

My time in Cambodia – Marco Wan

Work life in Cambodia:

It's honestly the best job there is. My job at the UN is mostly on coordination and a bunch of miscellaneous things I do to support my agency – UNFPA (United Nation Population Fund). My role as a coordinator means I manage the UN Youth Task Force and the UN Youth Advisory Panel. The task force is an internal panel of UN agencies working on youth issues in Cambodia. On the other hand, the UN Youth Advisory Panel is the group composed of Youth organizations and organization working with young people. I love how my job lets me work with people across the UN who are working with youth issues, as well as young people outside of the UN fighting for youth development in Cambodia.

Cambodia has such a large young demographic, with one-fifth of the population under the age of 25. It is incredible to see the amazing work in the UN and young people are doing to help the development of Cambodia. Human connection is the key to driving change and I believe that meeting these young people that form a key part of the UN Youth Advisory Panel has changed the way I see things. I am amazed at all these incredible people's stories and what they've done. I don't want to compare, but the adversity they face is something I simply can't imagine having to face. Befriending them and working with young people is what I enjoyed the most. Even if it means working on weekends, I'm really happy about it.



I think working in the UN gives you this great perspective of development as it sits at such a high-level working with government. I've come to more deeply understand the SDGs and how development isn't just about reducing poverty or increasing jobs. It's about livelihood and opportunities, and it's about quality of life for everyone. I've also gained a more nuanced understanding of the role of the UN or development agencies in any country. We simply cannot do everything, the UN agencies don't have the resources or the manpower.

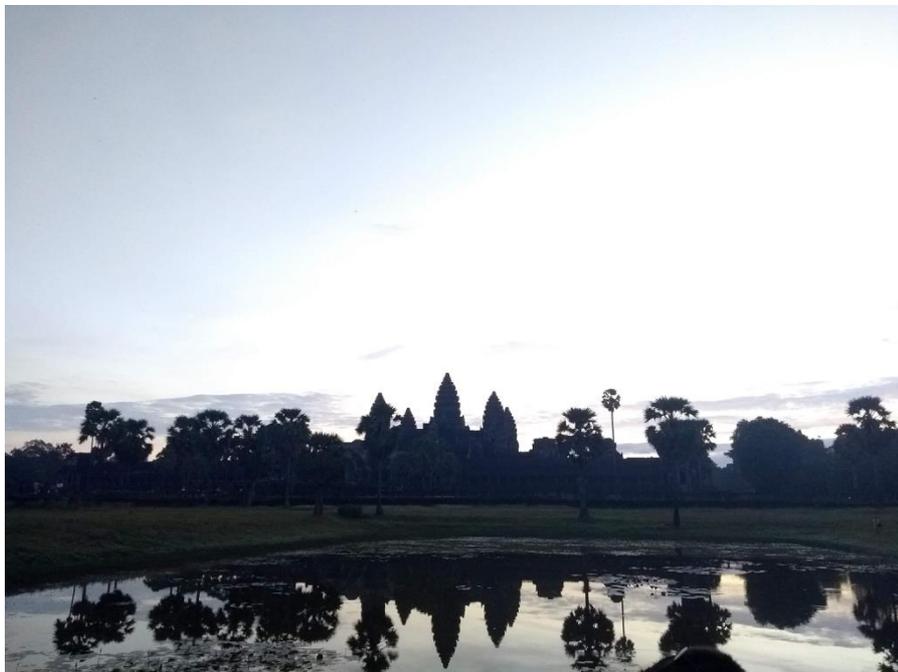
We work with different partners, government agencies, NGOs, and understand what our strength and weaknesses are. We are all part of a puzzle piece and I learned to understand our role in all this.

Overall, the job I got was challenging yet fulfilling. They say a job is what you make of it, and I am glad of what I've been able to do and learn from this experience.

Outside of work:

My life outside of my work is with friends I've made at the UN, with the UN Youth Advisory Panel people, and the people at church. The food in Cambodia is great and I always love to try out food in the area. I've gotten a bit adventurous with the Cambodian (Khmer) food I've been having, only suffering food poisoning twice but nothing major. I like to say food poisoning is a rite of passage! My usual routine is go downstairs to street stall for breakfast, BBQ pork on rice with marinated cucumber slices. I then hop onto my bicycle for work.

Travelling is also really fun. I've travelled around Cambodia with my friends in the UN Youth Advisory Panel and within the UN. Cambodia is a really diverse place, full of excitement and joy, like the beautiful untainted beaches of Koh Rong, the mangrove forests of Kampot, and the majestic temples of Angkor Wat. My favorite happened to be Angkor Wat which was located in the city of Siem Reap. For some reason, I decided to join the annual Angkor Wat half-marathon that I seriously questioned when my leg nearly fell apart. I think I had trouble using the stairs for a few days.



I even went couch-surfing in Ho Chin Minh, basically living in a stranger's home you met online. Some might say it was reckless but you really get to understand about the local culture if you stay a local person's home. I guess it kind of sums my time in Cambodia, slightly risky but worth it.

Conclusion:

In Cambodia I've found people I can call close friends and a country I can identify with. In UNFPA, we call ourselves a family and I feel like I have made many lifelong connections here. I'm not sure what I'll do next after my assignment here, but either way, this will not be my last chapter in Cambodia.