

VOLUNTEERING FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

Larissa Tang



Delivering a workshop to the UNFPA Cambodia office at staff retreat

I had the privilege of volunteering at The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Cambodia as a United Nations University Volunteer in Communications for six months. It was truly a valuable and inspiring experience that allowed me to connect my interest in international development with my studies in medicine in Hong Kong.

UNFPA: Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

During my assignment, I was mainly involved in two areas of work: communications and youth engagement. I believe communications is key to fostering understanding, raising awareness, and creating dialogue on key issues and challenges critical to the socio-economic development of Cambodia. My main tasks in communications included designing and drafting publications (eg country programme briefs, factsheets, concept notes and pamphlets to be used for resource mobilization purposes), drafting social media posts, as well as designing and launching a new national campaign (“The Power of Young People – Youth Champion Awards”) which aimed at honouring people’s efforts in promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights for young people.

Working in communications and with youth opened my eyes to the enduring process of development work in UNFPA’s focus areas. For example, attending a workshop on the development of an adolescent training manual for the prevention of violence against women and girls provided me with insight into ways to cultivate healthy attitudes among adolescents towards inter-personal relationships amidst a culture with heavily rooted gender norms and where gender-based violence is common. A field mission with the team to assess health facilities in selected provinces showed me how the lack of youth-friendly and accessible health services and information deterred young married girls from seeking family planning services.



LARISSA, 21, HONG KONG
International UN University Volunteer
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Everyone should have the right to make their own choices about their sexual and reproductive health.

I volunteer to create communications materials and support the dissemination of data from national data collection exercises to raise awareness and encourage young people and women to claim their reproductive health and rights!



THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development

Celebrating International Volunteer Day 2015

Never before have there been so many young people. Never again is there likely to be such potential for economic and social progress. How we meet the needs and aspirations of young people will define our common future.

Extract from the foreword of the State of World Population 2014: The Power of 1.8 Billion, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of UNFPA



With members of the UNYAP Cambodia

I appreciated being given the opportunity to be involved in the UN Youth Task Force (UNYTF) and to work with youth on the UN Youth Advisory Panel (UNYAP). The UNYTF is an inter-UN agency group aiming at ensuring coordination, knowledge-sharing and dialogue on the UN’s response to youth issues in Cambodia. On the other hand, the UNYAP is composed of a group of representatives from youth organizations in Cambodia who are consulted on the UN design of youth-friendly policies, strategies and programmes. The UNYAP is not only a platform to develop the youth’s understanding of development issues, but also a mechanism to empower youth to speak out on youth-related issues and make their voices heard at decision-making processes at all levels.

These two platforms gave me a glimpse into how youth are engaged in their local communities and the challenges local youth NGOs face in programme implementation or youth engagement. As the UNYAP coordinator, I worked to create a welcoming and engaging environment for the youth to brainstorm ideas, actively discuss issues, and express their opinions. I believe working with youth is especially important since Cambodia is currently experiencing a demographic dividend. Almost two-thirds of its population is under the age of 30. Young people embody great potential to drive and determine the direction of development in Cambodia as it moves towards becoming a lower middle-income country. I also found working with like-minded and passionate youth very motivating and inspiring.

The more you give of yourself, the more you find yourself.

Lailah Gifty Akita

This experience has helped me grow both personally and professionally. Throughout my six months there, my supervisor and colleagues gave me constant guidance and support. I particularly appreciated being given the flexibility, freedom and space to develop new ideas within a broad framework for both my work in communications and work with the UNYTF and UNYAP. The following are a few things that I have learnt:

- Adaptability and flexibility, especially when working in a multi-cultural environment
- Don't be afraid of expressing your interest in a project!
I realized that if you're willing to put in the effort, learn and be part of the team, you're almost always welcome aboard.
- Communicating with clarity
Social media is a great way to engage with a large audience. During my time there, I explored tools to convey coherent and consistent messages for UNFPA Cambodia. Technical information needs to be conveyed in layman terms. I had to pay particular attention to the tone and language used as that has a huge impact on how messages are interpreted at the receiving end. Additionally, when designing promotional materials, I worked to align our publications with UNFPA's identity and goals to ensure consistency not only in our messages, but also in our visual identity.
- Last of all, "with great privilege comes great responsibility"
As a UNV, I am not only just accountable to myself, but also to my host organization, the project I'm working on and the people I'm working with.



Celebrating the UN's 70th Anniversary in Phnom Penh, Cambodia



Presenting youth with questions about sexual and reproductive health and seeking their opinion on comprehensive sexuality education at school, UNFPA booth, National Forum on Promoting Volunteerism and International Volunteer Day, 4-5 December 2015

My time at UNFPA opened my eyes to the process, challenges and progress of development work in Cambodia. I saw the need for updated and comprehensive population data (which may not be readily available) for development planning. I recognized the long processes and extensive consultations needed to change the way things are run. I also better understood the appropriate methods needed to bridge parties and to ensure that programmes are suitable and accepted by the local communities.

If I had to choose a quote for my experience, it would be "the more you give of yourself, the more you find yourself" ~Lailah Gifty Akita. My six months in Cambodia was also a time of self-reflection. It gave me some perspective on the type of development or humanitarian work I would like to be involved in in the future. Volunteering at UNFPA has definitely been an incredible experience and a journey of personal growth.