Nanami Akimoto (Japan) serves as a UN Volunteer Programme Officer for Human Settlements at UN-Habitat Cambodia. Here, she visits the communities in Tbong Khmum province with a Community and Housing Expert to assess the damage caused by the floods.

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Nanami Akimoto, UN Volunteer Programme Officer with UN-Habitat

How one HRD-UN Volunteer mobilized US $900k to help flood-affected communities build back better

The UN Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) has been working in Cambodia since 1996, assisting the government and people through a wide range of technical assistance projects. As swift urbanization creates an increased need for inclusive and sustainable city development, UN-Habitat is supporting Cambodian communities in areas such as slum upgrading and urban poverty reduction, urban management, housing policy and water and sanitation.

Nanami Akimoto joined UN-Habitat as a UN Volunteer Programme Officer in April 2018 under the Human Resource Development Programme for Peace and Development. Her
assignment was fully funded by Japan. She had broad expectations of supporting the work of UN-Habitat Cambodia in advocacy and playing a critical role developing and maintaining networks with donors, development partners and other UN agencies.

When floods caused by a tropical storm hit Tbong Khmum, a province located on the central lowlands of the Mekong River, Nanami used her extensive experience in urban development, to devise a project to support affected communities to "Build Back Better". Nanami quickly realized that to get her project off the ground, she would need to mobilize resources herself.

"Build Back Better", or UN-Habitat’s People’s Process, is a community-driven approach for post-disaster recovery that reduces vulnerability to future disasters and builds community resilience. Build Back Better principles apply in infrastructure reconstruction and livelihood recovery, ensuring community members’ participation in housing reconstruction and designing to enhance disaster resilience and ownership in the community.

"I started with advocacy of the mandate and activities of UN-Habitat and built networks with potential donors, including the Embassy of Japan, JICA and Japanese private companies in Cambodia," Nanami says.

"Most of them did not have any idea of UN-Habitat’s work in Cambodia or what it is capable of. Some of them have not even heard of its name! Therefore, I attended many seminars and workshops and developed a close and personal rapport with them," she continues.

"Ultimately, I successfully mobilized a US $900,000 USD grant from Japan to support households affected by floods and developed the "Project for the Support for Improving Living Environment and Disaster Prevention Capacity in Cambodia". --Nanami Akimoto, UN Volunteer Programme Officer with UN-Habitat"

Nanami led all aspects of project development and resource mobilization including discussing the project idea with the Embassy of Japan, drafting the project proposal and budget, creating the proposal summary in Japanese, and arranging the signing ceremony requested by Japan.

The impact of Nanami’s Build Back Better project was significant. It supported 202 households with core shelters, and approximately 10,000 people benefited from hazard maps, community development support, and livelihood assistance. Some 172 construction workers in the flood-affected communities received training on resilient construction methods and around 70 national and subnational government officials deepened skills and capacity in disaster risk management policies.
Nanami’s experience as a HRD-UN Volunteer has given her confidence in project development and resource mobilization, including navigating coordination between donors and the recipient country, to build trust.

"After I submitted the proposal of the Build Back Better project, coordinating between the Embassy of Japan and the Cambodian Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction (MLMUPC) was challenging, especially through the preparation of the project documents and signing ceremony logistics," Nanami shares.

I tried to think of the beneficiaries of the project as the most important and reinforce our mutual goal. I also showed them our ability to be flexible to their needs, provided we maximized outcomes for beneficiaries. This resulted in winning the trust of both sides, and my contribution in this regard was highly appreciated. --Nanami Akimoto, UN Volunteer Programme Officer with UN-Habitat

Nanami’s assignment contributed to SDG 11: Make cities and communities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

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• International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction • Japan

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals