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Some more comments from Jan:

It is helpful to understand that only infrequently would you see a United Nations (UN) vacancy posting for a "geographer". More often, a post that a "human geographer" can assist with is more commonly -and ambiguously-termed what I am now: "Technical Officer". There are other titles just as ambiguous. The point is, there are opportunities for geographers, you just need to develop some experience in presenting your qualifications to meet their needs and frameworks of thinking.

So, what did I do with my degree in Human Geography ?

Qualified with the degree at the end of 2004, I immediately began angling towards a career in humanitarian work.

For me, the entry point was an internship with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This UN agency is completely concerned with the forced migration of people. Something relevant to many disciplines, not the least of which is geography. I worked as Registration Officer assisting with registering newly arrived asylum seekers from Myanmar, Aceh, Nepal, and Sub Saharan Africa.

I have colleagues who started their path as interns or employees of NGOs.

I later went on to do post grad studies in the UK and on completing that rather busy year, I then returned to UN work in a short term contract with the United Nations Development Programme in Southern Sudan. Following the signing of the peace agreement between north and south Sudan in 2005, I was assisting with the UN's Rule of Law initiatives supporting a secure environment for refugees who were now returning - refugees who had years past fled the massive civil war in Sudan (20 years of civil war) and were now returning to their original communities. I was working across the south in liaising with UN partners and community based orgs who were involved in extending legal and social support.

On concluding my contract in Sudan (many people are employed on contract, it is somewhat fluid in working across organizations in fact), I landed a post with the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. I am currently a Technical Officer assisting with Emergency Response and Operations support to humanitarian crises across the globe. Everyday, there are plenty of links to human geography. I am involved in drafting briefs and applications for emergency funding of emergency interventions. This means I assist with drafting the context and circumstances of these crises (example, Kenya post-election violence, Darfur-Chad-CAR insecurity, Iraq refugee flight, Afghanistan food price crisis and so on).

Each UN agency, especially field operational agencies such as WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, WHO have a great need for human resources with diverse and varied backgrounds, not merely "doctors" work at the World Health Organization. It has 20,000 employees across the world, and large segment of their staff are social scientists.

The UN system in its Humanitarian Reform initiative has even greater need for agencies to carry out their mandates with an integrated, cross-cutting approach. This means human resources now more than ever are more in need of people with a good understanding of global, multi sectoral approaches (sectors being a way of classifying the various themes of assistance in to a complex emergency or disaster: health, education, food, protection, water/sanitation, gender and so on). Human geography offers understanding and perspectives across virtually all the sectors that are involved in responding to humanitarian crises. Consequently, geography is an excellent platform with which to cultivate eligibility and experience and contribute to humanitarian initiatives, be it with the UN, or the vast network of NGOs.

In addition, GIS specialists and cartographers are in demand across all the UN field operational agencies. Updating and mapping information in humanitarian/complex emergencies is urgent stuff. See example of one of thousands of maps on UN Relief Web site: <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/AHAA-7D6K9Z?OpenDocument>

Mapping distribution of networks, resources and people is a really big deal. This kind of information is crucial for other agencies to analyze and then make decisions on rolling out a particular response, or redirecting an existing one. For another example, here is the link to the UN JLC via Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Joint_Logistics_Centre

UN JLC for Sudan:

<http://www.unjlc.org/mapcenter/>

And World Food Program is a big consumer of GIS capable folks (and other potential roles for geographers):

http://www.wfp.org/operations/introduction/index.asp?section=5&sub_section=1