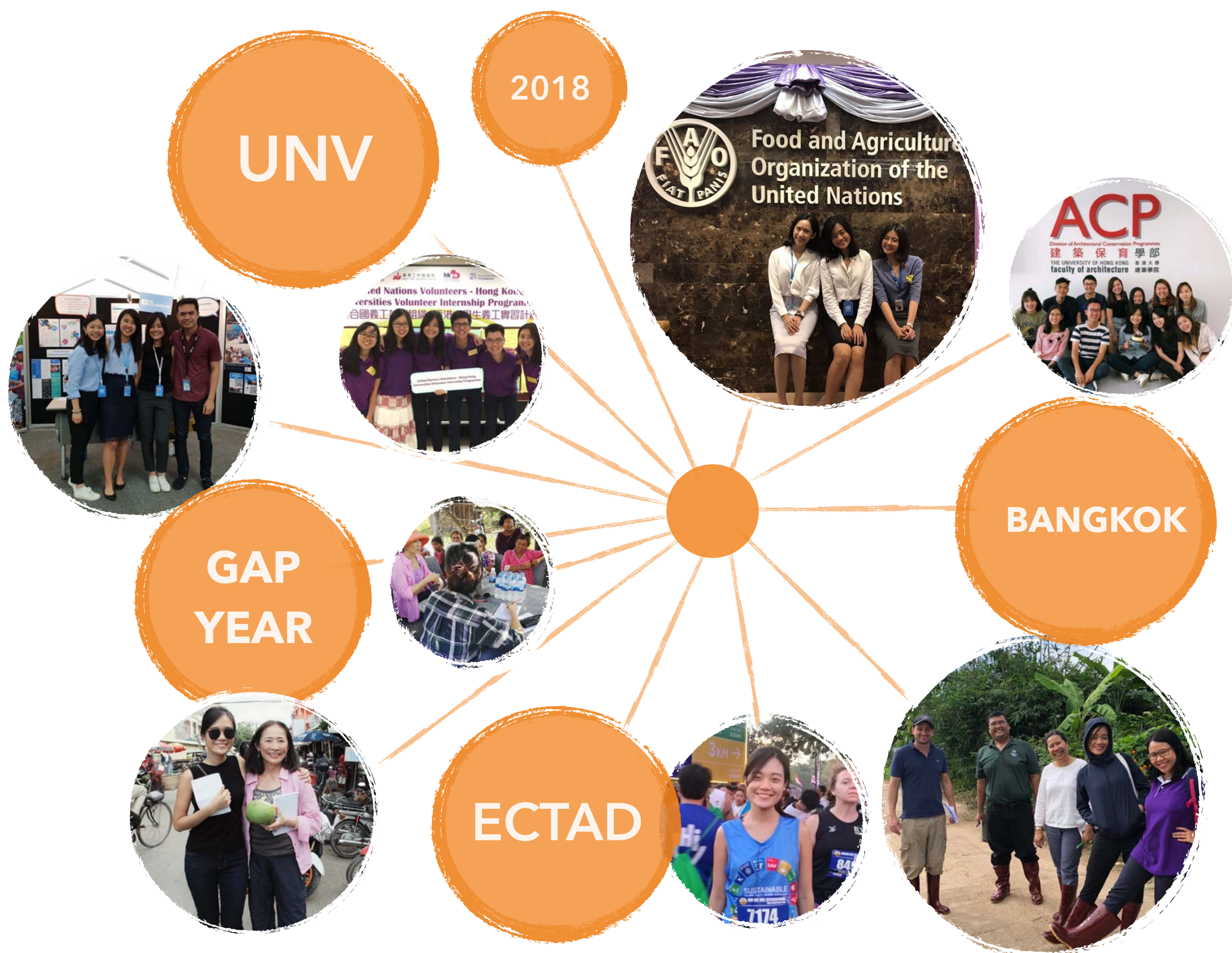


UN UNIVERSITY VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME 2018/19

POST ASSIGNMENT REPORT



MY UNV PROFILE (2018/2019)

Name: Gifty Chen Songling

Assignment Title: UN University Volunteer in Value Chain Analysis for Animal Disease Management

UN Host Agency: Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD) of the Food and Agriculture Organisations Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO-RAP)

Duration: 2 July 2018 – 30 April 2019

EXPERIENCES & REFLECTION OF MY UNV ASSIGNMENT WITH ECTAD-FAO IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

Article & Photos by Gifty
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“ You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future.

— Steve Jobs

BEFORE THE JOURNEY

Steve Job's words have my experiences an UN university volunteer in the past half year vividly captured. Looking back, all these dots that connected me to where I am now never lined up linearly back then.

I started my university journey as an architectural conservation student and for the first two years I thought that was what I would be pursuing. Later university exposed me to a great abundance of experiences and thoughts. Among these exposure, my volunteering experiences in the first three years had the biggest influence on me.

At the end of my second year I came to the realisation I am more passionate about the field of human rights and humanitarian works. I was and still am particularly interested in the field of protection for refugees and asylum seekers, survivors of torture and human trafficking, etc. The ecstasy of discovering the calling, however, did not arrive with the clarity of 'how to get there'. For more than a year I found myself at a disorienting state, struggling on how I am going to get there, what I am going to do with my studies, how I could shift from Architectural Conservation to a totally different career.

Amidst the haze and cloud, the UNV programme came up. I thought to myself, this is the opportunity!

The opportunity to pluck myself out from the bustle, toss myself far from the comfort zone, to experiment, know the self, challenge the self, absorb new ideas, and eventually, to gain the courage. With that conviction in mind and zero expectation on the specific outcomes of any particular UN agencies, I ticked 'no preference' on the application form.

I was matched up with ECTAD under Food and Agriculture Organisations of the United Nations Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific based in Bangkok, Thailand.

There the journey started.



One of the FAO office buildings where I work in. (Photo credit to FAO designated event photographer)

MY ASSIGNMENT WITH ECTAD-FAO

I started the assignment with excitement, nervousness, plus a pinch of disquiet from the fact I indeed knew little about animal disease and value chain analysis, nor was I particularly familiar with the works FAO has been doing.



A team photo at the rooftop of our office building. Photo taken in September 2018

But lucky was I to have an incredibly supportive and open-minded supervisor and be in a team of exceedingly warm-hearted and encouraging colleagues.

What I particularly like about my UNV assignment and the team are the multi-disciplinary nature displayed in the project as well as the team's openness and willingness to let young interns like me (who's also an absolute layman) take initiatives at work.

My very first task was to research on the integration of gender into livestock disease management project and design a set of questions to obtain gender information of the poultry value chains in several Southeast Asian countries which include Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar.

As part of the ongoing task, from 15th to 18th, October 2018, I assisted a gender expert in collecting gender data and interviewing stakeholders involved in the poultry value chain at a small village locates in Takeo, Cambodia. By giving voice to these women, the main objective of the mission was to identify

the roles, capacity and gender-based constraints of women along these local poultry value chains so as to empower them by taking into account their advantages and the restrictions confront based on gender in our poultry disease control project in Cambodia.



At the house of a villager in Takeo, Cambodia, where we did the interview. Photo taken in October 2018



Interviewing a poultry collector at a local Livebird Market in Takeo, Cambodia in mid October 2018



A photo of me presenting my research on the integration of gender into value chain studies in livestock disease management projects at a regional surveillance workshop, in which all the country team leaders from Asia and the Pacific attended. There was a Q&A session after the presentation. I gained a lot of constructive comments from the audience which helped me improve my work later. Photo taken on 12th September 2018



This is an infographic I created based on China's regulations on pig transportations and the ASF outbreak situation. It was presented by my supervisor on the 15th International Symposium of Veterinary Epidemiology and Economics in mid November 2018 in Chiang Mai, Thailand

The other major ongoing task I have been involving in was to establish a database and create an information platform website to monitor the outbreak situation of African Swine Fever (ASF) in China, which has caused incalculable loss and damage to the pig farming industry since its first outbreak in August 2018. Since most of the news and data about ASF are only available in Chinese, my language skill became an important advantage. My day-to-day work involved reading news about ASF in multiple official and private websites, selecting relevant ones, translated and compiled them into a newsletter to be sent to the team. Interestingly, none of these two major tasks



This is a group photo of the inception meeting of a South South Cooperation Project on Transboundary Animal Diseases, in which I was the simultaneous interpreter for the Chinese delegation.

were listed in my Terms of Reference. It was after I started working on some tasks did my supervisor decide my skill set would fit better with them. Throughout the process, I was able to utilise the skills I had, meanwhile absorbing new experiences and honing my communication skill, analytical and organisational skills substantially. I am truly grateful for my supervisor's support!

THE TEAM SPIRIT: WORK HARD, PLAY HARDER!



1: My colleagues, my supervisor (left second) and me; 2 to 4: A team weekend retreat in Amphawa, Thailand, where we had a taste of the floating market, fresh seafood and had so much fun doing team karaoke! 5: Our team celebrates every teammate's birthday with tasty cake and small party! 6: A Potluck Saturday gathering at one of our colleagues' house, each of us had to prepare a dish representative of his/her own culture. I brought with me shrimp dumpling and siu mai.

A PERSONALISED IMPRESSION OF BANGKOK: GLIMPSES OF THE DAY-TO-DAY LIFE



1. Evening boat ride from office back home, when I was lucky enough I'd watch Sunset like this; 2. A glimpse of Khao San Road, always full of vitality! 3. Evening sky at the Phra Atit Pier, which is a few steps walk from my office; 4. One of the temples the boat passes everyday, it has a beautiful name called The Temple of Dawn!



5. The park next to my office, where I occasionally visit after work, it is also a great place to meet and talk to people; 6 & 7. Some pictures of other magnificent temples in Bangkok

Bangkok is no doubt one of the most visited cities by many Hong Kong people. But I actually never visited it before the assignment started. My role as a UNV instead of a tourist had revealed to me the humble beauty of the ordinary.

Every morning I'd hop on the orange boat from the nearest pier of my apartment to go to the office. The thirty-minute boat ride on Chao Phaya River in the morning and evening was my favourite time of every week day: it was time for people watching, cityscape seeing, reading, music, planning, or just enjoying the luxury of being absent-minded. It is a pity though that I cannot speak enough Thai to talk to local people.

The other thing I like about my office is that it sits a few streets away from the well known backpacker paradise *Khao San Road*. Everyday countless travellers from different parts of the world arrived here. Naturally, I'd always found myself in conversations with some of them when I was eating out alone in the area after work, listening to all kinds of mesmerising and sometimes bizarre stories from here and there. So at times it felt like living in two realities: during the day I buried my head in the work and in the evening I felt like in a vacation. These stories from lovely strangers certainly add to my reminiscence of the place more sweetness!

PERSONAL GROWTH: A SHORT REFLECTION

The opportunity to live abroad for a considerably long time has also curated an enabling environment for introspection and personal growth. In here, for more than a half year, free of any entitlements, far away from the culturescape I was more or less conditioned by, free from the demanding workload as a student, I was able to dedicate a lot of time to practice 'looking inside', to genuinely imbibe new ways of seeing and thinking, by means of reading, contemplating, meditating and talking to people. I remember how emboldened I felt when I listened to a colleague, who at the time when I was talking to her, had just changed her career from a completely different field of work to FAO, starting everything from scratch, taking a new degree on a part time basis, following her quest. All these things that made me so anxious about career shift would have not bothered her a single bit! Why? I carried on with lots of questions like these and throughout the process I have learned about myself better and seen the same problem that bothered me before with more ease and courage.

So once again Steve Jobs had it well said, "you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future." I am excited to see what these dots my UNV assignment has unfolded will be connected in the near future.