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Assignment: UN Youth Task Force Coordinator
Country: Cambodia

A. Introduction

As a UN Youth Task Force Coordinator, I was stationed at United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. My role was to facilitate communication and collaboration between the United Nations Youth Task Force (UNYTF) and United Nations Youth Advisory Panel (UNYAP). The UNYTF consists of youth focal points from each UN agency while the UNYAP consists of 15 youth representatives from a variety of non-governmental organizations focusing on different youth issues, including education, employment and health.



B. Three things I enjoyed most about my assignment:

1. I loved my open and down to earth relationship with my supervisor. Though my supervisor was the deputy representative of UNFPA, she treated me as any other staff,

and always had an open door for me despite her busy schedule. Not only did she welcome questions relating to my task, but she was always open to listen to my frustration and questions relating to my role and perspective on development work.



2. I appreciated the opportunity to be innovative. I could both maximize or minimize the scope of my work. With the goal to increase visibility and impact of UNYAP, I had the opportunity to design a scavenger hunt for youth on SDGs, co-create a social media campaign for recruitment and co-produce a video for International Youth Day etc.
3. I enjoyed the network/ support system within the UNV. The UNV's support, both the field unit and other UNVs scattered throughout various agencies was crucial to my success. The support system within UNV enabled me to rely on and collaborate with various UNVs for multiple events such as International Youth Day, UN Day and International Volunteer Day.



C. Three Key things I have learned:

1. I have learned how to effectively communicate between UNYAP and UNYTF. During the UNYTF meeting, I had miscommunicated the comments from the evaluative meeting from UNYAP, my inaccurate wording taught me the importance of accurately and carefully transferring information from one party to another. Simultaneously, I learned the importance of using positive wordings when conveying areas of improvement.
2. I developed trust with UNYAP members which was the key to meaningful engagement between UNYAP and UNYTF. When I first attended the UNYAP meeting which contained 15 members, only 3 attended. However, towards the end, there was an average of 8-10 members who attended the monthly meetings. Though I was unable to reactivate all 15 members, the change of mindset and increase in commitment to the panel by each member was likely my greatest achievement. This began when I myself demonstrated my personal commitment to UNYAP, which fostered trust and unity between the members in the panel. The increase in unity and passion to advocate for youth issues paved the way for UNYAP members to deliver speeches and coordinate country-wide events as well as delivering a workshop on sexual reproductive health and rights with UNFPA to young adults.



3. I have also learned the importance of looking at all sides of the issue and avoid taking sides. There are always two sides to the story. I grew increasingly attached to the youth leaders from UNYAP and grew impatient at the slowness of change with the UNYTF. However, as I took the time to better understand the UNYTF and their side of the story, I began to recognize the complexity of change and that there needs to be a balance of patience and persistence in development work. By putting myself into other people's shoes, I began to see how to be a more effective coordinator and mediator with both sides in tackling youth issues.

D. My most memorable experience:

My most memorable experience would be UNYAP organizing a workshop on sexual reproductive health and rights with UNFPA. This workshop was opened to 18-24-year-old youth and there was a total of 20 youth who attended. The workshop focused on breaking gender stereotypes around issues of virginity and stressed the importance of safe sex and consent. I was deeply touched when towards the end of the workshop, one participant said "Before this workshop, I would never date a girl who is not a virgin, but after this workshop, I am now willing to accept girls who are not virgins." Watching mindsets change is always most rewarding.



E. What does it mean to be a volunteer?

As a UN University Volunteer, I felt like I was there to provide additional support. My role was needed yet there were not enough resources within my agency to devote one person to this particular role. Hence, the need for a volunteer. Knowing that I was a “volunteer”, I knew that I was there out of my free will to support and strengthen the voice of youth within the UN system. It was more than just a “job”.

F. What did I struggle with?

When I first started, I struggled with the lack of work I had. My assignment at times seemed to be juggling with two extremes, I would either have nothing to do or need to work overtime. However, towards the end, I had a consistent amount of work and was very occupied throughout.

