



UNV HK Universities Volunteer Program
United Nations Population Fund Sri Lanka
Youth Engagement Officer
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Start of the journey

Being a young person, who is lucky to have chance received good education and has been inspired by parents, teachers and peers, I would like to try my best to inspire other youth to live their life, pursuit their dream and create a better world together. Having participated in different volunteer work in the past few years in Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Cambodia etc., I realized my passion on utilizing my professional skills and knowledge to make the society a better one. While, UN as an international organization has worked hard on creating a better, harmonious, humanized world. Apart from working on the ground, I would like to explore how I could contribute to social change from another angle, engaging in policy making and decision-making advocacy aiming at tackling the social gap and bring positive changes to the social structure. This has motivated me to explore my role and position through participating in the UNV program.

Youth engagement in UNFPA Sri Lanka

As UNV working for the youth team in United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Sri Lanka, I mainly worked for the Peacebuilding Fund Project. The project aims at increase capacity of youth-led and youth-focused organization, as well as national, provincial level institutions to engage youth in peacebuilding, UNSCR 2250 and policy-making. I assisted the team formulating the project plan and activities after meeting with different stakeholders and visiting CSOs in the Northern Province.

One of my main contributions to the team is to enhance the access to information internally and externally. There are multiple projects and tasks ongoing at the same time responsible by different team members. It is important to make sure the whole team is on the same page when we are communicating externally. It is glad that I was Sallowed to introduce and utilize technology in our daily work for improving the information sharing. For example, new excel document was created for tracking project expenses, google drive has been better utilized for synchronizing live documents, powerpoint presentations were designed for illustrating project idea, planning process are well documented. The right and importance of 'access to information' has also been included throughout PBF project.

Externally, I helped to facilitate the communication and collaboration with other UNFPA teams as well as UNV. Consecutive meeting with communication team of UNFPA enhanced the mutual understanding of our works. Strategic communication plan for the PBF Youth4Youth Symposium has been kicked off successfully. As UNV working in UNFPA, I have better understanding of the ongoing project of both agency and thus could explore opportunity for collaboration. My participation in Active Citizen Program under VForce allowed me to share UNFPA's mandate and knowledge while helping the volunteers to plan their social projects. These kinds of collaboration are believed to add value for both agency and in line with One UN approach





Exchanging ideas with Active Citizen Program's youth participants



I am inspired by the community projects they proposed during the programs. Learning about the concept of "Locally Engaged, Globally Connected", this group of young people is working hard for their own community.

Walking into the community



After arriving Sri Lanka for a month, I joined my team for a field Mission to Jaffna, celebrating the International Youth Day 2017. It was the first activity I helped to organize after joining UNFPA. Our team organized a panel discussion, linking up the community leaders with the young people from the Northern Province. Although the discussion was mainly in Tamil, I could feel the enthusiasm from the young people when they were discussing the social issue of their community and what is the role of them in community leadership.

During the event, I was responsible for taking voice cut from young people for an advocacy video. I can recall how the young lady teacher who originally hesitated to face the camera, finally gave a good voice cut after our encouragement and guidance. This memory teaches me the youth, including women who are generally being suppressed in the patriarchal society are capable to do better and move farther when there is opportunity and encouragement, and they are being empowered. I am motivated to work harder for young people under Peacebuilding Fund during my stay in UNFPA Sri Lanka.



Challenges- the importance of humbleness

Being born and raised in Hong Kong, there are number of social cultural differences between my home town and Sri Lanka. My previous experience of organizing activities for young people may not applicable because of these differences. It is challenging for me to understand the local culture and history in short period of time and contribute constructive opinion that fit the local context. For example, in Hong Kong, job opportunities from private sector especially those in multinational companies are popular among young people. However, it is common that Sri Lankan youth only want to work for the government as those are the secured job even during conflict period. To address the unemployment issues, helping young people to understand and build confident to private company probably is an important step in Sri Lanka but not in Hong Kong. Although the 26-year long internal conflict has ended in 2009, the socio-economic development in the war zones remains to be underdeveloped in comparison to the rest of the country. There are more post-war byproducts, such as stress, anxiety and trauma affecting Sri Lankan. At the beginning of the assignment I used to have hesitation to give suggestions or advice because of the unfamiliarity. Yet, I still remember my supervisor always encouraged me and my team to read different journals, reports or news. No matter how much experience you have in the development field, the only way for you to create good impacts is to learn humbly. The society has once complaint about the arrogant “giving” attitude of volunteers that instead of addressing the beneficiary’s need, they do what they think is right or is needed. It is believed relaying on theory, perception and experience won’t help creating positive impact for the community. Instead, it is crucial for me to have a humble mind, get on the keen and understand the society’s need proactively before act. It took time for me to learn the local situation and build confidence to actively participate in the discussion with my team. Step by step, it is challenging yet worthy.

