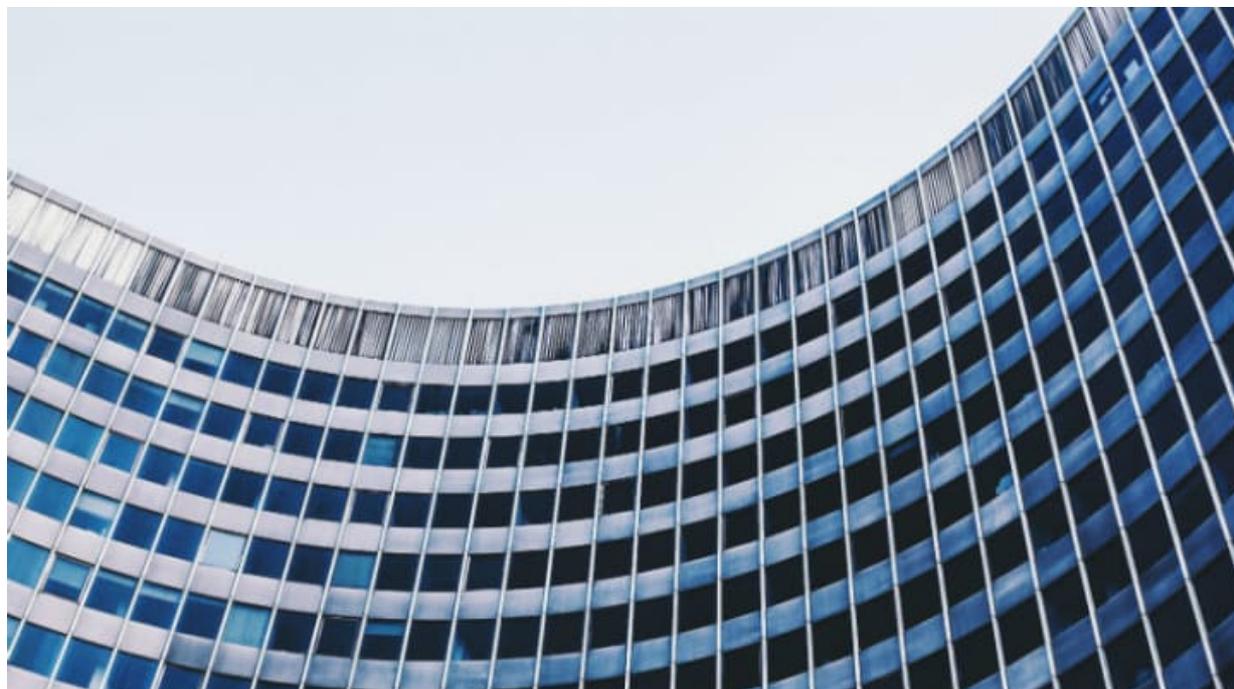


Opinion: The future of global development: 5 trends graduate students should know

 devex.com/news/opinion-the-future-of-global-development-5-trends-graduate-students-should-know-91189

By Claire Somerville

October 21, 2017



The majority of students studying international relations and development studies are aiming to deploy their knowledge and skills in what has become the catch-all field of sustainable development: an industry comprised of everything from the United Nations and governments, to civil society organizations, to social enterprise and, increasingly, to the private and corporate sectors. Aspiring diplomats, aid workers, and changemakers face an increasingly complex and competitive sector. What these graduates need to know now and over the next 15 years differs from the past.

From an institutional perspective, the postgraduate realities of current students mean that professional schools of international affairs are constantly striving to facilitate learning and skill acquisition to match the job market demand. Many graduate schools include initiatives such as Just Innovate's [C4SI](#) experimental education program, a student-run innovation lab aimed at co-creating responses to real world problems. At The Graduate Institute, applied research forms part of the core curriculum for interdisciplinary master's students. [Capstone](#) facilitates project-based collaboration between students, faculty, and external development actors. External partners in these projects are also future employers, feeding back unique insights into the skills, competencies, and knowledge sets demanded in a rapidly shifting career market.

Drawing from five years of experience in coordinating and supervising almost 200 students through 46 collaborations with U.N. agencies, INGOs, and civil society organizations in Geneva, here are five key trends aspiring development professionals should know or learn to prepare for the future.

