



UN VOLUNTEERS

in the Pacific

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NEWSLETTER

UN Volunteers in the Pacific

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We are inspiration in action



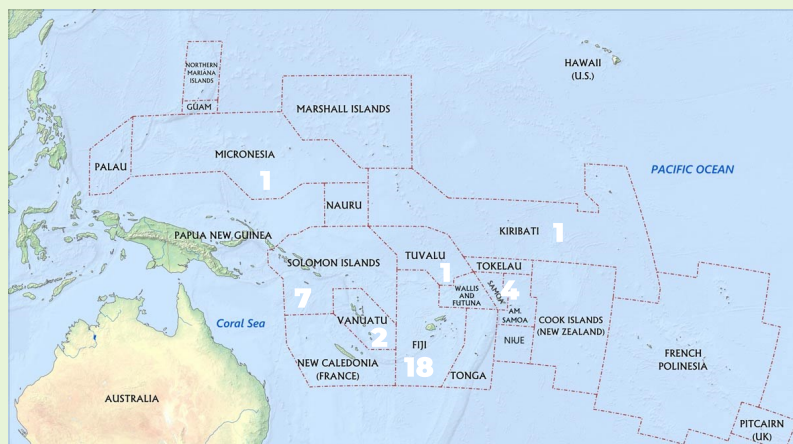
Introduction

About UNV in the Pacific



The UNV Field Unit is located in Suva and is integrated into the UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji. We promote and advocate for the recognition of volunteerism, and manage UN Volunteer assignments in 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Field Unit currently consists of a Programme Manager and an International UN Youth Volunteer in Communications and Partnerships. UNV is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

In 2019 from January to mid-July, a total of 43 UN Volunteers have served or are serving in the Pacific region, under both the UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji and Samoa Multi-Country Office. Another 30 recruitments are underway, including 11 Fully Funded assignments by Australia with priorities on UN Reform and Human Rights (including, but not limited to disability and gender equality). As of July, 19 volunteers are working with UNDP, nine with PFIP (UNCDF/UNDP), one with WHO, one with RCO, two with OCHA, one with UNCTAD, one with OHCHR — a total of 34 with the following geographical distribution:



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How UN Volunteers were involved



Climate Action Now: sharing the UN Secretary-General’s story in the Pacific by Will Seal

UN Volunteer and WHO Communications Officer Will Seal recently joined the UN Communications taskforce to support UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’s global climate action advocacy tour.

As a communications professional, the ‘other duties as required’ clause of your contract is used on a fairly regular basis. But, when asked to provide communications support to a visit by UN Secretary-General António Guterres to Fiji, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, it’s a bit beyond the norm.

Regarded as one of the most powerful figures on the planet, and bringing the full weight of the United Nations system, seeing the Secretary-General in action was impressive - particularly when his trip has one clear and overarching message: the need for immediate climate action.

As part of a multi-agency UN Pacific communications team, including seconded staff from the World Health Organization (me), UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office, we joined forces with colleagues from New York and further afield to help the Secretary-General share his message across the Pacific, and around the world.

The Pacific has a unique perspective on climate change. Pacific islands are one of the smallest contributors to emissions, yet they face many of the most pressing immediate and long-term impacts. From extreme weather events to increased rates of disease, negatively impacted lives and livelihoods, and damaged critical infrastructure, low-lying Pacific nations like Tuvalu and Fiji are truly on the front lines of the global climate emergency.

Beyond this, some face a truly existential threat to their very existence.

But, there are not only problems in the Pacific, there are also solutions — and tireless advocates working to overcome or mitigate these issues.

And this is exactly what Secretary-General Guterres was here to see, and share with the world.

Unsurprisingly, he doesn’t do this alone. Behind the scenes of such a major visit, UN and government staff work tirelessly to organize the myriad logistics of the 60+ meetings, activities and engagements the Secretary-General took part in during his week-long visit.