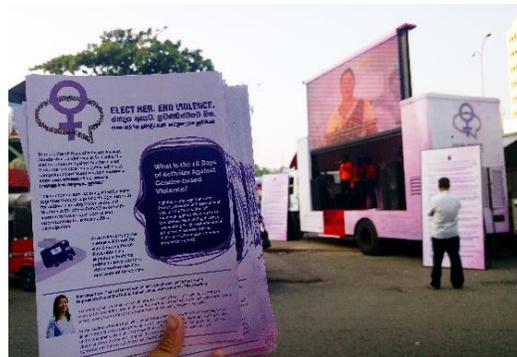


Learning from the youth who gathered for the final competition of IVoice, the first tri-lingual platform encouraging youth to exchange idea and solutions, from different part of Sri Lanka caring various social issues.



Visiting the Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil in Jaffna with colleagues. I started to experience and learn about the culture and history of Sri Lanka during the field mission with the sharing by my colleagues.

Distributing leaflet in front of the fort station for the international campaign '16 Days of Activism' with the theme of 'Elect Her, End Violence' which is responding to the Sri Lanka provincial election in Feb 2018.



Insight not to forget

Importance and value of strategic partnership

It is usually difficult for organization to bring great impact to the society by working alone. Cooperation is essential for most of the community work. Despite from 'working together', I learn the importance of creating mutual value and form strategic partnership with other stakeholders. For example, when we are organizing Youth 4 Youth Symposium, our team discussed the session objective and design with the speakers therefore we are able to share the same value and get motivated to work together. Although each stakeholder could have own specific mission and passion, discussion helps facilitating the mutual understanding among stakeholders and thus we are able to deliver good session, working towards the same objective and multiplying our effort.

Mindful about the sustainability; implementing SDG in daily live

Working with funding, there is project cycle and project end date. However, as we are working for the community, our work should be sustainability. It is heard that after funding withdraw from Sri Lanka when it is being classified as middle-income country, number of NGOs/ CSOs not able to continue their work. It is believed the funding modality has developed CSOs' reliance on funding and harm the community in certain extend. Learning from this experience, it is crucial for us to be mindful regarding project sustainability. Instead of giving funding to other social organization or creating new cycle, it is great to learn how UN could play the role of providing technique support and assisting the community to lead the changes.

Embrace the diversity

Living in a new country with different languages, culture and history, I not only expand my horizon, but also reflect more on my hometown Hong Kong. The under-developed public transportation system in Sri Lanka made me understand how urban planning helps increasing human capital mobility and thus enhance socio-economic development; Hiking with my colleague during weekend recalled the rarely high percentage of country park besides the well-known skyscrapers scenery along Victoria Harbour; The prompted questions about Umbrella Movement from my colleagues made me realized how social movement in Hong Kong is affecting people in other part of the world; Hearing Sri Lankan youth shared about their worries and dream, I know we are similar; Sharing the flat with two Korean UNVs, chatting about the volunteerism and struggles, we know we are not alone. The differences make everyone to be a unique one. The diversity teaches us no one is perfect, everyone shall embrace the diversity and learn from each other.



Waking up at 4 am, my colleague drive me to explore his country. The homemade sweet and tea from family run stall right next to the waterfall. The river where you can hangout with your friends freely during the lazy weekend. Walking with barefoot to feel the temperature of rock and river. I feel another side of Sri Lanka



Luckily, I got the chance participating in the inter-agency badminton tournament. The practice after work and the cheer from each other has strengthen our bonding.



Learning with my funny friendly teammates in retreat.



My family in Sri Lanka. We held a potluck Christmas Party in our home with other UNVs in Sri Lanka. We cooked, travelled, laugh and smile together. I'm grateful to have them shared the struggled and insight with each other.



