Ewout Erik Stoefs' story

Ha Noi, Viet Nam: I am currently working as a Capacity Building and Monitoring and Evaluation Officer for UNICEF in Ha Noi. I work for a programme called the Provincial Child Friendly Programme which aims to strengthen the capacities of Viet Nam’s provinces to tackle children’s issues. During the past years, the country has seen a huge wave of decentralization: the provinces now have more competencies, but often lack the capacity to consider children when implementing their plans and programmes. My work contributes to building such capacity and improving the knowledge of provincial officials about child-sensitive social policies.

Concretely, most of my time goes to assessing the needs of the provinces i.e. what gaps in capacity exist in the field, preparing programme documents (how UNICEF interventions can address these gaps) and developing strategies for our engagement at the decentralized level. I often have the opportunity to travel to different provinces and consult with local authorities.

Besides these tasks, and together with all the other UN Volunteers in Ha Noi, I have committed to being a ‘Green Champion’. In Viet Nam, all UN agencies are preparing to move into a ‘One UN Green”
House by the end of 2012 as part of the Delivering as One Initiative. Instead of waiting until then, we have decided to already start greening our behaviour and call upon others to follow our example. As a young and motivated inter-agency group, UN Volunteers can have a real impact when they coordinate their advocacy for behaviour change in their different host agencies.

In September 2011, we launched our three-month Greening the One UN in Viet Nam Campaign, aiming to reduce the environmental impact of UN operations in Viet Nam. As a group, we contributed to drafting the Green Action Plan, with specific targets and indicators, which will help us gain the World Wildlife Fund’s Green Office Certificate. In addition, many of the campaign’s activities are spearheaded by Green Champion UN Volunteers: for example, we are organizing green (vegetarian) lunches and green film screenings (or greenings, as we like to call them). One major challenge is improving the environmental friendliness of our transportation. Getting people to bike to work—when it’s 38 degrees centigrade and humidity is 98 per cent—is no easy task! But that won’t stop us.

For me, it has been a tremendous experience to live and work in such a fascinating country. I have learned much about Vietnamese culture and tradition, and working here has refined my intercultural skills. Not a day goes by that I don’t feel lucky to have the opportunity to volunteer here.

Since February 2011, Ewout (26, Belgian) has been working at the UNICEF Country Office in Viet Nam as a UN Volunteer Intern.