



80 YEARS OF VOLUNTEER IMPACT WITH FAO  
**LEGACY IN ACTION**







80 YEARS OF VOLUNTEER IMPACT WITH FAO

# LEGACY IN ACTION









**FOREWORD** 4  
by QU Dongyu  
Director-General  
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

**FOREWORD** 5  
by Toily Kurbanov  
Executive Coordinator  
United Nations Volunteers

**01** 7  
**THE FIRST TO SERVE**  
EARLY YEARS OF UNITED NATIONS  
VOLUNTEERS WITH FAO

**02** 17  
**UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTEERS AT FAO**  
A JOURNEY ACROSS FIELDS

**03** 105  
**ROOTED IN PURPOSE**  
UN VOLUNTEERS BECOME  
FAO CHAMPIONS

# FOREWORD



Since 1971, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and United Nations Volunteers (UNV) have nurtured a deep and impactful partnership grounded in a shared mission: to end hunger, alleviate poverty, and foster sustainable development through volunteerism. Over the decades, this collaboration has grown into a dynamic force supporting communities around the world—especially during times of increasing complexity and challenge.

Our joint efforts were significantly reinforced in 2017 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, reaffirming our mutual commitment to volunteerism. From tackling food insecurity and building climate resilience to promoting sustainable agrifood systems, UN Volunteers have brought energy, innovation, and a deep sense of purpose to FAO's mission on the ground.

Since the formalization of our partnership, more than 200 UN Volunteers—two-thirds of whom represent the Global South—have served in over 70 countries, helping to translate FAO's strategic goals into tangible, community-level impact. Their contributions range from advancing climate-smart agriculture in rural communities to supporting emergency agrifood systems in crisis settings.

UN Volunteers continue to bring diverse expertise and knowledge to FAO's work, strengthening our reach and impact. Our collaboration continues to grow in both scale, ambition and impact, with steady year-on-year increases in volunteer deployment and new joint efforts to elevate the visibility of volunteerism as a cornerstone of sustainable development.

On the occasion of FAO's 80th Anniversary, this photobook serves as a collection of powerful testimonies which celebrate our long-standing partnership with UNV and the enduring impact of volunteerism in advancing FAO's mandate of achieving food security for all, eradicating hunger and malnutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development worldwide.

Together, FAO and UNV will continue to foster a spirit of collaboration and solidarity in service of the world's most vulnerable populations—grounded in the belief that sustainable development is best achieved when communities are empowered to lead their own change, with technical experts and volunteers standing beside them every step of the way.

**QU Dongyu**

Director-General

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



# FOREWORD

FAO turns 80—and it’s more than a milestone. It’s a moment to spotlight a partnership that’s been going strong for decades. FAO backed volunteers before it was the norm, helping shape how volunteerism drives global progress.

This book—**Legacy in Action**: 80 years of volunteer impact with FAO—isn’t just a tribute.

It’s a chorus of voices: volunteers, mentors, and those who once served and now lead.

Eighty stories, each a spark.

Together, they light up the spirit of a partnership built on trust, purpose, and people.

Here’s to growing this legacy—and inspiring new hearts to serve, boldly and with soul.

**Toily Kurbanov**  
Executive Coordinator  
United Nations Volunteers



ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

- FAO** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- JICA** Japan International Cooperation Agency
- OECD** Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund
- UNDP** United Nations Development Programme
- UNESCO** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNFPA** United Nations Population Fund
- UNHCR** Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- UNIC** United Nations Information Centre
- UNICEF** United Nations Children's Fund
- UNRWA** United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
- UNV** United Nations Volunteers
- UN Women** United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
- WFP** World Food Programme





# 01

## THE FIRST TO SERVE EARLY YEARS OF UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTEERS WITH FAO

Sylvie Abong · Firoj Ahmed · Jaspar Albers · Wafaa AlRamadneh · Sithmi Attanayake · Mohamed Aw-Dahir · Solomon Bekele · Poonam Bista · Maria Rita Borba · Larissa Bruun · Melody Chali · Songling Chen · Barbora Chmelova · Kyu Won Choi · Sapana Dawadi · Tiruneh Debenä · Sana Diatta · Tharudini Ekneligoda · Kim Eunah · Amadou Fall · **Iraj Fekrazad** · Milagros Flores · Beatriz García · Chiara Guini · Oshan M. Gunathilake · Sergio Hinojosa · **Enrique Isagon** · Yuno Ito · **Mr. Yoshikazu Ito** · Annette Jaitner · Yunji Jung · Fatoumata Ka · Anamul Kabir · Sugyeong Kang · Rinat Kapev · Gopi Chandra Kharel · Tasneem Kibria · Shoko Kinoshita · Jaakko Korpela · Matungulu Kutombo · Seongeun Lee · N'Charick Mafinè Ouattara · Théo Martin · Esi Mawuena Christon-Quao · Fiza Mazhar · **Jerome Montague** · Jiyoung Nam · Elie Ndjeder · Azzizun Nahar (Tania) · Alisher Narizov · Christian Ngabonziza · Abdoulahat Ngom · Kamila Novak · Terumi Onuma · Seunghyo Park · Eda Pütgöl · Rana Ryan · Carolina Rengifo · Teija Reyes · Masayo Rossignoli · Felipe Sabogal · Makhfousse Sarr · Carla Schmid · Anita Shabani · Nour Shehadeh · Ken Shimizu · Hiroaki Sonoda · Zdeněk Stejskal · Axel Strömberg · Agnes Temba · Michiko Terada · Gael Thiébault · Branislav Trudić · Davide Valenti · Hiruni Weerasinghe · Thiago Resende Xavier · Serge Yelemou · Yumna Zawahir · Andrei Zhileikin

Iraj Fekrazad

## AT THE HEART OF CROP INNOVATION IN YEMEN



*Iraj Fekrazad (right), a 30-year-old UN Volunteer Agronomist from Iran, joined his Yemeni colleague Abdalle (left), and a young worker to examine a trial crop of Kenya Leopard wheat at FAO's Highlands Demonstration Farm near Ibb, Yemen. Iraj Fekrazad, was one of 17 UN Volunteers who supported agricultural productivity in FAO projects under UNDP in 1972. [UN Archive/F. Mattioli]*

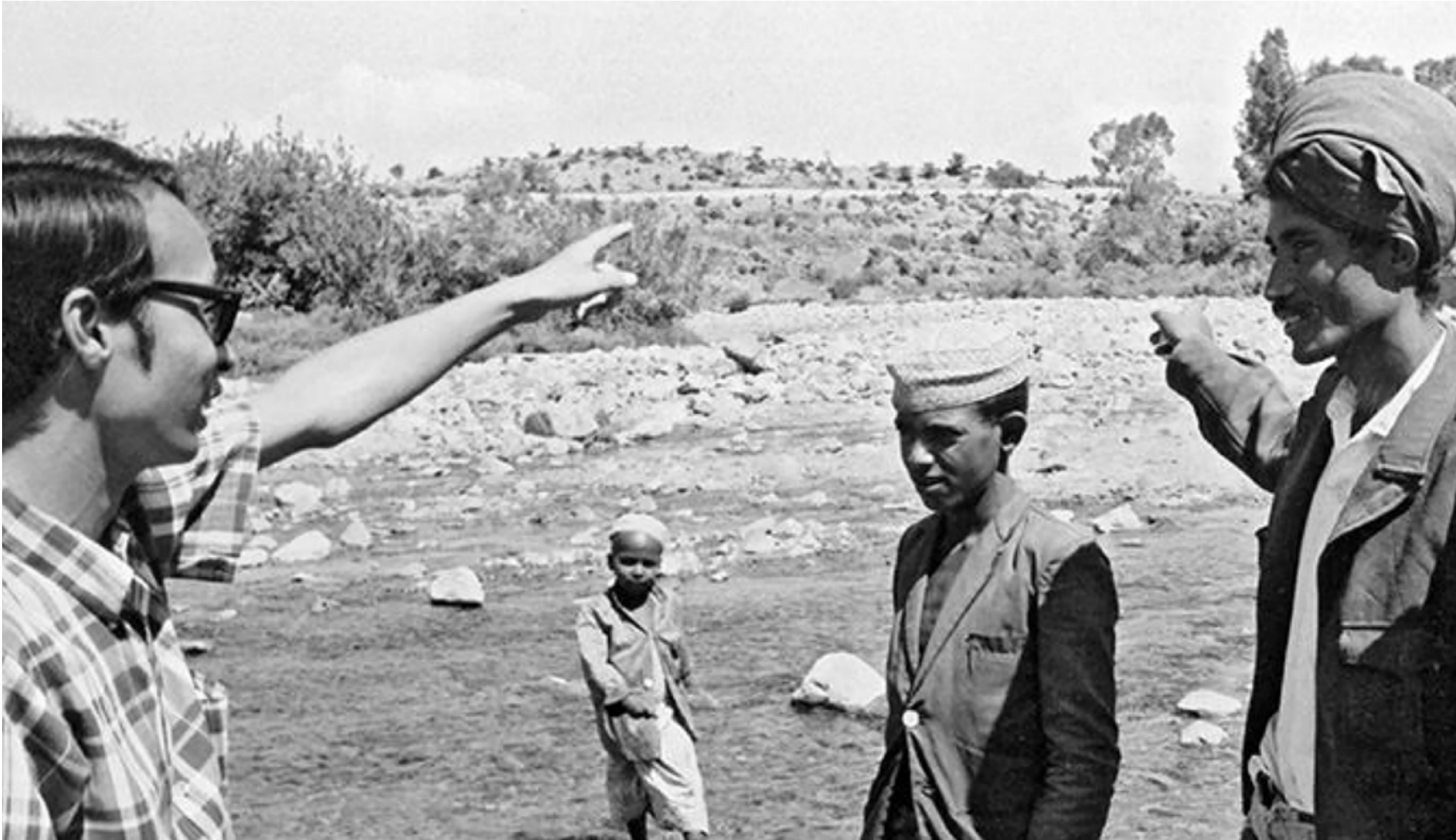


Enrique Isagon

## IRRIGATING HOPE IN YEMEN'S LOWLANDS



*Enrique Isagon (right), a 24-year-old UN Volunteer Mining Engineer from the Philippines, and Ernest Latham (left), a civil engineer from the United Kingdom joined a Yemeni farmer at an irrigation reservoir developed under a FAO project in Yemen's semi-arid Tihamah lowlands in 1972. The initiative funded by UNDP assessed the region's agricultural potential and included a demonstration farm near Wadi Zabid in the Republic of Yemen. [UN Archive/F. Mattioli]*



*Yoshikazu Ito (left), UN Volunteer Japanese Irrigation Technician, explains to Yemeni farmers how they would benefit from the Wadi Warazan irrigation project in the southern part of the Yemen Arab Republic. [UN Archive/F. Mattioli, 1972]*





## Mr. Yoshikazu Ito

### ONE OF THE FIRST UN VOLUNTEERS: HOW THE 'GOOD WAR' SPARKED A GREAT CALLING

I was working for the Irrigation Bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Japan when I was invited to speak at a symposium in Fukuoka. At the event, the Principal Officer gave me a book entitled *The Good War: the U.N.'s World-Wide Fight Against Poverty, Disease and Ignorance*. That chance encounter, in the summer of 1969, changed my life. It was the first step that led me to become one of the first UN Volunteers, an opportunity that opened the door for a long professional journey that spanned decades.

North Yemen was emerging from civil war at that time. There was a lot of uncertainty yet a strong need for reconstruction. My UN Volunteer assignment required that I develop water sources for drinking and irrigation within desert areas. The development of water resources, especially drinking water, was a crucial issue for the development of the region. I assessed infiltration water using electrical prospecting, collected data and dug wells. During the engineering process, I also trained government personnel in these techniques. We successfully delivered results across many project sites.

The door that opened in 1969 allowed me to travel across Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, working on development projects first with UNDP but then through organizations such as OECF, FAO or JICA, among others. That first UN Volunteer experience in North Yemen proved invaluable in other conflict areas such as Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Eritrea. I carried it with me every step of the way.

*“Looking back to those years, I realise that since serving as a UN Volunteer with UNDP, I have not only met countless dedicated people, including other UN Volunteers who remain forever engraved in my memory, but I have worked with them on four continents to build life-supporting infrastructure and improving lives. That, is the good war.”*

**FROM GRAINS TO FRUITS:  
BETTER HARVESTS AHEAD**

12

*In 1975, farmers at a research farm in Hudaydah, supported by FAO and guided by a UN Volunteer, cultivated maize as part of efforts to boost Yemen's largely subsistence agriculture, with grains, fruits, vegetables and cotton being the main crops. With UN agency support, the government launched development programmes to improve livelihoods and increase crop yields.*  
[UN Archive/Kay Muldoon]









Jerome Montague

## FROM THE WILD TO THE WORLD: HOW ONE VOLUNTEER BRIDGED CULTURES AND CONTINENTS

In 1978, Jerome Montague, from the United States of America, set out on an adventure that would shape his life, and many others. As an international UN Volunteer of the first hour, he found himself as a Wildlife Officer with FAO, working at Lake Murray's Baboa crocodile station, in Papua New Guinea. The country was newly independent, and Jerome's mission was as unique as the place: turn crocodile hunting into sustainable crocodile farming, providing income for rural communities while preserving wild crocodile populations. Most of the locals lived as hunters and gatherers, but soon saw how raising crocodiles could change their lives: "It was about showing that you can make more money by harvesting fish and wildlife and native plants than you could by harvesting crops and animals," Jerome explained.

