

Nepal Earthquakes

In 2015 Nepal was struck by the first of two devastating earthquakes. A second quake followed. Over 8,500 people were killed, hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed and millions of people were affected. The UK government has provided over £70 million of humanitarian aid in response to the 2015 Nepal earthquakes. We were at the forefront of the international response, and have since played a leading role in addressing the humanitarian needs of the Nepali people and supporting the long-term recovery and reconstruction efforts of the country. In terms of supporting longer term recovery the UK's efforts are increasingly focused on helping the Nepali people with the longer term recovery of their country. This includes supporting rubble clearance and the restoration of vital infrastructure such as health services and police stations, and by helping vulnerable groups, including women and girls, rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Nicola McDonald is a Senior Procurement and Commercial Manager Department for International Development.

Nicola gives us an insight into how the Procurement and Commercial team within DfID supported this project in Nepal and her experience of working for DfID.

After gaining my Degree in Corporate Law, I spent 3 years with Capita IT Services. I joined DfID as a procurement specialist and in 5 years have been promoted twice, and now manage a large team within the procurement and commercial department.

What attracted you to join The Department for International Development?

Whilst I enjoyed procurement in my last role, I did not feel engaged in the Category I was responsible for. The diversity of the services we deliver at DfID is so varied and different from other organisations which I find both challenging and rewarding.

We deliver development services for the UK Government for overseas countries to lead the UK's work to end extreme poverty across the world. I was also attracted to the commercial delivery aspect of the role and truthfully did not expect civil service to offer this aspect of the role in such depth. I was pleasantly surprised at the level of accountability and in depth involvement in negotiating and influencing I was presented with in practice.

Please tell us about your key responsibilities and main area(s) of focus at the moment in your current role?

My role is extremely varied and involves the management and leadership of my team, ensuring delivery of day to day approvals, building procurement pipelines and creating the strategy for individual procurements. As a senior manager, I am invested in building strategic relationships with colleagues overseas and developing sustainable supplier relationships across all sectors.

Work can involve analysis, investigation and consideration of the markets (for/and) supply base development or diversification. I am also involved in contract dispute resolution and mediation process.

What project have you most enjoyed working on with The Department for International Development and why?

I was the commercial lead in a project for helping to rebuild Nepal, post-earthquake, to help Nepal become more self-sufficient and stimulate the local economy. This included assisting the Nepalese Government to form strategic commercial partnerships with neighbouring countries to realise

commercial benefit from the provision of services ranging from Hydro power to generating the tourist industry.

My role was to work with the Nepalese government to build commercial awareness, ahead of the successful end-to-end running of the procurement programme. We had some great wins stimulating the supply base interest in the country. It was hugely rewarding and it gave me the opportunity to travel and the exposure to undertake the largest commercial negotiations of my career.

How have you personally and/or professionally developed since joining?

I love my role and really enjoy the opportunity to deliver procurement services which have such a real impact. My confidence has grown hugely in the role and this is partly due to my exposure to large scale projects but also undoubtedly due to what I believe is a unique team who are very supportive and involved. I am both personally and professionally satisfied working with DfID and feel privileged to work here.

What do you think makes The Department for International Development a great place to work?

Procurement teams often struggle to be elevated from a back office function but this is far from the case at DfID. The Procurement and Commercial Department have a seat at the top table and are recognised for the value we deliver by the most senior of stakeholders, this means we get front end involvement. Delivering value for money is top priority and we work in close collaboration with senior stakeholders across the business. Indeed, we recently won the 2016 Civil Service Commercial award in recognition of training programmes we provide to the Senior Civil Servant leadership team given their appetite to know more about commercial.

Is there any advice you would give to someone thinking about joining the team?

If you can try to comprehend the diversity of this international organisation it will help you understand the multiple opportunities on offer here at DfID. There is no better feeling than securing a deal you know really will translate into saving lives.

DfID is a great place for professional development and career advancement opportunities; you will be given the opportunity to grow in your role and build your own capability. This is supported through hub and formal training, mentoring and coaching which is all formalised through your own specially designed personal development plan. There is a real L&D focus and professional qualifications such as CIPS are supported and encouraged; indeed, I have even recently secured sponsorship to complete my Masters in Public Procurement Law.