

Giving back

As more professionals give up comfortable lifestyles to give back to society, one chartered accountant went to the Congo and acquired skills beyond her years



Congolese family: Helped by Goal

Chartered accountants have a long history of working with charities in their free time, but a growing number are actually taking career breaks to go and work in some of the poorest parts of the world, helping to save people's lives.

Take KPMG auditor Helen Ord. After being seconded to KPMG Geneva where she worked with the International Committee of the Red Cross, she decided she wanted to do 'more of that kind of work'. The 28-year-old says: 'I thought if I didn't do it before mortgages and things, I'd never do it at all.'

Ord was put in touch with Goal UK, a charity set up in 1977 to help street children in Calcutta. Since then, its brief has increased dramatically and it has responded to most major natural and man-made disasters in the world, working with the poor to ensure that they have access to food, water, medical attention and literacy.

Back to basics

Ord is now financial controller of 13 programmes that Goal is running in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It's a country emerging from seven years of war which

caused the deaths of 4m people, its economy is near collapse and its social infrastructure virtually non-existent.

The country could be wealthy, as it has some of the most valuable natural resources in the world, including gold, silver and diamonds. But most of DRC's 60m people live on less than \$1 (50p) a day and the vast majority have little say in how their country is run.

'The biggest thing I do here is cash management,' Ord says. 'Decent banking systems are only now coming into place so it is a very important part of my job. I have to order cash on a daily basis, working out how much money Goal needs for a particular day. Because of the levels of corruption, people don't send bank transfers, so it's really a case of back to basics workwise.'

Goal UK has run programmes in the DRC since 1994, when it responded to the Rwandan refugee crisis.

As well as agriculture, infrastructure and sanitation projects, the charity funds a primary healthcare programme training nurses and providing essential drugs and nutritional support to two hospitals and 31 health centres.

'The programme managers are responsible for their budgets but I am the person that helps them to spend it efficiently,' Ord says. 'All the numbers get churned through once a month. I push people to get this done. Sometimes people get scared of numbers, but I'm there to help them understand it all. Our total expenditure in DRC last year was US\$4.5m and it will be about US\$4m dollars this year.'

Managing her future

Ord has not decided what to do when her contract finishes in November. 'Being an accountant here is a great stepping stone into an operations role, as budget management is very hands on. I manage a team of three so I don't have to do any number crunching myself. My role is more about forward thinking and planning and analysis.'

'This experience has reinforced to me the importance of accountancy – all economies need it. I'm thrilled to have had this opportunity.'

Goal UK is holding a recruitment event for finance professionals at 7pm on 20 June at Jurys Kensington Hotel, 109 Queens Gate, London SW7 5LR. Contact Laura Byrne on lbyrne@goal-uk.org or Tel: +44 (0)20 7631 3196.