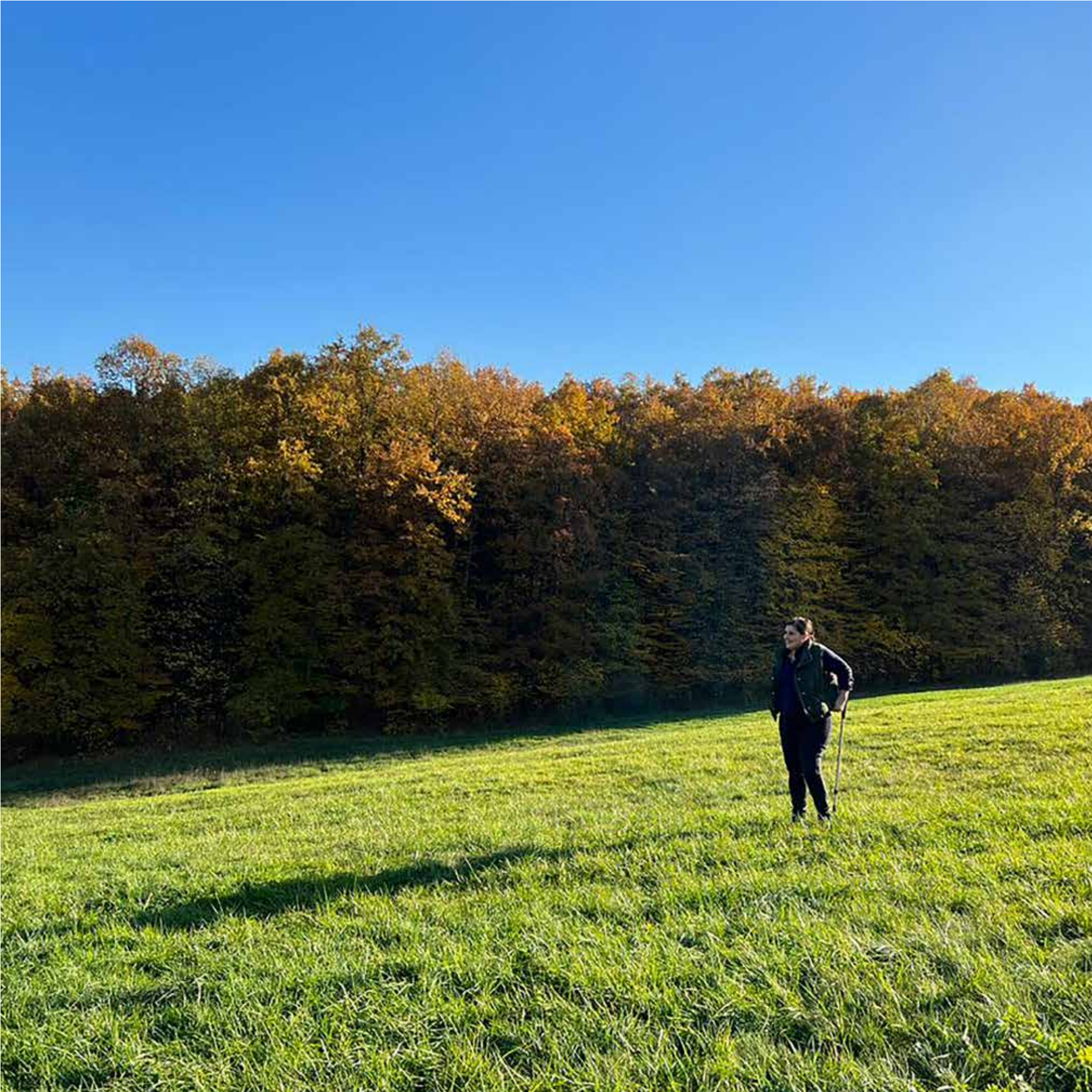
Working closely with the Kuni, Biami and Pari indigenous groups, he gained a deep understanding of their lifestyle. He learned how non-verbal communication could go a long way when one was overwhelmed by the more than 800 spoken languages in Papua New Guinea. That connection and learnings stayed with him. He went on to earn a PhD degree in Wildlife Ecology, run a crocodile farm in Australia, work with Aboriginal groups and even conduct research in the Arctic, serving as a bridge between the Inupiat communities and industrial development. His UN Volunteer assignment with FAO became the foundation for a lifelong journey of listening, learning, and linking worlds and gave him a unique gift: the ability to connect with people through respect, science and shared purpose.

*“When I worked with native people elsewhere, even though they weren’t for the most part living a true hunter-gatherer lifestyle like the New Guineans were, I understood where they came from and what their perspective was in a way that someone who hasn’t had that experience could never do.”*



*Jerome Montague, UN Volunteer Wildlife Officer, with a Biami warrior at Nomad River, Papua New Guinea, in 1978. [UNV/Jerome Montague]*







# 02

## UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTEERS AT FAO A JOURNEY ACROSS FIELDS

Agriculture · Climate resilience · Food security · Forestry · Emergency · Education · Animal farming and livestock

Sylvie Abong · Firoj Ahmed · Jaspar Albers · Wafaa AlRamadneh · Sithmi Attanayake · Mohamed Aw-Dahir · Solomon Bekele · Poonam Bista · Maria Rita Borba · Larissa Bruun · Melody Chali · Songling Chen · Barbora Chmelova · Kyu Won Choi · Sapana Dawadi · Tiruneh Debena · Sana Diatta · Tharudini Ekneligoda · Kim Eunah · Amadou Fall · Iraj Fekrazad · Milagros Flores · Beatriz García · Chiara Guini · Oshan M. Gunathilake · Sergio Hinojosa · Enrique Isagon · Yuno Ito · Mr. Yoshikazu Ito · Annette Jaitner · Yunji Jung · Fatoumata Ka · Anamul Kabir · Sugyeong Kang · Rinat Kapev · Gopi Chandra Kharel · Tasneem Kibria · Shoko Kinoshita · Jaakko Korpela · Matungulu Kutombo · Seongeun Lee · N'Charick Mañinè Ouattara · Théo Martin · Esi Mawuena Christon-Quao · Fiza Mazhar · Jerome Montague · Jiyoung Nam · Elie Ndjeder · Azzizun Nahar (Tania) · Alisher Narizov · Christian Ngabonziza · Abdoulahat Ngom · Kamila Novak · Terumi Onuma · Seunghyo Park · Eda Pütgöl · Rana Ryan · Carolina Rengifo · Teija Reyes · Masayo Rossignoli · Felipe Sabogal · Makhfousse Sarr · Carla Schmid · Anita Shabani · Nour Shehadeh · Ken Shimizu · Hiroaki Sonoda · Zdeněk Stejskal · Axel Strömberg · Agnes Temba · Michiko Terada · Gael Thiébault · Branislav Trudić · Davide Valenti · Hiruni Weerasinghe · Thiago Resende Xavier · Serge Yelemou · Yumna Zawahir · Andrei Zhileikin





2.1

**AGRICULTURE**

WORKING THE LAND,  
SECURING THE FUTURE



Sana Diatta

NURTURING CHANGE IN  
SENEGAL’S HEARTLAND

*Agriculture is more than just a sector in Senegal: it is the beating heart of the national economy. Employing almost half of the active population, it remains highly vulnerable to climate change, which threatens staple crops, food security and livelihoods of millions. In response, FAO launched several projects to support adaptation planning for food security, nutrition and sustainable development. Among those contributing to these efforts is Sana Diatta, UN Volunteer with FAO Senegal, who supported sustainable development initiatives in the village of Kataba. [UNV, 2024]*





## Beatriz García

### SKETCHING SOLUTIONS TO MALNUTRITION IN GUATEMALA

As a graphic designer, Beatriz García Gutiérrez had worked with advertising firms for commercial products. But when she joined FAO and WFP as an Online Volunteer, she applied her skills to something she had never done before: a project aimed at fighting hunger and malnutrition in Guatemala.

The two-year initiative supported smallholder farmers in some of the country's poorest regions, helping them improve maize production, adopt better agricultural practices, and strengthen their access to markets. Beatriz's task was to design a set of manuals for farmers: clear, accessible guides promoting techniques like greywater filtering, living fences and bokashi composting. She also created an almost 50-page summary of lessons learned around seed capital support for farmers.

It was a far cry from her usual work, but one that deeply resonated. "This project particularly interested me for two reasons. First, it focused on eradicating one of the great problems of our world—hunger and malnutrition. Second, as a project focused on a Latin American country, it increased my interest in being a part of it," she said.

For Beatriz, it was a chance to use design not just to communicate, but to empower, transforming technical knowledge into tools for food security and self-reliance.



*Beatriz García Gutiérrez served as Online Volunteer with FAO and WFP. [UNV, 2012]*



## Chiara Guini

### WHERE QUINOA MEETS CAMELIDS—MY EXPERIENCE WITH FARMING IN BOLIVIA

At FAO Bolivia, I had the opportunity to coordinate a platform bringing together FAO and different institutions working on the Quinoa–Camélidos Production project in the department of Oruro. This work took place in Bolivia’s inter-salar region, between the Uyuni and Coipasa salt flats, an area where, for thousands of years, family farming has cultivated quinoa and herd llamas, alpacas and other camelids together.

As a European, I initially knew very little about quinoa. But through this experience, I learned not only about its great nutritional value, but also its deep roots in Bolivian culture, closely linked to local traditions, family farming and ecological agriculture.

At the same time, I worked on a project that focused on building government support for ecological farming. It helped me understand how national policies and cooperation can support farmers and promote more sustainable agriculture throughout the country.

Being a UN Volunteer was a truly meaningful experience. It allowed me to get involved in issues I really care about, like rural development and food rights, while sharing what I know and building on my past experience. Most of all, it gave me the chance to talk to people directly, hear about their real needs and learn from their perspective.



*Chiara Guini, UN Volunteer from Italy, spoke about Quinoa–Camélidos and her experience about sustainable farming in Oruro, Bolivia. [UNV, 2015]*

## Rinat Kapev

### WORKING TOWARDS ZERO HUNGER

"Creating a favourable business climate in rural areas is vital, and that is exactly what FAO is doing." For former UN Volunteer Rinat Kapev, this is the key to spark an interest in agricultural development among today's youth.

As a Russian UN Volunteer with FAO's Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in Budapest, Hungary, Rinat spent over two years supporting countries like Armenia, Serbia and Uzbekistan in building partnerships with international organizations and other governments. His work focused on promoting agricultural development, improving food security and ensuring sustainable natural resources management.

Rinat brought with him a truly global perspective, having studied in four countries and interning with several international organizations. His assignment with FAO began remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, a challenge in itself, but thanks to a strong team and a flexible mindset, he found his footing quickly. His days were filled with everything from programme planning and bilateral meetings to designing tools to help FAO offices monitor regional progress more effectively.

For Rinat, volunteering wasn't about waiting to be told what to do, it meant asking questions, taking initiative, and understanding how everyday tasks contributed to broader development goals. "I liked my team, my job, and I was glad to use my skills to contribute to the global goal of Zero Hunger," he shared.



*Rinat Kapev, UN Volunteer from Russia, joined FAO's Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in Budapest, Hungary. [Rinat Kapev, 2021]*



## Matungulu Kutombo

### WHERE FISHERS THRIVE, COMMUNITIES RISE



Matungulu Kutombo Albert (left), UN Volunteer from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), supported local fishers and their associations as part of the Population Monitoring and Nutrition Systems project with FAO. Years of conflict, natural disasters and disease outbreaks have severely impacted food security. Matungulu's volunteer assignment helped monitor farming and fishing activities for local communities. [UNV, 2023]



## Eda Pütgöl

### FROM POLICY TO PLATE: ADVANCING FAO'S MISSION OF ZERO HUNGER

For Eda Pütgöl, joining FAO's Subregional Office for Central Asia in Ankara as a UN Volunteer marked both a beginning and a big step forward. It was her first full-time job, and one that helped her learn about food systems, development and the power of small actions.

Eda volunteered for over a year as Programme Assistant, working on two key projects supported by the Turkish government. One focused on improving support for farmers and the other on farmer infrastructure under the Global Soil Partnership. "I feel like I'm doing something meaningful for both my country and for FAO," she shared during her assignment in 2018.

Although her background wasn't in agriculture or food systems, the experience gave Eda the chance to learn directly from farmers, project teams and FAO experts. Her role took her into the field, where she participated in training programmes and spoke directly with farming communities. These conversations became the most formative part of her experience, helping her connect big policy goals, like #ZeroHunger, to the real, daily lives of rural producers. "It was a highly demanding but very satisfying job," she shared. "I learned new skills and how to support a project from start to finish." It also showed her how volunteering doesn't just build a résumé—it reshapes your worldview.

*“Things that seem very small can in fact change the whole world if applied by enough people in their daily lives. There is a guide called “Lazy Person’s Guide to Saving the World” prepared by the UN. There you can find lots of small ideas for big impact.”*



Eda Pütgöl, UN Volunteer Programme Assistant, joined FAO's Subregional Office for Central Asia in Ankara. [FAO, 2018]

Masayo Rossignoli

## FOOD SECURITY THROUGH SOY AND SYSTEMS IN GHANA



*Masayo Rossignoli (second from the left), UN Volunteer with FAO in Ghana, contributed to improving food security and livelihoods in rural communities. As a Nutrition and Food Systems Specialist, she supported sustainable soybean farming and food processing, helping families build more stable and resilient lives. [FAO, 2024]*



## Gael Thiébault

### SEEDS OF TRUST: VOLUNTEERING CULTIVATES COMMUNITY IN THE ANDES

Teamwork doesn't always start in a formal setting. Sometimes, it begins on a mountainside, between conversations, with someone willing to listen and share. A UN Volunteer from Belgium, Gael Thiébault, knows it well. As an Agriculture Officer with FAO Ecuador, he spent four years working closely with the citizens of Toacazo, in the central Andes, fostering collaboration and a strong sense of community ownership.

Gael coordinated Fincas Integrales (Integrated Farms), a project focused on producing organic food for local consumption, improving alpaca herding, managing water resources and marketing agricultural products through local networks. But his role extended well beyond technical coordination. With patience and consistency, Gael built relationships with farmers and local actors, encouraging everyone to participate throughout the process. As a result, the project became more than an initiative; it became a shared commitment. People didn't just take part; they believed in it.

His efforts also reached rural communities on the outskirts of Quito, Ecuador's capital, where Gael supported small agroecological producers in adopting sustainable techniques and reaching new markets. Always rooted in the principles of the solidarity economy, his approach served the collective good, addressing both social and environmental challenges through cooperation.

*Gael Thiébault (left) from Belgium was a UN Volunteer Agriculture Officer with FAO in Ecuador. [UNV, 2011]*



## Davide Valenti

### CONNECTING THE DOTS FROM APPLIED ECOLOGY TO APPLIED IMPACT

After completing my graduate degree in Applied Ecology, I fulfilled a long-held dream of traveling across South America. That journey opened my eyes: I encountered incredible cultural diversity and different ways of life, but I also witnessed significant environmental challenges that stayed with me.

