Responding to the needs of refugees in the West Bank, State of Palestine

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has provided relief works and programmes for over 60 years. UNRWA currently assists more than five million registered refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, as well as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, State of Palestine. UNRWA provides essential services such as education, health care, relief and social services, refugee camp infrastructure and improvement, micro-finance and emergency assistance. Takuma Haga (Japan) served as a UN Volunteer Associate Programme Support Officer with UNRWA under the Human Resource Development Programme for Peacebuilding and Development, responding to the needs of Palestine refugees in the West Bank.

The West Bank field office, located in East Jerusalem, supports over 800,000 refugees of whom 25 per cent live in 19 camps. Some camps are located next to major towns, while others are in rural areas.
Takuma gained first-hand practical field experience during his assignment, working with project staff across a range of sectors implementing reform initiatives identified in the West Bank Annual Operational Plan and UNWRA Medium Term Strategy.

During his time as an Associate Programme Support Officer, Takuma undertook projects related to enhancing the operational efficiency of the office and public outreach and awareness. He also established new agreements with external partners and coordinated the production of key reports and emergency appeal documents, among many other valuable tasks.

"Through working for UNWRA, I learned about the reality of the Israel-Palestine conflict and how a UN agency operates. I also improved my critical thinking and communication skills because of the general nature of the assignment. I experienced the Middle Eastern culture too, which was new for me. --Takuma Haga, UN Volunteer Associate Programme Support Officer"

Ensuring health and safety of camp residents is one of West Bank office’s key service areas. One of Takuma’s key tasks was to assist the Environmental Health Unit with development of the West Bank Solid Waste Management Strategy and Plans.

In coordination with implementing partners and drawing from the strategy, Takuma assisted the Unit to improve their solid waste management service. For the Nur Shams and Shu’fat camps, Takuma rolled out pilot plans that supported increased mechanization and efficient data management, while undertaking awareness raising activities among camp residents on the new strategy and camp-specific plans.

Through his work, Takuma helped establish frameworks that increase efficiency and effectiveness of the solid waste management service and guide camp-specific planning. Ultimately, by reducing health and environmental risks from accumulated waste, these plans will contribute to
an improved quality of life for the refugees in the camps.

In addition, Takuma supported public awareness efforts by writing profiles of the 19 camps in the West Bank that are included in outreach packages and published on the UNWRA website. He also supported production of documentation related to UNRWA service delivery, such as the solid waste management strategy and plan, Emergency Appeal and progress report, Annual Operational Report and a project completion report on 10 community-driven protection projects.

“Takuma gained first-hand practical field experience by working closely with programme staff across a range of sectors. As an operational agency, UNRWA offers the added value of running a multitude of programmes and projects directly through its own staff, as compared to other UN agencies. I especially believe this was a valuable experience for Takuma both in terms of strengthening his communication skills, but also in exposing him to a range of different sectoral issues. --Takuma's supervisor Laurianne Leca, Field Programme Support Officer, UNRWA

Fundamental to UNWRA’s mission, Takuma ensured that the needs of Palestine refugees were well documented and reflected in reports and studies by collecting information and feedback from programmes and support departments.

Takuma also developed a joint project with UN Habitat which the Government of Japan agreed to fund, and which subsequently entered the implementation phase in April 2018.

External organizations play a fundamental role in the ability of the West Bank field office to deliver. Takuma supported the development of new partnerships with external organizations, resulting in commencement of new projects. He developed Memoranda of Understanding and cooperation framework agreements with non-governmental organizations, enabling the start of a solid waste project in the Nur Shams refugee camp and a
Takuma learned valuable skills in stakeholder management through the implementation of these agreements and developed a strong appreciation of the importance of clear and concise communication.

Takuma’s time at the office was an opportunity for the team (mostly national staff) to be exposed to a different work ethic and way of thinking, which was beneficial. In addition, the local team also had a chance to share their knowledge and know-how in reciprocity. --Takuma’s supervisor Laurianne Leca

Throughout his successful assignment, Takuma made a significant contribution to UNRWA and raised awareness within the agency of the UN HRD programme. Many of the projects Takuma worked on will be maintained after the completion of the projects, provided funding continues.

*Takuma’s assignment contributed to SDG 1: To end poverty in all its forms everywhere.*

This article was prepared with the kind support of Online Volunteer Helen Maccan.


📍 Arab States

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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 1: No poverty, SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals