

# My Amazing UN University Volunteer Journey in Sri Lanka

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I am attached in the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Unit (SCRU), which is under the Colombo Duty Station of IOM in Sri Lanka. The SCRU is responsible for developing and implementing projects and programmes designed to support the overall reconciliation and social cohesion processes in Sri Lanka. My main duties and learnings are:

## **Research project on different stakeholders' view on the Office for Reparations**

Office for Reparations (OR) is one of the four Transitional Justice Mechanism to facilitate the peacebuilding process of the country. Different stakeholders have their view on the OR, and it was important for our unit to record and analyse their views, so as to strategize on how to support the OR Bill to pass through.

*Learnings:* Conducting this research has allowed me to understand that when trying to support the government in passing through a bill, keeping track on the viewpoints stated by different stakeholders, such as parliament members, justice courts, civil societies and international organizations, are very important, as their viewpoints might influence the decisions of implementing bills, and UN agencies have to react quickly on these issues. I also equipped some research skills, including recording data, and how to generate them into meaningful information to form a report.

### **Civil Society Organization (CSO) Mapping and Psychosocial Services Mapping**

The mapping of CSOs is to identify the existing civil societies working on peacebuilding in the country. Strategic notes on these CSOs were made so as to identify CSOs who are helpful for our unit to work. We then met CSOs to explore possibility working with them. The psychosocial services mapping result is prepared to provide information to the Office for Reparations the referral path-way for psychosocial services in the future.

*Learnings:* Both these mappings belongs to an important stage of implementing any project of a UN organization: Strategizing. Supporting my team by doing mapping researches, it allow me to understand in order to implement projects that seem to be successful, it all starts from strategizing, and researching for relevant information helps the team to make better decisions, such as which organizations to work with. Of course, mapping is just one part of it, I realize for example colleagues have connections with different societal members and having the political understanding of the current situation is as essential, if not more. Therefore, building up people connections and equipping political understandings are essential elements of being a UN staff.



Photo with Chief of Mission & my supervisor



Photos with my colleagues

### **Service gap research report for Refugee Youth Returnees in a Northern district (Field Trip)**

The service gap research was a task I worked on for another unit, the Migrant Assistance Unit (MAU). In the past, due to country's 30 years conflict, many have fled to Tamil Nadu, India as a refugee. The conflict has ended since 2009, and some have been returning. Therefore, I worked for MAU to conduct this research.

The research was done by comparing the Need Assessment of Refugee Youth Returnees and Mapping of Service existing in the Mannar District, to conclude the service gap. I went on a field mission to the Mannar District with a colleague to conduct interviews with service providers and refugee returnees. This report was done for our organization on what service gaps needs to be filled to effectively support refugee youth returnees in the country and thus develop future projects based on the research.

*Learning:* I have learnt that service gap analysis is important for developing and implementing projects, as it helps organizations to decide on what project to design and also help convince donors to support certain projects. This is an essential part of a project cycle.

The Field experience, which included interviews with NGOs have allowed me to realize that many social services, other than job training, are not funded by the government in Sri Lanka, but by International funding. As Sri Lanka's civil conflict has ended in 2009 and as economic statistics show that Sri Lanka has been newly defined as lower middle-income country, funding have been withdrawn, thus many services has closed down. In fact, many refugee youth returnees thus expressed that there are lack of support to fulfil their needs. Life is still very difficult for them. Meanwhile the Sri Lanka government is promoting refugees to come from India back to Sri Lanka, many youth returnees has expressed life is evening tougher in Sri Lanka than in India. This field experience allowed me to see reasons for the difficulty for refugees to return to their homeland due to lack of local support.



Field Colleagues in the Northern District of Sri Lanka

One more important lesson for me was that as UN, INGOS or NGOs, we should be serious on why we are conducting interviews during field work visits. When we first met the youths, they were not seeming to be happy or willing to share their thoughts, they have told us that many organizations have been visiting them, while asking them a lot of information but there seems to be no change in the supporting situation for them. This experience has reminded me we should be serious on providing support to people we wish to support.



Field visit with refugee returnees from India

Apart from work:

### Church Life

As a Christian, I have experienced so much regarding faith in Sri Lanka, also having to build friendships with was amazing and lifelong.



Youth Fellowship Church Camp

### Travel

I remember one of my colleagues always telling me to not working overtime or during weekends, as life experience outside of office is where you learn even more. This is something that I am still learning, but I can tell that his reminder to me is full of wisdom, as travelling in the country has taught me about people, nature and culture so much more.





Sri Lanka Unique Train Ride



Perahera Festival



UN Inter-agency badminton competition



Cricket Match



Thankful for this amazing journey!!