martial law.

Talks are under way with both about a path back to democracy that will allow the suspensions to be lifted.

Rwanda has applied, says Mr Esipisu, because it "wants to be counted as one of the states that is looking to improve its democratic credentials".

To promote such goals, the Secretariat in London plays a key role, finding and funding advisers who can help draft legislation. It helps develop better judicial systems. And it sends experts on health, education, and even gender equality to help members achieve their Millennium Development Goals.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II remains the titular head of the Commonwealth. Yet the arrival last month of Kamalesh Sharma, the Indian diplomat, as secretary-general could bring a change of tone.

Mr Sharma replaced New Zealander Don McKinnon, who had completed two four-year terms. India, with a population of 1.1bn, accounts for half the people in the 53-nation club. It is becoming an economic powerhouse with achievements many other members, particularly in Africa, would like to emulate.

Mr Sharma, lately Indian High Commissioner to the UK, has an impressive record in negotiations on trade and development finance. Yet when he was elected at last autumn's Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Kampala, Uganda, he said he plans to pay particular attention to women and young people.

He is a humanitarian, a technician and a consensus-builder. But he will have to focus on efficiency and service delivery as well. The Secretariat has a tiny budget, with member contributions in 2005-06 of just £13.5m.

The Secretariat numbers just 360 people, including 250 in London, with the others in branch offices in countries such as Guyana, Zambia, India and the Solomon Islands.

Staff have a huge range of skills, from finance to law. But when it comes to putting boots on the ground, the Secretariat often hires consultants, employing about 60 each year on contracts of six months to two years, and perhaps 40 on shorter contracts.

But the opportunity to carry out a civil aviation financial review in Antigua and Barbuda, or to run a timber harvesting and climate change monitoring not-for-profit organisation in Guyana does not trigger a mile-long queue of applicants.

"Finding the right skills and the right people is a challenge," says Edith Lawrence, a human resources officer at the Secretariat. The Commonwealth is little-enough known in the UK, she says. "How do we get somebody who is in a remote part of the world to respond to the offer of a vacancy?"

> When it comes to putting boots on the ground, the Secretariat often hires consultants

So Secretariat staff have to use a great deal of imagination and local knowledge to find people with the requisite skills. Posting vacancies on its own website is not enough. Staff also use specialist websites, leverage NGO networks and place local newspaper adverts.

The opportunities offered at any one time may be as few as 10, but probably exceed 100 a year. The Commonwealth includes 23 micro-states with fewer than 1m people, and their needs are often greatest.

Typically, a member state will request an adviser from the Secretariat for a project, and once terms are agreed, the Secretariat will find an expert and fund the post. If the project runs longer, the cost may be shared with the member state.

While nurturing global democracy, Mr Sharma also has to ensure the welfare of a mini-Commonwealth of employees and advisers scattered across the globe. The staff are as diverse as the member states, with geologists and meteorologists on the same payroll as lawyers and a speech therapist.

'Rats' grow fat on Nigeria's public purse

Funke Egbemode, a columnist, has advice for professionals venturing into Nigeria's public sector, reports **Matthew Green** in Lagos.

"Civil servants are cunning," she wrote in The Sun newspaper. "In that rat pack are Nigeria's most wanted criminals and any appointee who loses sight of that little fact will eventually be served for dinner."

Ms Egbemode voiced her opinion after Adenike Grange, a paediatrician, was forced to resign as health minister when investigators accused her of complicity in a plot to embezzle government funds.

The scandal was a reminder of the decay that has turned much of the civil service into the last place where Nigeria's brightest professionals would look for a job.

But the government's ability to recruit agile brains will be pivotal in deciding if the nation can make the leap to the faster growth achieved by India, China and Brazil.

Since assuming office a year ago, Umaru Yar'Adua, the president, has pledged to remove hurdles ranging from minuscule power generation to a lack of investment in the oil industry.

Senior civil servants say they are determined to overcome nepotism, inefficiency and sleaze.

In the years after independence from Britain in 1960, graduates flocked to government jobs as their best hope of joining an emerging middle class.

By the late 1970s the decline had started. Under military government, the public sector became a machine for dispensing patronage. Wages for the majority of workers were paltry, morale collapsed, and corruption span out of control.

After army rule ended in 1999, the government of former president Olusegun Obasanjo began to strip away some of the fat as part of its liberal reforms.

Solomon Matankari, the permanent secretary of the Bureau of Public Service Reform in the current administration, says the number of people employed by federal government ministries has in recent years fallen from 160,000 to 130,000.

But the total number of civil servants in the country stands closer to 3m, taking into account various government agencies, the security forces, state-owned industries and state and local governments. The wage bill absorbs about 10 per cent of non-oil GDP.

President Umaru Yar'Adua AP

Mr Matankari says his next priority is to replace about 3,000 senior civil servants due for retirement, which could be a chance to hire new talent.

