

Passion and Career Intertwined

A profile of Pamela Steele

As a humanitarian logistics specialist I am responsible for providing strategic leadership and management in support of global humanitarian and development field programmes. I have over 15 years of operational experience in the field of logistics and 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 and advocating for gender equality and mainstreaming it in humanitarian logistics keeps me inspired, driven to challenge myself, and striving to do my best.



Past experience

My past experience in humanitarian logistics and supply started in Africa in an extremely challenging environment including cross-border operations involving several countries. The daily challenges I experienced working in that environment made me comfortable with the rigors of logistics and supply in third world conditions. Growing and learning each step of the way has brought me to several organisations such as World Vision International, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Oxfam Great Britain and currently UNFPA. 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.

Personal growth and development

Growing up in Kenya allowed me to understand firsthand 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 10 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 has taken me through a series of academic endeavours. I hold an MSc in Business Administration, an MBA in Supply Chain Management, and am a 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.

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 and 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 one 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 and Logistics Manager), the

International Committee of the Red Cross, Oxfam and now with UNFPA. 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 helps restore dignity and hope to the victims of disasters. However, when my daughters were younger it was a challenge balancing my career development with being a single mother.

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. When Oxfam gave me an opportunity to act as head of logistics and supply chain I 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 for 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. As the Humanitarian Logistics Specialist for UNFPA I am able to demonstrate competence and perform my job effectively and efficiently. Over the coming years I will continue to work in this capacity and develop and turn the strategic plans into reality. I believe that I have the knowledge, skills and experience to enable me to diversify from UNFPA 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 including those who get affected by disasters. This is why I established, with a few respected friends, an organisation by the name of WISE (Women's Institute for Supply Chain Excellence). WISE aims to improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian organisations in delivering aid, to build a cadre of female logisticians and provide them with 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 to be able to respond in disaster situations. 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.

WISE / HUMLOG research

WISE is overseeing a study led by HUMLOG (www.humloggroup.org), a group of (mainly) academics whose research interests also focus on improving humanitarian logistics supply networks. The study is on what makes a good humanitarian logistician, how gender relates to the skills and qualities identified above and lastly what are operational issues that could be improved by the increased presence of female humanitarian logisticians? The research will be placed into the public domain by means of academic conferences, seminars, teaching, and publicity on WISE, HUMLOG and other appropriate websites. Watch this space.