When I returned home, a seed of purpose began to grow: to be part of the region's sustainable development. That's when I came across UNV, and before I knew it, I was on a flight from Italy to my volunteer assignment: La Paz, Bolivia. That was the beginning of an adventure that would define the next year of my life.

For over a year, I served as a UN Volunteer with the Programme Unit of FAO in Bolivia, contributing to a diverse portfolio of initiatives focused on natural resource management. My work supported areas such as genetic resource conservation, agrobiodiversity, sustainable forest management and climate change mitigation among others.

Looking back, I truly value how much this office respects and recognizes the contribution of UN Volunteers. Our roles are not only seen as meaningful, they are genuinely appreciated. This experience taught me a great deal, about myself, about UNV and the vital role in advancing human development, about the inner workings of the United Nations and national governments. It also taught me about Bolivia, a country of striking contrasts, rich cultures, diverse ecosystems, deep rooted traditions, and complex challenges. It is a land of stories, emotions, beauty, colours, scents and unforgettable landscapes. I left deeply enriched, with a broader perspective of the world around me and a deeper understanding of the realities others face.



*Davide Valenti, UN Volunteer from Italy, during a natural resource management field session with the FAO team in Bolivia. [UNV, 2010]*



Serge Yelemou

## **GUARDIANS OF THE LAND: PRESERVING BURKINA FASO'S FORESTS**



*Serge Yelemou was a UN Volunteer with FAO Burkina Faso. As an expert in ecological monitoring and evaluation, he contributed to raising awareness of local communities about forest and land preservation. [UNV, 2024]*





2.2

## **CLIMATE RESILIENCE**

ADAPTATION IN ACTION:

RESPONDING TO

CLIMATE CHANGE

## Firoj Ahmed

### BUILDING TRUST THROUGH DATA IN EASTERN SUDAN

In Kassala region, Eastern Sudan, drought, displacement and poverty have long threatened lives and livelihoods. But the Joint Resilience Project helped communities find new ways to adapt—and people like UN Volunteer Firoj Ahmed made that possible.

As a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer with FAO, Firoj supported this initiative from FAO, WFP and UNICEF. The goal was to help communities better cope with challenges like poor harvests, food shortages and limited health and nutrition services for mothers and children. Based in Khartoum and working deep into the field, Firoj helped design surveys, collected data and most importantly, built relationships.

“When we first encountered villages, we couldn’t enter unless we were invited. We had to consult village leaders and ask for permission to help,” he explained. That approach earned him trust. In Hangola, a village leader wrapped Firoj in his own turban, a powerful sign of welcome. A year later, Firoj returned, surrounded by children and drawing for them on the ground.

For Firoj, these moments were what mattered most: “We travelled through rough terrain, worked with diverse individuals and groups, and bonded with people I never thought I would. It was an unforgettable experience,” he added.



*Firoj Ahmed (right), UN Volunteer Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, consulting with village leaders in the North Delta, Kassala, Sudan. [UNV, 2016]*

*“Bonding is so important, it’s great to help people, but to actually know the people you are helping—that is something else.”*



## Melody Chali

### BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE

*“The future is bright for women if only they are motivated to do what they like. Indeed, equality can be attained through volunteering, knowledge and skills.”*



Melody Chali (left), UN Volunteer Research Assistant at UNDP Zambia, during one of her field visits to meet farmers of Namwala district, Zambia. [UNV, 2022]

In the rural heartland of Namwala, in southern Zambia, UN Volunteer Melody Chali challenged long-held traditions as she opened new paths for women to lead. As a single mother with an unshakable belief in gender equality, Melody knew one thing for certain: there can't be progress when women are held back.

From 2019 to 2023, she served as a Research Assistant with the SCALA project (Scaling up Climate Ambition on Land Use and Agriculture through Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans), a joint initiative by UNDP and FAO supporting over twenty countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Most days found her out in the fields, shoulder to shoulder with farmers, training women, men and youth to build sustainable, climate-smart livelihoods. Melody advocated for a minimum of 60 percent female participation in all project activities. There was tangible impact: women in 15 rural camps across the region are now making their own farm drip lines and running agri-businesses, taking on roles once reserved for men.

“Volunteerism has taught me to be resilient and work for the change I want to see,” Melody reflected. In the sun-drenched fields of Namwala, that change is already taking root.

## Barbora Chmelova

# MAKING CLIMATE COLLABORATION WORK THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM

As an international UN Volunteer in Agricultural Economics, I served with the FAO office in Hanoi starting in April 2017. My work focused on improving rural livelihoods and food security, as well as supporting efforts to adapt and mitigate climate change.

One of my main roles was supporting the UN Result Group on Climate Change. I helped organize and facilitate meetings, kept communication flowing among group members and prepared materials to support their work. This was part of a wider effort to improve how UN agencies work together in Viet Nam and around the world.

While most of my work took place in the office, I also joined monitoring visits across different provinces and represented FAO at national workshops and events. I believe there is great potential to involve more national UN Volunteers in FAO's work, especially in disaster preparedness, climate awareness, and outreach in rural communities.

Every day at the UN helped me grow, both professionally and personally. I truly appreciated working with experienced colleagues, learning from experts and connecting with national and international volunteers. Sharing knowledge and perspectives with diverse teams has shaped my path in agriculture, sustainable development and volunteerism for peace.

*“FAO and UNV brought a perfect balance to my work life. I find it unique to have the opportunity to combine in my work two areas which I am truly passionate about—agriculture, climate change and sustainable development, along with volunteerism.”*



Barbora Chmelova was a UN Volunteer in Agricultural Economics with FAO in Viet Nam. She shared her experience at a learning session for UN Volunteers and national volunteers about community-based projects and volunteer mobilization in Czechia. [UNV, 2017]



## Yuno Ito

# SUPPORTING CLIMATE-RESILIENT AGRICULTURE IN LAO PDR



*Yuno Ito (far right) during the final workshop of Climate REAL Project.  
[FAO/Vilaylack Khounvisith, 2022]*

From the end of 2022, Yuno Ito spent two years as a UN Volunteer with the FAO office in Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), stepping into unfamiliar territory as a Nutrition and Food Systems Officer. Her work centered on the Climate REAL project, an effort to build climate-resilient and eco-friendly agriculture systems in Attapeu Province.

In a region where most farmers are smallholders facing poor soils, erratic weather and limited resources, the project offered tools for resilience: rice and vegetable seeds, native chickens, small-scale solar-powered irrigation and hands-on training in sustainable practices.

Yuno supported communications, reporting, and helped organize the project's final workshop. Without prior experience in UN settings or administration, the learning curve was steep. But through steady collaboration with local colleagues, she found her rhythm and purpose. The experience, she said, helped her understand what it takes to run a complex project and how real change is built, not in isolation, but through trust, partnership and shared effort.

Théo Martin

## SUPPORTING SENEGALESE FARMERS THROUGH FIELD SCHOOLS



*Théo Martin during a fact-finding mission to support the planting of vegetables in the peanut growing basin as part of the Farmer-Field-School and Climate Resilience Project. [FAO, 2017]*

Senegal is particularly affected by declining rainfall and rising temperatures. Seasons are shifting, with increasingly irregular rainfall patterns, which adds to the challenge of meeting the needs of a growing population.

As a trained agronomist, I worked with FAO in Senegal to help reduce farmers' vulnerability to climate change. I contributed to the Global Environment Facility project, which promotes the "farmer-field-school" approach, an outdoor learning model where farmers receive hands-on, practical training to adapt to changing climate conditions. I regularly joined field visits and trainings in peanut-growing areas and cotton fields, gaining deeper insights into sylvo-pastoral agriculture and participatory training methods.

My main role focused on monitoring and evaluation, developing a method to assess whether the project was being implemented effectively. Using tools such as geomatics, rural sociology and statistics, I worked to understand the living conditions of farmers and measure the project's impact on their lives.

Working in a rich learning environment, I had the opportunity to collaborate with producer collectives, NGOs, and government structures. I was part of a highly experienced, multidisciplinary team and learned a great deal alongside my Senegalese colleagues. Above all, it was the human dimension that made my UN Volunteer experience truly meaningful.



## Jiyoung Nam

# NURTURING NATURE AND CONNECTING COMMUNITIES IN ALBANIA

Ensuring women farmers are not left behind was a key priority for Jiyoung Nam, UN Volunteer and Climate Change Specialist with FAO in Albania. She supported projects that helped women and young farmers improve their skills and find new ways to earn income.

Originally from the Republic of Korea, Jiyoung worked closely with the Albanian government to define and implement its projects in the agriculture, forestry and other land-use sector. She coordinated with national and international partners and guided projects that promoted more sustainable and inclusive practices.

“One of our goals was to support excellent local organic products that rarely reach city markets due to limited logistics and marketing,” she shared. Another project she worked on focused on restoring soil fertility and combating land degradation through better natural resources management.

“There was so much potential there for inclusive and sustainable growth,” Jiyoung noted. With a background in international development and experience at UNDP Indonesia and environmental NGOs, she brought both expertise and passion to her role. “Serving as a UN Volunteer with FAO helped me grow, while connecting climate policy with real needs on the ground.”



*Jiyoung Nam, Climate Change Specialist UN Volunteer with FAO Albania, visiting a local farm. [Jiyoung Nam, 2021]*

Carla Schmid

## CHAMPIONING ECO-FRIENDLY POLICIES FOR A GREENER CAMBODIA

*“I know that the policy work is so important to create the environment where natural resource protection can benefit so many people long-term.”*

Carla Schmid joined UNDP Cambodia in early 2024 as a UN Volunteer, stepping into a role that bridged policy and climate action through a joint initiative with FAO. Her focus: protecting biodiversity and managing natural resources in ways that support Cambodia’s ability to cope with climate change.

Carla contributed to the Community Action for Sustainable Forests project, implemented by FAO, UNDP and regional partners. The project supported communities in managing forests sustainably and becoming more resilient to the effects of climate change. Carla’s contribution supported policies and long-term environmental protection.

“I was motivated to find a job that has an impact in real life, that improves society and contributes to communities,” Carla said. Through her assignment, she was able to turn her environmental protection efforts into action.

Her volunteer work with all stakeholders is a good example of how collaboration between UN agencies, national partners and volunteers can lead to progress on the ground. Through active advocacy of policy and practice, Carla advanced Cambodia’s efforts to protect its environment and support communities affected by climate change.



Carla Schmid (left), UN Volunteer with UNDP Cambodia, promoted eco-friendly policies. [UNV, 2024]



## Zdeněk Stejskal

### GREENING WITH EQUITY—A VOLUNTEER'S VOICE



*Zdeněk Stejskal is a UN Volunteer supporting FAO's environmental portfolio in Sarajevo. [UNV, 2024]*

Being a UN Volunteer with FAO offers me many opportunities to learn and grow, both professionally and personally. The role of FAO is critical when it comes to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 that relates to ending Hunger, improving Nutrition and ensuring Food Security.

With a professional background in International and European Union (EU) environmental law, I focus on the environmental portfolio of FAO in Sarajevo, and as such contribute to SDG 13 for Climate Action.

I am grateful to be part of a diverse team of experts. What I believe I bring to the table is a strong emphasis on a rights-based approach, making sure that even the most marginalized members of the society equally benefit from the green transition. Each of us can take an active role in driving positive change—and volunteering for the United Nations is an excellent first step.





2.3

**FOOD SECURITY**

WORKING TOWARDS

A WORLD WITHOUT HUNGER

## Sylvie Abong

“FOOD SECURITY ISN'T JUST ABOUT MEALS,  
IT'S ABOUT JUSTICE.”



Sylvie Abong, UN Volunteer Proofreader, supported the Food Systems Coordination Hub at FAO. [Sylvie Abong, 2025]

Growing up in Africa, Sylvie Abong learned early that food should never be wasted. “If we ever left food on our plates, my mom would say, ‘Do you know how many children go without food?’” That lesson stayed with her. Though her family could afford food, she saw many others go without, even asking for clean water at her doorstep. “Seeing all that made me realize how deeply unfair it is that something as basic as food isn’t guaranteed for everyone.”

Now based in Canada, Sylvie joined FAO as a UN Volunteer Proofreader, supporting the Food Systems Coordination Hub by proofreading a French web story. “I had to make sure the text was clear, accurate and respectful.” What she enjoyed the most was helping to communicate FAO’s work to a wider audience: “I felt proud to support communication that promotes food security and international cooperation. It made me feel part of something meaningful and global.”

To Sylvie, food security isn’t just about meals—it’s about justice, respect and opportunity. “No one should go to bed hungry. I want to help build a world where every person has access to good, nutritious food.”

## Wafaa AlRamadneh

### CHAMPIONING VOLUNTEERISM FOR DEVELOPMENT IN JORDAN



Dr. Wafaa AlRamadneh, Programme Officer with FAO in Jordan, is a champion of volunteerism for development. [Wafaa AlRamadneh, 2025]

Dr. Wafaa AlRamadneh, from FAO Jordan, sees UN Volunteers not as support staff, but as essential partners in development. As a Programme Officer, she has worked closely with UN Volunteers over the years, guiding, mentoring and championing their role across a range of initiatives. “UN Volunteers do not merely supplement our efforts, they amplify them,” she says.

Wafaa contributes to initiatives that boost agricultural productivity and secure food supplies. This is critical in Jordan, a country which is already grappling with water scarcity, climate shocks and the pressures of hosting refugees from the region due to the geopolitical situation.

She currently supervises one UN Volunteer and actively promotes an environment where volunteers can lead with confidence and purpose. “UN Volunteers often serve as vital bridges between FAO and the communities we serve,” she explains. “Their presence at the grassroots level builds trust and ensures that programmes are genuine and responsive to the needs and priorities of the country.”

As FAO celebrates 80 years, she reflects on what it means to be part of this moment. “This legacy is not just historical; it is a living, breathing framework that guides my daily work. It means I am part of an institution that has consistently led global efforts to transform agri-food systems, adapt to evolving challenges like climate change and resource scarcity, and build resilience in communities.”

*“I’ve seen how UN Volunteers bring an extraordinary blend of enthusiasm, innovative ideas and a deep commitment to community engagement. They infuse our programmes with energy and enrich our understanding with diverse cultural insights.”*



**BUGS ON THE MENU:**  
FIGHTING MALNUTRITION WITH LOCAL WISDOM

In the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR), where nearly 40 percent of children under five suffer from malnutrition, FAO turned to an age-old, local solution to improve diets—edible insects.

44

Jaakko Korpela

*Jaakko Korpela, UN Volunteer Laboratory Officer with FAO in Lao PDR, supported the Edible Insect Project. With one of the highest rates of insect consumption in the world, Lao PDR is built on tradition to promote insects as a source of nutrition, income, and sustainability. [UNV, 2011]*



## Larissa Bruun

*Larissa Bruun, UN Volunteer in Lao PDR, promoted edible insects as a viable protein source. [Charlotte Spinazze, 2010]*



45

Larissa Bruun, UN Volunteer with FAO, was part of this effort, working to combat nutrient and protein deficiencies with culturally accepted, sustainable food sources.

“Insects as human food is nothing new to the world,” Larissa explained. “However, to our knowledge, this was the first time that the United Nations was acknowledging this potential food source with concrete action.”

Working from Vientiane, Larissa contributed to two FAO-led initiatives: capacity building on nutrition across all levels—from national to community—and public education campaigns promoting edible insects as a viable protein source. In Lao PDR, where insects are already part of the traditional diet, the project helped direct this rich food source towards those most in need, especially children.

“Working with an indigenous solution is the kind of development I truly believe in,” Larissa said. By blending nutrition education with local practices, Larissa and her fellow UN Volunteers helped lay the foundation for healthier futures in one of Southeast Asia’s most food-insecure countries.

## Mohamed Aw-Dahir

### BUILDING BRIDGES TO END HUNGER

With 15 years of service at FAO, Mohamed Aw-Dahir knows that partnerships are essential to ending hunger. As Partnerships Officer at FAO's Subregional Office for Eastern Africa, he helps coordinate strategic alliances with governments, regional bodies and development partners. "The essence of FAO's partnership work lies in its commitment to building strategic alliances that drive the organization's mission to eradicate hunger and malnutrition," he says.

Mohamed coordinates the Hand-in-Hand Initiative in Eastern Africa, FAO's flagship programme to mobilize investment in the agrifood value chain in the fight against poverty and hunger. He also supports FAO offices in over 25 African nations to turn their plans for working with other UN agencies into concrete action—from shaping policies to delivering support on the ground.

A key part of his role is supervising and mentoring a UN Volunteer. "I provide daily guidance, connect him with strategic networks, and introduce him to policy trends shaping Africa's food systems' transformation," he explains. The UN Volunteer has helped organize a high-level partners' dialogue with the African Union and other institutions, and supported resource mobilization in Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan. "UN Volunteers bring technical expertise and local insight," Mohamed says. "Their adaptability makes them an impactful resource, especially in complex environments. They are vital partners in FAO's work."

*"FAO's story is one of hope, resilience, and innovation. It reminds us that food is not just sustenance; it's dignity, opportunity and peace."*



*Mohamed Aw-Dahir, Partnerships Officer at FAO's Subregional Office for Eastern Africa, is based in Ethiopia. [Mohamed Aw-Dahir, 2025]*



## Sapana Dawadi

### SEEDS, SUPPORT AND SERVICE—SAPANA'S JOURNEY WITH FAO



Sapana Dawadi, UN Volunteer Procurement Assistant with FAO Nepal, supports the delivery of essential goods and services to farming communities. [Sapana Dawadi, 2025]

Sapana Dawadi has always found joy in giving back. “Even the smallest efforts can create real change,” she shared. Guided by that belief, she stepped into her role as a UN Volunteer Procurement Assistant with FAO Nepal. She supports the delivery of essential goods and services to farming communities. “Understanding the purpose behind each procurement, whether seeds or veterinary support, makes the work deeply fulfilling.”

A turning point came during a UNV leadership training. “It changed how I approached challenges and built my confidence,” she recalled. Another meaningful moment was joining a clean-up campaign after a flood in Kathmandu. “Seeing the space transformed reminded me how small actions add up.”

Being part of FAO as it celebrates its 80th anniversary is something Sapana holds close. “It’s an honour to contribute to an organization that has worked for decades to build a world free from hunger. It’s one of the best things that’s happened in my life.”

Even the most technical tasks carry purpose, reflects Sapana—and how serving others with heart can drive real change.

*“As a UN Volunteer, I often found myself becoming a helping hand in moments others didn’t anticipate needing one. Our presence inspires compassion, innovation and meaningful change across teams and communities.”*

Annette Jaitner

## LOCAL LEADERSHIP FOR LASTING FOOD SECURITY



Annette Jaitner (left), UN Volunteer with FAO in Mozambique, served as a Food and Nutrition Security Officer in the provinces of Manica and Sofala. The key objective of her volunteer assignment: helping local actors lead. Working closely with government offices, NGOs and community groups, Annette supported food systems by improving both knowledge and access to resources. [FAO, 2007]



## Yunji Jung

### FOOD, FUTURE AND THE FIGHT AGAINST DESERTIFICATION

*“I’ve also seen firsthand that Africa is home to a rich diversity of ancient and indigenous crops—nutritious, climate-resilient and full of potential. Strengthening food security here can empower local communities and support sustainable development far beyond the continent.”*



Yunji Jung, UN Volunteer from the Republic of Korea, supported women and young people through hands-on agroecology training in Senegal. [UNV, 2024].

“Food represents our past, present, and future,” says Yunji Jung, UN Volunteer from the Republic of Korea with FAO Senegal. “It is the foundation of every sector—education, health, the economy, even culture.”

Yunji’s connection to Africa began during her first field experience in Senegal as a UN University Volunteer with WFP. That experience inspired her to study Development Economics, and later join the Korea-Africa Foundation, where she discovered the Great Green Wall project. “Its transformative vision to fight desertification and build resilience deeply inspired me,” she explains.

That same inspiration led her back to Senegal—not as a visitor, but as a UN Volunteer with FAO, working directly on the Great Green Wall project. She supported women and young people through hands-on agroecological training, including sessions on how to use modern machinery to package their oil and soap products for sale. “What I enjoyed most was engaging directly with local communities,” she shared. “Hearing their stories, understanding their challenges, and seeing how our support empowered them to take action against desertification was incredibly meaningful to me.”

As FAO celebrates its 80th anniversary, Yunji feels proud to have contributed to its legacy. “It’s an honour to be part of an organization that leads global efforts for food security and sustainable development. I hope to stay engaged in this mission for years to come.”



Shoko Kinoshita

SETTING THE TABLE FOR BETTER NUTRITION IN VIET NAM

*“Through my work, I helped to set the table for the future success of the nutrition-sensitive food systems project. It was a great experience, and I am grateful to everyone who supported me during my assignment.”*

When Shoko Kinoshita arrived in Viet Nam in 2018, she joined a growing global effort to make food systems more responsive to nutritional needs. As a UN Volunteer Food Security and Nutrition Specialist with FAO, her work became part of a Japan-funded initiative implemented across Ghana, Kenya and Viet Nam, countries where rapid development coexists with persistent nutritional challenges.

In Viet Nam, progress in food security has improved notably over the past two decades. Still, undernutrition, overnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies remain widespread. Shoko’s role was to help ensure that agriculture, food science, and business sectors, not just health, contribute to healthier diets. “Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are critical to developing nutrition-sensitive food systems given their potential for reaching more vulnerable populations,” she noted.

She co-authored a background paper with national and FAO experts, identifying key challenges and areas where Vietnamese SMEs could better support access to nutritious food. “This paper will be used to design e-learning models and will help sustain these efforts over time,” she added. Her work also involved training university students, and engaging government, academia, civil society and the private sector.



*Shoko Kinoshita, UN Volunteer Food Security and Nutrition Specialist at FAO Viet Nam, helped identify areas where SMEs could better support access to nutritious food in the country. [FAO, 2019]*

## Seongeun Lee

### FROM SURVEYS TO STORIES THAT MATTER

Growing up in the Republic of Korea, it was Seongeun's dream to work at FAO. In 2024, that dream became a reality when she joined the FAO team in Nigeria as a UN Volunteer. "I wanted to contribute to the fight against hunger," she said. "While living a sustainable life may seem like a given for some, for many people around the world, it remains an urgent and unmet need."

As a Food Security Analysis Officer, Seongeun helps monitor food and nutrition in Nigeria. She works closely with government partners to assess where support is most needed. "It's about using both numbers and people's stories to shape meaningful action," she explains.

One particular moment stayed with her. While reviewing surveys from displaced families, she came across a line that read: "We have no plans or dreams for the future". That sentence struck her. "It reminded me that our reports aren't just data, they carry the voices and realities of vulnerable communities. It's my responsibility to make sure our analyses reflect their needs."

"Institutions often lean toward stability," says Seongeun. "But UN Volunteers bring fresh ideas, bold energy, and new perspectives. That spark is what leads to innovation and change."



*Seongeun Lee, UN Volunteer Food Security Analysis Officer with FAO in Nigeria, helps monitor food and nutrition in the country. [FAO, 2024]*

Ken Shimizu

TURNING PRINCIPLES INTO ACTION:  
UN VOLUNTEERS AT THE HEART OF FAO’S WORK



A native of Japan, Ken Shimizu is the FAO Representative for Bhutan and Nepal.  
[FAO, 2025]

As FAO Representative for Bhutan and Nepal, Ken Shimizu leads the organization’s work in both countries, overseeing programmes, staff and partnerships that aim to build more resilient agrifood systems. “I joined FAO to help reduce hunger and poverty, and to address the gap between developed and developing countries,” he shared. His path was inspired by fellow Japanese professionals serving in the UN system, including UN Volunteers.

Ken has worked closely with UN Volunteers in both countries. “They bring energy, passion and a deep sense of service,” he said. In Bhutan, a UN Volunteer with disabilities initiated important conversations on inclusion in farming and agrifood systems—both within FAO and among local partners. In Nepal, a youth volunteer helped build stronger ties with youth-led groups working to improve food systems.

He sees UN Volunteers as integral to FAO’s work on the ground. “They help turn our principles, Better Production, Better Nutrition, Better Environment and Better Life, into real action, especially at community level.”

As FAO marks its 80th anniversary, Ken says it’s both a privilege and a responsibility to contribute to its legacy: “It’s been a life-changing, empowering experience and one I’ll always be grateful for.”



## Hiroaki Sonoda

### **FARMING SMARTER: LINKING FIELDS TO MARKETS**



*Hiroaki Sonoda (right), UN Volunteer Value Chain Development Specialist in Zambia, conducting a participatory rural appraisal in the SIFAZ project. [FAO, 2020]*

In Zambia, many families rely on agriculture to survive, but changing weather, pests and rising costs have made it harder to grow enough food. Around one in five people is undernourished, and over a third of children under five face chronic nutrition challenges.

When Hiroaki Sonoda came from Japan as a UN Volunteer with FAO, he wanted to help small-scale farmers improve their crops and find better ways to earn a living. As a Value Chain Development Specialist, Hiroaki worked on two projects: one focused on improving farming methods, and another on creating jobs for young people in agriculture.

“I helped plan how farmers could grow food in a way that also made business sense,” he explained. He gathered useful data, created guides and marketing materials and explored ways to connect farmers with buyers.

Working closely with Zambia’s Ministry of Agriculture, he trained local staff, who then passed on skills and advice to farmers in their own communities. Over time, the work reached 16,000 farmers in 27 districts. His work contributed to national efforts to improve food security, helping people take care of their land, grow more food and build better lives for their families.

Agnes Temba

MAKING EVERY DATA POINT COUNT FOR FOOD SECURITY  
IN THE GAMBIA



Agnes Temba, UN Volunteer Monitoring and Evaluation  
Officer in The Gambia. [Agnes Temba, 2025]

*“As volunteers, we offer flexibility and a willingness to learn, while also contributing valuable expertise. We support the mission with fresh perspectives and often act as a bridge between communities and technical processes.”*

For Agnes Temba, becoming a UN Volunteer was a chance to contribute her skills to a cause that truly matters. “Volunteering with FAO aligned with both my personal values and professional interests in sustainable development,” she shared.

Originally from Kenya, Agnes has seen how food insecurity affects every part of life. “Lack of access to sufficient and nutritious food affects education, health and economic potential. It’s more than just ending hunger; it’s about creating a fairer, more resilient world,” she explained.

As an Online UN Volunteer Monitoring and Evaluation Officer for FAO in The Gambia, Agnes supported monitoring and evaluation activities, helping to design reporting tools, track project outcomes and compile progress reports. “I really enjoyed the collaborative aspect of translating data into insights,” she shared. A highlight of her assignment came when she saw how her data helped inform a programme review: “It reminded me that every task, no matter how technical, plays a role in achieving broader development goals.”

As FAO celebrates its 80th anniversary, Agnes reflects with pride: “Knowing that I contributed even in a small way to a legacy focused on eradicating hunger and improving livelihoods worldwide is something I’ll carry with pride throughout my life and career.”

## Thiago Resende Xavier

### FROM BRAZIL TO PAKISTAN—SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION IN ACTION



*Thiago Resende Xavier, during the UN Volunteers Partnerships Forum 2016, in Bonn, Germany. [UNV, 2016]*

Thiago Resende Xavier joined WFP in Pakistan as a UN Volunteer, working at the intersection of policy and partnerships. He contributed to Pakistan's national Zero Hunger Programme, a comprehensive effort shaped by Brazil's Fome Zero and supported by FAO, WFP, UNICEF and other development partners.

As a UN Volunteer, Thiago worked with Pakistan's Ministry of National Food Security and Research. There, he supported the government in coordinating food security programmes, drafting policy documents, and strengthening links between national and provincial stakeholders.

At the heart of the programme was a shared commitment to ending hunger, one that required not just technical expertise, but trust, dialogue and cross-cultural understanding. Thiago travelled to provincial regions to help build awareness and local ownership of the initiative, connecting national goals with everyday realities.

"By living in a cultural environment so distant from my own," he shared, "I'm able to put in perspective my values and improve my ability to empathize with colleagues from different backgrounds. This gives me the chance to reflect about volunteerism, its universal acknowledgement and the impact it can have on peace and development."

