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Bringing innovation to development

A shared vision and collaborative action through volunteerism and private-public partnership



Mohammad Iham Akbar Junior, National UN Youth Volunteer, discussing with his colleague in the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Indonesia Country Office. (UNICEF, 2017)

People around the world are facing an interconnected array of social, environmental and economic barriers to sustainable development. In this landscape, solutions for economic and human development require collaborative efforts by multiple sectors of society such as the private sector — a key player in the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When knowledge, technical expertise and innovative practices are applied to community investment, aligning economic development with human development, everybody wins.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is building such win-win relationships between the public sector and private sector. In 2014, UNV took part in the founding of [IMPACT 2030](#), a global private sector-led collaboration to advance the achievement of the SDGs. While such collaboration at the global level is vital to build broad support to strengthen partnerships between the two sectors, cooperation at the local level is crucial to positively impact communities.

To realise public-private-community partnerships, we recently expanded our long-standing partnership with Cisco, a partner of UNV since 2001, to provide opportunities for students and recent graduates of Cisco Networking Academy to work on development projects supported by UN agencies. Currently, seven graduates trained in ICT are assigned to UN agencies in their countries of origin as [UN Youth Volunteers](#), a modality created by UNV in 2012 in response to the former United Nations Secretary-General Ban-Ki moon's call to facilitate the engagement of young people in peace and development programme.

These seven young women and men are applying their skills far beyond the management of ICT systems. They are building websites and mobile applications, designing programmes using big data, and integrating online and offline activities. When we met with them, it was evident that they are applying their skills and creativity to build solutions to development challenges.

Ms. Sandy Walsh, Cisco's director of Social Innovation Group for Asia Pacific and Japan told us, "What is exciting about the partnership with UNV and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is that it enables young people to bring together the skills and knowledge learned through the Cisco Networking Academy programme and apply them to addressing real social problems and challenges in this region."

I see that this partnership brings productive results because it creates a win-win relationship between all parties. Youth are gaining experience in a real work environment where they can apply what they have learned while UN agencies are receiving expertise and insights to innovate in their activities, taking more efficient and effective approaches.

An important element of such partnerships is the shared vision among partners. UNV shares Cisco's belief in harnessing the power of technology for launching a generation of global problem solvers who innovate like technologists, think like entrepreneurs, and act as social change agents. The UN system urgently needs innovation to approach today's complex issues, and harnessing technology solutions is one of the key ways to make it happen. This mutual understanding of the vital necessity of technological solutions for society is evidenced by our 15-year relationship with Cisco and the ongoing expansion of our collaboration.

This article first appeared in [Communication Director](#).

Manon Bernier is regional manager Asia and the Pacific at the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. The UNV is the UN agency which promotes peace and development through volunteerism. Over the years, it has been working with private sector through the engagement of their employees as volunteers. More recently UNV is also collaborating with Impact 2030.

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