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Aspiring for a world of equality in Lao PDR

UN Volunteer Queenie Law (Hong Kong, SAR China) shares her journey in aspiring for a world of gender equality. She has been serving with UNDP in Lao PDR as a Gender and Social Inclusion Support Officer since July 2019.

Growing up in an open and forward-thinking environment, I am grateful for the fact that no one ever told me what to do, or what not to do, simply because I was a girl. For me, women are definitely strong enough to play crucial roles beyond the stereotypes that define them otherwise. My gender identity has, and should, never limit my potentials or aspirations.

As I grew up, I began to notice one particular pattern among some people I met along the way, especially women. They tended to underestimate themselves and were often crippled by self-doubt. I was and still am convinced that this happens more subconsciously than on purpose, though I sense that lack of awareness was why people behaved that way.

Gradually, I started to gain more and more interest in gender equality and
women’s rights. The curiosity grew within me, and I began taking academic courses in university, studied further into these topics, expanding my knowledge. I was so passionate about the topic, that I even wrote about women in warfare for my graduation thesis.

“I knew I wanted a career in gender and development. I am motivated to help others, be they men, women or other, to see the immense potential within themselves. But I’m just a woman with huge ambitions. That’s when I came across an opportunity with UNV.”

With no doubt or hesitation, I compiled all the required documents and sent through the application process with my fingers crossed.

Now, it is already my ninth month with UNDP in Lao PDR, where I volunteer with the Governance, Livelihood and Poverty Reduction Unit.

Through my assignment, I am engaged with the rule of law project that strengthens legal institutions in the country, while providing access to justice, especially for women and victims of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV).

The project also builds greater gender sensitivity along the judicial chain, to ensure SGBV victims are shielded from secondary victimization during the investigation and legal process.

Another highlight is the Community Radio project. Lao PDR is a multi-ethnic country with a rich cultural diversity. This characteristic, however, also limited educational, economic and social opportunities for disadvantaged ethnic communities, who can only speak in traditional dialect.

Hence, through our project, radio programmes on gender equality have been designed and broadcasted in different ethnic languages. This is done to alter entrenched gender stereotypes and enhance access to information, especially for women and girls.
For quite a while, I was sceptical about whether what I do, as a UN Volunteer, behind the desk, is actually valuable. But hearing back from our national UN Volunteers that local women are gradually starting to understand their rights and the diverse opportunities they have in life, I am ecstatic to know that I am part of the change and that our projects are actually making an impact on others’ lives.

When talking about gender equality, the focus has mostly been on women only, but at the very heart of feminism is equality for all. It is not about winning over men, pushing one down to lift another up, but standing side by side with one another.

Asia and the Pacific

• International women’s day • IWD • gender equality

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 5: Gender equality, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals