



Planting trees is just one of the many climate actions UN Volunteer Sung-gil Lee (kneeling) carries out as a UN Volunteer Environment Specialist with UNDP in Timor-Leste. Sung-gil's UNV assignment is fully funded by his home government of Korea. (UNV Timor-Leste, 2017.)

UN Volunteer fully funded by Korea helps Timor-Leste take climate action

It is rather fitting that the first impression of Timor-Leste that UN Volunteer Sung-gil Lee recalls is the stifling heat he felt when he got off the plane from his home country, Korea, and stepped onto the Dili airport tarmac. That day in February, 2016, Sung-gil reported for his assignment as a UN Volunteer Specialist for Environment with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Soon he would be carrying out a host of duties to help Timor-Leste's citizens take action against global warming.

As a UNV Environmental Specialist, fully funded by the Government of Korea, Sung-gil serves the Sustainable Development Unit of [UNDP Timor-Leste](#). "My work is [determining] how to ensure environmental sustainability of Timor-Leste," Sung-gil stated. "This includes supporting the implementation of environmental projects in progress, assessing emerging policies and development issues in Timor-Leste to highlight potential

environmental concerns, and identify and formulate new environmental challenges,” he continued.

No small order, Timor-Leste is one of the youngest countries in the world. It established its independent government in 2002 and faces various challenges raging from poverty to environmental degradation.

But the Korean volunteer did not arrive empty-handed. Sung-gil brought to his assignment seven years of experience working for an environmental NGO with a strong commitment to global environmental protection. He had assisted the NGO as it dealt with various environmental issues such as sustainable land management and combating desertification.

“Timor-Leste is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change,” said Sung-gil. “Climate change is threatening Timorese people with water scarcity and a rising sea level. UNDP’s Coastal Resilience Project aims to protect its coast line and improve local livelihood by ecological restoration of mangrove forests.”

““Even though Timor-Leste is a young country, facing many challenges, it has many passionate volunteers and dedicated NGOs,” said Sung-gil. “They are doing their best to make a difference for their homeland.”

Sung-gil travelled through the country with the project team, where meeting many local people informed him, not only on how to monitor and evaluate project implementation, but how to achieve an agreement among people with different backgrounds and knowledge. “It helped me understand how the UN works with various stakeholders at different levels,” he said.

Due to prevailing poverty and high prices of imported fuel such as kerosene and natural gas, most Timorese still highly depend on firewood for cooking, which is one of the major drivers of deforestation and land degradation.

“Timorese people use traditional three-stone cook stoves which produce significant smoke and consume much firewood,” Sung-gil said. “It not only worsens the health of women and children who spend a long time in the kitchen but also accelerates forest degradation.”

Thus, in collaboration with local authorities and NGOs, Sung-gil and his team at UNDP Timor-Leste are trying to distribute fuel-efficient improved cook stoves and promote bio-briquettes made of wastepaper, coffee husks, and organic residue. “When I planted trees with young volunteers and local students in a tree-planting event to save an elementary school from a possible landslide,” he continued, “I could see hope on their faces.”

“From my UNV experience in Timor-Leste I have learned that if given the chance, people will do their best to make a better future,” Sung-gil said, concluding, “I am very proud to be a UN Volunteer helping Timorese people realize their potential and make their future clean and green.”

In 2016, UNV deployed 6,590 UN Volunteers in 126 countries. Some 418 were funded by the partners of the UNV Full Funding programme. The Republic of Korea funded 60 UN Volunteers, a number which will double in 2017.

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