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Volunteers

inspiration in action

Turning an ideal into reality

By Paola Piccione

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Bangkok, Thailand: I still remember my first thought when I arrived in Bangkok: "What am I doing here"? A metropolis was standing in front of me and I felt so overwhelmed by the five-star hotels, glitzy shopping malls and gleaming skyscrapers. This scenario was totally different from the one I experienced as an international volunteer in remote and rural areas in Africa and in the Balkans...

At the beginning of my assignment as a UNV volunteer Intern in the Democratic Governance Unit, I was wondering about the rationale for posting me, a UNV volunteer, in a country which has achieved most of the Millennium Development Goals well in advance of 2015. Thailand is in fact a middle income country and it is more and more emerging as a donor and an outstanding 'South-South Cooperation' partner, providing substantial technical support to developing countries.

But despite all the achievements of the past 20 years, development challenges and inequalities still persist in Thailand, particularly for the most vulnerable groups and for those living in the most underserved areas.

Throughout the country, the voices of the most excluded are often unheard. Just an example: despite all efforts being made to achieve gender equality, women have fewer career opportunities compared to men and lack their political voice. Women's representation in Cabinet is 8.6 percent, an indicator that women's voices in politics are needed for a more balanced deliberation of national issues.

To respond to these challenges, UNDP Thailand, under the Governance portfolio, is supporting the Royal Thai Government's efforts to enhance the capacity of Governmental institutions as well as empower communities and the most vulnerable groups. UNDP projects contribute to making the decision-making and implementation processes more participatory, transparent, accountable, effective and responsive. Processes need to be equitable for both women and men, and adhere to the rule of law.



UNV Supunya Yonpiam from Thailand is a Water and Sanitation Engineer for UNMIL in Liberia. Due to her white lab coat, her team nicknamed her 'Water Doctor'. (UNV)



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During my assignment as a UNV volunteer Intern, I have provided technical support at the formulation as well as at the implementation stage of these projects. I have also liaised with stakeholders involved in the initiatives, particularly with the relevant ministries, the donor community, and the UN system in Thailand.

I have shared with Khun Somchai and Khun Mallika - the Governance Unit, with the UNV team as well as with other colleagues, so many challenges and laughs! All this has contributed to make me feel a member of a friendly and hard working team, strongly inspired by the senior management and always ready to welcome new development challenges.

When talking about challenges, I cannot help thinking about a project UNDP Thailand is working on in partnership with other UN Agencies. This action-research aims at producing policy options to be shared with all stakeholders dealing with displaced people in Thailand.

The donor's requirements were very strict in terms of submission of the proposal as well as in terms of contractual issues after the approval. I was involved in the formulation phase of the proposal and then assigned to look after the donor's requirements after the approval as well as the coordination with partners.

This challenging experience represented a great opportunity for personal growth and my work as a UNV volunteer. I deepened my knowledge of several issues related to displaced people living in Thailand through meetings with all stakeholders: representatives from the Royal Thai Government, academic institutions, UN agencies and donors, as well as NGOs working in the camps along the Thai-Myanmar border.

I also contributed to the work of the office, and the Democratic Governance Unit in particular. Given my ability to analyse issues in depth and my attention to detail, I have been able to successfully manage the tricky deadlines and requirements of the donor.

I feel that this has been my value added, as a UNV volunteer, to the Democratic Governance Unit and my contribution towards the realization of UNDP Thailand's mission to be the "centre of excellence dedicated to providing policy advice and advocacy for change in support of human development and partnership".



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What I have experienced throughout this year is that democratic governance is an ideal, a multifaceted and challenging process.

Without any improvement or change at the decision-making level, the status quo remains unchanged. Hence it is only by enhancing this challenging process that the human development of communities and the people most in need can be achieved in a sustainable way.

I really feel proud to have served as a UNV volunteer in Thailand and to have contributed making this ideal a reality!