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Position: Support to Communications
Agency: United Nations Communications Team
Duty Station: Viet Nam

Came with Passion, Come Home with Direction

This report is a record of my participation in the second cohort of *UNV – HK Universities Volunteer Programme* from July 2016 to January 2017.

Background

With prior experience in overseas volunteering, and enthusiasm for peace-making and development, I was right away intrigued by the Programme when I first learnt about it – it was nothing short of a golden opportunity for like-minded young people to delve into the field of international development. Without any hesitation, I applied for it through my University and was informed of the good news soon. It is indeed one of the best decisions I have ever made in my life.

Gearing up

Before departure, UN University Volunteers of the second cohort received a briefing organized by Agency for Volunteer Service and supported by a training specialist from UNV Headquarters. It revolved around soft skills like intercultural competency and stress management.

Milestones

In my capacity as UN Youth Communications Specialist, I was responsible for supporting both internal communications of the UN in Viet Nam, and external communications of specific UN Agencies. I also contributed to UN's scopes of work other than peacemaking, including youth empowerment, advocating for gender equality (by ending gender-based violence) and encouraging volunteerism for development.

For internal communications, I coordinated the preparation work for the UN Staff Day. My colleagues and I designed a menu with dishes representing our respective countries, and eventually served a colorful spread on the Staff Day food fair. It was a real-life scenario of how cultural diversity was leveraged to stimulate innovations in the workplace.

For external communications of UN Agencies, I was in charge of UNFPA¹ Online Photovoice Exhibition on Migration in Viet Nam, and also pioneered the UNV Field Unit Video Newsletter. In the former project, I proofread English stories submitted by the Project Consultant, devised a social media plan, and designed the layout of stories. Editing human interest stories of the migrants, I had a better picture of the country's social

¹ United Nations Population Fund

structure, and opportunities and challenges attributable to internal migration. It is with hopes that a significant advocacy effort of hardships migrant workers endure, like family instability and difficult working conditions, could be built among the public following the exhibition.

To promote volunteerism for development, I directed the very first UNV Field Unit Video Newsletter. I shot and compiled footages of UNV activities in 2016 before the video newsletter was presented to UNV's donors and partners. This first-of-its-kind video newsletter serves as a summary of UNV Field Unit's year-round advocacy work for an enabling climate for volunteers' efforts to flourish in the country.

What's more, on the occasion of the UN Viet Nam Model Conference 2016, I guided and oversaw students from the Diplomatic Academy of Viet Nam to design communication materials for the Conference.

Serving as the In-House Reporter, I conducted exclusive interviews with guest speakers on the UN-wide International Youth Day 2016. The stories disseminate changes that vulnerable groups in the country desire for, e.g. people with disabilities, LGBTIs and ethnic minorities, and are presented in video reports on social media.

Takeaways

Having completed my first UNV assignment, I have grown tremendously in terms of knowledge, and hard and soft skills.

To begin with, I experienced at first-hand the field of volunteerism for development. Serving pro-bono in and out of work with my fellow colleagues, we built a bridge with and moved one step closer to the community by our involvement in local initiatives. My exposure to the field of Communications for Development (C4D) has also drawn me closer the 2030 Agenda (17 Sustainable Development Goals), enabling me to play my part in peacemaking as a global citizen. Professionally, I looked beyond my specialty and explored career opportunities abroad.

Practically, I also polished my work skills. I had the opportunity to shadow my colleagues, who are experienced experts in C4D. Not only have I sharpened my editorial and video-editing skills; in terms of soft skills, I also used my cultural intelligence and learnt how to collaborate well with my fellows in a multicultural team.

At the expense of one semester, I discovered my potentials, discovered the full picture of social problems in the developing region, and discovered I could join the driving force of international development. In short, I served others and learnt from others simultaneously in the mutually beneficial cycle of volunteering.

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