*"It was especially rewarding to consider that as a citizen of a Global South country, I was helping to support progress in another: I was part of South-South cooperation in action!"*



Andrei Zhileikin

## WHERE DIPLOMACY, DATA AND DEVELOPMENT MEET

For Andrei Zhileikin, becoming a UN Volunteer was shaped by experience. “I’ve always felt drawn to work that contributes to something larger,” he said. But it was seeing firsthand the human cost of inequality, and the limits placed on people’s lives by lack of opportunity, that turned that instinct into action.

Now based in Addis Ababa as a Partnership Support Officer, Andrei helps connect FAO’s work with the goals of African institutions. He brings teams together, joins key conversations and makes sure regional plans are backed by facts and focused on people. “I find it particularly rewarding to contribute to high-level policy processes that have tangible impacts on the ground, and to work in a dynamic environment where diplomacy, data, and development intersect,” he shared.

One important insight Andrei gained early on was just how vast, diverse and truly fascinating Africa is. “This realization deepened my appreciation for the complexity and potential of the region,” he said.

Andrei holds onto the hope that one day, the partnerships he builds and the initiatives he supports will lead to concrete results. “The thought of these collaborative efforts genuinely improving food security and livelihoods across Eastern Africa is what continues to inspire and drive my work today.”



*Andrei Zhileikin, UN Volunteer Partnership Support Officer, is based in Addis Ababa with FAO. [Andrei Zhileikin, 2025]*

*“Food security means dignity. It means not having to choose between groceries and bills. It means kids can grow up healthy and they can focus on their studies.”*





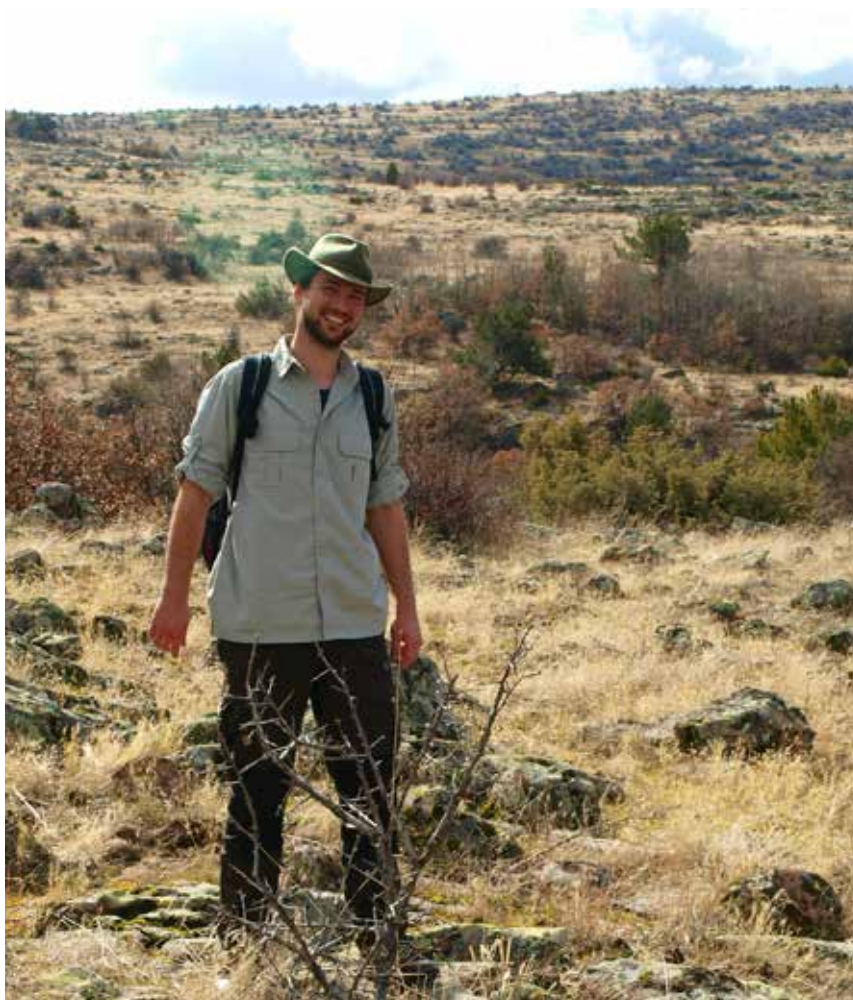
2.4

## **FORESTRY**

PROTECTING FORESTS,  
REBUILDING BALANCE

## Jaspar Albers

### CONNECTING THE DOTS BETWEEN FORESTS, FOOD AND FUNDING



*Jaspar Albers, UN Volunteer Forestry Specialist, during a field trip in Türkiye. [Jaspar Albers, 2014]*

For Jaspar Albers, becoming a UN Volunteer was a natural continuation of something that had always guided him: doing purposeful work. “Volunteering was how I spent my time meaningfully, even as a student,” he shared. So when the chance came to apply his skills in forestry to support FAO, Jaspar didn’t hesitate.

From 2013 to 2016, he served as a Forestry Specialist with FAO’s Subregional Office for Central Asia in Ankara, Türkiye. He worked on forest management in Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan, biodiversity and desertification in Türkiye, and desert ecosystems in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. “The range of topics combined with the variety of countries was truly exciting, but what I loved most was working with like-minded people.”

He helped secure funding from donors and show how forests are part of the food solutions. “Forests may not cover much of Central Asia, but they matter: providing soil conservation, drinking water and pasture for livestock. Firewood remains an important source of energy, and non-wood forest products like nuts, fruits and honey are a significant source of food and income,” he explained.

Now back in Germany as a Forestry-IT Coordinator, Jaspar reflects: “These experiences helped shape how I see my work and the world. I am grateful that I had this opportunity.”

Kim Eunah

## BRIDGING DISCIPLINES FOR SMARTER FOREST MANAGEMENT



*Kim Eunah, UN Volunteer Assistant Project Manager for Natural Sciences (left), joined a collaborative initiative to rethink how forests and water are managed across China's diverse landscapes.*

*In partnership with the Chinese Academy of Forestry and organizations such as FAO and UNESCO, the project set out to enhance the integrated management of forests and water systems. By combining diverse disciplines and perspectives, it aimed to deepen understanding of how forest management practices influence water resources—particularly in the context of growing climate-related challenges. [UNV/Peter Harris, 2008]*







Teija Reyes

## **FORESTS FOR ALL:** POLICY, PEOPLE AND PARTICIPATION

Over half of Peru's land is covered by forest, making it one of the most forest-rich countries in the world. As a Forestry Specialist with FAO in Peru, I had the chance to support national efforts to protect these vital ecosystems in a way that benefits both people and the planet.

I worked closely with the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment to gather data and support new forest laws and policies. My role included helping prepare for a national programme to reduce deforestation, and supporting the development of a new, independent National Forest Service. I also spent time with indigenous communities in the Amazon, promoting community-led forest management and transparency.

One key part of my work was understanding how people living near forests use and rely on them. We developed simple tools to measure the value of forest products like food, firewood or medicine, while also making sure we included both men and women's perspectives. This helped make forest laws more inclusive and responsive to real needs.

This assignment was a dream. I felt respected as a professional, involved in real change and deeply connected to the people I met in communities across Peru.

## CREATING GREEN JOBS IN SENEGAL

The Resilience and Intensive Reforestation Project for the Safeguarding of Territories and Ecosystems in Senegal (RIPOSTES) is an ambitious project, also known locally as Dooleel Aalam in Wolof. This is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Environment, the European Union and FAO aimed at bringing 10,000 hectares of land back to life and create 8,000 green jobs in the country.

At the heart of this community-driven initiative have been three UN Community Volunteers assigned to FAO: Fatoumata Ka, Abdoulahat Ngom and Amadou Fall, who worked directly with communities on degraded land. Makhfousse Sarr, Programme Officer at FAO, worked closely with them and other UN Volunteers to help translate the project's vision into daily action on the ground.

### Amadou Fall

64

In the rural village of Lougere Thioly in eastern Senegal, UN Volunteer Amadou Fall helped restore damaged land and bring new opportunities to his community. He worked with farmers, local leaders and partners to make sure everyone worked together and moved in the same direction.

As part of the RIPOSTES project, Amadou helped raise awareness about the project, supported reforestation work and collected information from the field. He also helped communities start small projects using forest products like fruits, nuts and medicinal plants; new ways for families to earn a living.

“For me, volunteering is not just about serving; it’s about being part of local solutions alongside local actors,” he said. “Being a young beneficiary of the system, I feel a strong call to give back to my community and my nation.”

At 30, Amadou is proud to support his community. His work helped people take care of their land while building a more hopeful future, right where they live.



*Amadou Fall (left), UN Community Volunteer Community Liaison Officer in Lougere Thioly, preparing nurseries for reforestation. [UNV, 2023]*



## Abdoulahat Ngom



*Abdoulahat Ngom (second from right), UN Community Volunteer, and an accompanying delegation from FAO engaged with participants in reforestation activities in Ndiob elementary school. [UNV, 2023]*

In the towns of Ndiob and Diakhao, UN Community Volunteer Abdoulahat Ngom worked to create closer ties within the community. At just 29, Abdoulahat helped map local resources, listened to residents and made sure community voices were part of every decision. He also supported the coordination of FAO field visits, helping build trust between the organization and the people on the ground.

For Abdoulahat, volunteering is more than a job, it's a way to take action on the things he believes in: protecting nature, reducing poverty and contributing to peace.

The changes he helped to make were steady and meaningful. Through his work, communities were not only reclaiming damaged land, but were also shaping a more hopeful and sustainable future.

## Fatoumata Ka

In the Kaffrine region, UN Volunteer Fatoumata Ka engaged people, especially women, to understand and take part in sustainable practices. She strengthened ties among women’s associations and led awareness sessions on reforestation and plant nursery techniques. Her efforts changed habits. She sensitized 25 percent of the 1,500 agricultural producers to abandon slash-and-burn practices, with 10 percent now using assisted natural regeneration.

This simple but powerful method, letting native trees grow back naturally, yielded results. Farmers in Kaffrine are now protecting 5,000 forest plants each year. Agricultural yields have increased by more than five per cent, showing that restoring nature can also improve livelihoods.

*Fatoumata Ka, UN Community Volunteer, sensitizing communities in Diounto Village on the reforestation and plant nursery production. [UNV, 2023]*



## Makhfousse Sarr



*Makhfousse Sarr, Program Officer at FAO Senegal, explained the role of UN Volunteers in the RIPOSTES project. [UNV, 2023]*

As Programme Officer for FAO in Senegal, I support RIPOSTES, a project focused on reforestation and strengthening ecosystem resilience. We involve UN Volunteers because inclusivity is at the heart of how we work. Engaging young people—especially young UN Volunteers—is a key priority for us.

We rely on the energy and commitment of all volunteers. By working together, reflecting collectively, and supporting one another on the ground, we can turn our vision of a strong, community-driven dynamic into reality. That's how we'll achieve our goals and build forward better.



## Anita Shabani

### INCLUSION BEGINS WITH OPPORTUNITY



Anita Shabani, UN Volunteer with FAO in Pristina, during her first field visit to the Blinaja National Park, in Kosovo\*. [Anita Shabani, 2022]

*\*References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).*

"Despite my disability, my gender or my background, I know that I am a strong asset to help the world. And we are stronger together," said Anita Shabani.

As a UN Volunteer with FAO in Pristina, Kosovo\*, Anita supported gender, inclusion and community engagement in forestry and agriculture projects. Her work focused on developing gender-responsive strategies to transform agri-food systems and promote women's participation.

She joined FAO through a call encouraging people with disabilities to apply. "I got to support inclusion and gender mainstreaming, serve important initiatives, meet new people and learn every day," she said. Anita worked closely with partners, seamlessly translating between English, Albanian and Serbian, while supporting legal workshops on forestry.

"Being part of workshops with government and stakeholders was challenging and exciting. I provided my inputs and successfully conducted the tasks assigned to me," she reflected.

Anita also worked with schools, teachers and local leaders to fight discrimination and promote equal rights. "Our aim is to strengthen the voice of young women and men, notably through youth organizations," she explained.

With a background supporting women with disabilities and survivors of domestic violence, Anita approached her role with compassion, determination and a deep understanding of the challenges many in her community face.

*"Volunteer work is where one can make a positive impact on another's life even in the simplest of ways."*

# Axel Strömberg

## FORESTS, FOOD AND PEACE



Axel Strömberg, UN Volunteer and Associate Forestry Officer in Yerevan, Armenia. [Axel Strömberg, 2025]

“Without food security, there can be no sustainable life,” says Axel Strömberg, a UN Volunteer and Associate Forestry Officer based in Yerevan, Armenia. “If we had more food security, we’d have fewer conflicts and a more peaceful world.”

Originally from Sweden, Axel joined FAO after volunteering with NGOs and completing his master’s thesis in Mozambique. “Those experiences pushed me to explore the world and UNV was the perfect chance to do good while discovering what a UN career might offer.”

At FAO, Axel’s work focuses on both forestry and climate action. What he enjoys most is the balance between office work and time in the field. “That’s why I studied forestry, to be out in the beautiful nature that surrounds us, not only behind a desk.”

What’s stayed with him the most is the hospitality he’s received. “Even when we don’t speak the same language, they always make sure I feel welcome.”

For Axel, UN Volunteers bring fresh perspectives and new energy to the UN system. “We come from different backgrounds, and we learn from one another.” Now, becoming part of FAO’s 80-year story feels very special to him: “It’s an organization I relied on throughout my studies, and now I get to be part of it. I feel honoured.”





2.5

**EMERGENCY**

WHEN CRISIS CALLS:  
ON THE FRONT LINES  
OF FOOD AND AID

## Tiruneh Debenä

### HELPING FAMILIES GROW FOOD IN A REGION SCARRED BY CONFLICT

"I witnessed how our beneficiaries were able to produce and cover their basic food needs," said Tiruneh Debenä, UN Volunteer Emergency Livelihood Specialist from Ethiopia.

North-east Nigeria is facing one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world today. In a region where over seven million people need urgent food assistance due to insurgency and climate crises, Tiruneh quickly got to work. He travelled to the hardest-hit areas to assess needs and helped plan FAO's emergency response. "Speed of reaction was crucial," he reflected.

Based in Adamawa State, in Nigeria, Tiruneh supported communities who had lost their homes, land and livelihoods. His work focused on helping families grow their own food again and regain some financial independence.

Through projects like seed fairs, micro-gardening, livestock distribution and seasonal farming support, Tiruneh's efforts helped reached almost 40,000 households rebuild their ability to feed themselves and earn a living. In a place where daily life has been shaped by crisis, Tiruneh's work helped families take concrete steps toward stability and a more hopeful future.

*"What I am most proud about my work with FAO was to ensure that resources had been applied on those who needed it the most, especially women, children and elderly households. This gave me a lot of moral satisfaction."*



*Tiruneh Debenä (centre) was a UN Volunteer and Emergency Livelihood Specialist with FAO in Nigeria. [UNV, 2019]*

## Anamul Kabir

# SOWING SEEDS OF RESILIENCE THROUGH VOLUNTEERING



*Anamul Kabir (left), UN Community Volunteer Emergency Response, assisted recovery efforts after Cyclone Remal struck Bangladesh's southern coast in 2024. [FAO, 2024]*

In 2024, Anamul Kabir joined FAO Bangladesh as a UN Community Volunteer Emergency Response, supporting emergency response efforts after Cyclone Remal struck the country's southern coast. "What I enjoyed most was seeing the smiles on community members' faces when they received seeds and aid," he recalls. "To me, it felt like a spark of hope for rebuilding their dreams."

Kabir helped make sure people got the support they needed—organizing field visits, gathering information, and helping deliver cash and training where it mattered most.

Kabir recalls one moment vividly, when he met a teenage boy on a remote island in Bhola district, while he was distributing seeds and fertilizers to those affected by the cyclone. "He told me that planting vegetables in their courtyard could support their household food needs for at least six months, reducing costs and allowing them to save money. I also learned that he wanted to become a marine engineer one day. That gave me a lot of inspiration on the resilience and aspirations of local communities," he said.

"Volunteering with FAO has strengthened my empathy and sense of responsibility towards marginalized communities," says Kabir. For him, being part of FAO's 80-year legacy is a deep source of pride and the beginning of a lifelong mission.



Fiza Mazhar

FROM PAKISTAN FLOODS TO TIMOR-LESTE’S HILLSIDES



Fiza Mazhar (centre, chairing the meeting), UN Volunteer Programme Support Officer with UNDP Timor-Leste, held a team meeting to discuss the annual work plan. [UNDP, 2024]

In 2022, Pakistan was hit by one of the most devastating floods in its history: one third of the country went underwater, affecting over 33 million people, with millions displaced and livelihoods swept away.

Fiza Mazhar, then 34, was at that time on the frontlines with FAO, working as a Humanitarian and Resilience Officer in Islamabad. She supported the organization's emergency agriculture response across Balochistan and Sindh, two of the hardest-hit provinces. Her focus—getting farming tools and livestock to communities, helping people start over after losing nearly everything.

The experience was a turning point. Fiza later joined UNDP in Timor-Leste as an international UN Volunteer supporting disaster resilience projects.

Reflecting on her journey, Fiza finds gratitude in being able to contribute to communities and playing a meaningful role in their recovery and development: “Although I worked on multiple projects with the United Nations and other international organizations in the past, the spirit of giving back to society and helping people in need motivated me to become a UN Volunteer,” she said.

## Elie Ndjeder

“BECAUSE I CARE!”

### A UN VOLUNTEER'S COMMITMENT TO HUMANITY



*Elie Ndjeder was a UN Volunteer Operations Associate with FAO in Chad. [UNV, 2021]*

My name is Elie Ndjeder, and I served as an Operations Assistant with FAO in Chad, my home country. I was responsible for supporting the financial management and monitoring of FAO projects—ensuring they stayed on schedule and within budget. In short, I made sure everything ran smoothly from both operational and financial perspectives.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, my role as a UN Volunteer took on added significance. I helped support vulnerable groups who were most at risk. One moment that stands out was when we distributed face masks to high school students, ensuring each candidate had at least one mask before sitting their exams.

What mattered most to me was making sure that assistance reached communities in time, and that every project delivered real, tangible results. To me, this is how we build peace and social cohesion.

I chose to become a UN Volunteer because I believe in development and peace—and I saw it as an opportunity to grow, both professionally and personally. Volunteering, for me, is a commitment: it means offering your time, energy and skills in service of the community.

*“UN Volunteers bring three unique strengths to FAO’s work: community trust, agility and compassion. They serve as the critical last-mile connectors between humanitarian aid and affected people.”*



*Azzizun Nahar (right), Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist at FAO, interacts with a community member following Cyclone Remal emergency response in Bangladesh. [FAO, 2024]*



Azzizun Nahar (Tania)

## SUPPORTING CYCLONE REMAL'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN BANGLADESH

77

For Azzizun Nahar (Tania) every emergency response is also an opportunity to learn. As Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist at FAO Bangladesh, she turns raw data into smarter, faster, community-driven action. “I make sure that we also learn from what we do—documenting good practices and using data to improve our responses,” she explains.

A cornerstone of her work is overseeing the selection of beneficiaries—a task she describes as “the most critical and accountable” in any humanitarian operation. “Ensuring that aid goes to those who need it the most is a responsibility I take very seriously,” she emphasizes.

Following Cyclone Remal’s devastation across coastal Bangladesh in 2024, Tania supported FAO’s emergency response, tracking outcomes and guiding recovery efforts through evidence. But she wasn’t doing it alone. “I had the privilege of supervising UN Community Volunteers during our response,” Tania shares. “Their familiarity with local contexts enables them to act quickly and effectively. They also enhance accountability and promote inclusion in our field operations.”

Having grown up in a country shaped by climate shocks, Tania witnessed first-hand how timely support can restore not just livelihoods, but dignity. That’s why at the core of her work is a commitment to resilience and accountability. “My job is about ensuring our programmes are based on evidence, timely and grounded in the realities of the people we serve,” she says. “That inspired me to dedicate my work to resilience-building and food security.”

## Alisher Narizov

# ENSURING AID REACHES PEOPLE IN NEED IN YEMEN'S HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

When Alisher Nazirov arrived in Yemen as a UN Volunteer with FAO, he brought with him over 15 years of experience from the Republic of Tajikistan, having worked with WFP, FAO and UNDP. But nothing could fully prepare him for the complexities of operating in what the UN has called the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Joining FAO at the end of 2017, Alisher took on a critical task: strengthening monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems to ensure aid reached those who needed it most. "My assignment coincided with expanding the M&E team and establishing a sound M&E system under my supervision," he shared.

In just six months, the team grew from one national officer to five, strategically deployed in Aden, Hodeida and Sana'a. "It was an exciting and challenging job given the emergency context and the desire to contribute as much as possible in reaching out to people in need efficiently and effectively," he said.

For Alisher, the experience affirmed the impact of UN Volunteers in the field. "I hope there are more UN Volunteer specialists involved in FAO activities, which definitely adds value to the success of its mission around the globe."



*Alisher Nazirov, from the Republic of Tajikistan, was a UN Volunteer Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist with FAO Yemen. [FAO/Alisher Nazirov, 2017]*

## Rana Ryan

# SUPPORTING COVID-19 RESPONSE—FROM CAIRO TO THE WORLD

During crises like COVID-19, FAO strengthened social protection systems to help vulnerable communities safeguard their livelihoods and access essential services. Programmes like Takafol 2 in Jordan, led by the National Aid Fund with support from FAO, the World Bank and other UN partners, were launched to support families below the poverty line through targeted cash transfers and coordinated recovery efforts.

As an Online Volunteer based in Cairo, Rana Ryan contributed to the global pandemic response by supporting UNDP Brazil and FAO Jordan research teams. She conducted interviews with stakeholders about digital tools and social protection systems for rural communities in countries such as Argentina, Jordan and the Philippines. “It gave me a glimpse into how a programme emerged after the COVID-19 crisis, how intergovernmental partnerships take shape, and how outreach to rural beneficiaries is achieved.”

In addition, Rana supported FAO’s Evaluation Team by translating key global resources, such as the Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation, into Arabic, which made them more accessible to Arabic-speaking audiences.

“Even in a volunteer role,” she reflects, “being part of FAO’s legacy of advancing food security and inclusive development is incredibly meaningful.”



*Rana Ryan, Online Volunteer supported pandemic response with FAO.  
[Rana Ryan, 2025]*





2.6

## **EDUCATION**

SEEDS OF WISDOM:  
ADVOCATING,  
EDUCATING, EMPOWERING

Poonam Bista

FOOD SECURITY IN THE MOUNTAINS OF NEPAL



Poonam Bista, UN Volunteer Youth Engagement Associate with FAO in Nepal.  
[FAO, 2024]

Poonam Bista saw her UN Volunteer assignment with FAO Nepal as a turning point. “I recognised this platform as a unique opportunity to gain enriching experiences, collaborate with inspiring individuals, and create tangible impact at the community level.”

As Youth Engagement Associate, she contributed to strengthen agri-food systems, focusing on including young people, sharing information and making communication more effective. “What I enjoyed most was working with young people, being a passionate youth myself, it was incredibly energizing to witness their enthusiasm and fresh ideas.”

Food security, for her, is about having a stable and dignified life. Her work supported the livelihoods of mountain farmers, growing a deep appreciation for FAO’s work in that area. “I also deeply valued our work in the mountainous regions of Nepal: embracing their natural beauty, reaching often-overlooked communities, and helping uplift the mountain economy through inclusive, economy-enhancing interventions.”

Over six months, Poonam stepped into her role with growing confidence, honing her coordination skills along the way. “It guided my career choices—reinforcing my dedication to working in the development sector,” she shared.

As FAO celebrates 80 years, Poonam reflects on the values that inspire her. “It felt incredible to contribute, even in small ways. Being part of that mission filled me with pride, purpose and lasting inspiration.”



# Milagros Flores

## EDITING FOR CHANGE: SUPPORTING FAO AS AN ONLINE VOLUNTEER



Milagros Flores is an Online Volunteer from Argentina. [Milagros Flores, 2025]

I've always enjoyed volunteering and wanted to share my knowledge in real-world settings. Becoming an Online Volunteer felt like a meaningful way to contribute to global sustainable development efforts.

I contributed as a proofreader, ensuring clarity, accuracy and consistency in line with FAO's style guide. I especially enjoyed immersing myself in the vocabulary and tone used across the UN system—it was a great opportunity to learn more about FAO's work and the challenges it addresses.

Through this, I gained deeper insight into food security—how it's tied to health, education, dignity and opportunity. It's something many take for granted, yet it reflects wider social inequalities. Addressing it means going to the root causes.

One thing that stood out during my experience was how coordinators were incredibly supportive throughout the process. It was smooth and well organized, and I learned not only from the content but also from the team's collaborative, purposeful approach.

This role strengthened my editing skills while grounding me in the values of service, inclusion and cooperation.

Contributing to FAO's legacy, even in a small way, was a powerful step in my journey to use communication to support global change.

## INSPIRATION IN ACTION TO SUPPORT LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES IN SRI LANKA

Hiruni, Sithmi, Yumna and Tharudini are four young women who spent months knocking on doors and talking with families in low-income neighbourhoods of Colombo. As UN Community Volunteers, they helped community members grow food at home, learn about their health and the challenges they face.

They were part of a joint project led by FAO, UNFPA, UNDP and UNV, focused on supporting women and young people through home gardening and health education. From October 2022 to February 2023, the project reached 12 communities across Sri Lanka, supporting nearly 2,000 families.

Hiruni, Sithmi, Yumna and Tharudini worked directly with communities. Together, they organized sessions on sexual and reproductive health and distributed farming kits, food packs, and maternity and menstrual kits.

Through their close interactions with community members, they built trust and created safe spaces for conversation. These UN Volunteers were inspiration in action on the ground.



*UN Community Volunteers Peer Educators organize the distribution of agriculture support kits in Sri Lanka. [UNV, 2023]*



*(From left to right) Sithmi Attanayake, UN Community Volunteer; Tharudini Ekneligoda, V-Force Volunteer; Yumna Zawahir, UN Community Volunteer; and Hiruni Weerasinghe, UN Community Volunteer in Sri Lanka. [UNV, 2023]*

## Sithmi Attanayake



*Sithmi Attanayake, UN Community Volunteer, spoke at an agriculture support session for urban home gardening in Sri Lanka. [UNV, 2023]*

Sithmi Attanayake served community members in the urban areas of Colombo, namely Nagaswatte and Kirula D4. She also organized awareness sessions on sexual and reproductive health for women and youth. Actively reaching out on issues of stigma like gender-based violence, Sithmi expanded support for women in the form of sisterhood circles where participants opened up and spoke with one voice.

## Tharudini Ekneligoda



*Tharudini Ekneligoda, V-Force Volunteer (centre), distributed lunch packs at the Youth Forum in Sri Lanka. [UNV, 2023]*

The service of UN Community Volunteers was complemented by 70 V-Force Volunteers. Tharudini Ekneligoda was one of them, who supported the low-income communities by providing them with lunch packs. Along with the UN Community Volunteer Peer Educators, she visited Wellawatta communities in Colombo to evaluate the progress of home gardens.



## Hiruni Weerasinghe



*Hiruni Weerasinghe, UN Community Volunteer (centre), supported community members to fill out a survey on home gardening, sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence in Sri Lanka. [UNV, 2023]*

Hiruni Weerasinghe supported families in Borella 33A and 33C, one of the largest suburbs in the city. She guided women on setting up home gardens, distributed hygiene and sanitary supplies, and led candid conversations about health, nutrition and gender-based violence. “Directly or indirectly, the local community has also been a part of my growth as a person,” she reflected. “The year 2022 was a difficult period for us seeing the socio-economic crisis in the country. I strongly believed that this was the moment to rise to the occasion and give my best to help the communities in need.”

## Yumna Zawahir



*Yumna Zawahir, UN Community Volunteer (centre), assisted an awareness session on sexual and reproductive health in Sri Lanka. [UNV, 2023]*

Yumna Zawahir explained how assisting community members was an emotionally uplifting experience for her: "Volunteering allows you to change people's lives, including your own. Working on this project gave me the satisfaction of playing a role in someone's life, helping people who may not be able to help themselves. It gave me the opportunity to give back to my community while developing important social skills and gaining valuable work experience."

