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Building trust and reciprocity among people

Ramallah, State of Palestine: I love people, cities and towns. For that reason, I chose to be a spatial/urban planner and I plan for people. When we plan, people should be at the centre of the process; and we should aim to improve people’s lives. People, cities, towns and villages cannot be viewed separately, they are so interconnected. As long as people are there, cities always develop and never stop. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), where I work as a UN Volunteer Urban Planner/Project Manager, is concerned with cities and is mandated to promote the socially and environmentally sustainable development of cities.

As a UN Volunteer with UN-Habitat, I manage two projects under the banner of “Spatial Planning Support Programme in Area C” in the West Bank in Palestine, funded by the European Union and the French Government. Before I came here, I worked for UN-Habitat in Kosovo, my home country. As a volunteer and a planner I try to contribute with the knowledge and skills I gained in Kosovo.

Despite the fact that the challenges here are greater than in my country, I strongly believe
that there is room to make positive changes through volunteerism. For us, as volunteers and urban planners, the task is to go an extra mile to help people get involved and participate in planning for their cities and towns, and help them improve their living conditions.

I strongly believe that people are at the centre of the planning process; and I try to bring more volunteers from the community to participate in planning and designing their public spaces. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to contribute to society by utilizing the knowledge and experience gained in my previous career. I am also benefiting greatly from this experience and have learnt a lot during my assignment in Palestine.

I live in Ramallah, a very lively and booming city, which functions as the de facto administrative capital of the State of Palestine. People are very friendly, and they make me love their city. Day by day, I am convinced that it is the people who make the city beautiful and enjoyable; and the buildings and roads are merely a backdrop for city life. For us, volunteers and planners, the task is to help people improve their living conditions through planning with them and for them.

Working as a volunteer also makes me rethink my work ethic. Why do I want to contribute to the urban development process of Palestine? For me, it is about helping people safeguard their development rights, as well as building trust and reciprocity among people through participatory planning.

Apart from work, I enjoy running in the streets of Ramallah; hiking and taking pictures of the gorgeous and diverse landscapes, with valleys and hills of olive trees on one side, and half deserted hills on the other. There are no running paths, but I find my way, as well as friendly people to run with and discover the other beautiful side of Palestine. I hope Palestine loves me as much as I love Palestine.