

**United Nations University Volunteer Programme
The Journey That Matters**

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Day time in Phnom Penh

Up until now, I am still feeling grateful and fortunate to worked with United Nations as a volunteer, the experience of which will definitely shine throughout my life journey. The time I spent with UN Women Cambodia was very meaningful and significant for my growth, both professionally and personally.



Night view in Phnom Penh

The agency that I worked with, UN Women Cambodia, is a relatively small country office, with some 15 colleagues. Therefore, multitasking is a common practice here. After discussing with my supervisor, I was given sufficient flexibility to assist with different programmes and encouraged to be open-minded and bring in new ideas, rather than following strictly according to the job description. Having lots of ambitions and aspirations to learn and contribute, the freedom and autonomy that it allows is stimulating yet challenging. It is crucial to proactively ask for more information, actively talk to colleagues and figure out various projects that are going on.



My lovely colleagues



My buddy (rightmost), National UNV on LGBTIQ Coordination

My assignment was mainly about communications, which actually did not match perfectly with my major of study in the university. But I saw it as a good opportunity to acquire new skills. Throughout the six months, I have learnt a couple of software and applications from scratch in order to create communication materials; I worked closely with a few consultants and experts to curate events; I have had the chance to reach out to a variety of people, and there were more than I expected in the first place.



Being a coordinator in an official dialogue

One of the most remarkable events that I worked on was Innovation for Impact Ideathon, a Hackathon-like event that lasted for three days. More than 70 participants were brought together in an effort to tackle social issues about gender inequality.



Ideathon Event Organizing Team

I was involved in the entire course of the event, from Concept Notes till the Final Report. A trove of precious “first time experience” emerged over the process: my first time to approach guests and partners independently; my first time to act as an emcee and moderator; my first time to design a series of communication products... In all, it was my first time to stage such a large-scale event, the exposure of which largely enhanced my confidence in communicating with people and taking on some important responsibilities.

The event itself, on the other hand, gave me a unique insight into the challenges and barriers that women candidates experience in their daily lives in Cambodia, but also their strength. It really demonstrated to me what true empowerment can be, and the unique leadership that women can offer to the communities.



My emcee partner at the Ideathon

Learning opportunities were abounding. For example, I participated in the 5-year strategic planning process for the country office, which strengthened my understanding of the landscape of UN Women’s mandate and approaches to propose impactful activities from the long run in the development sector.

I also went through several trainings about video production, especially with a focus on marginalized groups like LGBTIQ. Meanwhile, I have had the chance to know a number of advocates for LGBTIQ who are incredibly brave and determined to defend human rights in a tough and conservative social environment, telling their struggling stories with a smile.

I even went on a mission in Bangkok to attend a workshop about communications and private sector partnership where I have learnt that there are many stakeholders in development, and that depending on whether you are representing a NGO, donor, the government, civil society, a UN agency, or activists, you have a unique role to play and different strengths and weaknesses. I have learnt to value those different perspectives and roles. UN Women has a key role in bridging different stakeholders and working there gave me a good understanding of how integral the different perspectives and angles are. Through my experience with UN

Women, I have also been reminded how incredibly significant context is and how we must trust women themselves to be the experts of their own realities.



Met UN Women colleagues from other countries during the workshop in Bangkok

Besides office hour, I was always enjoying the lunch time with my colleagues. It's normal to pack lunch boxes, from which I took much fun in preparing the typical Chinese food and introduced to my colleagues. We share the food, as well as our cultures. We chatted about all kinds of topic, from work and life, to social issues and politics. The pantry was full of laughter and cheerful voices.



Daily lunch box sharing with colleagues

Thanks to the nature of my assignment, my social networks were not limited to my colleagues in UN Women but covered many else like those from other UN agencies, non-profit organizations and civil societies. Meeting or working with them greatly extended my horizons within and beyond the UN system that how these parties are coordinated and cooperated to fight for a more harmonious and sustainable society. It also helped me to understand the unique position and global citizenship as UN staff. Every time I talked to these passionate people, listened to their devotion and prospects, I got constantly motivated.



