



UN Volunteer Ayaka Naito (top row, second from left) together with facilitators and participants in a COVID-19 Proposal Development Training workshop.

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From Tokyo to Tashkent and back: UN Volunteering assignment kicks off new career pathway

For Ayaka Naito, a UN Volunteer assignment with the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) in Uzbekistan became an important first step into a new career in international development. Building on her experience in the business world, Ayaka undertook a ten-month assignment as Programme Assistant on COVID-19 Partnerships Development and Finance in Tashkent. Her UNV assignment was supported through the COVID-19 Impact Reduction Programme, funded by the Government of Japan.

Ayaka's assignment had a strong focus on COVID-19 response and capacity building, along with accelerating private sector engagement in the Sustainable Development Goals. She also enhanced Uzbekistan's participation in the UN Food Systems Summit last year.

"My main responsibilities were to support developing the funding framework and the resource mobilization strategy/plan of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF)," Ayaka shares. "This included supporting COVID-19 response and recovery and spearheading private and business sector engagement for the resource mobilization strategy."

Ayaka delivered stakeholder mapping, a tool to establish and leverage the relationships of the 24 UN entities working in the country with traditional and potential new partners by identifying common interests and areas of potential cooperation to achieve the national SDGs.

She also supported the development of the multi-year funding framework for the UNSDCF. "In order to help the UNCT in planning its joint resource mobilization strategy in the next five years and identify the funding gaps in the funding framework, I contributed to the preparation of various materials in the initiation stage and the bilateral agency validation process."

Ayaka leveraged her strong coordination, organizational and relationship management skills. "On COVID-19 response, together with my supervisor, I supported five-day proposal development training workshops established to help the UN Country Team to better respond to the ongoing development emergency. The training provided the UN resource mobilization officers with the opportunity to learn how to develop competitive proposals responsive to the pandemic."

“ I contributed to accelerating private sector engagement with the SDGs, leveraging my understanding of private sector organizations. The private sector is an essential partner in pandemic response, particularly bridging the gap in finance, innovation and technical capacity. -- Ayaka Naito, UN Volunteer with the UNRCO, Uzbekistan

Ayaka recognized that while collaboration between UN entities and the private sector is in its infancy, the UNRCO serves as the focal coordinator to widely engage in-country private sector and businesses in practical dialogues.

"I supported the organization of the inaugural event, UN Global Compact: The Benefits of Private Sector Engagement Towards Sustainable Development," Ayaka shares.

“ Through this practical dialogue, we engaged 33 participants from local and global companies operating in Uzbekistan, helping to pave the way forward for deeper integration of national SDG targets in the business activities of the local private sector. --Ayaka Naito

Ayaka also supported the Ministry of Agriculture with a series of national and sub-national dialogues held to mobilize country support for and response to the UN Food Systems Summit. The multi-stakeholder dialogues, including the government, the UN, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and the private sector, helped to develop national pathways towards sustainable food systems. She prepared documentation for the dialogues and provided vital reporting capacity, by drafting all dialogue's official reports.

For professionals considering a career change, international development is often a compelling sector to join. Volunteering in this sector has the potential to affect real change, improve lives and help UN Volunteers to gain valuable experience.

From Tashkent, Ayaka has now moved on as a Private Sector Partnership Consultant with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Tokyo. Ayaka's experience as a UN Volunteer has firmly opened the door on her new career in international development.

"Without the UN Volunteer experience, I would not have had the opportunity to work for UNDP," Ayaka says. "It was a great opportunity for me to learn and to shift my career as a first step from business, to the international development field."

Ayaka's assignment contributed to SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

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