

My Time as an Intern at *Sight and Life*

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Max Voegtli, *Sight and Life* intern.

I joined *Sight and Life* in August 2014, straight after graduating from York University, UK, with a BA in Politics with International Relations. Like many young students of politics, I had spent many hours studying, learning, and debating the challenges of the world we were entering. We were invigorated by these new ideas and by the way in which different strands of theory proposed markedly different solutions to similar problems. We took in tried and tested ideas and merged them with new ones that were coming to the fore as the world around us changed.

After three years of experimenting with ideas in this way, it was finally time to test our thinking in a real-world situation. This is where *Sight and Life* as an organization caught my attention.

As many of you will know, *Sight and Life* is a humanitarian nutrition think tank that works toward a world free of malnutrition and is focused on three main fields of action: advancing research, sharing best practice, and mobilizing support. To me, this was an

organization that wasn't merely focused on understanding the problems around us, but actually dedicated to finding solutions to these problems and ensuring that those solutions are acted upon and that they are also sustainable.

This is what attracted me to *Sight and Life*.

The transition from MDGs to SDGs

At *Sight and Life*, I was to put into practice the many ideas I had explored during my time at university, when it became clear to me that we needed new ideas for a changing world. This was also the time of the transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The MDGs were developed and implemented at a time when the world was on the up. The Cold War had ended peacefully, many nations had achieved the independence they had long craved, and there was success in many fields, such as combating disease and improving technology. The MDGs were formulated at a time of optimism, to move the world – especially the developing world – forward. However, new problems emerged, and world society evolved in a manner that prevented the MDGs from fully ushering in the promised dreams.

“The MDGs were written to move the world forward”

The MDGs have expired now, with some having been met and a long battle still ongoing to achieve others. Progress toward achieving the MDGs was uneven. Many praised the MDGs for making states accountable and giving them specific goals to strive for. Others criticized them, saying that the MDGs “failed to consider the root causes of poverty and overlooked gender inequality as well as the holistic nature of development.”¹ This is where the SDGs follow. Instead of eight goals, the number has now been expanded to 17 to cover some of the issues that needed specific attention, for example violence against women. The SDGs are also global goals now, with relevance to developed as well as developing countries.

Being able to study this transformation and the debate around it at university was exciting in itself, but *Sight and Life*

allowed me to look even deeper into root causes and what we could do to tackle a wide range of societal issues. While working with the team, I was very aware of how “fresh” I was to this world, with the experience of many, including Eva Monterrosa, Anne-Catherine Frey, Svenia Sayer-Ruehmann and of course Klaus Kraemer, guiding me.

Working as part of *Sight and Life* forced me to sit up and look at the situation in a real-world context. Things were no longer possible simply because they made sense on paper. Hidden and unplanned-for issues arise when development plans are enacted, issues that have to be dealt with if one is to move forward and be successful. It was during my internship that I learned how to try to predict issues and deal with them as they arose, attempting to find an appropriate response as I went along.

The SDGs give us a broader understanding of what is required to move forward. While the MDGs were mostly focused on poorer countries that were finding their feet after decades of civil war, disease and famine, the SDGs are a truly global effort, with all states being held accountable, no matter how large or rich they may be. A key requirement for improving the chances of success for the SDGs is that everyone should work together in true partnership.

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“Every organization has its part to play in finding the best solutions”

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Finding the best solutions

Every organization has its part to play in finding the best solutions and disseminating these to the organizations that can best implement them and scale them up. This is one of the key things I learnt during my time at *Sight and Life*. Here, a relatively small think tank, with only six permanent members of staff, is able to have a disproportionate influence on the direction of discourse. *Sight and Life* has played a crucial role in many projects, touching lives for the better all over the world. *Sight and Life* is also able to link larger elements of society (such as business) with established NGOs to create a more effective joint effort. Each side brings its own specific expertise, providing a more effective total solution – and that is vital.

The importance of sharing ideas means that more people and groups need to get involved in solving complex challenges. As human beings, we are all different, having grown up in different cultures and with different attitudes – attitudes that shape how we think as we become adults. By harnessing the various perspectives of different people from all around the world, we are able to combine these experiences to create effective solutions that will make the world a better place.

I experienced this myself when *Sight and Life* gave me and a colleague financial assistance to allow us to attend a conference on Sustainability in Copenhagen, where we presented our ideas on maize and rice fortification in South America. Not only was this an incredible opportunity for me: it also allowed me to interact with many amazing people who, through their various experiences, brought a very different way of thinking to bear on my own ideas and thought processes. I met young idealists like myself, older practitioners with a wealth of experience, and up-and-coming scientists who were starting to make a name for themselves. All these individuals challenged my ideas, just as I did theirs, and from that we were able to bring forth new concepts and thus continue the debate in our own areas of specialism.

Bridging different worlds

In my view, *Sight and Life* plays a crucial role as a bridge between all these different worlds – a bridge between multi-national companies and leading NGOs, both with large budgets, lots of experience, and their own roles to play. *Sight and Life* gives them the platform to jointly discover and implement the best solutions.

Sight and Life has taught me many things – how to spot and factor in hidden issues, for instance; how to link the worlds of different players to bring about a more united effort; and also how to challenge existing ideas so as to improve them or even replace them entirely. I was able to draw on the team’s years of experience while also being free to contribute my own ideas. *Sight and Life* gave me my own platform to look at issues I care about, and for that I am extremely grateful.

Now it is time for me – and for and the many others whom *Sight and Life* has hosted as interns – to take these lessons and propagate them as we go forward with our careers.

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