UN Youth Volunteers bridging UNICEF and young women and men in Indonesia

There are 1.2 billion adolescents aged 10-19 years in the world today, and more than half of them are living in Asia and the Pacific. However, there is a lack of services that can support the different needs of the children, young people and adolescents. That is why the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Indonesia, a country with around one-third of its population aged 10-24 years, has been hosting UN Volunteers, including UN Youth Volunteers, in its efforts to support adolescents and youth. These UN Volunteers are supporting UNICEF to understand, connect, and engage with adolescents from the perspectives of young women and men.

Ms Valerie Crab, Programme Specialist and Innovation Lead, has been working with two national UN Youth Volunteers and one national UN Volunteer in the twenties on innovation, such as the U-Report Indonesia, a polling system that uses social media to help deliver youth opinions to
policymakers. “I think that UN Volunteers should be recruited to bring an added value to a programme that otherwise we wouldn’t have access to,” she says. On the value of having a UN Youth Volunteers in her team, she describes,

“From a programme delivery point of view, our volunteers contribute their social networks and youth engagement acumen to the programme. They help us build a peer-to-peer connection, that’s where the added value comes in.” — Valerie Crab, UNICEF Programme Specialist and Innovation Lead, Indonesia

Mohammad Ilham Akbar Junior serves as a national UN Youth Volunteer in Technology, Youth and Innovation Coordinator with UNICEF in Indonesia. He supports innovation through technology development, design thinking, user experience, and using Big Data as foundation to every innovation step.

“Through this volunteering assignment, I learned to be a data-driven person. I work closely with big data through the U-Report Indonesia, a polling system that uses social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, to help deliver youth opinions to policy makers. Each month we share information with more than 66,000 young people across Indonesia, creating a space for youth to participate in decision making through their answers to our polls. Each time a poll ends, I collect the data and analyze it to gather many insights from it. We use the results for advocacy and to influence policy making.”
Ms Ticiana Garcia-Tapia, Youth and Adolescent Development Specialist who is also working with a young national UN Volunteer to support youth networks and adolescent participation across different programmes, notes that the young UN Volunteer is “bringing the energy, and now we have a closer youth network.”

The UN Youth Volunteer assignment is a learning process for these young women and men, where they are strongly encouraged to take efforts to build their work skills during their assignments. To accelerate the learning curves, both Ms Crab and Ms Garcia-Tapia have been providing day-to-day supervision closely. One form of support from the team that Ms Garcia-Tapia found useful was an introduction given by a team member who was also a former international UN Volunteer, when the UN Youth Volunteer arrived, which functioned as peer-to-peer support.

The UNV Field Unit in Indonesia has also been using the peer-to-peer support mechanism by organizing a monthly meeting among the UN Volunteers based in Indonesia. Ms Crab describes that the network of UN Volunteers helps them to “become a global citizen and open-up their horizon.” “I like the community that is there,” adds Ms Crab.

“How can we effectively engage with young people if we do not have these youth volunteers in our organization? We want to know from the volunteers if they feel that we are providing them with opportunities to contribute meaningfully to our work. We do not want them to feel that they are just helping hands. We hope we are helping them to grow into becoming professionals in different fields for the future workforce. --Tayyeba Nasir, UNICEF Human Resource Manager, Indonesia

Ms Tayyeba Nasir, Human Resource Manager in UNICEF Indonesia, agrees that UN Youth Volunteer is an effective modality for UNICEF and questions, “How can we effectively engage with the young people if we do not have these youth volunteers in our organization?” She further explains the importance of receiving feedback from them because “we want to know
from the volunteers if they feel that we are providing them with opportunities that allow them to contribute meaningfully to our work. We do not want them to feel that they are just helping hands. We hope we are helping them to grow into becoming professionals in different fields for the future workforce.”

Ms Nasir describes that the different UN Volunteer modalities allow host agencies to add a wide range of skills and experiences to the organization. While she has also hosted specialist UN Volunteers in UNICEF Indonesia and Viet Nam, such as a UN Volunteer who had extensive experience in child protection, UNICEF Indonesia is also seeking youth to join their team to bring new spirits, ideas, creativeness and innovation.

Asia and the Pacific

• youth • adolescent participation • capacity building

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