

Uneasy yet irrefutably rewarding piles of learning

Macy Kwok Yi Ching

Whilst thinking of what must I include in this report, I am walking home from the UN House, along the rugged frozen roads, under the howling winds and bitter cold attributed by the -30°C Astana weather. I think it would be best to infuse some temperature into my words, by tracing the warm and bitter moments that nurture my growth in this life-changing and impossible-to-forget adventure.

To put my experience short, I describe it as an “uneasy yet irrefutably rewarding piles of learning”. Life living and working in a foreign country alone has not been easy, as barriers and difficulties emerge in all aspects of life – adapting to the adverse weather, making friends in a Russian-speaking community, managing households alone, and working by translating almost every document...

However, very proud am I to shout from the rooftop **that I grew as a better person after all**. Lessons, big or small, are brought to me spontaneously, simultaneously and massively like a shower of rain in spring.



Raindrops wash up my flaw, nourish my growth and I am thankful that the shower doesn't usually last long with help from colleagues and friends. Such experience **makes me different from who I was before I came**.



As a UNV

I work as a Communication and Advocacy Associate in United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). My duty station is located at the capital of Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan (formerly named, Astana). My original contract lasts only for six months but I am privileged to have it extended for another half year, doubling my enrichment here.

My duty as a UN Volunteer (UNV) is diverse but the tasks generally concern with external affairs of UNFPA. I contribute to improve its visibility and awareness-raising through developing information materials for publication and social media. I improved my hard skills in various video-editing, designing and photo-editing software through some on-the-job self-learning.

Sometimes I conduct interviews with community partners and write up human interest stories. I visited a temporary shelter for mothers who are in difficult financial or family situation and conducted interviews with mothers on their story and perception towards sexual and reproductive health.

Besides, I assist in the preparation, organization, and implementation of public events and education and community awareness activities. Also, I conduct desktop research and suggest innovative ideas to expand the exposure of UNFPA to reach broader publicity and fundraising targets.



Seeing the world

Little did I know about Kazakhstan until truly stretching my legs over its vast piece of land, gazing at the futuristic architecture in the city of Nur-Sultan and feeling the warmth, kindness and hospitality of Kazakh people. At first, I felt detached from life here since I hadn't had any friends or done anything fun. Absorbingly, in the moment of deciding whether I should stay for another half year, I realize I have a bellyful of reasons to stay – more or less relates to the placid and restful pace of life here.

Living away from hustle and bustle, I was given so much room for thinking, appreciating, observing and understanding everything around me. I had leisure time picking up books and poems that I longed to read. Taking up painting and ceramic classes are great ways to meet new people.

Very good time I had connecting with nature on weekend trips hiking or visiting lakes. I even helped to babysit my colleagues' children and cat; and accidentally saved a stray dog, which allowed me to gain a deep insight into the stray dog policy here.

Bits and pieces in life immerse me into this city's reality. It means so much to make my pursuit and understanding towards volunteerism complete – since high school, I took part in various local or overseas volunteer activities, but are usually short term, especially those two-week experience of volunteer tourism. So I have been questioning myself their usefulness and is desperate for answer. This one-year experience irrefutably adds dimension (or complexity) to my lifelong seeking of answers to it. It pushes me to dig deeper and rethink how can I, as an individual, bring more impacts to the world?

May our every day be like unwrapping gift box

Talking about cultural shock, I can't recall much of them now but I am pretty sure I had a lot of them when I was still a newbie. With time, those shocks seemed to have internalized as part of my cultural knowledge or understanding of this place.

I am grateful for a magnified understanding of my capacity and adaptability. **I feel empowered** that I can live anywhere alone and nothing bothers me now. During fall time, I had a solo trip to Uzbekistan and visited other UNVs from Hong Kong working there. I thought to myself that fear can be just an ungrounded imagination or social construction.

To sum up, my every day is like unwrapping gift box, with excitement and incidents unexpectedly pop up. After all, these uneasy experiences will definitely mutate into important milestones in life.

Thanks for your patience in reading.

