



UN Volunteers on the road travelling throughout Cambodia with 'Volunteer Caravan'. Maeve Anne Halpin travelled with the team, meeting volunteers in different parts of Cambodia and hearing their perspective on volunteerism. (UNV, Cambodia)

My volunteer experience with UNDP Cambodia opened a lot of doors for me

"Volunteering took me out of my comfort zone." Maeve Anne Halpin, UN Youth Volunteer in Communication, Outreach and Youth served with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Her assignment was funded by Irish Aid.

I had never been to South East Asia nor had I ever worked in the UN System – it was a big change for me, professionally and personally.

Volunteering abroad took me out of my comfort zone. It was nerve-racking the first couple of weeks, navigating the busy streets, meeting new faces every day, and attempting to communicate in Khmer, all while starting a new job in an unfamiliar setting.

UN Volunteers are highly regarded in the United Nations system. Our assignment has a lot of responsibility. We are encouraged to take part in and organize activities related to our

assignments, to motivate our UN colleagues to volunteer and to create a sense of community.

“ For a UNV project called ‘Volunteer Caravan’, I travelled throughout Cambodia to meet with volunteers and their organizations. We discussed issues affecting volunteers, various projects the volunteers worked on, and the impact of their work.

My role involved a steep learning curve as I was thrown in at the deep end from day one. This allowed me to develop professionally very quickly. My assignment with UNDP opened many doors for me and gave me the opportunity to learn from other colleagues. Field visits with UNDP to their projects on water management and agricultural practices added to my learning.

Volunteerism is entrenched in Khmer culture; many Khmers volunteer in two or three roles besides having an employment. This passion for volunteering and community work is common practice in the culture and has rubbed off on me too. It has encouraged me to volunteer wherever I go.

The UN Youth Volunteer assignment in Cambodia was an adventure for me. I made friends from Cambodia and abroad. I travelled to incredible hidden treasures in Asia. I got lost on back roads. I fell off a motorcycle. I tried (and some may say failed) to learn Khmer. I developed my professional skills. I cried a bit but laughed a lot. And, most importantly, I found out what makes me passionate in my work.

Volunteering was a remarkable experience but, as the saying goes, ‘you only get as much as you put in!’

My UN Youth Volunteer Assignment not only developed my professional skills, but opened a lot of doors for my future. Following my return from Cambodia almost two years ago, I left for Washington D.C. to work as Communications and Advocacy Fellow at Intrahealth International, a global non-profit health organization. After completing the fellowship, I returned to Ireland where I worked in the Multilateral Unit of Irish Aid, supporting Ireland's engagement with United Nations agencies and European Union development. And presently I am based out of London having recently joined Devex, the media platform for global development community, as Partnerships Associate for the United Kingdom.

Maeve Anne Halpin's UN Youth Volunteer assignment ended in Feb 2015.

In 2016, UNV deployed 6,590 UN Volunteers in 126 countries. Some 418 were funded by the partners of the UNV Full Funding programme, including 22 Irish UN Youth Volunteers and one Irish UN Volunteer Specialist serving with 11 UN agencies.



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