

EXPLORE THE HIDDEN GEM

07. 2024 - 01. 2025

UNITED NATIONS
VOLUNTEER

UNICEF
EDUCATION TEAM
PROGRAM SUPPORT

Lao People's
Democratic Republic

SUN, Yun-Chu (Corrine)



Sabaidee, Vientiane



In Lao PDR, we greet each other with 'Sabaidee,' which means 'hello' or 'good.' The word sabai translates to relax or chill. This simple greeting reflects the laid-back nature of Lao culture, where people tend to embrace a slower, more relaxed pace of life.

Having spent a month in the suburbs of Thailand before, I initially found Laos to give off a similar vibe when first arrived. However, Laos has its own unique charm and beauty. While the language and culture share some common roots, I've come to see how distinct they truly are. Staying here for 6 months has given me the opportunity to fully appreciate and fall in love with this beautiful and peaceful country.

I work as a Program Support with the Education Team at *UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)*. My previous experience as a teaching volunteer during university inspired me to pursue a role focused on advancing children's education in Laos.

This documentary features photos and stories that capture both the bright and challenging moments of my journey in Lao, offering a glimpse into the experiences, lessons, and growth I encountered along the way.





FIRST DAY OF WORK

Arrived on a Friday afternoon, I quickly settled down into the Airbnb, conveniently located near the UNICEF office. I spent the rest of the day taking care of essential tasks like grocery shopping, figuring out long-term accommodation, and unpacking my luggage. Before I knew it, the weekend flew by.

On my first day of work, July 29, our team coincidentally jumped straight into a midterm review workshop with the Ministry of Education and

Sports, held at a hotel. As a brand-new team member, I helped with reception, greeting colleagues with a big smile while feeling both nervous and excited—especially since I hadn't met them before. During the meeting, I remember jotting down as many notes as possible since everything was completely new to me—how UNICEF operates, what the Education Team is working on, and the challenges Lao PDR is facing. Looking back, despite having done research beforehand, I realized just how much I still had to learn.

▼ decoration of my office desk ✨



#MEETTHETEAM

STEM FOR GIRLS BOOTCAMP

The major project I was working on, to empower adolescent across Lao PDR with skills in digital literacy and STEM subjects.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY XMT YOUTH AMBASSADOR
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Seeing the student participants actively engaged and expressing their desire for longer bootcamps gave me a strong sense of fulfillment, knowing that I was making a meaningful impact.



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The STEM for Girls Bootcamp is a two-day program designed to help students apply their STEM knowledge to real-life problem-solving. It was held in three provinces: *Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Savannakhet*.

I served as a support coordinator, acting as a bridge between the implementing partner, *XM Technovator (XMT)*, and the government body, *Research Institute for Educational Sciences (RIES)*, ensuring that concerns from multiple stakeholders were addressed. For example, RIES aimed to promote *Khang Panya Lao*, a mobile-friendly digital learning platform, while UNICEF prioritized ensuring the program objectives were met. My responsibilities included conducting weekly

track progress and provide necessary support. During the bootcamps, I monitored logistics and teaching methods to assess whether the learning goals were met, gathered feedback from participants, and documented key moments through written reports, photos, and videos to highlight both achievements and areas for improvement.

Reflection

Good project-based experience, but the current format felt more like a one-time event, limiting its long-term impact, so finding strategies for greater outreach and sustainability is a key consideration in the future.



OTHER TASKS

Other ad-hoc tasks I worked on involved designing brochures and documents to enhance visibility, including materials for Khang Panya Lao, STEM for Girls, and *Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes* (ASLO) cover design. This not only strengthened my design skills but, more importantly, deepened my understanding of the education landscape in Lao PDR.

Another key responsibility was serving as the focal point for education emergency flood response. When Typhoon Yagi severely impacted northern Lao, many students were unable to attend school due to flooding. My role involved coordinating and disseminating information among humanitarian and governmental organizations, particularly in tracking what resources (e.g., schoolbags, textbook printing, and school equipment) different government bodies could provide to the affected schools. The overarching goal of this effort was to strengthen the network among education focal points across Lao, fostering collaboration and improving response efficiency in future emergencies.

Reflection

Over six months, I realized that much of my work involved completing assigned tasks rather than identifying and addressing new needs on my own. A key takeaway for me is the importance of proactivity—identifying gaps and proposing solutions rather than waiting for direction. While it's natural to start by learning and executing assigned tasks, my next goal is to take greater ownership of my work. **True impact comes from action, not just recognition.**



UNWINDING

I was then thinking... what should I do after work?



