

The British response to Ebola in Sierra Leone

The British response to Ebola in Sierra Leone in 2015 was an example of the UK's development impact. Experts from DfID coordinated a joined-up effort across Government, bringing together the best of British expertise to defeat the devastating disease. DfID led a huge cross-government effort involving 10 departments and Public Health England, NHS England, the Government Office of Science and the UK Border Force all working together to reduce the spread of the disease. This was a truly collective effort with more than 1,500 British military personnel, some 150 NHS volunteers, more than 425 Public Health England staff, and more than 250 DfID surge staff working on the crisis, alongside permanent staff and dozens of civil servants from other departments. Together we supported more than 1,500 treatment and isolation beds - more than half of all treatment beds available, built and funded six Ebola Treatment Centres and operated more than 70 community care centres across the country. The UK is continuing to support Sierra Leone's recovery following the crisis, and we remain the country's largest bilateral donor.

Anne Langley is a Senior Commercial Specialist, programme sourcing and commercial delivery network team.

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

I Joined the Department for International Development 4 years ago as a Senior Commercial Specialist. I had gained 15 years of strategic procurement experience in a variety of industries working for GE, Jaguar Land Rover and Dell.

What attracted you to join The Department for International Development?

I enjoyed all of my previous roles, however, I had undertaken a role in the third sector and I found the dynamic of working in a values orientated organisation very fulfilling. As I explored opportunity for a progressive move, I wanted this again. I identified The Department for International Development as an "employer of choice" and then found myself waiting for the "right role" at the "right level" to become available to applicants.

I love seeing the direct link between the work procurement does and end objectives and deliverables of the organisation. In DfID, this is even more powerful, as I can see the tangible results linked to improvement in people's lives.

It is testament to the success of the organisation, and the function, that there are now more opportunities available in the team at this senior level.

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

I lead a team of incredibly dedicated individuals who range in experience level from apprentice level through to professionals with over 25 years of experience. We are responsible for all programme sourcing and procurement for large complex programmes and providing technical assistance to stakeholders.

The team are using the full range of procurement tools available. For example, we have pushed forward strongly on utilising the relatively new competition with negotiation process for negotiations. We ensure we put in place contracts and partnerships which will be the very best partners for the programme, delivering procurements to a high quality and at pace for stakeholders whilst regularly exceeding the delivery of savings and efficiency targets.

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

The project we undertook supporting the Ebola Crisis is one I feel very proud of my team for delivering. The requirements were dynamic and changing in scope on a daily basis. From the provision of medical aid and medications to protective equipment and transport! And there were over 100 stakeholders to work with.

We had the opportunity to create a delivery team which in addition to procurement and supply chain expertise included Infrastructure, insurance and medical experts. We deployed a rapid response programme which had been developed in readiness for a crisis. The procurements were turned around on critical timescales, to a very high standard.

For these provisions which included treatment centres, we used a robust end-to-end procurement process, from early market engagement, through RFQ, bid evaluation and contracts award. Suppliers were mobilised within just 11 days! We also managed to utilise a mix of international and local suppliers, investment to help the recovery of the local economy was a factor. This team went on to work on the Post Ebola recovery investment programme, which means they have taken their expertise and knowledge of the country on into helping deliver the long term recovery and poverty reduction. They get to stay involved with their stakeholders and continue to see how their efforts have helped deliver a real impact. The team won two CIPS awards for our work on the Ebola crisis, one of which is here in our UK office and the other is proudly displayed in the DFID office in Freetown.

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

My leadership capability has grown considerably, I took on a team of 30 people grew it to 40 and then added more, including the complex transactions team which we formed in response to contracts which are increasing in value, size and complexity. I now lead 70 people!

I have found that I have been rewarded for success with more responsibility and more challenge and I find this very motivating.

I have also developed through pushing the pace of delivery, rising to the challenge of balancing different priorities and the exposure to very different and unique requirements, It's a very interesting role!

I also gain a lot of satisfaction from the team development element of my role, developing individuals, planning with them for their progression and seeing them thrive.

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

First and foremost, the team. From the onset, I found them welcoming, warm, professional and Innovative - people who think differently!

The sheer variety of work, especially in these leadership roles is fantastic. There is no typical week; I may be leading a big negotiation, helping shape our commercial strategy, providing negotiation training to stakeholders, speaking at conferences, meeting with ministers or coaching and mentoring individual team members. It is a highly dynamic and engaging environment.

The organisation has a high priority in Investment in people, commitment to Learning & Development and ensures the provision of space, time and resources for this investment. It also provides the opportunity to travel if you want to. I have travelled to Zambia, India, Pakistan and South Africa, experiencing countries and cultures which I find fascinating, and the people are so welcoming. We also provide excellent technology to help you communicate with overseas stakeholders from right here at home in the UK.

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

What are you waiting for? Do it!

This is an opportunity to build and develop your career. Which could ultimately be in an even wider context than procurement. If this appeals to you then think about how you match the great things about procurement and the delivery of commercial excellence in the context of international development. This is the most exciting element of what we do every day.