Dressing up in green and red Sri Lanka custom, celebrating the Christmas in office. I have tasted different style cuisine, e.g. Sri Lankan, Hindu, Muslim, in the office as colleagues always share the joy with others in office after celebrating their religious festival.

Snapshot of Colombo



Snapshot of Sri Lanka



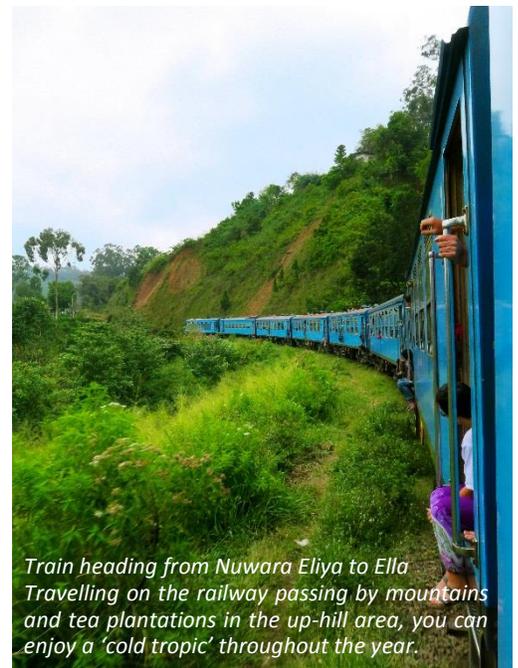
Around 70% of Sri Lankan are Buddhists



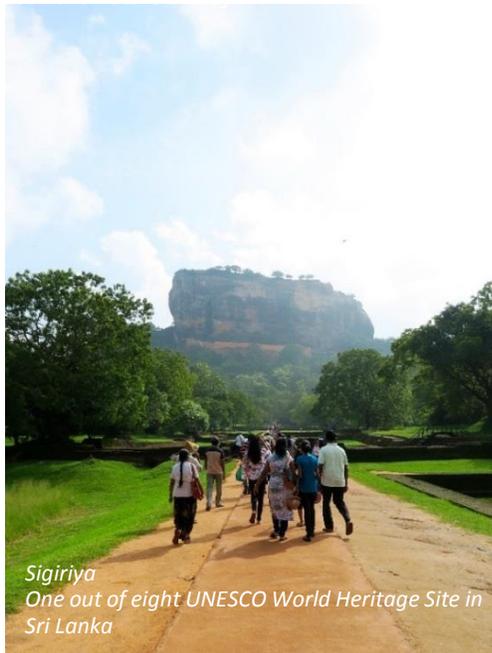
Fishery industry is one of the major economic activities



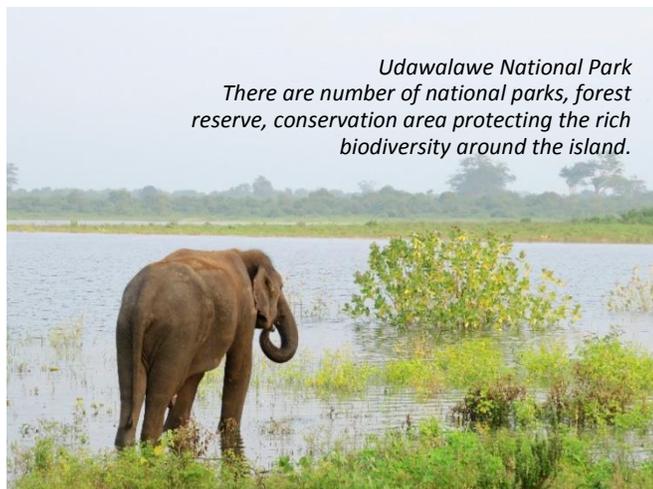
*Weligama
The south west coast is the tourist paradise for surfing, diving, whale watching, sea turtle hatchery etc. You can easily enjoy*



*Train heading from Nuwara Eliya to Ella
Travelling on the railway passing by mountains and tea plantations in the up-hill area, you can enjoy a 'cold tropic' throughout the year.*



*Sigiriya
One out of eight UNESCO World Heritage Site in Sri Lanka*



*Udawalawe National Park
There are number of national parks, forest reserve, conservation area protecting the rich biodiversity around the island.*