1. Know the 21st century global agenda

When the Millennium Development Goals arrived on the scene, many of us reflected on the globalization of development as a symptom of millennial fever; a one-off go at fixing the world. Fifteen years later, 193 member states did it all again to produce the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Younger generations have never known a world without a global agenda for action; a world before goals, targets, and indicators. The future global development professional will not only operate in, but also drive a post-neoliberal model of business that couples the agility of a startup (to pilot small and scale, or fail) with the universal and rights-based approach to sustainable development encapsulated by consensus in the 2030 SDGs.

We can already observe how this one world agenda directs resources and sets the terms of reference in the international development job market. Understand how to align strategies and work plans to contribute to the SDGs. It is becoming a hallmark of action on implementation, and even begins to appear in job descriptions.

2. Recognize the rise of capacity (and power) transfer

Acceleration in the pace of economic transformation in lower and middle-income countries — as currently termed — together with shrinking bilateral development assistance will serve to recalibrate capacity (and power) transfer. As new models of funding — from foundations and crowdsourcing to social enterprise revenue — enter the pool, the stakeholders and their demands will shift. In response, the future development professional must be skilled in co-creating capacity, ideating solutions to meet multiple expectations, and fostering inclusion. Ultimately, you must learn to relinquish your position to diverse change agents and local stakeholders.

Get development's most important headlines in your inbox every day.

Thanks for subscribing!

3. Remember the old soft skills of international relations

Sustained, inclusive, and peaceful global development is achieved not only through economic and technological transformation, but political will and partnership. Soft skills will always be critical — professionalism, diplomacy, skilled communication, and negotiation are essential assets for all development professionals. Relationships are built on trust. In times of conflict and political turmoil, technological and climatic transitions, these skills are even more critical for an inclusive and peaceful world.

Use opportunities such as internships and the courses to observe others and hone these transferable skills from predecessors who tread carefully the path between confidences and transparency.

4. Acknowledge gender equality ... the time has come

From the SDG Goal 5 (to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), to Sweden's feminist foreign policy, to Canada's feminist international aid budget (committing 95 percent of funds to gender, women and girls), to U.N. Secretary

General António Guterres' system-wide gender parity strategy — together with the \$12 trillion that can be added to global GDP by 2025 by advancing women's equality — the case for paying attention to gender in your classes has never been stronger.

As heads of agencies, INGOs, and member states commit to leadership networks such as the International Gender Champions, the onus of action and responsibility for holding these leaders and organizations to account falls on you, our upcoming development professionals. This generation needs to move the dial on gender justice and ensure there is no backslide if we are to deliver on the SDGs. Be sure to reflect on the cultural, political, economic, and historical role of gender in your coursework. Build women and girls' rights into your internships, capstone projects, and professional life.

5. Prepare to adapt

But perhaps the most interesting question to ponder on the future of international development professionals is: what next? Will two rounds of 15-year cycles of global development agenda setting be followed by a third? Will the world once again gather, consult, and agree upon a third global plan, or will our future decision-makers determine a new approach to creating the world they want? What is most exciting is that the answers are in your capable hands.

Choose a graduate program that provides exposure to the elements above, while giving you the tools to navigate the changing landscape. Expose yourself to a range of issues and cultivate diverse skillsets to prepare for what's next.

Acknowledgements: to all the Capstone (formerly ARS) students at the Graduate Institute; Our International Geneva Partners and Julianne Piper, former student.

You know you need a postgraduate degree to advance in a global development career, but deciding on a program, degree, and specialization can be overwhelming. In partnership with the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs (APSIA), Duke Center for International Development (DCID) at Duke University, Duke Kunshan University, the Online Master of Public Health (MPH) at George Washington University, and the MPA/ID Program at Harvard Kennedy School, we are digging into all things graduate school and global development in a weeklong series called Grad School Week. Join online events and read more advice on pursuing a postgraduate education [here](#).

About the author



Claire Somerville

Dr. Claire Somerville is currently the executive director of the Gender Centre at the Graduate of

Institute of International and Development Studies, an APSIA member since 2001. An applied medical anthropologist by training, she continues to pursue research in global health, systems innovation and technology; teach various courses and supervise students in the Development & International Studies M.A. programs including applied research and qualitative methods, and also delivers modules in executive education courses.