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UN Volunteer Zeng Yunheng (China) during a field visit to local farms with agricultural experts in Zhouqu in January 2020

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Volunteering for inclusion and resilience

UN Volunteers across the Asia Pacific region ensure that disaster risks are reduced and communities are better prepared for response and recovery. In doing so, they contribute to sustainability in their communities. On International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, two UN Volunteers serving in China and Nepal, reflect on their assignments.

Resilience in Zhouqu

UN Volunteer Zeng Yunheng has been serving as a Project Coordinator for the United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP) - Demonstration Project for Poverty Reduction and Resilience Construction - in Zhouqu County, Gansu Province in China since November 2019. Due to geological and geographical conditions, Zhouqu is one of the worst-hit areas by natural hazards in the country.

"Since my relocation to Zhouqu from Chengdu, I participated in a series of activities facilitating local poverty reduction and resilience construction. Through accompanying our consultants on site-visits and discussions with local authorities, I took part in field research and thematic workshops and in safeguarding the formulation of Agricultural Products Optimization and Demonstration Plan of Zhouqu County. I assisted in the preparatory work for

the International Symposium for Resilience and Sustainable Development and recently participated in the formation of capacity building plans for rural online education and e-commerce operation.

In June 2020, COVID-19 socio-economic impact research was conducted in Zhouqu, and I was fortunate to get involved in the household surveys. The research statistics showed some pressing issues posed by the pandemic, such as a drastic decrease in income of local farmers and unemployment and relatively low agricultural productivity, the poor sales of agricultural products and the deficiency of online education capacity. An Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) localization proposal was formulated based on the research findings to address the challenges, particularly at the community level.

In early August 2020, torrential rains triggered hazardous mudslide and floods in Zhouqu. The government and people of Zhouqu County made swift and efficient efforts in the timely relief to affected communities. Many people tend to associate Zhouqu with disasters when speaking of it. However, with my experience serving in the county, I am more than willing to view it with a character of resilience.

Looking back on my experience as a UN Volunteer, I am fortunate to have learned the skills of project management within the UN system. This experience has enriched my understanding of sustainable development from a wider spectrum and consolidated my determination of progressive contribution to development work."

“As a field-based UN Volunteer, Yunheng has been playing an integral part in community resilience building with his pronounced passion for SDGs promotion in northwestern China.” - Wanyi Wang, Programme Manager, UNDP China

Tackling disaster risk reduction inclusively in Nepal

UN Volunteer Reika Horio from Japan joined UNICEF in Nepal as a Programme Officer in Disaster Risk Reduction in April 2019. She developed and managed the Improved Comprehensive School Safety (CSS)

programme at 7,132 schools in districts affected by [the 2015 April Earthquake](#) in Nepal. Reika initially started her UNV assignment fully-funded by the Government of Japan. The assignment was extended by UNICEF due to her dedicated support and proven performance. Currently, Reika is serving as an Education Officer with UNICEF Nepal. She shares her UN Volunteer experience in DRR and beyond below.



UN Volunteer Reika Horio serving with UNICEF Nepal during a monitoring programme mission on improved comprehensive school safety in the earthquake affected schools at Bhaktapur, Nepal, 2019

“The Comprehensive School Safety programme is an extension of the Government of Nepal’s School Sector Development Plan, and as such, provides a detailed roadmap on how to ensure a child’s right to access quality education in safe learning environments. My key duties in the capacity of a DRR Programme Officer were to monitor programme progress and provide technical support in a timely manner.

The programme covered a lot of ground. UNICEF distributed CSS tools and material to 7,132 schools and 131 local governments. The CSS standards were also disseminated in 14 earthquake-affected districts through various events and information, education and communication materials, while a

media campaign ensured nation-wide sensitization. 201 schools were able to improve their school safety based on the CSS Minimum Package.

In addition to this, UNICEF also supported the construction of 250 Transitional Learning Centres in 173 schools in nine earthquake-affected districts with funding from USAID. Being with UNICEF in the midst of these exciting innovations to re-establish education for the hardest-to-reach children in the country, and contribute to their resilient recovery, was very rewarding and a great learning experience.

My connection to disaster risk reduction goes back to my childhood. My father had a visual impairment. When coping with natural disasters while growing up in Japan, I was always trying to think of how I would help my father to safety in case of an emergency. That led me to research disability inclusive disaster risk reduction for my dissertation during my post-graduate studies.

Then, in 2015, as an intern at UNICEF Philippines I further conducted a situation analysis on people with disabilities when the region was hit by Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Unfortunately, after the disaster, the aid did not reach many of the most disadvantaged people, and they were desperate for help. During an interview, a person with disability told me, "I am just happy to share what I went through at the time, even though I haven't gotten any assistance until now.

It was voices like these from the ground that stirred in me the desire to help create more inclusive programmes at UNICEF that would work both in development and emergency contexts and to enhance equity for children. This was the moment when I became determined to devote my life to realizing the Sustainable Development Goal and 'leaving no one behind'.

Even though disasters are all around us, I still sometimes find it difficult to convey to people the importance of disaster risk reduction. There is a sense among people that "this will not affect me." For example, when the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami hit my country, there were some people who did not evacuate because they thought they would be fine, and the tsunami would not reach their homes. As a result, they lost their lives.

“ Disaster risk reduction is a matter of concern for everyone, not just those living in disaster-prone countries. It is my strong hope that everyone makes

“ DRR their responsibility and take whatever steps they can to prepare and minimize the effects of future disasters.

On this International Day of DRR, I stress the importance of understanding the potential risks of disasters and creating awareness in order to prepare for disasters and save every possible life."

Reika served through the Global Human Resource Development Programme for Peacebuilding and Development (HRD) of the Government of Japan.



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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 1: No poverty](#) [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#) [SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities](#)