From engaging with youth climate advocates, to meeting a vast majority of Pacific island leaders. Learning from UNICEF-supported innovators working to tackle plastic pollution, to discussing the issues that climate change poses to health.



How UN Volunteers were involved

These wide-ranging activities require a communications team ensuring opportunities to talk to the media are in place, that lessons learned are shared, actions required highlighted, that multimedia is captured to bring these stories to life in traditional and new media, and the message is heard and amplified - along with plenty of other logistical tasks.

The result was exactly that. Millions were reached globally, and with the upcoming 2019 UN Climate Action Summit, millions more will hear the stories of those impacted, and living on the frontlines of a global climate emergency.

In the Pacific, these stories, impacts and solutions are largely not new – but every opportunity to share them on a global platform is one to be seized, particularly with the attention the UN's top figure brings.

While my role was a small one, alongside a wider team, it was thrilling to play a part in bringing a critically important visit like this one to life, and working to persuade others of the need for climate action now.

Will is a UN Volunteer and Suva-based Communications Officer with the World Health Organization's Division of Pacific Technical Support (DPS). Established in 2010 to provide tailored, timely support to the 21 Pacific island countries and areas in its area of responsibility, DPS's main office is in Suva, Fiji, with six other offices across the region.





Field trip and launch of the State of the World Volunteerism Report

UNV Executive Coordinator Olivier Adam and UNV Regional Manager for Asia-Pacific Shalina Miah visited Fiji and Samoa with the first in history of Field Unit high-level mission to the Pacific. The visit coincided with the International Volunteer Day (IVD) celebrations on day 5 December which Mr. Adam and Ms. Miah spent in Samoa. In Fiji, on day 29 of November the UNV Programme organized the soft launch of the State of the World Volunteerism Report and panel discussion on the volunteering for resilient communities.



Left: Dinner with UN Volunteers; top right: Launch of the State of the World Volunteerism report with the UN Resident Coordinator Mr. Sanaka Samarasinha and UNV Executive Coordinator Mr. Olivier Adam; bottom right: panel discussion with Vodafone ATH Fiji Foundation Executive Ms. Ambalika Kutty, UNV Regional Manager Ms. Shalina Miah, National Volunteering Steering Committee Chair Mr. Neil Maharaj (moderator), Pacific Disability Forum Deputy CEO Ms. Savina Nongebatu, Fiji Council of Social Services Executive Director Ms. Vani Vulaca.



Field trip and launch of the State of the World Volunteerism Report

As part of a week-long program, Mr. Adam and Ms. Miah were able to see first hand work done by the volunteers in the Pacific. A field visit was organized by the volunteers for Nasau village in Wainibuka, that was part of the UN Women Markets for Change project. UN Volunteers in Fiji worked closely, not only with villagers of Nasau, but market vendors and farmers from the 12 main municipal markets around Fiji and partners in agriculture to provide basic agricultural and financial literacy training and link the market vendors and farmers to various financial and social services. This is done through market business fairs organized by the UN Volunteers, or in the case for Nasau Village and other rural communities, bringing the services right to their door.

During the field visit, Mr. Adam and Ms. Miah were able to experience exactly that. They were awarded a traditional welcome by the village, after which the volunteers introduced a new microinsurance bundle to the farmers as well as a the new PacFarmer App. The app aims to make it easier for farmers and market vendors (middlemen) to connect and sell their produce. The UNV Head also had time to visit a few farms in the village. Nasau is well-known for their bananas, and they also farm and sell ginger, dalo and cassava, which Mr. Adam was able to see and taste during the visit.



The Markets for Change Project is a UN Women project, that aims to ensure marketplaces in rural and urban areas of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory, promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment. UNDP in the Pacific is the implementing partner for Outcome 2: Improving the socio-economic security and rights of market vendors, especially women.



IVD in Samoa



Top row: Tree-planting ceremony to make up for air-travel emissions of International UN Volunteers in Samoa; middle row: International Volunteer Day event with government and UN representatives, volunteer-involving organizations and volunteers; bottom row: Field trip with UN Resident Coordinator Simona Marinescu (far left) and UN Volunteers.





Anna Lobanova

UN Youth Volunteer in Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, UNDP

In October 2018, I joined UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji as an UN Volunteer in Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management. Prior to becoming a UN Volunteer, I worked as a researcher at the Analytical Center for the Government of the Russian Federation, where I was responsible for analysis of the current world economic situation. I then moved to the Russian Ministry of Energy, where I worked on climate change, energy efficiency and renewable energy issues. Gradually I became more and more interested in consequences of climate change and how countries can mitigate them, so I decided to move from national to international level and apply for this position in the UN.

Here in the Pacific I work for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Disaster Resilience for Small Pacific Island Countries (RESPAC). Our project helps 15 Pacific island countries (PICs) to increase their resilience and preparedness to natural hazards increasing number of which they experience during cyclone season.

At work I mainly focus on the component related to strengthening early warning systems and climate monitoring capacity in selected PICs. We work directly with National Meteorological and Hydrological Services in the Pacific to increase quality of meteorological data collection and improve advanced weather prediction. As a part of our work, we support countries with purchasing of modern equipment, such as Automated Weather Stations or organization of trainings for meteorologists.

During the tenure I got to visit different parts of Fiji and some Pacific countries, such as Cook Islands, Nauru and Solomon Islands. During one of the recent missions I visited Levuka, Ovalau, the old capital of Fiji. RESPAC project supported the celebration of World Meteorological Day there. Meteorological and Climate Change Awareness is an important aspect of the strategies to ensure a sustainable future for the countries. There is a crucial role of meteorological services in strengthening the safety and the resilience of communities to weather and climate events. The World Meteorological Day celebration provided a unique opportunity to raise awareness on weather, climate and hydrology to general public and schoolchildren.



RESPAC project helps countries to reduce the likelihood of conflicts, and to lower the risks of natural disasters, including caused by climate change. I am proud to be part of UN and do something good for people and sustainable development of the world. Working for UN is a great opportunity to explore the world and get a unique experience.



Ilana Burness

UNV Human Rights Specialist, UN OHCHR

I am a National UNV Human Rights Specialist with OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific (OHCHR ROP). I have worked for various regional and international organizations in Fiji and have over 10 years of regional and international administrative, events management and research experience in international development. I graduated with a Bachelors in Geography and Tourism from the University of the South Pacific (2001) and a Masters in Human Rights and Democratization from University of Sydney, whereby I undertook a 6 month internship at the Kathmandu School of Law in Nepal (2012-2013).

I joined the OHCHR on the 30th of November 2018. My experience so far has been one of learning.

That is the benefit of being a UN Volunteer — you have the opportunity to gain practical experience through active learning.

Part of my role at OHCHR ROP is to support the various activities of the office including via research on the Rule of Law such as conducting a mapping exercise on the National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) for Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Also conducting research and supporting the implementation of the international human rights mechanisms via the Universal Periodic review (UPR) process and Civil Society and Democratic Space.

I have participated in a few advocacy and training events including attending Fiji’s first International Day march against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT) held on 17 May in Suva. The day was marked with a march from the Flea market in Suva to Ratu Sukuna Park and was attended by UN agencies, CSOs, family and friends of the LGBTI+ community.

As well, I attended the ‘6th Pacific Regional Conference on Disability: From recognition to realization of rights: Furthering effective partnership for an Inclusive Pacific 2030 for Persons with Disabilities’ on the 1st March at Tanoa International in Nadi. There were 260 participants from 21 Pacific Island Countries and Territories at the conference. I presented during session 5 on “CRPD Reporting”, along with other panel members Iosefa Maiva (UNESCAP) reporting on “Legal framework”, Alex Cote (Centre for Inclusive Policy) reporting on “Budget”, Stanley Gwavuya (UNICEF) and Wiletta Waisath reporting on “Data” and Baily Grey (Disability Rights Fund) — on “CRPD Reporting”.



My goals are to gain practical experience in the field of human rights in the Pacific and to support the OHCHR ROP via advocacy, research and capacity building.



Maurizio Cacucci

UNV Public Outreach Coordinator, UNDP

In late February 2019 I joined the UNDP Vanuatu Electoral Environment Project (VEEP) serving as an International UNV Public Outreach Coordinator. By taking up this UNV assignment in Vanuatu, I am back to volunteering for the UN system and for the first time in the Pacific!

At VEEP project, we provide assistance to the Vanuatu Electoral Office (VEO) in delivering its mandate to supervise the registration of electors and to conduct credible and inclusive electoral process.

Project's results will contribute to the complex dynamics of political changes and strengthen the democratic governance mechanisms of the country.

I am currently working on supporting the electoral authorities on organizing a voter education and information campaign for the 2020 general election, based on solid grounds.

By establishing a partnership with the Vanuatu National Statistics Office, the electoral authorities will conduct a survey on civic understanding and access to information of the different communities. The objective is to identify what voters need to know and how to deliver those messages to them. Once the data is collected, compiled and analyzed, we will be able to plan how to make our messages pass through and outreach to the general public as well as specific groups who might need special motivational messages to get involved.

Vanuatu has a population of around 285,000, predominantly rural. Population is spread on more than 80 islands and speaks a wide variety of local languages. Illiteracy is another factor to be considered while choosing appropriate dissemination channels of information. Undoubtedly, a challenging landscape in the provision of electoral awareness.



Photo: Maurizio (second on the left) with VEO and UNDP-VEEP teams.

Being in the Pacific region for the first time is definitely a challenge for me. You can bring professional expertise and experience gained in other countries but when it comes to adapting good ideas to different contexts, local experience is essential. Our project counterparts are keen on working in close partnership with us and that is the best welcome I could get in Port Vila!



Innocent Nyandwi
UNV TB Specialist, UNDP

Access to primary health care is a big problem due to insufficient medical staff (few doctors and nurses), absence or poor quality of health facilities, lack of health information on a number of health issues, limited government resources as well as poor and vulnerable population. This affects mostly people in outer islands and has negative impact such as: late diagnosis of a number of diseases (NCDs, TB, HIV, among others), few pregnant women on ANC follow up and deliver in a health facility, and poor healthcare delivery quality in general. People have to intervene by setting well-equipped health facilities in every outer island, increasing medical trainings especially for doctors and nurses and work on poverty reduction.

The role of the UNV TB Medical Specialist with The Multi-Country Western Pacific Integrated HIV/TB Programme of UNDP includes the following key functions:

TB care and treatment: among other activities, I facilitate the provision of comprehensive TB services within the Kiribati Ministry of Health, support identification, assessment, screening and evaluation of contacts who may have been exposed to a person with TB, develop screening plans and strategies, evaluate screening results and ensure further screening is progressed as required in collaboration with TB clinicians. I ensure HIV screening to all TB patients and vice versa. I also support TB preventive activities such as outreach, training and workshops for key populations, as well as engage in the development of TB workplan for UNDP multi-country grant and facilitate implementation of endorsed activities in the workplan.

Data management: collection, collating and entering data relating to cases of TB into the TB register and database, using local surveillance data to inform needs based TB/HIV services for the local population and collaborating with the Public Health Unit to maintain timely and high quality local disease surveillance and the Chief Public Health and Epidemiologist to ensure national and donor TB surveillance reporting requirements are met.

Governance: I support the implementation of TB practice standards amongst healthcare workers and compliance with standard MoH reporting requirements including in the event of a critical TB related incident, and liaise with the WHO TB Technical Advisor to plan and implement an appropriate response.





Volunteering for Antimicrobial Resistance

Jieun Kim

UN Youth Volunteer in Antimicrobial Resistance, WHO

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is one of WHO's 2019 top ten threats to global health. Occurring when micro-organisms (like bacteria and viruses) adapt and grow in the presence of antimicrobials, AMR occurs naturally, but misuse and overuse of antibiotics in people and animals is accelerating the process. Microorganisms that develop AMR are sometimes referred to as "superbugs", and threaten our ability to treat common infectious diseases.

One of WHO's main efforts to address AMR is improving understanding of the threat it poses among all relevant groups – not just among medical professionals and the public, but farmers, food processors, the environmental sectors and many others.

As part of a team, I coordinate activities to raise awareness of AMR in partnership with Ministries of Health across the Pacific. I'm a veterinarian by profession, so I also focus on addressing AMR microorganisms that develop and move between animals and humans through the food chain.

AMR is one of the tripartite (FAO-OIE-WHO) collaboration agenda that needs the multi-sectoral effort from human, animal and environment sector. Many of countries and several international agencies have now recognized the importance of a One Health Approach within their action plans to address AMR. Hence, my goal for AMR project in Fiji is inclusion of food and agriculture sectors to address AMR in Pacific. In person, as a youth professional, I would like to build the capacity for the different aspects of AMR including policy making and governance other than research I used to get involved in. Also, I would explore AMR for human health security based on my background, veterinary medicine and food security.



It is a wonderful opportunity to experience Pacific culture for me being born and raised in Republic of Korea. It could be difficult to move in totally different country for work but our local colleagues always surprise me with great hospitality and support. More than words, food definitely helped me settle down in Fiji quite fast. I eat Kokoda at least once a week



Gabby Bush

UN Youth Volunteer in Partnerships and Resource Mobilization, UNDP

Samoa has an extensive and well organized government with 52 Ministries and State-owned enterprises. The digital age brings the ability of governments to make their systems even more efficient and put their data online. Currently, the Government lacks the capacity to quickly and efficiently share data amongst their ministries and agencies, creating silos and requiring duplication of work. Studies have shown that putting systems online, with data sharing agreements of using blockchain or X-Road technologies creates an efficient way to store all the data online and update it for all agencies in real time. Not only does this make the government more efficient but saves times for the citizens.

In June 2018, UNDP Samoa Multi-Country Office and the Government of Samoa hosted “Together for a Digital Pacific” Conference. My role was to coordinate the conference, sending invitations, registering participants, organizing venue, catering, assisting in the design on the agenda and the logistics of the private sector engagement. Over 100 people attended the conference with national, regional and International stakeholders participating in dialogues and sharing their own digital transformation journeys. Present were also the Hon. Prime Minister Tuilaepa Dr Sailele Malielegaoi from Samoa, the Ulu of Tokelau Hon. Afega Gaulofoa, the Deputy Prime Minister of Tuvalu Hon. Maatia Toafa and the UN Assistant Secretary-General, UNDP Bureau Director for Asia and the Pacific, Haoliang Xu. The conference concluded with great political will to leapfrog into the digital area, with Pacific Nations working together to share the benefits of technology. Together with a colleague, I submitted a proposal that was granted funding for a Digital Solutions for Samoa initiation plan.

In December, I hosted an ICT stakeholder workshop. The aim was to bring together ICT focal points from across government to discuss digital transformations from a technical, on the ground perspective. Having political buy-in is important but having technical people on the ground engaged and enthusiastic is also an integral part of any transformational agenda. The workshop was attended by focal points from 26 ministries and state-owned enterprises from across government. They discussed at length the need for changes within government and left feeling excited about the possibilities that digitisation could bring to their country and their work.



Working in digital transformation has given me immense satisfaction and hope for the future. If agencies like the UNDP and UNV can help governments transform the way they deliver services, targeting the most vulnerable in the most hard to reach places, millions around the world can benefit. From my experiences in UNV I feel I have been able to further the digital agenda and put Samoa on the map as a country interested in harnessing the benefits that digital technologies can bring.



Basem Ibrahim

UNV Information Systems Officer, UNCTAD

I am from Yemen — a country in the west of Middle East. In order to come to Fiji, I had to fly more than 40 hours. After overcoming many obstacles, I finally arrived in Suva. I have been in Suva for more than seven months working with ASYCUDA Support Mechanism in the Pacific ASMP.

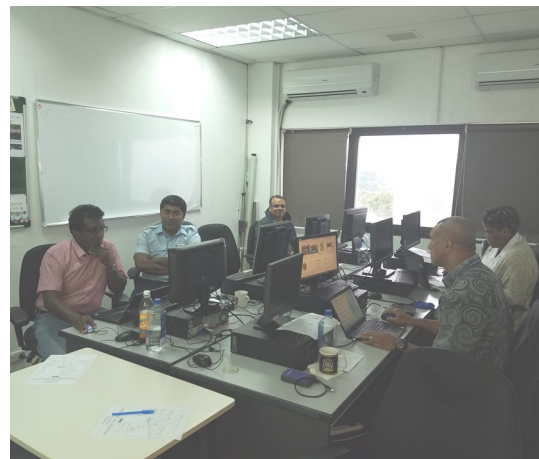
I have a Bachelor degree in Information Technology and a Master in Business Administration. I have more than 15-year experience in IT and information system development. Before being a UN volunteer, I had done some volunteering work online. For example, I developed a smart app for blood donation. Also, I worked in the public sector for the Customs Authority in Yemen. I have experience in information system development and customs functional aspects. Because of that, I have been selected for the position of International UN Volunteer Information System Officer in ASYCUDA World project.

ASYCUDA, Automated System for Customs Data, is one of the projects of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). ASYCUDA World is the web-based version of ASYCUDA which can be accessed via internet browsers.

My role is to develop and modify e-documents and reports for the customs departments in the Pacific countries: Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa, and New Caledonia. We work together with national teams in customs departments to accomplish our goal which is growing economy of the Pacific region.

Also, my role contains conducting training activities for the national teams to improve their capability in both functional and technical aspects of ASYCUDA World. In June 2019, we will conduct new technical training in JAVA programming language for the technical staff in the customs departments.

“Different country, different language, and different culture. How can I adapt to this?” I asked myself when I arrived in Suva. I admit that I was worried before arriving. However, I felt very comfortable with the Fijian people. They are so kind and they always welcome me wherever I go. After a few weeks, I felt familiar with my work and with my colleagues. It is an interesting experience to be here.



Now, after seven months of volunteering work in ASYCUDA World, I can say I've accomplished many work and personal objectives. We, ASMP team, have automated most of functions of the customs departments. Being a member in United Nations Organizations enables me to gain a good experience in international work. I have gotten a good knowledge in UN regulations and systems. In future, it will give me opportunities to work anywhere around the world.



Tomomi Ishikawa

UNV Youth Employment Specialist, UNDP

I work for the Pro-Poor Economic Growth and Reduced Unemployment in Samoa. Prior to this, I worked in administration, finance and inventory in Marshall Islands, before that I worked as a primary teacher in Japan and Vanuatu for around four years, and in sales and marketing in Japan for several years. I have a Master's degree in Social Sciences focused on management of infrastructure and community development and a Bachelor's degree in Commerce.

As a UN Volunteer from November 2017 to the end of October 2018, I was based at the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWSCD) working with Savai'i Koko to build up the Koko industry and Samoan Natural Food encouraging further employment. I worked with a local team under the ACEO on programme delivery in order to build active communication between UNDP and the government. I established the fundamental database for monitoring and reporting the changes of income before and after the 10 dry houses were built with the funding from UNDP to increase the number of employers and the sustainable income for communities through cacao industry. In terms of Samoan Natural Food, it required cooperation between their business and local farmers. My goal was to inform the local communities on the increasing organic vegetable and fruit market and to make the business model clear for the communities. In addition, I supported the daily works of community development such as monitoring of Youth Employment Programme under UNDP and some national events.

Now my workplace has changed to a local organization, Women in Business Development Inc. (WIBDI). The aim of WIBDI is the improvement of the limitations that small-scale farmers have in the cash economy by using traditional and modern technology and promoting fair trade.

Our team promotes the products that are earning real income for rural families. Products should reach global markets with additional value. My goal is to find wider markets and to improve the monitoring system.

One of WIBDI's most successful project is the revival of Samoa's traditional 'measina' fine mat practice. WIBDI started the fine mat workshop in 1998 and from 2002 the Ministry of Women has supported the fine mat project under the national policy for the Cultural Tradition. Recently the fine mat show-case project is an annual national event. WIBDI has been supporting the village-based women with a financial sponsorship program.





Talei Tupou

UNV Taxpayer Onboarding Specialist, UNCDF/UNDP

The role varies quite a lot. I am currently gathering success stories for E-Tax, conducting training for staff and customers, drafting bulk emails and developing a launch plan for the second phase of E-Tax. E-Tax is a milestone project as it is the first service of its kind here — a software solution where customers (businesses and individuals) can create an account, file returns and pay through internet banking.

I've had field trips to deliver presentations to large and small groups which is always nerve-racking. Representing a serious government organization, I need to be professional and confident. I've had a huge range of experience both challenging and exciting!

More examples of my tasks: 1) building relationships and working with the IRD Teams and Executives; 2) working remotely and on-site with system providers and the government ICT unit; 3) identifying and working with stakeholders (from very large businesses to some individuals); 4) learning about digital finance and extending my networks to experts in this area to assist with marketing E-Tax; 5) learning about national tax system, legislation and why it is important; 6) learning to use the IRD Revenue Management System; 7) identifying service providers to assist us in marketing E-Tax including Bank of the South Pacific, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation and Solomon Post.

It has been a big learning curve. The goals that I still have are: 1) to refine my persuasion skills to onboard customers who don't feel comfortable online; 2) more in-depth knowledge of E-Tax; 3) weekly training sessions for businesses; 4) to understand more about the drivers for non-compliance with tax obligations, and use E-Tax to improve it; 5) to continue training for staff and develop quality measures for communication uniformity; 6) to review our marketing – there is room for improvement; 7) to consider in more detail how I can effectively transition my work to the Tax Education Team. I also want to continue learning and improving my skills,. This will eventually inform key decisions about my future.

There are now more than 120 active accounts, with more than 350 users (Tax Agent accounts have a greater reach). We've produced a radio segment for E-Tax awareness. I have built rapport with IRD and customers, and created relationships that will last my career. I've gained valuable experience in a large government organization and improved my skills in training, putting customers at ease and making them feel comfortable to learn and ask questions. UNV has provided me with this opportunity and so far, it is an exciting challenge. It is surely the push to the right direction in accomplishing great goals .





Ajay Jagannath

UNV Finance Inclusion Coordinator, UNCDF/UNDP

The World Risk Report in 2018 ranked Vanuatu as the country most at risk from natural hazards. Whether it is a cyclone or flood, a tsunami or an earthquake, the risk of a natural event turning into a disaster only partly depends on the natural force itself. The assistance on the ground and the options available to the affected people matter just as much.

Having worked with banks in Singapore and India, I fully understand the importance the formal financial system. From savings accounts to adequate insurance, access to finance is crucial for development and ultimately, quality of life. My experience as a UN Volunteer in Vanuatu has been truly enriching. In the short time that I have been here, I have organically accepted this country and people for the beauty and kindness. My mandate as a Financial Inclusion Coordinator is to work towards enabling the policy and regulatory environment as well as supporting financial innovation and consumer protection initiatives.

This role has provided me with a unique opportunity to work at the intersection of technology, finance and policy.

The Pacific Financial Inclusion Program works with public and private partners, specifically the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu, National Bank of Vanuatu, Telecom Vanuatu, Vanuatu National Pension Fund and VanCare Insurance by providing technical and grant assistance to implement the financial inclusion targets set forth by the 2018-2023 National Financial Inclusion Strategy. With the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu, I am working on introducing electronic payment channels in government transactions where seasonal workers can obtain police clearances digitally rather than at the headquarter in the city center. Vanuatu proudly sends approximately 8,000 seasonal workers per annum to Australia and New Zealand – all of them require police clearance. With the Telecom Vanuatu, I am working on the roll out of their Mobile Money product, which has the potential to reach the market far and wide due to its ease of operability. Currently, Vanuatu's economy runs primarily on cash, and smart phone penetration is at a healthy 80%. I am also supporting the staff at the National Bank of Vanuatu who are working hard to release a mobile app where citizens can access their accounts, transact, place deposits and convert money – at the click of a few buttons.

The best part of being a UN Volunteer has been the exposure this role has given me. I meet people from various backgrounds—heads of organizations, government officials and colleagues from other UN agencies. As luck would have it, I even got to witness the unveiling of the joint UN office by none other than the Secretary General himself. It was an exhilarating, yet sobering experience to watch him speak about Climate Change and the effect that it has had on this beautiful island. To conclude, I would say that my journey has been eventful and purposeful. I look forward to contributing my bit to make Vanuatu a better, more inclusive place to all its wonderful people.





Olivia Vakaosooso

UN Youth Volunteer Financial Education Officer, UNCDF/UNDP

Becoming a UN Volunteer is one of the best choices I have made. The opportunities to give back to my community and the South Pacific have been a fascinating experience. The Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme has helped more than two million Pacific Islanders gain access to financial services and education – primarily focusing on innovation, policy and empowerment of consumers for inclusive environment. I first joined PFIP as a community development assistant shortly after graduating from the University of the South Pacific. I concentrated on providing affordable insurance for low income earners. I traveled to most parts of Fiji for fieldwork and assistance in research for specific clusters of income generating activities. After six months of being a University Volunteer, I was offered a role of Financial Education Officer.

National Financial Competency Survey found that low-income households demonstrate unproductive financial behaviors and the overall level of adult financial competencies is low to low-moderate. We are improving financial literacy level through the integration of FinEd components into primary and secondary schools as well as into Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) curriculum.

With high levels of income misuse and no proper money management, there is a strong need for financial literacy intervention in the Pacific. One of the many projects I have participated in is the piloting of FinEd programme within the TVET curriculum in the Solomon Islands. It enabled students and teachers to learn money management. Most people resort to unsafe saving practices like keeping money under the mattress because access to formal facilities can be quite a challenge. Banking can be expensive, costing up to SBD 50 (USD 6.20) to travel to the nearest branch at the back of a truck for two hours through rough terrain. We teach of other options if access to a bank is difficult. The creation of a savings club is what one of the communities we had introduced FinEd into had done. It was a simple solution for the underserved group. Members meet regularly and contribute to a pool of funds. Payouts are often scheduled to coincide with planned expenses such as school fees and holidays, or can be accessed when most needed. Unlike a bank, the club only requires regular savings to be made—without fees.

In Papua New Guinea FinEd was also introduced within the TVET level. Kamaliki Technical Vocation Training Institute included money management into the trade courses. I traveled to PNG to assist in a workshop for the teachers. The dedication shown by them is a clear indication of the importance of FinEd. Students and teachers learn about bad habits and realize the benefits of financial literacy. To know how to generate income with the resources, talent and ideas you have, to identify the demand in your community and capitalize on it; to understand that it does not have to be a grand idea: agriculture students - plant and sell vegetables, skills students - bake and sell goods, have a money box, build discipline – these are just some of the components of Financial Education.

I work with exceptional people from various walks of life, all striving to create a better world. UNV opens opportunities for career and personal development. You are challenged to come out of your comfort zone, travel to the outskirts and learn a variety of new things along the way through the projects and the people you work with.



Photo Highlights



Youth Volunteer Workshop
Bangkok, March 2019



UNV get-togethers in Fiji



Photo Highlights





UN VOLUNTEERS

in the Pacific

UNV Field Unit would like to acknowledge and thank all the UN Volunteers in the Pacific for the hard work and contributions to this newsletter.

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We are inspiration in action