WHAT WILL THE NEXT GENERATION OF DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS LOOK LIKE?

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New sources of funding, new actors and new technologies are quickly changing the way we do development. This led us to wonder, what will the next generation of development professionals look like and what will they need to be successful?

In partnership with the US Global Development Lab at USAID and PSI, Devex recently conducted a survey of development professionals to see what tools, skills and approaches they think the next-generation of development professionals will need to thrive.

One finding was clear: 83 percent of respondents believe that in 10 years, the technology, skills and approaches used by development professionals will be significantly different than they are today. The results paint the picture of a well-rounded, flexible professional who takes a holistic view of development work. Just as likely to be a venture capitalist or high-tech whiz as your traditional aid worker, the future development professional will need to be agile, collaborative and constantly learning new skills.

WHO ARE THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS?

Of the 1,041 respondents, 65% have at least 10 years of experience working in the global development industry.

Respondents come from a broad variety of development sectors, particularly:

1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
2 MONITORING AND EVALUATION
3 ADMINISTRATION/POLICY
4 EDUCATION
5 HEALTH

Respondents are most experienced in the following regions:

Gender balance was slightly skewed towards male participants, who made up 62% of all respondents.
WHO’LL BE THE DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL OF THE FUTURE?

Respondents believe the following types of professionals will be most in demand in ten years:

- **47% Integrators**
- **27% Specialists**
- **16% Generalists**
- **10% Disrupters**

Integrators are particularly important to climate change professionals at 59%, while they are least important to procurement specialists at 34%.

A sharp departure from the current-top down approach, respondents say individual beneficiaries and their communities will have the most say in how aid is invested.

- **41% Individual or Community Beneficiaries**
- **34% Host Governments**
- **26% Traditional Aid Donors and Organizations**

While overall respondents ranked host governments second in decision-making, host governments ranked themselves last, putting aid organizations first and individuals second.

88% of professionals working for international NGOs believe the same about technology, skills and approaches.

84% of respondents believe in ten years the technology, skills and approaches used by development professionals will be significantly different than they are today.

31% of all respondents believe militaries will have less impact. But 58% of health professionals believe that militaries will have more impact than they do today.

Among health professionals, 94% believe that high tech firms will have more impact on development than they do today.
Percentage of respondents who believe that 10 years from now development professionals should be highly proficient in:

1. **SUSTAINABILITY**
   - Percentage: 70%
2. **INNOVATION**
   - Percentage: 54%
3. **COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES**
4. **DATA-DRIVEN AND EVIDENCE BASED PROGRAMMING**
5. **IMPACT EVALUATION**
6. **HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN**
7. **LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**
8. **CROSS-DISCIPLINARY/MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH**
9. **PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS**
10. **DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT/MOBILE TECHNOLOGY**

**WHAT APPROACHES WILL THEY TAKE?**

- **THE TOP 10** approaches respondents believe will be important for future development professionals to be highly proficient in:

However, 43% of respondents from for-profit implementing organizations favor technical skills over people skills.

Percentage of people who believe people skills are either as or more important than technical skills for project leaders:

- **78%**

Percentage of respondents who believe that 10 years from now development professionals should be highly proficient in the following:

- **HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN**: **47%**
- **MARKET-BASED APPROACHES**: **41%**
- **CROWD-SOURCING SOLUTIONS**: **22%**
- **GAMIFICATION**: **13%**

Even more health professionals, **55%** in fact, believe proficiency with human-centered design is of the utmost importance.

**MEN**

**WOMEN**

Women were **20%** more likely than men to rank capacity building as an important approach for future development professionals.

46% of respondents between 25-44 years old believe that 10 years from now development professionals should be highly proficient with market-based approaches compared to just 37% of respondents who are over 45 years old.
Respondents believe these will be the top 5 most essential soft skills for future development professionals to have:

1. Flexibility and adaptability
2. Implementation and execution ability
3. Ability to work in teams
4. Resourcefulness
5. Empathy

Skills Gaps: Respondents identified the Top 5 approaches they wish to gain more training and education in:

1. Data- and evidence-based programming
2. Multi-disciplinary approaches
3. Impact evaluation
4. New methods of development financing
5. Innovation

Respondents above the age of 44 are 2.3 times more likely to rank ability to work in teams as the number one soft skill of the future, compared to those 25-44 years old.

Health professionals ranked data-driven and evidence-based programming as the number one for which to gain more education.

72% of respondents believe professionals will need a graduate level education to succeed in international development in 10 years.

79% of respondents believe professionals will need to be fluent in at least two languages to be successful, with English fluency increasing in importance.

65% of respondents believe that in 10 years, Arabic will be more important than it is today across all development sectors. 75% believe the same for English.