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Victor Reyes (left) is a UN Volunteer CSR Policy Specialist in Trinidad and Tobago. (UNV, 2013)

## Impacting the lives of others

An international United Nations Volunteer experience has more to it than the professional opportunity. I chose this volunteer assignment for the opportunity to significantly impact the lives of those with few opportunities.

**Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago:** Halfway through my one-year assignment as international United Nations Volunteer in Trinidad and Tobago, the balance so far is definitively positive. I am in charge of managing a project to develop a National Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment. Yes, quite a mouthful and definitely quite a challenge.

At a professional level accepting this position gave me a lot to reflect upon. Is CSR just a way of legitimizing businesses to operate according to fair labour or non-corrupt practices on a voluntary basis? Is CSR just another way of reducing the responsibility of the government towards its constituents? Chances are that this text would have another author if that was the case.

I chose this volunteer assignment for the *opportunity* to significantly impact the lives of those with few opportunities.

I add emphasis to opportunity as true impact will happen when companies incorporate the notion of responsibility being not limited to their board. This could mean enhanced production, more skilled work force, better communities, and the list goes on.

In an aggregated effect, enabling corporations to go beyond business as usual can foster sustainable growth. Achieving such impact is of course bigger than my assignment, but it turns out that through this project we can trigger change.

As with any policy exercise there is a great deal of work to be done. Research, interviews, discussions and management of different interests are all part of the day to day work "routine". There is great buy-in from different sectors of society and it seems we are on the right track. It is also true that much of this effort will be invisible in the final policy draft but as discouraging as that can be no good policy has ever come out of a succinct, desktop-base policy process.

It's also fair to say that an international United Nations Volunteer experience has more to it than the professional opportunity. It is a chance to experience reality in other countries beyond newspapers. For me it means experiencing that appendix some regional organizations like to add to their name – Latin America AND the Caribbean – as if it were

one.

It is clear for me that the Caribbean is a world to itself, with a culture with much to offer and conditions that differ greatly from its close continental neighbours. That of course is not a call for distancing them, but perhaps integration efforts should not be built on geographical closeness but on the common desire to respect and value our identities.

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## Latin America and the Caribbean

• Trinidad and Tobago • CSR • Corporate Social Responsibility • trade

Sustainable Development Goal: