



**Bimonthly WISE hopes to provide a series of articles about a female logistician and the growth of her career. This article is about Pamela O'honde, the founder of WISE.**

## Passion and Career Intertwined

### A Profile of Pamela O'honde

Qualifications: **Msc. In Business Administration, MCIPS, CILT, MBA in Supply Chain Management**

Employer: **Oxfam Great Britain**

Position: **Deputy Head of Logistics & Supply**

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Growing up in Kenya allowed me to understand first hand the challenges of living in a developing country. The struggles that my family and I had to overcome are the foundation of what drives me to be involved in the humanitarian sector. The luxury of education and active learning were not part of my life until I was ten years old. However, it was primary, secondary and higher education that set the framework for a successful career and became a defining period for me.

During the course of my development I have aimed to keep balance in my life through full time work in logistics, being a single parent to two daughters, continuing my education, and active involvement in my church. Challenging myself both personally and professionally have taken me through a series of academic endeavours. I hold an MSC in Business Administration, an MBA in Supply Chain Management, and am member of the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) and Chartered institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT). Along with academics I have been involved in multiple forums and institutes, which promote gender awareness and encourage more women to join logistics.

As the Deputy of Logistics for Oxfam I am in a position to provide strategic leadership and management in support of global humanitarian and development field programmes. I have over 19 years of operational experience in the field of Logistics & Supply, have built rapport and ongoing working relationships with donors, and have a record of success in development and implementation of policies and procedures. There are other aspects of this profession, which have allowed me to keep my passion for people and change alive. Working in humanitarian logistics I have had the opportunity to bring life saving supplies and hope to victims of human made and natural disasters. The impact that I can have to increase the welfare of beneficiaries on a daily basis keeps me inspired, driven to challenge myself, and strive to do my best.

### Past experience

My past experience in Humanitarian Logistics & Supply started in Africa in an extremely challenging environment including cross boarder operations involving several countries. The daily challenges I experienced working in that environment made me comfortable with the rigors of logistics & supply in third world conditions. Growing and learning each step of the way has brought me to several organizations such as World Vision International, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and currently with Oxfam Great Britain. It is in this sector that I have been able to continue to progress in my logistics career and make an impact in the field. I have spoken on Logistics and Supply Chain Management to various forums and guest lectured on several occasions. A memorable experience for me was lecturing at Cambridge University on Logistics Systems Control, providing them with a real world description of the Logistics / Supply of the non profit sector. It is a mutually beneficial experience because when I am involved in speaking activities it gives me the opportunity to share experience and learn from the listeners.

## Career moves

Year	Career Highlight & Place
Jan 1987 – Feb 1994	Purchasing and office manager, Wood ventures Ltd, Kenya
April 1994 – Oct 1997	Procurement and Logistics Manager, World Vision International – Sudan /Somalia Programmes based in Kenya
Nov 1997 – Oct 1998	Regional Relief Purchaser, ICRC (The International Committee of the Red Cross, Logistics Centre, Kenya)
April 2000 – Aug 2002	Regional Operations Manager, Oxfam GB in the Horn East & Central of Africa (HECA) Regional Management Centre, based in Kenya
Sept 2002 – Sept 2003	International Logistics Adviser for Oxfam Great Britain
Sept 2003 – March 2005	Acting Head of Logistics and Supply for Oxfam Great Britain, based in Oxford
March 2005 to date	Deputy Head of Logistics for Oxfam Great Britain, based in Oxford

### What led me to Logistics?

It was my brother-in-law who first introduced me to supply chain principles while he was studying for a purchasing & supply course and enjoying working in a warehouse. I was inspired to follow his lead and study 'Purchasing and Stores' at Kenya Polytechnic which I believed would be challenging, as well as enable me guaranteed employment to support my family. In the mid-80s, very few women ventured into logistics - I was the only woman in my class and 1 of less than 100 professionally qualified women in Kenya. Having gained experience at a leading Kenyan hire-purchase company, I moved into the humanitarian sector working for World Vision (Sudan and Somalia programmes - as a Procurement & Logistics Manager), the International Committee of the Red Cross and now with Oxfam. I knew I had the right qualifications, experience and attitude to be successful - I didn't consider logistics to be a man's job.

### Removing the myth that only men can do Logistics

Logistics, within the humanitarian arena, is still a male-dominated profession; however I have derived much career and personal satisfaction. I have worked hard to become recognised as an experienced practitioner who understands logistics in humanitarian and development programmes - not just because I am a woman. I derive much personal satisfaction from knowing that my contribution saves lives and help restore dignity and hope to the victims of disasters. However, it can be challenging balancing my career development with my single mother responsibilities.

### A word for Logistics inspired women

I would always encourage women to venture into Logistics as it develops hard skills with the potential for career progression and satisfaction. I am proud to work for Oxfam because, as an organisation, it is truly committed to gender equality. For example, I was recently seconded to the Head of Logistics & Supply role, which was challenging, yet very rewarding. There are now a number of professionally qualified women working at Oxfam's country, regional and Head Quarter offices who act as role models for other women. I have gained much experience from meeting customers, managing and supporting teams both directly and remotely. By being prepared to learn from a variety of people, I have been inspired to succeed by many people. My philosophy has always been that fortune favours the brave.

### What is my motivation today and in the future?

By applying my beliefs in integrity, teamwork, respect and compassion I grow professionally and personally. It is inspirational to know that by developing my career I will continue to play an important role in the lives of beneficiaries and the humanitarian sector. Working with the Head of Logistics and Supply I am able to demonstrate competence and perform my job

effectively and efficiently. Over the next three years I will continue to work in this capacity and turn the strategic plans we have developed into reality. I believe that I have the knowledge, skills and experience to enable me to diversify from Oxfam and chose a new career path. There are many opportunities to consider including the wider humanitarian sector, consulting, or private sector work. Whatever continues to challenge and inspire me will be the next step in my career. Of course, I will always pursue education and personal development. The Chartered Institute and Cranfield University are developing training for Aid sector Logistics; hopefully this will cover a doctorate level so that I can continue to progress and advance my current knowledge.

**What will be my personal impact?**

We all know that there comes a time when we have to hang up our boots through retirement and let the new generation continue the work. Before this time comes I would like to make sure that there is something that I will have personally done for women in supply chain working in the humanitarian sector. This is why I have established , with my few respected friends, **WISE (Women's Institute for Supply Chain Excellence)**. This organization will aim to provide women in humanitarian logistics an environment where they can share and exchange ideas while learning from each other. The members will be able to establish and grow relationships as well as support one another. It will also play an advocacy role on issues affecting women in the sector and help find ways through which they will be able to upgrade their skills. **WISE** will also link members to key websites where they will be able to know of job opportunities receive coaching and engage in mentorship programmes. By creating a place where women can feel empowered to develop themselves as individuals and professionals I will leave a legacy I am proud of.