

24 December 2021



UN Volunteer Coordination Assistant Malou Eudela, serving with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, at a workshop on resilience planning to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in the Philippines.

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## Serving alongside the most dedicated, experienced and grounded practitioners on the ground

Malou Eudela (Philippines) was one of the over 20 national UN Volunteers deployed in the Asia Pacific region through the Special Voluntary Fund of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme to support COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. Online volunteer Anitha Murthy was in conversation with Malou about her UN Volunteer journey.

Malou had worked earlier as a consultant for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UN Development Programme (UNDP), and as a staff member in UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), all in the Philippines. She is now a UN Volunteer Coordination Assistant in the Philippines.

For the past several years with different UN entities in the Philippines, the ever-smiling Malou had always been out in the field. Her time was mostly spent travelling from one area to the other to ensure that programmes were in place, and she was happy working with communities. She was aware of the importance of crafting and influencing good policies, and working on reports or grants to secure funding for field interventions. However, her focus was on direct interactions with the community.

All that changed when she joined the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) in the Philippines in May 2021 as a UN Volunteer Coordination Assistant. The new role made her truly appreciate organizational coordination at the highest level. "Being in the field, I had many assumptions of how rigid personnel and meetings would be, but what I saw was more of humanity in action, with much flexibility accorded in specific contexts and strong collaboration for the greater good. I was exposed to different heads of agencies and realized that they speak from the heart without compromising evidence, facts and reason."

The UNRCO had organized seven stakeholder group consultations that ran over three months. These strategic dialogues gathered valuable feedback and insight into the UN Socioeconomic and Peacebuilding Framework (SEPF) for COVID-19 Recovery in the Philippines, 2020-2023.

The SEPF is a new roadmap of the UN in the Philippines, which aims to build forward better, while keeping the country within the path towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Malou was given the task of coordinating the consultations, and this taught her to appreciate the work of the United Nations even more.

Malou's work has assured her that the pursuit to ensure that 'no one is left behind' is not an empty slogan; it is very real. "I am happy to be a part of the strategic dialogues with various stakeholder groups," Malou continues. "I felt privileged to listen to the consultations as I work on the reports, attempting to give justice to the sharing, discussions and agreements that transpired.

“ I am moved by the sincere concern and strong commitment of humanitarian and development personnel, including volunteers, to the communities they serve. I reckon we have the most dedicated, experienced and grounded practitioners on the ground, who are consistently helping to advocate for the vulnerable in society. --Malou Eudela, UN Volunteer Coordination Assistant with the UNRCO, Philippines

Marianne Olesen, RCO Team Leader, has nothing but praise for Malou. "We so value having Malou on board. Despite working remotely the entire time, Malou has quickly become one of the team!"

“ As a UN Volunteer, Malou brought with her solid professional experience from development and humanitarian programmes serving

“ some of the most vulnerable communities in the Philippines, so she was able to fit right in and understand the context in which the UN works. --Marianne Olesen, RCO Team Leader, the Philippines

"We could not have done our series of consultations with key stakeholder groups without Malou," Marianne continues, "and importantly, we now have this important process fully documented which will enable follow-up and further integration of stakeholders' feedback into the implementation of our cooperation framework."

"The UN never waned in its services, advocacy and programmes," Malou shares. "Some agencies kept their presence in the field, while others continued to support COVID-19 response efforts and rollout of programmes through the new work setup of working from home. In high-level meetings, the care of heads of agencies for staff was translated into the decisions they took. They explored ways to ensure that everyone had access to vaccinations, so that we could go back to work while protected from the risk of COVID-19."

As she signs off with her trademark smile, Malou emphasizes the importance of volunteering. "I strongly believe that we all have a moral responsibility to share and contribute during this pandemic, and to step up during difficult times."

“ Volunteering is something I am keen on engaging myself in because it allows me to meet people and work alongside them to help make things better. I intend to check online volunteering opportunities, so that I am still able to contribute to meaningful development efforts when I move on from my assignment to a job. --Malou Eudela



## Asia and the Pacific

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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 3: Good health and well-being](#) [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)