## Gopi Chandra Kharel

### GIVING VOICE TO FAO’S WORK IN THE GAMBIA



*Gopi Kharel (right), UN Volunteer Communications Specialist with FAO in The Gambia, capturing success stories for advocacy and communications. [UNV, 2021]*

Since 1979, FAO has worked in The Gambia implementing hundreds of projects to improve food production, nutrition and support for farmers. One of the people who helped share this work with the public was Gopi Chandra Kharel, a UN Volunteer from Bhutan.

As a Communications Specialist, Gopi made sure that people knew what FAO was doing in the country. “I was humbled to make a significant contribution to improving our message by leveraging different communication channels and methods to share key messages and success stories with our audience,” he reflected.

Since joining, Gopi enhanced FAO’s communications and presence across platforms. He revamped the country website, established regular media partnerships and strengthened digital engagement. Thanks to his efforts, FAO Gambia’s Facebook page reached over 2,000 followers, and media coverage increased to three or four features each month.

Gopi’s work helped renew public and institutional interest in FAO’s mission. By making technical work more accessible and human-centred, he supported national food security goals, ensuring the stories behind the data reached those who needed to hear them.



## Tasneem Kibria

### “IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT HUNGER, IT'S ABOUT HOPE.”



Tasneem Kibria, UN Volunteer Communications Officer with FAO in Dhaka. [UNV, 2025]

From rescuing injured animals as a child to organizing aid for flood-affected communities, Kibria's path to becoming a UN Volunteer has always been guided by empathy and purpose. “I’ve always felt deeply,” she says. “Helping just felt right.”

Her journey began with Scouts, where service became second nature. That passion deepened during an international exchange year, she spent weekends volunteering in women's shelters and at community events. Inspired by her father's love of nature and her mother's dedication to education, she chose to stay in Bangladesh to give back. “When you lead with purpose, others who share your values join you,” she reflects.

Today, at FAO Bangladesh, where she works as a UN Volunteer Communications Officer, Tasneem uses storytelling to bring forth voices that often go unheard. “I also love creating content that is practical and empowering.” Her video series on homestead gardening and nutrient-preserving cooking is now helping rural families improve nutrition and food access.

For Tasneem, food security is personal: she grew up hearing her grandfather's stories of farming under harsh conditions and her parents' memories of wartime food scarcity. “It's not just about hunger,” she says. “It's about dignity, sustainability and hope.”

*“Being a UN Volunteer has taught me the importance of listening, not just to communities or colleagues, but also to myself. I have learned to slow down and really hear what people are saying, even when it's not spoken out loud.”*

N’Charick Mafinè Ouattara

**BREAKING BARRIERS AND BUILDING BRIDGES:  
VOLUNTEERING ONLINE FOR FOOD SECURITY**

For N’Charick, becoming an Online Volunteer started with a passion: humanitarian work. Driven by the idea of helping others by breaking language barriers, she saw volunteering with FAO as a powerful way to contribute.

Her journey began virtually from her home country, Burkina Faso, from where she supported FAO Italy with the translation of Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation from English to French. "It was technical," she recalls. "But it allowed me to learn more about UN terminology and work and it was truly rewarding."

During her two years as an Online Volunteer, one memorable project brought her together with translators from Chad, the United States of America, and beyond, collaborating to translate an entire international forum. "We learned a lot from each other and expanded our networks," she shares.

Today, as a professional translator and interpreter, N’Charick credits her UNV experience for sharpening her skills and shaping her global mindset. "Being a UN Volunteer helped me get where I am today, professionally speaking. I also learned (and I continue to learn) so much from colleagues and mentors with extensive UN experience. Personally, this journey has given me hope and strength for the future."

*N’Charick Mafinè Ouattara, Online Volunteer from Burkina Faso, supported FAO Italy.  
[N’Charick Mafinè Ouattara, 2025]*



## Christian Ngabonziza

### FROM THE FIELD TO THE FEED: STORIES THAT MATTER

For Christian Ngabonziza, being a UN Volunteer with FAO Rwanda is about more than writing updates or managing social media; it's about connecting technical work with real-life impact. "It's fulfilling to see how our communication efforts help support food security and climate-resilient agriculture."

A graduate in conservation agriculture, Christian brings both heart and knowledge to his role as Communications Assistant. "Food security isn't just about access, it's about ensuring that it's nutritious, sustainably produced and equitably distributed," he shares. "I deeply care about food security because it touches every aspect of people's lives, especially in rural communities."

A highlight of his assignment was a national training with fellow volunteers: "We exchanged experiences, and the sense of community and shared purpose made a lasting impression on me."

Working with FAO honed Christian's communication and storytelling skills—and deepened his belief in the power of collaboration and inclusion. Now, his path forward is clear. "This experience has guided my career goals toward making a long-term impact in areas like food systems, climate change and community resilience." As FAO marks 80 years, Christian feels honoured to be part of its legacy: "It motivates me to contribute even more."



*Christian Ngabonziza, UN Volunteer  
Communications Assistant with FAO Rwanda.  
[Christian Ngabonziza, 2025]*



## Carolina Rengifo

### ONLINE VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTES TO FAO PERU'S PIXELS WITH PURPOSE



*Carolina Rengifo, Online Volunteer from Ecuador.  
[Carolina Rengifo, 2025]*

“As a Systems Engineer and Data Analyst, I’ve always believed that technology and information, when used ethically and purposefully, can empower people and drive development,” explains Carolina Rengifo, an Online Volunteer with FAO Peru.

Carolina designed and maintained a user-friendly, informative website to communicate FAO Peru’s initiatives to a wide audience. She focused on clear structure, easy navigation and accessibility. “What I enjoyed the most was knowing that my work had purpose beyond aesthetics. Every design decision I made contributed to better communication of important issues like food security, sustainable agriculture and rural development.”

One of the most memorable moments was when the site went live. “Seeing the platform fully functional and being used by people across different countries was incredibly fulfilling. What made it unforgettable was the feedback we received: colleagues mentioned how easy it was to find key resources.”

The experience also reshaped Carolina’s perspective. She now seeks work that creates impact, encourages connection and contributes to something greater. “It reinforced values that are now central to how I live and work: empathy, service and a commitment to creating positive change.”

# Felipe Sabogal

## PROOFREADING FOR PURPOSE: AN ONLINE VOLUNTEER'S SUPPORT TO FAO



Felipe Sabogal, Online Volunteer with FAO in Colombia. [Felipe Sabogal, 2025]

Felipe Sabogal, a communications professional from Colombia, supported FAO as an Online Volunteer, translating and proofreading the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub website. “This is a task I really enjoyed, and I feel proud to have supported FAO’s mission through my skills.”

Felipe has a strong history of volunteer service. “UNV’s commitment to peace and development through the promotion of volunteerism strongly aligned with both my personal values and my professional experience,” he said. He previously served with UN Women in Colombia for two years and worked with WFP, contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger. “Currently, this is a challenge in my country.”

His two-week assignment with FAO may have been short, but it had a deep impact: “I appreciated seeing my work reflected in materials for high-level meetings and on FAO’s website.”

“The UNV experience was beneficial, both personally and professionally. I found what I wanted to do for the rest of my life and learned that even the smallest task can contribute to a greater social impact.”

Nour Shehadeh

SHARING THOUGHTFUL WORDS  
TO MOVE THE WORLD FORWARD

“What made my experience with FAO memorable was the realization that my attention to detail would directly impact how UN guidance reached policymakers and practitioners across the Arab world,” says Nour Shehadeh, who served as an Online Volunteer with the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub.

She translated documents into Arabic, including one explaining how coalitions support food systems transformation and the Sustainable Development Goals. “What I enjoyed most was contributing to global food security efforts by making critical UN knowledge accessible to Arabic-speaking stakeholders,” she explained. “I also appreciated collaborating with a team to ensure accuracy and clarity in the translation.”

The experience deepened her appreciation for how precise language can advance international development, even from afar. “It reinforced why I volunteer: to use my skills where they’re needed most, no matter how small the role may seem.”

It also left a lasting impression on her: “Volunteering became part of my identity—I’m currently serving as a UN Volunteer Contributions Associate Officer with UNRWA. These experiences taught me that meaningful change often happens through consistent, behind-the-scenes contributions.”

Whether translating, proofreading or offering quiet support, Nour’s work reflects a deep commitment to service, and a belief that words, thoughtfully shared, can move the world forward.



Nour Shehadeh, Online Volunteer from Jordan.  
[Nour Shehadeh, 2025]



## Michiko Terada

### FROM GARDEN TO CLASSROOM: SHAPING HEALTH AWARENESS IN NIGERIA

In Abuja, Nigeria, school gardens are becoming classrooms for healthier futures. Michiko Terada joined FAO Nigeria's School Gardening for Better Nutrition project as a UN Volunteer Community Development Expert. She supervised training activities for teachers and students and evaluated how gardening could improve young people's understanding of food and health.

"I believe that providing youth with a platform and connecting their talents and abilities is key to youth empowerment," says Michiko. She led sessions with teachers from across Nigeria, encouraging them to share regional food knowledge and cooking methods. "When I also shared information about unique foods from Japan, such as fermented soybeans, participants were so enthusiastic that they even brought plants with them to explain their culinary use in more detail."

For Michiko, food is more than nutrition; it's a bridge between identity and understanding. "Knowing different foods can lead to recognition of one's own culture and identity and help students strengthen their cross-cultural understanding," she explained.

Through her work with FAO, Michiko supported young people with knowledge, confidence and curiosity for them to build healthier futures for themselves and their communities.



*Michiko Terada (right), UN Volunteer Community Development Expert, supported a School Garden project in Nigeria with FAO. [FAO/Emmanuel Kihale, 2021]*



2.7

**ANIMAL FARMING  
AND LIVESTOCK**  
MANAGING THE HERD,  
PROTECTING THE EARTH





*Solomon Bekele (centre), UN Volunteer Pastoralist Literacy and Education Specialist, served with UNESCO in Juba, South Sudan. Here, he led a discussion meeting with community members on the benefits of education at Aliet/Warabyie cattle camp. [Swokiri Jams, 2016]*

## Solomon Bekele

# SUPPORTING LIVESTOCK LIVELIHOODS THROUGH EDUCATION IN SOUTH SUDAN

99

In South Sudan, FAO and UNESCO, backed by the European Union, supported pastoralist communities to strengthen livestock-based livelihoods. By bringing knowledge and skills directly into cattle camps, the project helped herding families adapt to changing conditions.

Solomon Bekele, a UN Volunteer with UNESCO, managed the education component and worked closely with FAO and government partners. "I gained a lot of experience relating to professional aspects, as well as working with people having diverse areas of expertise, cultures, backgrounds and experiences."

Local and county facilitators trained through the project now deliver sessions in the camps, covering literacy, numeracy and life skills alongside livestock-related knowledge. Materials and technical support ensured the curriculum met the needs of mobile communities.

With new skills and improved practices, pastoralist families saw more diverse livelihoods and better nutrition. By linking traditional herding with practical education and support, the initiative helped build stronger, more resilient rural lives.

## Songling Chen

### SAFEGUARDING LIVELIHOODS THROUGH ANIMAL HEALTH

My six-month UN Volunteer assignment at the Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases of FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific focused on supporting value chain analysis for animal disease management. It was an eye-opening, enriching and challenging experience—one that offered continuous learning and personal growth.

Over these months, I gained deeper insight into how the centre contributes to disease control and public health across Asia-Pacific countries. It also gave me a new lens through which I could view international development. In this region, animals such as hogs and poultry are vital sources of nutrition and raising them continues to support many underprivileged families. Efforts to eliminate animal diseases not only improve public and animal health but also help protect farmers' livelihoods.

What I appreciated most about my assignment was the project's multi-disciplinary nature and the team's openness. I was trusted to take the lead on tasks, including one of my major responsibilities: exploring how to integrate gender into animal disease projects.

More importantly, I gained valuable experience working with experts and colleagues from different country teams. Their support, along with my supervisor's guidance, made all the difference. I feel incredibly lucky and grateful to have been part of such a fun, energetic and supportive team!



*Songling Chen (middle), UN University Volunteer from Hong Kong University, at FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, in Bangkok, Thailand. [FAO, 2019]*



## Sugyeong Kang

### **PAGES OF PROGRESS:** A CATALOGUE HELPS MONGOLIAN HERDERS ACCESS BETTER TECHNIQUES

In Mongolia, herding has long been a way of life. But with climate change, seasonal income, and limited access to resources, more people are giving up herding each year and moving to Ulaanbaatar, the capital. The Support to Employment Creation in Mongolia project was led by FAO with national partners and supported by the European Union. It aimed at bringing new opportunities to rural communities by promoting quality jobs in livestock and agriculture.

Sugyeong Kang, UN Volunteer from the Republic of Korea, joined the initiative as Junior Project Assistant. "I worked on a catalogue book, which introduced labour-saving techniques and contact details to herders and small and medium enterprise owners," she explained. "Since the biggest difficulty for herders and owners was the lack of access to proper techniques, the catalogue book provided them with better access to such information."

Field visits were a highlight of her assignment. "On the first field trip to Dundgobi, I stayed with a herder family and helped them cook, milk the animals, collect horses and experienced the real nomadic life. It was a big honour to listen to their story in person," she shared. "The project brought hope to rural areas and herders so that the true beauty of Mongolia could remain intact."



*Sugyeong Kang, UN Volunteer Junior Project Assistant at FAO Kazakhstan, supported a project to promote jobs in livestock and agriculture. [Sugyeong Kang, 2017]*

## Esi Mawuena Christon-Quao

### SMART FARMING THROUGH A SIMPLE DIGITAL SOLUTION



*Esi Mawuena Christon-Quao (centre), UN Volunteer Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist with FAO, visited the fish landing site in Pirang during International Volunteer Day 2021 activities. [UNV, 2021]*

Esi Mawuena Christon-Quao, UN Volunteer Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist with FAO in The Gambia, contributed to a wide range of initiatives that supported agriculture, nutrition, natural resources and rural livelihoods. Her work spanned 21 projects, from livestock and fisheries to food security and forestry, each aligned with FAO's mandate to improve agricultural systems and strengthen national capacities.

