

## ZOA's Graduate Traineeship Programme

### Introduction

ZOA is a Christian international NGO, with its head office based in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands, operating in 16 countries worldwide. ZOA serves those affected by violent conflict and natural disasters. Through its long-term commitment, it attends to the needs of those it serves, at different stages of any incident, from relief to recovery, in a variety of sectors. By working alongside communities, it contributes to signs of hope and restoration, and ensures people's dedicated participation in rebuilding their own lives so as to have a lasting and sustainable change.

Since 2009, ZOA has developed a successful traineeship programme for Dutch young professionals and graduates. The traineeship programme offers recently graduated bachelor or master's students, whose studies are aligned to the humanitarian sector, the opportunity to work for one year in one of the ZOA programme countries. As a trainee, they work on a volunteer contract and discover how ZOA coordinates its programmes. Due to the fact that the traineeship programme has also been developed to access and connect ZOA's work with its constituency, ZOA focusses on Dutch applicants.

In 2008, ZOA discovered that the new generation of millennials in the Netherlands found it very difficult to find a job and/or obtain work experience within the humanitarian aid and development sector. At the same time, NGOs were searching for candidates with at least a couple of years of work experience in the field. Therefore, a gap was developing within the Dutch labour market in the sector. ZOA saw the opportunity to access this new generation and designed a learning and development programme aimed at millennials. Since it launched in 2009, more than 40 trainees have successfully completed the programme.

### The process and practice

#### Recruitment and preparation

The application process for the graduate trainee programme is open to interested candidates throughout the year. Using criteria related to their background and the match of their academic studies to ZOA specific sectors and needs, ZOA preselects possible candidates and invites them to an information day where they learn more about ZOA and the programme. Following a second round of the selection process, potential candidates meet with country directors for interviews (face-to-face or via video conferencing). Depending on match, availability, and country security they are offered a traineeship. Before they start their traineeship, graduates have a three-month orientation period, which includes several induction trainings, an extensive security training and programme specific training.

#### Support to the graduate trainees

The ZOA Human Resources (HR) team coordinates the entire trainee programme and is responsible for recruitment, logistics (such as booking airline tickets, visa and training) and supporting the trainee during traineeship. The costs for a trainee are split between the HR budgets in the Netherlands (ZOA NL) and the programme country. The trainee works as a volunteer in the programme country and receives no salary or wage. In the field they are matched to a mentor depending on their trainee position; a programme manager, a programme advisor, or a general affairs manager. Together with their mentor they work in the programme country and visit field projects frequently. Through regular evaluations, pre-designed personal goals, and project plans, a learning plan is offered to the trainee based on their needs of personal development within the setting and function they are learning to perform. ZOA NL HR maintains contact with applicants, selected candidates, trainees in the field, and the country directors.

### **Further opportunities for graduates**

Depending on the availability of roles, graduates may be offered a junior position, with a two-year contract, related to their training. For example, if they have been a trainee general affairs manager (MGA) they could become a junior MGA. On completion of the junior contract there is the possibility of being offered a senior management contract within ZOA. Therefore, trainees can grow into a full senior management position within five years. Since the programme began 20 trainees have been promoted to junior positions and given an employment contract within ZOA. Around 10 of these were then given a senior management position. ZOA places great value on this programme as it provides a way to attract highly educated and motivated staff.

### **Operational Impact**

The trainees support the programme country teams on a valuable basis, working on operations level and supporting their direct mentor and country director. We also have the opportunity to raise our own staff up through development of the trainees, promoting development, retention of staff, and a more attractive organisation to future trainees and staff. It also allows for programme growth as, while they hold no authority, they are able to provide extra skills and work force to accomplish ZOA's targets.

### **Benefits of the programme**

Since 2013, ZOA has on average 10 trainees a year. Currently, the programme is so successful as a way of delivering programme objectives, that there is a high demand for trainees from country directors and the number of applicants is often higher than the number of positions, which means that ZOA can be highly selective.

ZOA benefits even if trainees don't remain in the organisation. The graduate trainees, mostly millennials, are hard workers and very motivated and often stay connected with ZOA in some way, for example through advocacy for the organisation, working for the organisation at a later date if positions become available, and supporting ZOA's work.

There are benefits for the trainees too. They gain valuable skills and training for their professional development and careers, as well as gaining experience in working for an international organisation.

For additional information please contact [Mr. Wil Omlo](#), HR director ZOA and [Nienke Maris](#), HR Officer.