



UN Volunteer Isabel Ramos (Portugal), planting a tree at UNISFA headquarters in Abyei on World Soil Day, which coincides with the International Volunteer Day (5 December).

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Ensuring sustainability in Abyei for planet and people

Serving in a remote location that can only be reached by helicopter on the border between Sudan and South Sudan is Isabel Ramos (Portugal), an international UN Volunteer Environmental Officer with the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). She is one of many women ensuring that UN operations around the world are environmentally responsible.

No two days are alike for Isabel. Her work in the environmental field involves the development of projects that promote sustainability and collaborative work with the local community, including the mission's civilian and military staff.

She spends a lot of her time in the field at troop deployment sites, delivering environmental awareness training, assessing environmental concerns, sharing good practices and providing recommendations to UNISFA personnel. Such activities aim to facilitate sustainable mission operations while maximizing efficiency and minimizing environmental

risks.

Isabel also supports tree planting initiatives in team sites and local communities where charcoal is widely used. She describes her assignment as a good mix of going by the book and being innovative. With no public or private infrastructures to rely on, UNISFA is responsible for its own waste management, water treatment and power supply. Despite the challenges arising from the lack of infrastructures, Isabel explains that this helps the mission set a good example to the local community on the issue of sustainability.

The biggest challenge that Isabel faces in her assignment is people's attitudes towards environmental issues, sustainability and animal welfare. She expressed that many people often don't realize the impact of their actions and that we humans are indeed a part of the natural world. Getting people to see that we are merely stewards of this land and that we should treat it with the utmost respect is what inspires her every day.

“ Involving women is crucial. In many societies, women are still the main caretakers and educators. Women are the ones responsible for cooking and growing food. Environmental and climate action with no food security is virtually impossible.” -- Isabel Ramos, an international UN Volunteer at UNISFA

Isabel explains that sustainability is holistic and involves interconnections between various fields and issues. In that sense, involving women is crucial. “Women have always had to wear multiple hats and juggle multiple responsibilities and they are well prepared to take on challenges that require a multidisciplinary approach,” she adds.

According to Isabel, serving as a UN Volunteer is essentially about making good use of one's professional experience through being of service. “Volunteering is about sharing, about giving back. It would be amazing if more people had the opportunity to do it, as it can truly make you change your perspective and reassess your priorities. Volunteering is about doing something without having your own gain as the main focus,” she concludes.

Arab States

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