I wanted something different, something that sets apart from my usual routine in Hong Kong and Taipei.

That's when I decided to try Muay Lao, introduced to it by a fellow Taiwanese friend, Jenny. I joined group classes 2-3 times a week from 18:00 to 19:00, gradually making it a habit. Time after work seemed to pass quickly, and the practice became both a way to unwind and to clear my mind.

Other activities I've tried (to list a few haha): weaving, climbing, zumba-dancing, bachata, painting in a cafe, practicing guitar, etc.

I enjoyed the independence of living on my own, having the freedom and time to pursue whatever sparked my interest.

Tips: A lot of interesting info can be found on fb and google maps. Those are the 2 main resources to seek fun activities.



Eventually, the loneliness of living abroad hits.

I started missing my family and friends, especially the comfort of having someone to talk to after work. To me, working out of the comfort zone is a double-edged sword, while it offers plenty of me-time to explore, too much of it creates a sense of emptiness and homesickness. Fortunately, my mum paid a visit in the beginning of November, and her stay gave me a much-needed recharge! ❤️





< my cute cactus



TWO UNFORGETTABLE HIGHLIGHTS: A TEST & A TRIUMPH

I selected two experiences that left the strongest impression on me, one was a challenge that taught me a valuable lesson, and the other was a cool story and adventure!



**STRUGGLE,
PERSIST,
FIND PEACE IN WHAT REMAINS.**



The challenging moment came when I lost my phone in Vang Vieng, a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts.

It slipped out while I was driving a buggy car late at night in the rain. Despite the situation, I stayed calm and explored every possible way to retrieve it. Knowing it had gone missing within a 25km stretch from the rental shop, I retraced my route twice but found nothing. I then began knocking on doors, asking locals if they had seen it, and even designed a poster on-site using Canva, written in Lao with contact information and description of the phone appearance, to break down communication barriers.

Unfortunately, my efforts were in vain, and I filed a report at the police station as the last resort. What a sad story ;(

Of course I felt worried throughout the process; however, after trying every possible way to retrieve my phone, I found a sense of reassurance in knowing that I had done my best. At that point, all I could do was accept the situation and focus on regaining access to essential information like my bank account, phone number, and personal and work contacts to stay functional.

Latest update on my phone: GPS signal comes and goes, but still in Vang Vieng...



I spent 2 weeks in late 2024 traveling across Lao, starting with a brief stay in the north before heading south to explore Pakse, Siphandone, Champasak, Phou Fai (volcano), and Paksong – covering 3 motorbike rentals, 4 camping nights, and 8 waterfalls.

It was a backpacking adventure, just essential clothes, devices, and a spontaneous spirit. My friend and I had no fixed plans, but southern

Lao was incredibly traveler-friendly, with easy transport connections and local agencies offering day tours.

On New Year's Eve, we camped on a volcano to welcome 2025. By chance, it was the campsite's grand opening, and we met a group of friendly locals—the entrepreneurs behind the project. We had great conversations and quality time together!



FINAL THOUGHTS



My initial goal in joining this program was to gain a deeper understanding of the UN's structure and operations, given its global role in peace and development. Now, I have a clearer picture—especially of how UNICEF advances children's rights worldwide.

Unlike my previous volunteer teaching experiences, working with UNICEF gave me a broader perspective. I saw how policies are shaped, like advocating for government support in children aspects, and realized that helping others isn't just about direct action but also

understanding the systems in place. This experience deepened my awareness of the picture while reinforcing the value of hands-on work. Throughout this journey, I also became familiar with Lao's education landscape by understanding the roles of various NGOs, the priorities of government agencies, and how they intersect. Seeing where UNICEF fits into this puzzle gave me a deeper appreciation for the complexity of driving meaningful change.

Most of all, it feels fulfilling to work toward a meaningful purpose! This experience has strengthened my commitment to making a positive impact, and I will carry this mindset with me into the future.



A heartfelt thank you to my incredible Education Team, the colleagues who became friends at UNICEF, and everyone I crossed paths with in Lao PDR. Your support made this journey truly unforgettable, filled with meaningful connections and lasting bonds.



Khop chai!



Tattooed in memory of Lao,
where the sunsets paint the most beautiful stories.