Selfie with my supervisor (middle) and UN Resident Coordinator (rightmost)



Casual gathering with people from UN agencies, embassy, NGO, etc.

For me, UN Women was a very enabling environment, where I was pushed to trust my judgement and develop leadership skills, experimenting to try new things. My colleagues continuously inspired me. I appreciated to have a strong network of experienced and open people surrounding me, who trusted my ability to make good decisions and produce quality work. I left a big part of my heart in Cambodia and the work we did together has set me on a wonderful path to advocating women's rights and gender equality around the world. Their passion for change, attention to detail, integrity and critical analysis gave me new eyes to see this field. I feel like even though I am no longer a part of the team, my connections with them and the context they work in remain strong.



Office retreat in Kep Province



Farewell party surprise from my colleagues

Striking a work life balance was vital for me over the six months. When I was by chance informed that there would be a charity marathon happening in Siem Reap, I registered without hesitation. I barely run, much less exercised. For this event, I've gone from no days at the gym to nearly 5 days a week – which is a miracle for me. But I want to prove that nothing can stop you if you put your heart and mind to it. The ending of the story, apparently, I successfully completed 10km, which I never thought that I could make it.



Mini marathon at the Angkor Wat

Taking the holidays to explore the beauty of Cambodia is another big part in my spare time. Nothing is more relaxing than bathing in the sun on a tranquil island, hearing the soothing sounds of waves and sea wind.

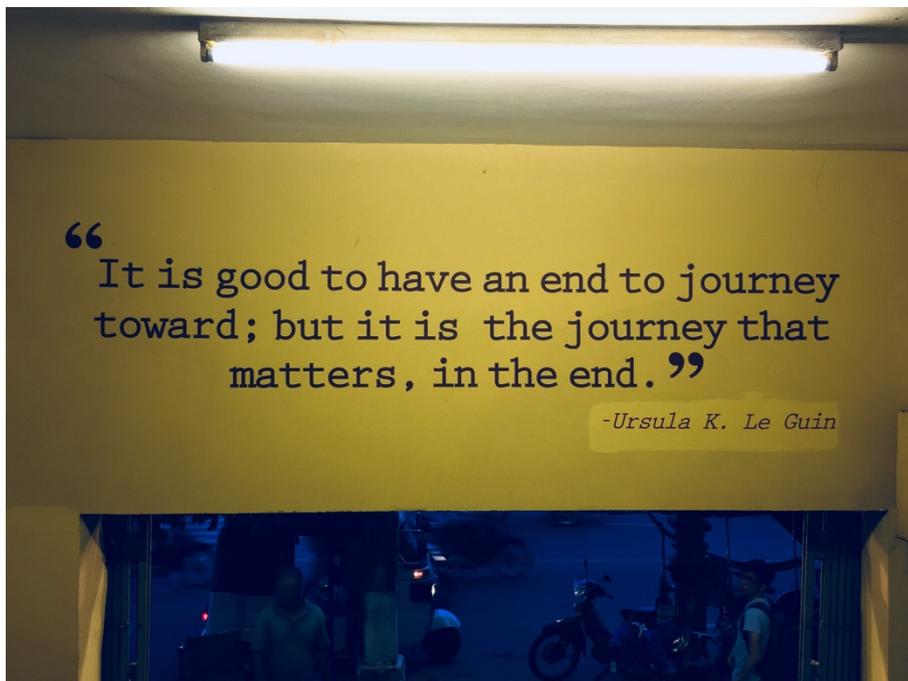


Holiday in Koh Rong Island

If someone would ask what I will miss the most during the six months in Cambodia, there is no doubt that it's the "people". The lovely ones are treasures in my life, and I do hope to reencounter them in the near future around the world.



Farewell party



Quote from a famous restaurant in Phnom Penh

Just as the quote says, "It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end." It's definitely a fruitful journey, and I will keep the beautiful memories together with all that I learnt and carry on.