Critics say progress has been slow, but the previous government can point to successes achieved when donor governments funded competitive salaries for new agencies set up to steer reforms.

The Debt Management Office cleared more than $30bn of foreign debt, and created sub-Saharan Africa's biggest and most liquid bond market outside South Africa.

The new pension commission runs one of the most advanced pension systems of any emerging market.

Now Mr Yar'Adua has taken over the presidency, other Nigerian professionals abroad want his government to find new ways to harness the country's large diaspora.

Benjamin Akande, the dean of the School of Business and Technology at Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri, left Nigeria to study in the US in 1979. He believes many professionals would return if they were confident they could make a genuine contribution.

"You need fresh blood and people who ask questions," Dr Akande says. "You need to shake that tree and to refurbish it with new, bright, young ideas."

In some cases, established professionals have offered their services for nothing.

But until the civil service offers better salaries, Nigeria's fast-growing banks and telecommunications companies will continue to skim off the cream of graduates.

NGOs training local staff for senior management

SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Amy Kazmin examines local talent at international non-governmental organisations

Oxfam is keen to have more local content

For 10 years, Wipawii Jaraswarapan, a 35-year-old Thai accountant, worked for multinational companies in Thailand, helping to facilitate the transfer of large profits from local operations to their home countries.

But a year and a half ago, Ms Wipawii decided that she was fed up with watching Thai money flow into the pockets of shareholders overseas. So taking a cut in pay, Ms Wipawii opted to join the south-east Asia regional office of Oxfam, the British charity, which runs aid programmes around the region.

Today, as Oxfam's regional finance coordinator, Ms Wipawii supervises local accountants in Oxfam's country offices in Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia and Vietnam, as well as Thailand.

Her role, she says, is to work with local accountants to ensure their reports meet both Oxfam and international accounting standards, a job that requires frequent travel and occasionally intensive efforts to train new recruits.

"It's challenging because I used to work with the colleagues who know very clearly about their roles, and have very good systems," she says. "In NGOs, they are good people, they are kind, they are willing to help others, but their way of working is not so systematic.

"But I found that a lot of people still need help from others in this world," she says. "If I can earn enough money for my living costs, and I can share my time with others to benefit them, I feel more value in what I do."

Many east Asians still see international non-governmental organisations as "western" charities helping the less fortunate, who have been left behind in their otherwise booming economies.

But organisations such as Oxfam are making a serious effort to recruit senior regional management locally – promoting local staff into positions of decision-making and authority both in their own countries and regionally.

"Sarah Ireland, Oxfam's south-east Asia regional director, says: "People who live in the countries, or have an overview of the region, understand the context better than we do. I, as a westerner, can overlay management and leadership principles over their cultural understanding, but I'll never understand it the way they do."

In middle-income countries such as Thailand and the Philippines, a growing number of experienced professionals, such as Ms Wipawii, are opting for NGO jobs, seeking the kind of personal fulfilment that they may not have found in the private sector.

India, too, with its historic educational links to the west, has been a significant source of talented and committed aid and development professionals. "Whenever I go to a regional meeting of NGOs, it is packed with Indians," Ms Ireland says.

Yet fulfilling aspirations to have a primarily local and regional staff, while ensuring professionalism and performance, is taking considerable effort, and fresh innovation.

> Experienced professionals are seeking the kind of personal fulfilment that they may not have found in the private sector

"We need to have policies and practices in place that enable our local staff to work their way through the organisation to get the skills they need to occupy senior positions," Ms Ireland says.

Oxfam has invested heavily in its own management and leadership programme, which each year takes in 35 so-called "rising stars" selected from its 10,000-strong global workforce. It then trains them in professional management skills aligned with its own values as an aid organisation.

Save the Children – the British child's rights organisation – also recently began its own global leadership development programme, aimed at boosting management skills to achieve better on-the-ground results within its country programs.

Most country directors and senior managers – almost entirely local staff – are now being put through the training.

"What is going on... is a realisation that we have to professionalise our staff," says Greg Duly, the organisations' regional director. "We have to be accountable for the delivery of good quality of work... and ensure programmes at country level have the right impact."

Even so, recruiting the right local talent for senior management roles remains challenging.

In Cambodia – where the education system is still recovering from the legacy of the Khmer Rouge genocide and years of isolation – experienced staffers have more lucrative opportunities with the World Bank and UN agencies, leaving most international NGOs heavily reliant on expatriate leadership.

In Vietnam – where the economy is booming – talented local staff are being lured away by lucrative private sector opportunities against a backdrop of surging inflation and living costs.

Elsewhere in Asia, NGOS say they have strong national talent, but struggle to pull them higher up the management ladder, as many are unwilling to go abroad.

"The way in which Oxfam competes in the market is that we don't pay huge cash salaries, but our benefits, such as health insurance, are better than other NGOs," says Ms Ireland.

"But it's becoming increasingly difficult to sell that, particularly in middle-income countries."