

# UNV - HK Universities Volunteer Programme

Chan Wai Shan Flora

Communication Support Officer | UNRCO

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*UNV Assignment in the  
UN, Timor-Leste*

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*What does “volunteer” mean to you?* Serving? Showing care and offering assistance to someone in need? In a six-month UNV assignment, being a volunteer means beyond sparing no efforts to contribute knowledge, ideas and skills to empower the pillars of the future society in Timor-Leste, I got inspired from my colleagues and friends in Timor-Leste every single day, and I learnt from every task I got involved.



## My Role as A Communications Support Officer at the UNRCO

Following the end of UN peacekeeping mission in Timor-Leste in 2012, the UN is now actively providing support, in terms of experience, financial resource and human resource, to the national development of Timor-Leste. As a UNV - a Communication Support Officer at the United Nations Office of Resident Coordinator (UNRCO), raising awareness among the Timorese on the connection of the UN's work and sustainable development of Timor-Leste, as well as bringing world attention to some development issues in Timor-Leste, is one of my major tasks. I am responsible for managing the UN Facebook page, writing news stories about the UN projects, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) on social media of the UN.

Besides, I offered support to the UNRCO for its daily operation and events, such as UN Day, Media Workshop and SDG University Lectures. Sometimes, I took the lead in planning and organizing activities in the UNRCO. I thank my supervisors for giving me a precious opportunity to plan one of the international campaigns hosted by Plan International - Girls Takeover: Shadowing the RC. Planning for every detail, reporting to the seniors and liaising with external bodies trained my skills to cooperate with others and work professionally.



The UNRCO is an office coordinating the work of all the UN agencies. It always provides support to agencies which need helpers, photographers and communications team particularly. There were many opportunities for me to serve the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Women. I am proud to be a part of Take Back the Street Walk which was the first-ever large-scale march against sexual harassment organized by the UN Women and many NGOs in Dili. I was greatly inspired by the Walk and it motivated me to have a reflection on what I can do to raise awareness of gender equality in this country. Promoting on the UN social media, volunteering in a NGO specializing in the related field, offering support to the activities organized by other UN agencies or the UNRCO were the further steps I had taken to promote gender equality and end of violence against girls and women in Timor-Leste.



I was assigned to work for the UNDP and the WFP in two field trips in a remote village in Baucau and Suai which is in the southern part of the country. This enables me to understand more about how the UN's projects are connected with the sustainable development of Timor-Leste in reality. Experiencing the local authentic culture, which cannot be seen in the capital, is a bonus as well.



This is the UNDP's project "Low Cost, High Impact, Climate Resilient Water Infrastructure" in Baucau in December 2016.



## Promoting local and international volunteerism as a UNV

Volunteering in Timor-Leste is not merely about promoting volunteerism among the UNVs in the UN House, I made efforts to promote the volunteerism in Timor-Leste.

Upon the request of the Resident Coordinator, I created an official video to share the experience of the UNVs in Timor-Leste. The video was then uploaded onto the Facebook page and the YouTube Channel of the UN Timor-Leste. It aims to further promote the international volunteerism and share what the UNVs have learnt in the UN.

In response to the International Volunteer Day, a group of UNVs and I helped promote the local volunteerism through organizing the UNDP's event "Global Applause for Volunteers" held in December 2016. In the encouraging vote of thanks, the government officials and the representatives of the UN applaud the contributions of local volunteers, SDG youth ambassadors and participants in SDG Art Competitions in promoting the enthusiasm to serve in their community.



The UN events promoting girls' and women's rights and the challenges to the local women in their everyday life drive me to think about the feasible ways to eradicate gender inequality, which are deeply rooted in Timor-Leste. Social preconceptions and gender stereotype bar many Timorese girls and women from going to school, being a decision-maker, being a leader and living with dignity. Many of them cannot live up to their full potentials, and this will also hinder the economic and social development of the country in a long run. The fundamental human right which we take for granted in more developed cities is not well protected for all human beings. Apart from the UNV assignment, I took an initiative to be a volunteer on communications in a NGO promoting gender equality, rights of girls and women, so I could apply what I had learnt from the UNV experience of being a Communication Support Officer in empowering girls and women in Timor-Leste to work for equal opportunities to all, both girls and boys, men and women.



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*Learning from the experience in the UNV assignment*

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I used to learn about how the UN works from news and school, thanks to the UNV assignment, I have a better understanding of the UN system and how all the UN agencies uniting as one to devote themselves to provide assistance to the developing countries.

Mr. Knut Ostby, the UN Resident Coordinator in Timor-Leste always advocates in his speech that the role of the UN in Timor-Leste shifted from a peacekeeping force to become a development partner with the local government. The UN is here to assist during the transitional period of development in a young nation, but not to lead and dominate the national development of Timor-Leste. The UN here encourages the development of Timor-Leste by Timorese themselves in a long run.

What's more, during my assignment, I was training my skills in photography and computer software application. Luckily, I have met some colleagues who are masters of photography and are willing to teach me. Therefore, I could learn how to do reporting with a professional camera capturing significant moments in every event. I was requested to make video, create a banner, cards and souvenirs for the events, this sharpened my skills in image editing, video editing and using some other design software. The skills developed will be useful to the other voluntary work and even my career in the future.



Language barrier is one of the challenges I had during my assignment. Most of the local campaigns and workshops were conducted in Tetun, which is the official language of Timor-Leste. For writing Facebook stories and reports, I need to conduct interview with the local participants. However, we could not understand each other, there were difficulties in collecting materials for story writing. I always sought help from my local colleagues who could translate the news stories and the interviews for me. However, this might add extra work and burden on my colleagues. In these six months in Timor-Leste, I tried to learn Tetun through listening and practice, and now I manage to read and speak in some basic Tetun.

In addition, I have learnt a big lesson from my colleagues in the UNRCO - work efficiency, staying calm and seeking help if necessary is the key to dealing with the stress in work. Having piles of works with deadlines ahead, we should be able to work under stress and keep emotion under control. Working with the experienced colleagues enables me to see how they usually deal with stress in work.

When I was in Timor-Leste, there were plenty of opportunities to work with the local colleagues in the office and getting along with the local people. Many of them shared with me their own views on overcoming development challenges in their country and in the world. Some of them are equipped with professional knowledge in particular fields and they are willing to share with me what they think. People living in a less developed country are not necessarily less knowledgeable about different professions than people living in more developed countries. I appreciate the passion of many local people, whom I met and worked with in Timor-Leste, in building a better future for their nation.

Volunteers are here to serve and learn. The best way to serve is to learn from the local people and the local culture, integrate into their culture, cooperate with the local people, step into their shoes and find a way to serve the nation with respect to its people and its unique culture. Serving humbly and learning from others is an essential value of volunteerism of which I always remind myself during the UNV assignment.



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*When the UNV journey  
comes to end...*

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Frankly speaking, the life here in Timor-Leste is not easy. Nonetheless, the passion to serve and bring knowledge and experience from a more developed side of the world to this young developing nation has been guiding me to vanquish all obstacles in these six months including adverse circumstances and cultural difference. I am sure it will keep guiding me throughout the life journey to serve the world.