One project Esi holds close is a community poultry initiative that reached 30 communities across six districts. While conducting a routine field visit, she noticed an opportunity to enhance how farmers shared knowledge. Many had innovative practices but few platforms to exchange ideas. Esi proposed a simple yet effective solution: a WhatsApp group for poultry farmers. The group connected over 70 members who regularly share updates, questions and peer support, a self-organized network that continues to grow today.

"I saw firsthand the changes that FAO's support made to the lives of people and communities," she said. "I am proud to say that I played a role in the changes."

Her assignment also expanded her professional skills and opened new collaborations with other UN agencies. For Esi, being part of FAO's work meant contributing to something bigger, sustainable progress, driven by local insight and teamwork.

## Seunghyo Park

### RESPONDING TO THE DZUD IN MONGOLIA



*Seunghyo Park, UN Volunteer Research Assistant with FAO Mongolia, supported dzud response in disaster-affected areas. [FAO, 2016]*

I worked at FAO Mongolia as a UN Volunteer Research Assistant. I assisted with various research projects on climate change trends and food security issues in different parts of Mongolia.

One of the activities I participated in was the dzud response, a severe winter disaster. This was in response to emergency needs in the disaster-affected areas of Mongolia. I helped package animal welfare kits that consisted of multivitamins, minerals, fodder crops and other supplements needed for animals.

One of the best experiences of working at FAO was interacting with local communities. During a field visit, I was able to understand what was most needed in the affected rural areas to address livestock challenges. I also gave a presentation to university students on FAO's activities in Mongolia and my experience as a UN Volunteer. I was glad to see their interest in volunteering.

Back in my university days, I did not clearly understand what volunteerism meant. Through UNV, I learned it is not just about serving others but about becoming a part of the community.

I am grateful for this experience—and my time in Mongolia's vast steppe under its clear blue sky—, it helped me grow into a more open and positive person.





# 03

## ROOTED IN PURPOSE UN VOLUNTEERS BECOME FAO CHAMPIONS

Sylvie Abong · Firoj Ahmed · Jaspar Albers · Wafaa AlRamadneh · Sithmi Attanayake · Mohamed Aw-Dahir · Solomon Bekele · Poonam Bista · **Maria Rita Borba** · Larissa Bruun · Melody Chali · Songling Chen · Barbora Chmelova · **Kyu Won Choi** · Sapana Dawadi · Tiruneh Debena · Sana Diatta · Tharudini Ekneligoda · Kim Eunah · Amadou Fall · Iraj Fekrazad · Milagros Flores · Beatriz García · Chiara Guini · **Oshan M. Gunathilake** · **Sergio Hinojosa** · Enrique Isagon · Yuno Ito · Mr. Yoshikazu Ito · Annette Jaitner · Yunji Jung · Fatoumata Ka · Anamul Kabir · Sugyeong Kang · Rinat Kapev · Gopi Chandra Kharel · Tasneem Kibria · Shoko Kinoshita · Jaakko Korpela · Matungulu Kutombo · Seongeun Lee · N'Charick Mañinè Ouattara · Théo Martin · Esi Mawuena Christon-Quao · Fiza Mazhar · Jerome Montague · Jiyoung Nam · Elie Ndjeder · Azzizun Nahar (Tania) · Alisher Narizov · Christian Ngabonziza · Abdoulahat Ngom · **Kamila Novak** · **Terumi Onuma** · Seunghyo Park · Eda Pütgöl · Rana Ryan · Carolina Rengifo · Teija Reyes · Masayo Rossignoli · Felipe Sabogal · Makhfousse Sarr · Carla Schmid · Anita Shabani · Nour Shehadeh · Ken Shimizu · Hiroaki Sonoda · Zdeněk Stejskal · Axel Strömberg · Agnes Temba · Michiko Terada · Gael Thiébault · **Branislav Trudić** · Davide Valentí · Hiruni Weerasinghe · Thiago Resende Xavier · Serge Yelemou · Yumna Zawahir · Andrei Zhileikin





Maria Rita Borba (centre), former UN Volunteer, is now staff at FAO.  
[Maria Rita Borba, 2019]



Maria Rita Borba

## FROM UN VOLUNTEER TO SAFEGUARDS SPECIALIST WITH FAO

107

Maria Rita Borba always aspired to combine her background in Geography and International Relations with a career in international development—but coming from a family without global exposure, she wasn't sure how to begin. Discovering UNV was a turning point. "It was like an 'ah-ha' moment," she recalls. "I was finally able to put into practice what years of field experience in my home country had taught me, in a different context."

From 2018 to 2019, Maria Rita served as a UN Volunteer Associate Livelihoods Officer with UNHCR in northern Mozambique. Working with refugees in Maratane camp, she helped coordinate a multi-agency programme to expand sustainable livelihood opportunities. It was also where she first collaborated with FAO teams. "The people I worked with and for—the refugees, UN colleagues, and local partners—left a lasting mark on me," she says.

That experience paved the way to her current role at FAO headquarters in Rome, where she now works as a Natural Resources Officer specializing in social safeguards. "It taught me valuable skills about meaningful dialogue and collaboration," she says. "Now I get to support global teams in doing just that."

Kyu Won Choi

## FROM UN VOLUNTEER TO PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT CONSULTANT WITH FAO

Kyu Won Choi's journey as a UN Volunteer with FAO drew a deep concern for the future of agrifood systems. Alarmed by the growing dominance of petroleum-based industrial farming, she began working directly with smallholder and organic farmers in the Republic of Korea, founding cooperatives and launching digital marketplaces to support their livelihoods.

From that experience emerged a guiding principle: "the unity of smallholder farmers will be key to sustainability." Her drive to explore this further led her to FAO's Regional Office for Africa, in Ghana, and later to FAO Timor-Leste as a UN Volunteer, where she joined the Green Jobs for Rural Youth Employment project. There, she supported the formation of farmer cooperatives, youth-led agribusinesses, and policy work on green employment.

A few moments stood out for her: "After a sustainable livestock management training in Bacau municipality, young farmers invited me to dinner and prepared a goat from their farm. I also recall a moment in Manufahi municipality, where a young farmer had established an integrated farm using seed money and training support from FAO. During my visit, he proudly shared fresh cucumbers from his harvest. Their unconditional generosity made me feel truly connected with the community and inspired me to delve deeper into their language and culture."

Today, Kyu continues to draw from her UNV experience. "My time in the field taught me to design farmer-centred programmes that respond to real needs." Now part of FAO's staff, she continues to champion food sovereignty—working from the ground up to build the capacities of farmers and expand local food systems.

*Former UN Volunteer, Kyu Won Choi, while photographing local farmers in Timor-Leste, "One of them put a monkey on my head," she shared. Kyu is now staff at FAO. [Kyu Won, 2023]*





## Oshan M. Gunathilake

### FROM UN VOLUNTEER TO SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST WITH FAO

Before joining the UN, Oshan M. Gunathilake was deeply rooted in grassroots volunteerism across Sri Lanka—supporting rural schools, working on sustainable livelihoods, and encouraging youth networks. His four-year journey as a UN Volunteer took him from transitional justice and reconciliation to youth innovation and community engagement, working with UNDP, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, and United Nations Peacebuilding Fund.

"Becoming a UN Volunteer allowed me to get an idea of how local realities may differ from theoretical designs," he says. "It reshaped how I view development: not as something done to communities, but something co-created with them through dialogue, participation, and sustained solidarity."

A defining moment came while documenting stories of conflict-affected families. "It wasn't just a story to document. It was a cry for truth, for recognition, for peace," he recalls. Moments like these, and the countless programme participants who still greet him with a heartfelt "Aiya [brother], do you remember me?", affirmed his commitment to community-driven change.

Today, Oshan works as a School Engagement Specialist with FAO, supporting the Circular Economy in the Food Sector project, in Sri Lanka. "I see education not just as teaching, but as a space to nurture ethical leadership, critical thinking and care for our shared future."

Reflecting on FAO's 80th anniversary, he adds: "It represents a powerful bridge between community development, sustainable transformation and innovation."



*Oshan M. Gunathilake, former UN Volunteer, is now a staff member at FAO.  
[Oshan M. Gunathilake, 2022]*

## Sergio Hinojosa

### FROM UN VOLUNTEER TO NATURAL RESOURCES OFFICER WITH FAO

Climate change is here, but champions like Sergio Hinojosa are helping FAO fight back. Life's path took this Bolivian environmental engineer from Chile to Italy, changing continents but staying true to his mission: helping communities build resilience against climate change.

Sergio began his journey with FAO as a UN Volunteer in 2017, supporting the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, before moving to the Climate and Environment Division in Rome. He played a key role in developing a strong Green Climate Fund (GCF) portfolio across 15 Latin American countries, backing projects like Reclima in El Salvador and Proeza in Paraguay, initiatives that bring climate-resilient agriculture to over 120,000 people.

Today, seven years on, Sergio serves as a Natural Resources Officer at FAO. He recently celebrated a major milestone: the achievement of 100 GCF readiness projects under FAO's coordination. "Together, we can make a meaningful impact!" Sergio shared as he and his team supported 77 countries to access these grants for initiatives that shape policies and plans for climate-resilient agrifood systems.

111



*Sergio Hinojosa, who worked as a UN Volunteer with FAO in 2017 in Chile, is currently a Natural Resources Officer with FAO Italy. [FAO, 2019]*

Kamila Novak

## FROM UN VOLUNTEER TO REGIONAL MONITORING AND PLANNING SPECIALIST WITH FAO

Before joining the UN system, Kamila Novak built a career in corporate sustainability and impact assessment, working at the intersection of academia and the private sector. Kamila re-entered the international development space in 2020, when she took on an assignment as a UN Volunteer International Specialist with FAO in Sarajevo.

Joining a small, agile country team without formal FAO representation, she embraced a dynamic and multifaceted role—one that demanded adaptability, initiative, and a deep commitment to impact. She supported a range of strategic and operational areas, from drafting country programming frameworks to helping secure funding from major donors. “I was always supported and trusted with exploring new responsibilities and new functional areas,” she explains.

Now serving as Regional Monitoring and Planning Specialist at FAO’s Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, Kamila continues to apply her skills as a regional focal point for strategic planning and results monitoring. “I try to always maintain that ‘country-office’ lens by working towards the overall objective of supporting the country teams in a timely and most efficient manner,” she adds.

Reflecting on FAO’s 80th anniversary, she notes: “This anniversary is a reminder that real change takes time, dedication, and collaboration. The UN community is currently going through unprecedented pressure requiring us to stay relevant and fit-for-purpose, and results monitoring is key to demonstrating the organizational impact to external donor and government partners.”

*Kamila Novak, former UN Volunteer, is now an international consultant at FAO. [Kamila Novak, 2025]*











Terumi Onuma

## FROM UN VOLUNTEER TO RESPONSIBLE AGRICULTURAL INVESTMENTS OFFICER WITH FAO

When Terumi Onuma first heard about the United Nations Volunteers, she was serving as a press attaché at the Japanese Embassy in Paris. A conversation with a friend at UNESCO sparked her interest in the opportunity and led her to apply for a UNV assignment in Dakar, Senegal. Eager to test her skills in a new context, she became the first Strategic Communications and Knowledge Management Officer at the UNV Regional Office for West and Central Africa.

There, Terumi developed a strategy covering 24 countries, built strong partnerships with agencies like UNIC, UNHCR and UN Women, and helped raise UNV's visibility across the region. "Being the only Asian communications officer in the region was intimidating," she recalls, "Visibility became advocacy: it was a chance to show the diversity and expertise UN Volunteers bring to the UN system."

Her time as a volunteer marked a shift from bilateral diplomacy to multilateral development. Today, Terumi is a Responsible Agricultural Investments Officer at FAO, working on projects across Southeast Asia and West Africa. "My work is about promoting responsible agricultural investments and recognizing their value—kinder to people and the planet," she adds. "In Mauritania, for example, we're aiming to document how this can contribute to social cohesion. I enjoy working across very different regions and bridging high-level policy with grassroots realities: from farmers and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), to parliamentarians."

115



Branislav Trudić

FROM UN VOLUNTEER TO FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES SPECIALIST WITH FAO

“Volunteering for UNV and later working for FAO changed my life completely—both professionally and personally,” says Branislav Trudić. As a UN Volunteer in Rome, he contributed to the Second Global Report on Forest Genetic Resources—an effort he later continued as a consultant, and one that became one of the proudest moments of his career. “This publication is considered as one of the bibles in this field,” he says. “Having my name included in it, it’s really something.”

Forest genetic resources, Branislav explains, refer to the favourable seeds, seedlings, and other reproductive material, new hybrids and clonal material originating from trees and woody species that can be used in reforestation and forest restoration. “They’re critical to how we rebuild forests and respond to climate change,” he notes.

From Serbia to FAO headquarters in Italy, his journey expanded not only his expertise but also his perspective. “I became more sensitive to different cultures and people and everything they bring with them,” he shares. “I feel more ready to work now in an international environment than ever before.”

Looking ahead, he hopes FAO stays grounded in its founding mission. “It was established for a good reason,” he reflects. “Reconnecting with that purpose would be amazing—especially to stay present in the lives of people who need it most.”





*Branislav Trudić, former UN Volunteer, served as Forest Genetic Resources Specialist at FAO in Italy.  
[Branislav Trudić, 2025]*









The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

**United Nations Volunteers (UNV)**

Headquarters  
Platz der Vereinten Nationen 1  
53113 Bonn, Germany

[www.unv.org](http://www.unv.org)

X: <https://x.com/unvolunteers>  
YouTube: [www.youtube.com/unv](http://www.youtube.com/unv)

---

© United Nations Volunteers (UNV), 2025  
Permission is required to reproduce any part of this publication.

Published by: External Relations and  
Communications Section, UNV  
Editor-in-Chief: Jennifer Stapper  
Writer and Researcher: Mercè Pau  
Copy Editor: Ayesha Khan  
Designed by: Phoenix Design Aid, Denmark

The book is available online at [www.unv.org](http://www.unv.org).

Printed on FSC™ certified paper with vegetable-based inks.  
The printed matter is recyclable.









