Sports and volunteerism as a transformative force

Volunteerism is at the heart of nations. The Pan-American Games Lima 2019 presented to the entire world one of their biggest legacies: 19,000 Peruvian citizens trained and motivated as a result of their participation in the Games as volunteers. After the Games, a new generation of Peruvians is committed to justice, fairness, inclusion, and to leaving no one behind. UNV supported the Lima 2019 Games through UNV’s modality ‘Volunteers for Events’, engaging Peruvians in the Games through volunteering.

“We always referred to inclusive volunteerism, where there are no restrictions, for example, of age. The selected volunteers are at least 16 years old, but above that age there is no limit. Diversity is one of the fundamental pillars of the volunteers engaged with the Games. Around 61 percent of the trained volunteers were women, and their participation was critical for the success of the events,” said Angela Morales, the head of the Volunteer Office in Lima.

Ivonne Harvey, international UN Volunteer Learning Specialist, together with
another 46 highly qualified UN Volunteers, supported the Peruvian Government to coordinate the training and management of volunteers during the Games.

One of the most essential elements for a successful volunteer deployment is training, and the Lima 2019 Volunteer Programme designed and implemented both online and onsite training modules, which offered a diversity of learning experiences that allowed participants to identify, strengthen and put into action their competencies and soft skills in support of the Lima 2019 objectives. Those competencies serve - once the event ends - to tackle challenges faced by the volunteers in their communities to achieve sustainable development.

“During the training you have the possibility to transform, to make a difference in the minds of people. It’s about engaging with a large number of citizens of different backgrounds and trying to enable them to serve very diverse participants at the event, for instance the para athletes. It’s a lifetime opportunity to make a difference through volunteerism. It gives you the chance to put into practice everything you know about accessibility and inclusion, and a practical understanding of what it means to not leave anyone behind,” says Ivonne, the UN Volunteer Learning Specialist who contributed to the design of the training modules.

One of the 19,000 volunteers involved in the Games is Yetsamira Vaca, 19 years old, from Cusco. Inspired and committed to become the agent of change the world needs, she applied for the Lima 2019 Volunteer Programme. “As it is my dream to become a diplomat and work for my country to tackle poverty, this is one of the biggest and most rewarding experience in my life: to meet and work with people with similar motivations. It gives me hope that together we can achieve change in our society,” says Yetsamira.

“It is very clear to me that this volunteering experience during the Pan American Games has changed the mentalities and attitudes of many people and, day by day, their civic engagement as well. In the long run, this experience directly impacts the commitment of these citizens to tackling the challenges faced by their communities,” says Carlos Guillén, Representative of UNOPS and responsible for Lima 2019 Communications and Strategic Partnerships.

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