Bringing new perspectives and fresh ideas

Guatemala City, Guatemala: While serving as a UN Volunteer Finance Officer with the World Food Programme (WFP) in Guatemala, I had the opportunity to participate in pilot projects in the area of Finance. The whole financial framework of the WFP is in a process of transition towards higher transparency, cost efficiency and accountability. I was excited to contribute to this transformation.

International organizations will have to address the growing demands from donors and beneficiaries for higher transparency, and the pressure to better utilize resources. I believe this is a great opportunity for volunteers to assist in this process by bringing new perspectives and fresh ideas.

During my time as UN Volunteer, I also had the opportunity to witness important changes both in the country and in the organization. At the time of my arrival, the Central American region had been recovering from an extended drought: a consequence of the El Niño phenomenon.
Guatemala is prone not only to droughts but also to other natural disasters, including hurricanes, earthquakes and landslides, which place it on the list of the most environmentally vulnerable countries in the world. This undoubtedly contributes to the widespread food insecurity. Over 49% of children under the age of five face chronic malnutrition, and half of the population lives in poverty. The most affected segment of the population are indigenous people living in rural areas.

The time of my stay in Guatemala was also characterized by significant political changes: after the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala collected overwhelming evidence of corruption in government, unprecedented public protests spread across the country and ultimately led to the fall of the President and other senior government officials.

The newly established Government defined the reduction of malnutrition as one of its main goals. The WFP and the Government of Guatemala are working together to “improve the nutritional status of mothers and children under five and living conditions of vulnerable groups by increasing agricultural productivity and farmers’ marketing practices”.

There are several innovative ways to do so, as the WFP in Guatemala is a pilot country office testing the latest and most efficient approaches towards better nutrition and higher food security.

I was particularly interested in a concept of nutritional counselling called “madres guías” (mother guides), where female volunteers selected from different geographical areas are trained to educate other mothers on the nutrition of their small children, through informal gatherings and in their own languages.

América Latina y el Caribe

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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 1: No poverty, SDG 2: Zero hunger, SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production