



UN Staff Day, Hanoi, Viet Nam

Inspiration in Actions

UNV reflection

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Introduction

Whenever I started writing my reflection, I find it hard to conclude every thought and feeling on paper. So much has happened that it is sometime too dreamy to imagine. While I envisaged UN to be a peace and human right defender, there were realistic limitations and obstacles which destroy all the fantasy and unrealistic expectations. Working as an UNV is full of contradiction. It is particularly applicable to Hong Kong UNVs serving in oversea countries this year. It was a constant struggle for every one of us, to serve the most vulnerable in remote areas but to neglect the urgent needs of our own people. I believe that it was a moment of reflection – what we have learnt and what we should do as both a Hong Kong and a world citizen.



The Power of Education

Education is the most empowering force in the world. It creates knowledge, builds self-esteem, and breaks down barriers to opportunity. For children, it is their key to open the door to a better life and better opportunities.

“For every child, quality education”

Since I am an English-major graduate, people assume I will be a teacher one day. I admit that being a front-line educator is a meaningful job. It has the power of changing one’s life forever. However, if we advocate for equitable and beneficial policy, it will change the life of more than one student, but thousands or millions of them. This is something which always ignites my heart and passion. There is still a long way to go, but I am glad that I was offered a starting line to have a taste of what it like to work for education policy and programs.

Adulting

I served in UNICEF, Education section of Vietnam office, as UNV in Education. My assignment areas are related to second decade education and learning, which encompasses formal lower and upper secondary education, technical and vocational training (TVET) and non-formal education pathways for out-of-school adolescents. I mainly assisted my supervisor, Education Specialist, in programme implementation and communication.

During my 6-month assignment, I was given a lot of working experience especially working with other agencies and civil society partners. I worked with other agencies during International Youth Day (IYD) and attended inter-agency meetings of youth and adolescent working group. Both of the experience exposed me to inter-agency working context and the difficulties associated with it. Although the UN has a grand vision of working as one, it is always difficult to implement given all

the cost and human resources constraint. I was also invited to civil society partners' launching ceremony, dissemination workshop, working group and Christmas party. I learnt how to socialize and linger with different stakeholders and partners. All of the experience seems dreamy and unreal to me, as I cannot imagine a fresh graduate like me can be invited to events like this, but this is part of adulting – taking responsibilities and acting professionally. No matter how junior I am, my presence represents UNICEF. My behavior and language carry weight in reputation of my agency.

Apart from this glory part of my assignment, there is obviously a less interesting part – the daily operation and administrative duties. Writing emails, reading reports, creating communication materials, providing inputs and helping with emerging task are my daily routine. Among these, I spent half of my assignment helping in the dissemination of the TVET report. Although there are many back-and-forths, the moment seeing the dissemi-

nation workshop being organized was an exciting one. It is important not to romanticize the work in UN, but it is also important not to underestimate the impacts we could bring. What we are working on may seem small and simple, but it contributes to the overall development and achievement of a bigger goal. This is what it means to be a professional adult – to perform the best no matter what it is.

Ideal and reality

While people may imagine UN to be a superhero protecting human rights and vulnerable groups, it is more like an ideal rather than a reality. One of the programs our section advocating is “mother-tongue based bilingual education”, which promotes the use of the mother-tongue language as a medium of instruction for ethnic minority children. While it is outlined in government document that ethnic culture should be respected and protected, language is clearly another story. Hav-



International Youth Day, Ha Giang, Viet Nam

ing everyone speaking the same language, the Kinh language or Vietnamese, is considered part of the effort of harmonizing the Vietnamese and nation building. It makes this program difficult to be scaled up and protect the languages of ethnic minority.

This example is an illustration of what it likes to advocate. It is easy to jump to the conclusion that UN lacks the power to protect human rights. Undoubtedly yes, it has its limitations. However, there are things that only UN can achieve. Its close relationship with government is a double-edged sword. It brings influence in policy changes in scale and at the same time limiting itself in some critical issues. Still, I believe in the power of political integration and collaboration. Global problems need global solution. It is my wish that one day, no one and no sensitive issues will be left behind.

Warm family

Education team is a warm and caring team. I am thankful to have a section chief who is always open-minded and caring. She invited me to take part in a reversed mentoring program,



Education Team, UN house



International volunteer Day, Hanoi

in which she is the mentee and I, as a young person, is the mentor. This is truly surprising to me as I could have never expected that young voices are so valued in the agency. I also want to thank my supervisor who taught me and gave me exposure to different topics. To other colleagues, thanks for being so caring that I feel like education team is another home to me.

Last but not least, I am thankful to have the UNV family by my side. The experience of organizing International Volunteer Day and Youth Day and performing together in UN staff day is memorable moment which I cherish a lot. Without them, my UNV journey will not be a complete one. Thank you all.