Upscaling my contribution to resolving global issues through on-site and online volunteering

I am proud to provide my expertise to organizations abroad and collaborate to bridge the gap between UN agencies, policy-makers and civic activists. For me, online volunteering has become a practical option to upscale my contribution to resolving global issues.

I have served as an Online Volunteer with the UN Volunteers (UNV) programme, partaking in emergency mapping, women’s rights advocacy, NGO funding, creating learning opportunities for people in poverty, rare bird species conservation and much more.

I have also volunteered on site, including in children's learning, first aid and other critical projects by the Red Crescent Society of Kazakhstan. There, I assisted with communication, information dissemination and the delivery of basic goods to meet the needs of vulnerable and financially-insecure people in Almaty.

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Yuliya Pismennaya, Online Volunteer
come hand-in-hand. As a volunteer, I walk a challenging path, striving to realize my dream of helping those in need and simultaneously encouraging volunteerism. --Yuliya Pismennaya, Online Volunteer

I believe that every professional and volunteering experience helps make me an expert problem-solver, needed in critical times like these, as COVID-19 swept across the world.

With this in mind, I applied for an assignment posted by the HIV, Health and Development Department at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). I aspired to gain more hands-on research experience and examine the variety of national health policy approaches for one of the key UN agencies helping populations in need. I was enthusiastic to offer my expertise and skills to produce institutional context analysis papers and test my skills by studying data for a diverse range of countries from different continents.

My research skills have proven useful for compiling the health investment cases the department uses to understand which countries should be prioritized to receive UNDP’s assistance.

Although I am quite familiar with the procedures of several UN agencies, for this project I had to learn and do extensive research on health and smoking, familiarize myself with the work of UNDP, the World Health Organization (WHO) and Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), as well as international non-governmental organizations supporting the global fight against diabetes, heart disease and other health risks.

To date, I have submitted my research on non-communicable diseases and tobacco control in Tajikistan, Eswatini and Kuwait. My analysis offers insight into:

- health issues prevalent in each of these countries;
- why and for which groups these issues are especially detrimental;
- which risks undermine the government’s efforts to deliver improved health support; and
- what cost-effective solutions would likely produce a positive impact and drastically improve the health and wellbeing of the population.

I have subsequently assisted with developing guidance and documentation for UNDP’s emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is how I have found myself increasingly involved in the formulation of some of the key strategies and policies determining UNDP’s response to health issues and their input into the global advocacy for restructuring and advancing healthcare to protect people against the COVID-19 pandemic.
Although I believe my contribution is quite modest, I continue learning about the connection between COVID-19 and health risks, non-communicable diseases, as well as the changing dynamic of smoking.

Step-by-step, I continue my path towards a gratifying career in international development. I think there is no such thing as minor help. When one person chooses to help another, this is reciprocated to others who really need it. This what volunteering is about. --Yuliya Pismennaya

Are you interested in getting support from Online Volunteers or finding an online volunteering opportunity? Check out UNV's Online Volunteering service and sign up today.

• Online Volunteering • COVID-19 • Coronavirus

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 3: Good health and well-being, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals