



NEWSLETTER

UN Volunteers in the Pacific

IN THIS ISSUE:

	Page
Introduction	2
Australian UN Volunteers support the Pacific COVID-19 response	3
A journey from University UN Volunteers to Specialists with PFIP	5
Volunteering for UN75 and COVID-19 Crisis Communications	7
Information Management for humanitarian response	9
International Volunteer Day 2019	11

We are inspiration in action



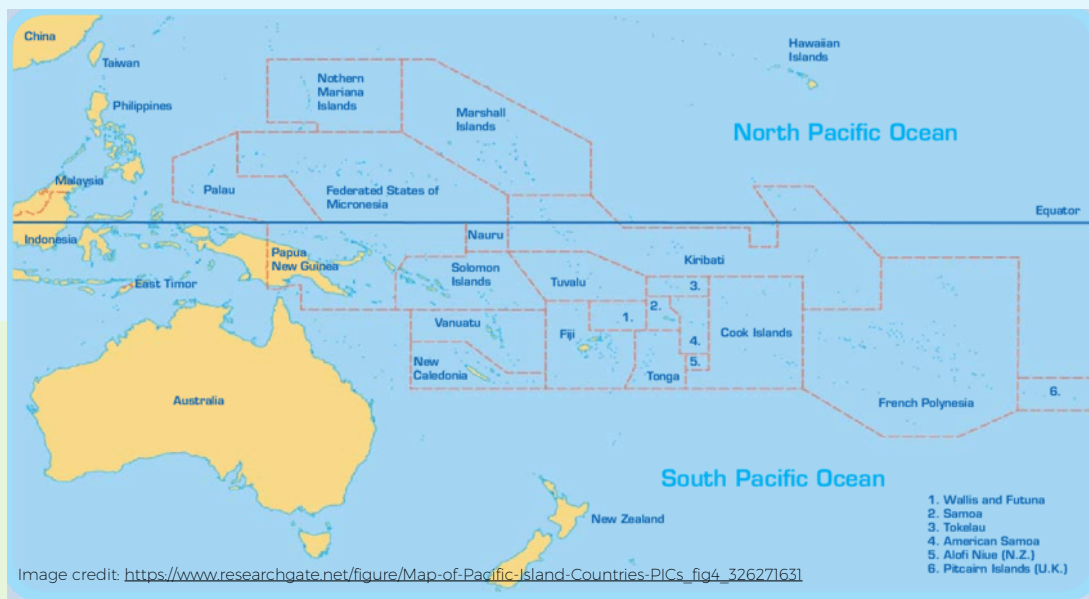
Introduction

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 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.

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- Global website: unv.org



As of June 2020, there are 53 UN Volunteers serving in the Pacific region with the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN Women, UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), UN Resident Coordinator Office (UNRCO) and UN Volunteers (UNV). There are 13 national volunteers in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. International volunteers come from Yemen, Australia, India, Uganda, Fiji, Republic of Korea, Nepal, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Nigeria, United States of America, Kyrgyzstan, South Africa, Hungary, Italy, Afghanistan, Japan, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Malawi.

Australian UN Volunteers support the Pacific COVID-19 response

In 2020, the 11 UN Volunteers fully funded by the Australian Government have started their assignments in the Pacific.

Here's how these Australian volunteers are supporting the United Nations:

Country	UN Host Entity	Assignment
Fiji	Resident Coordinator's Office	UN Country Coordination Specialist
Solomon Islands	Resident Coordinator's Office	UN Country Coordination Specialist
Vanuatu	Resident Coordinator's Office	UN Country Coordination Specialist
Tuvalu	Resident Coordinator's Office	UN Country Coordination Specialist
Samoa	Resident Coordinator's Office	Joint Programme Support Officer
Solomon Islands	UNDP	Access to Justice Disability Inclusion Support Officer
Fiji	UNODC	Anti-Corruption Junior Officer
Fiji	UN WOMEN	Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Support Officer
Vanuatu	UNFPA	Gender Based Violence Programme Officer
Fiji	UNICEF	Health Communications for Development (C4D) Junior Officer
Samoa	UNDP	Inclusive Development Support Officer

Like their host agencies, many of the UN Volunteers are now focusing on crisis response and have had to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions.

Ella Ballerini is serving with UNICEF as a Health C4D Junior Officer and is normally based in Fiji. She has been on a prolonged mission in Kiribati due to the travel restrictions. Her routine activities have switched over to helping the tiny island nation prepare for the health emergency response through:

- Supporting risk communications and community engagement activities;
- Conducting community-based risk assessment with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS) staff to identify underlying attitudes and perception related to the novel coronavirus through focus groups and interviews;
- Training of volunteer health promoters to conduct COVID-19 awareness and prevention activities such as health talks and hand washing demos;



Australian UN Volunteers support the Pacific COVID-19 response

- Supporting MHMS staff through developing a continuity plan for Primary Health Care Services during COVID-19.



Photo: Ella (left) supports health response in Kiribati

"This is my first time in the Pacific and first time working in two countries, that is Fiji and Kiribati. I have experienced the diversity of the Pacific landscape and the unique challenges and opportunities each country faces. As a C4D Junior Officer, I work actively with communities, Primary Health Care nurses and the governments to develop strategies to improve maternal and child health and nutrition." - UN Youth Volunteer - Health C4D Junior Officer, Ella Ballerini.



A journey from University Volunteers to Specialists with PFIP

Olivia Vakaosooso, Simone Veilawa and Reginald Singh joined the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme (PFIP) as National University UN Volunteers in 2018. Since then, they have progressed to National Youth and now National Specialist modalities. We asked these young Fijian professionals to share how their UNV experience has been so far.

“I enjoy the opportunity to work with people within my own country and also with people from different parts of the Pacific. Just going to different parts of Fiji and gaining a better understanding of perspectives from the grassroots level has been compelling. The opportunity to experience firsthand how things unfold in different parts of the Pacific was wonderful. Realizing that yes, we may all be in the same region, but to make projects work, sometimes it is not a one size fits all - we have to understand the cultural context and factor that in,” said UNV Financial Education Officer, Olivia Vakaosooso.



Photo: Olivia (sitting on the far right) with participants during a training in Honiara, Solomon Islands



A journey from University Volunteers to Specialists with PFIP

“If you are ever given an opportunity to volunteer for the UN, I’d advise you to take it. The people you will meet and share experiences with is priceless. The UN is full of people from different walks of life and for us all to be working together under such a global umbrella focusing on different programmes and working on a wide scale of projects from financial inclusion to human rights, climate change and more is worth the experience,” added UNV Financial Education Officer, Olivia Vakaosooso.

Initially, the University Volunteers with PFIP were involved in field surveys and community research and awareness with the the Inclusive Insurance Innovation Lab. This project focused on creating an affordable and inclusive insurance product for the Pacific communities. After an initial six month contract, Olivia took up the role of Financial Education (FinEd) Officer, assisting Financial Inclusion Specialists across the region in finding ways to implement or improve FinEd in the Pacific.

The current phase of PFIP is coming to an end in 2020, and the team is now developing the next stage. Reginald’s main focus of this year is assisting with the implementation of the Pacific Insurance and Climate Adaptation Programme (PICAP) programme. This would include conducting workshops with relevant stakeholders, field and desk research of the risks faced by the Pacific communities due to climate change and identification of the Climate Disaster Risk Finance (CDRF) strategies individual Pacific island countries could adopt. He is now involved in assisting with the development of the Project Document, monitoring and reporting of project activities related to insurance and meeting with relevant stakeholders.

“I have gained a lot of experience in a variety of areas, such as communications, research, monitoring and evaluation, finance and more. Thanks to the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme, we have been given a great amount of exposure to develop ourselves as professionals, and I think the UN University Volunteer is a great platform to start one’s professional career.

In the field of development, it is important to understand the lifestyle of the local communities, how vulnerable they are and what are their coping mechanisms during an emergency. These things are best learned from a firsthand visit to the local communities. The part of my work that I enjoy the most is conducting field surveys in various communities. Different communities have different lifestyles and it is amazing to experience these different cultures,” said the Financial Inclusion Research Officer, Regional Singh.



Volunteering for UN75 and COVID-19 Crisis Communications

To mark its 75th anniversary in 2020, the United Nations has launched the UN75 campaign, that is promised to be the largest and furthest-reaching global conversation ever on building the future we want. Through UN75, the United Nations will encourage people to put their heads together to define how enhanced international cooperation can help realize a better world by 2045, the UN's 100th birthday. The Pacific was selected as one of the first regions in the world to pilot the UN75 local dialogues, which started in January 2020. While country population sizes may be relatively small throughout the region, the Blue Pacific offers an extremely unique and important perspective in the pursuit of global solutions because of both its geographical size as well as its geostrategic importance.

To support the UN75 campaign, UN in the Pacific has engaged a National UN Volunteer Outreach Officer based with the Resident Coordinator Office in Fiji, who began the assignment in March 2020.



Photo: UNV UN75 Outreach Officer, Ernest Gibson



Volunteering for UN75 and COVID-19 Crisis Communications

Ernest Gibson is a graduate of the University of the South Pacific, with a Bachelor of Arts in Politics and Language, and is currently pursuing a Masters in Diplomacy and International Affairs. He was also the recipient of the gold medal prize for the most outstanding student in Political Science. Ernest has worked as the Civil Society Contract Manager at the Delegation of the European Union for the Pacific and was a member of the Expansion Team that opened the first AIESEC chapter in the Pacific, based in Suva, Fiji. He is a member of the Technical Advisory Group for the Pacific Youth Council and the Pacific Regional Youth Coordinator of the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE).

Starting his assignment just as the COVID-19 crisis was unraveling, Ernest has already assisted the World Health Organization with some of the communications work and social media campaigns. He edited the WHO Pacific Representative's 'Safe Hands challenge' video, which was shared through the social media, challenging Pacific Islands' leaders to do the same.

As part of the UN Crisis Communications Team, Ernest is working on putting together two regional campaigns on best practices for infection prevention in the fight against COVID-19 and assisting the UN Communications Group with media monitoring, as well as social media content creation.



Photo: Ernest (top left) during the UN Pacific Communications Group meeting in March 2020



Information Management for humanitarian response

Mohita Joshi joined The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Office of the Pacific Islands (OCHA OP) as the UNV Information Management Officer in late January 2020. Prior to starting this role in Fiji, she worked with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in her home country of Nepal for nearly four years in various positions under the Recovery & Resilience Unit. Mohita served as a National UN Volunteer for a government-led project to initiate and incubate e-governance, directly supporting the development infrastructure in the country. She supervised 26 ICT Engineers and was the only female in her team of eight members to hold such position.

She holds a Masters of Technology in Computer Science & Engineering from National Institute of Technology, Warangal, India. Data mining and warehousing is her interest, but to add colours to her life, she also enjoys acrylic and oil painting. However, her toddler daughter is the only art Mohita enjoys lately.



Photo: UNV Information Management Officer, Mohita Joshi (left) with colleagues



Information Management for humanitarian response

When she travelled from Nepal to Fiji at the start of 2020, the six reported deaths from COVID-19 were confined to Wuhan and the virus had spread to just six countries outside China. Now, most of the work in the Pacific is directly related to the global pandemic.

In OCHA, Mohita worked on creating a live dashboard, collaborating with the World Health Organization (WHO) to track COVID-19 updates in the Pacific for 21 countries & territories. A dashboard of daily events has been made live on the web. It houses all information pertaining to COVID-19 in the region and is updated everyday round the clock to give accurate information with relevant and genuine sources. Mohita currently collects and analyzes 3W (Who Does What Where) data from Pacific Humanitarian Team partner clusters, creating informative analysis from the data to support better activity implementation and coordination on the ground. She is also involved in response to Tropical Cyclone Harold, doing similar data analysis of who is doing what where, for whom and when. The plan has been to create a dynamic informative dashboard, reports and infographics for agencies to timely act, prepare and coordinate for effective response and preparedness.

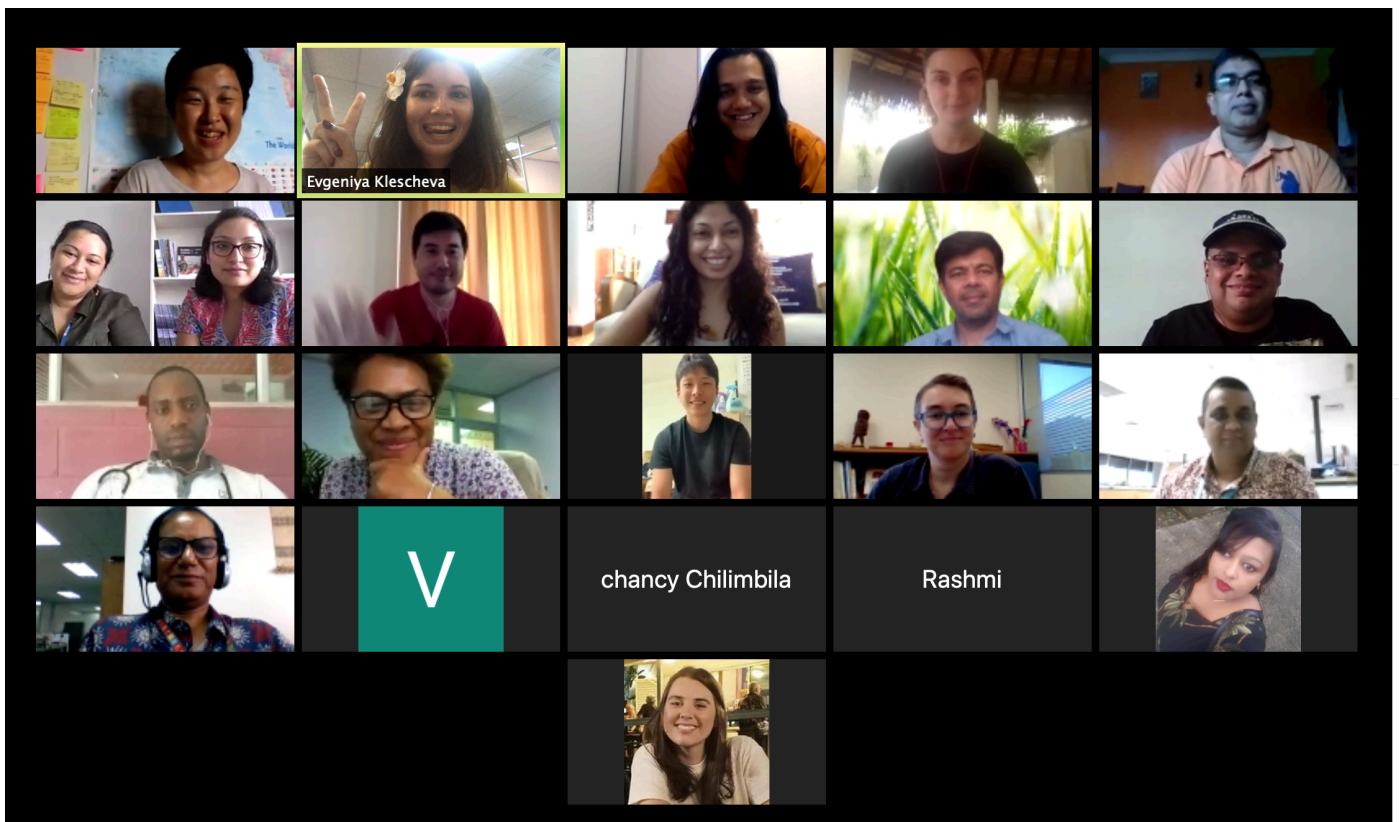


Photo: Virtual meeting of UN Volunteers in the Pacific, June 2020



International Volunteer Day 2019

International Volunteer Day is an annual global event celebrated on **5 December** as mandated by the United Nations. Theme of IVD 2019 was **“Volunteer for an Inclusive Future”**. Inclusion is recognising our universal “oneness” and interdependence. It is also celebrating the richness and value of diversity in our societies. Vanuatu, Samoa and Fiji held celebration activities in 2019. Given the measles epidemic at the time in Samoa and the country under State of Emergency, UNV allocated resources to the Helping Hands organization where volunteers were mobilized.

Vanuatu

International Volunteer Day celebration in Vanuatu was organised in collaborations with volunteer organizations such as US Peace Corps Vanuatu, Volunteer Service Abroad New Zealand (VSA), Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), France Volontaires. The activities on the day included:

1. Short speeches of a representative from each organization - quick overview of the organization and personal experience as volunteer in Vanuatu;
2. Sensitization about healthy habits and eating;
3. Entertainment for kids and other by playing games, sport activities and colouring books and a playlist prepared for the event.





International Volunteer Day 2019

Solomon Islands

Over 70 national and international volunteers working in the Solomon Islands celebrated International Volunteers Day (IVD) at the National Art Gallery in Honiara. Among the organizations celebrating the IVD together with UN Volunteers were the Christian Church, the Deaf Association, Red Cross, SeifPles, Dreamcast, Rotaract, Pacific Youth Forum Against Corruption, and international volunteer agencies: Australian Volunteers International (AVI), Volunteer Service Abroad New Zealand (VSA), KOICA and JICA.

UNDP Country Manager Berdi Berdiyev reflected on his transformative experience as a UN Volunteer 15 years ago and expressed his gratitude to all the volunteers. The celebration concluded with a community service activity of cleaning up the Art Gallery surrounds.





International Volunteer Day 2019

Fiji

The Fiji National Volunteer Steering Committee (NVSC) organized the IVD celebration at the Fiji Sports Council Multi-Purpose Court in Suva on Thursday, 5 December 2019. To promote the IVD 2019 theme, the Fiji NVSC partnered with the Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation and its member, Fiji Paralympics Committee to promote volunteerism through sporting activities. The main sporting activities on the day included:

1. Goal Ball - a team sport designed for the blind. The game is played in teams of three. Athletes attempt to score by rolling a ball equipped with bells. The sound of the bells attached to the ball guide defenders who use their bodies to block against these shots.
2. Sitting Volleyball - this game is governed by the same set of rules as the able-bodied game with a few differences.
3. Bocce - also known as Italian lawn bowling, is one of the most widely played games in the world and is one of the oldest lawn or yard games.

The Inclusive Sports Day was attended by approximately 150 volunteers and supporters.

The UN Resident Coordinator for the Pacific Sanaka Samarasinha gave the opening remarks, commending volunteers for the work on the ground and encouraging everyone to continue volunteering in their professional and personal lives. UN Volunteers, JICA, KOICA, FDFP, UN agencies, PIANGO, Fiji Red Cross, Australian Volunteers International, PIANGO, UN Association of Fiji were among others engaged in the activities.





**UN
VOLUNTEERS**

Pacific

Stories and photos were provided by the UN Volunteers. Views expressed in articles of this newsletter are those of the authors. They do not reflect the opinions or views of the UNV, UN Volunteer host agencies and other partners that appear in this newsletter.

The 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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