

My journey as a United Nations Volunteer

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I am a United Nations Volunteer.

Working as a UNV Communications Assistant at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Bangladesh, I am often asked, "How did you end up working in Communications, that too being an Environmental Science graduate?" Well, it all began with a hobby.

Reading and writing has always intrigued me. Although I wasn't the most avid reader, writing was something I thoroughly enjoyed. I would patiently wait for the weekly youth supplement of The Daily Star, read it to my heart's content and envision to one day qualify to be a writer there.

I joined SHOUT, The Daily Star's youth supplement which quite frankly, changed my life. Being a part of SHOUT helped bring out a side of me which I didn't know existed and opened a trail of opportunities which would otherwise be far from accessible.

Since we celebrated UN Day every year at school, the UN bug bit me quite early in life. In fact, a senior recalled asking me where I wanted to work after graduation. I had exclaimed, "The UN!" Five years later, here I am.

I am honoured to be a UN Volunteer. UN Volunteers operate through the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme which is the only UN entity capable of mobilising large numbers of highly qualified volunteers, who serve the UN system in war-torn communities, classrooms, hospitals, and homes. The UNV programme works under a dual mandate – to mobilise volunteers for the United Nations System and to advocate for the importance of volunteerism in development worldwide.

People, however, are still somewhat oblivious and apathetic towards the term 'volunteer.' Volunteers are invaluable assets to the society. They work as catalysts to engage people in tackling development challenges, working to transform the pace and nature of development.

The UN Volunteers create a new image of the United Nations. They are people who contribute to improving the livelihoods of real people in exempt of material gain. Volunteers are thus the most powerful social capital of a country.

Eradicating poverty, fighting climate change, ensuring gender equality cannot be achieved by the government and international organisations alone. It requires the commitment from all levels of society. Because the responsibility for the road to development lies in all of us. We are all part of the system.

Being a volunteer, I have the opportunity to engage with people from the ground up and positively impact my country. Youth engagement is a crucial part of volunteerism. This gives us a platform to share our thoughts and perspectives to the world, enhancing our interpersonal and decision-making skills. It shapes our personality, our character.

My host agency, UNFPA Bangladesh has a record of hiring the most amount of UNVs. Today Bangladesh has around 200 UN Volunteers.

UNFPA primarily works to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality by focusing on skilled birth attendance, emergency obstetric and neonatal care, family planning and other vital services especially for people residing in hard-to-reach areas ensuring no one is left behind. Having lost my mother earlier this year, I understand the importance of this now more than ever.

They also work with adolescents and youth. Equipped with the right information and preparation, the youth have the potential to lead lasting changes in the world. That potential can only be realised if only they are healthy,



educated and have full control over their minds and bodies. UNFPA works together with governments, civil societies and development partners and, above all, with young people themselves to ensure that they have the knowledge and power to make informed choices and to participate as active citizens.

Working as a UNV at UNFPA, I have already been part of two major UN missions including the Nordic Mission to Khulna and Dhaka as well as the UNICEF-UNFPA HQ-RO-CO mission to Jamalpur, along with other small ones.

At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), governments agreed to meet the special needs of adolescents and youth, especially young women, for access to education, health, counselling and high-quality reproductive health services. Twenty-five years since ICPD in Cairo, Bangladesh has come a long way and progress has been made on many fronts. But there is still some unfinished business that needs to be acknowledged.

This November, UNFPA, Denmark and Kenya will convene the Nairobi Summit on 25 years of ICPD, where heads of state and other top government officials will seize

the opportunity to recommit to realising the ICPD vision for a better world. Young people will be on the forefront at the Summit, sharing their perspectives and contributing their ideas, their leadership, their energy and creativity in hopes of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the ICPD agenda by 2030.

Our ICPD communication activities thus plan to amass fresh and innovative ideas from the youth and experts to be presented at the Nairobi Summit 2019 highlighting the successes and emerging challenges Bangladesh is currently experiencing. Having closely worked in this has not only acquainted me with the ICPD agenda but it has also provided me with an opportunity to internalise this knowledge and apply it in my field of passion which is communication for development.

The future belongs to those who dare to dream. Whatever your hobbies or fields of interest are, make sure to cherish and nurture it, because you never know where it may take you.

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