

Inspiration in Action in the context of MGDs and post 2015 agenda:

# *Voices from the Pacific*



# Introduction

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The objective of this booklet is to share with you the contributions of UN Volunteers to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the defining of the post 2015 agenda in the Pacific. The objective of this booklet is to document these contributions and display lessons learned from volunteer contributions, including encouraging local ownership of development result. Raising UN Volunteers' voices contributes to the recognition of volunteerism as one of the most effective methods to trigger development initiatives from within the beneficiary society and to build bridges amongst civil society actors.

The global United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is inspired by the conviction that volunteerism is a powerful means of engaging people in tackling development challenges worldwide. It contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. The UNV Fiji Multi Country Office manages UN Volunteer assignments and supports the development of programmes, thereby promoting volunteerism across the Fiji Parish, which includes Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and Tuvalu.

UNV in the Pacific has been supporting single and joint UN agencies' development interventions in the past year, covering one or multiple Pacific Island Countries. UN Volunteers are and have been working very closely with local governments, local and regional non-government organizations (NGOs) and institutions. Through their support and advice to local agencies on steering local improvements in infrastructure and wellbeing of Pacific communities, UN Volunteers have shown how close connection to the community is an essential factor to make development initiatives successful and adequately responsive to the unique challenges that Pacific communities face.

Volunteerism is a strategy that aims to increase the pace and ensure a proper sequence of development results by utilizing the spirit of selfless and relentless sharing. Development and social cohesion is being harnessed through generating community driven development initiatives. Communities have been enabled through UN Volunteers' involvement in jointly defining contextualized desired development results and strategizing for the attainment of those development results. This has been the case with the assignment of UNV Provincial Advisers to the various provincial governments in the Solomon Islands, with the result of the Provincial Government Strengthening Programme (PGSP) developed through cooperation by UNDP and the local government. Here, UNV Provincial Advisers supported local governments to define and realize provincial development needs and strategic planning. A similar appropriate and intense development has also occurred through the close collaboration of the UNV Economic Development Specialist, working with the Yap State government in Micronesia. An alternative was introduced and nurtured for food security to free the Yap economy from foreign aid dependency and to address the threat of increasing food transport costs.

Through joint collaborations, UN Volunteers often strengthen the relationship between local governments and communities. This is in line with UNV's mandate and mission, explicitly to increase local ownership of development results, an increased recognition of community needs, and the creation of mutual respect and understanding. UN Volunteers are elevating human capacity and ability to respond to the needs of communities through a number of projects, including UNV medical support to the regionally successful Expanded Programme on Immunization (UNICEF), UNV Facilitation and research expertise to the regional Pacific Enable Project (PDF, UNESCAP, UNICEF, ILO, WHO and UNV), and diverse UNV Technical Assistance to the Tension Reduction, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation projects (UNDP) in the Solomon Islands, where success relies much on sound community involvement.

Through UNV's support to UN agencies' to assist local government in Universal Periodic Review (UPR) reporting and implementation obligations, UN Volunteers are advocating for recognition and implementation of human rights. Via the work of a UNV Human Rights Specialist and UNV Human Rights Coordinator based in Vanuatu and the Marshall Islands, focusing on the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) and Convention Against Torture (CAT), UNV supports the most vulnerable and most in need. These UN Volunteers work directly with local governments and the community to address these issues in a participatory way, and thereby steer discussion on the important issues of EVAW, child protection, and international human rights standards in the local context. Furthermore, UNV provides direct support to governments in the Solomon Islands and Tonga through the Civic Education Specialists. This project displays the structural support UNV is providing and involved in in the two Pacific Island Countries, bringing top down and bottom up initiatives together.

This booklet concludes with two remarkable contributions of the UNV Youth and Participation Officer (UNICEF) and the UNV Regional Disaster Risk Reduction Officer (UNISDR). The UNV Youth and Participation Officer helps youth to contribute to defining the post 2015 agenda, emphasizing the importance of equity, inclusion and youth leadership. She supports young people of the Pacific to create a strong, impactful and ambitious Pacific youth platform in a global development framework, and emphasizes the role volunteerism can play to mobilize the energy and passion of young people to move beyond business as usual. The UNV Regional Disaster Risk Reduction Officer supports the much needed Disaster Reduction and Preparedness intervention in the Pacific region, provided by United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) Pacific Office. Some of his contributions are cooperating with national (government) development agencies and other society actors to define, exercise, simulate and guide implementation of relevant policies and operational frameworks.

I wish you a happy reading of these very interesting testimonies and elaborations on projects UN Volunteers are diligently supporting.

**Fraternally,  
Lioba van Dam**



## MDG 1:

### Volunteer intervention in the eradication of poverty and hunger in Micronesia



Linda Germanis

*Linda Germanis is an Italian UN Volunteer currently serving in the State of Yap, Federated States of Micronesia, as a UNV Development Economist. While in Yap she started a local NGO by the name of Yap Fusion. Yap Fusion addresses food security by using local produce for alternative value-added recipes, and aims at supporting women and youth in boosting a local food industry to eliminate the State's current cultural dependence on imported food.*

*Linda is a trained economist and holds a Master of Arts degree in Conflict, Reconstruction, and Human Security. Previously, Linda worked as project coordinator and analyst for various UN and government agencies.*

#### Why food security?

This is the story of a UN Volunteer involved in supporting local economies in Micronesia where one of the most ancient traditional practices, the social experience of the meal, has turned into an unhealthy and unethical shopping experience. Through this volunteer experience, it can be seen that ready-to-eat products can be healthy and locally produced. Ethical marketing is not a privilege of wealthy countries, but a voluntary choice.

A next step might be to allow this experience to speak to a broader audience: It is suggested that using "common goods," such as recipes and agricultural practices, in an innovative way to meet social needs will challenge the privatization of the culture of food.

#### How did this initiative begin?

I came to Yap in September 2011 as a UNV Development Economist, a direct technical assistant to the government of the State of Yap. I had the opportunity to participate in Yapese community and traditions. It is through this learning process that I desired to bridge the gap between global economic requirements and local practices. I support the financial significance of traditional forms of volunteerism and social cohesion, incorporating communities and informal economy into state planning, and highlighting the importance of the potential economic benefits of ensuring social spillovers for each initiative undertaken by the Government.

In September 2012 I organized the State Social and Economic Summit 2012 with representatives of public, private, and community sectors (encompassing informal economy and traditional practices). The objective of the Summit was to merge traditional resources and practices with modern needs – towards productive new enterprises. The community sector emphasized

the extent to which consumers make the "wrong" choices in purchasing and consuming food, and the dramatic consequences of these choices. This called for the support and proliferation of initiatives such as the Local Food Promotion by the Yap Tobacco & Diabetes Free Coalition in partnership with three local stores: YCA, the Organic Market, and Gardener's Market. It is within this context that I began experimenting with local produce and shared new recipes with the Yap Women's Association. After months of volunteer exchanges, they suggested that I formally establish Yap Fusion to start implementing the Summit's recommendations.

The key recommendation outcomes of the Summit, which may be implemented via Yap Fusion, are: (edited for formatting)

- anticipating upcoming health challenges,
- supporting, through public awareness, commitment and tangible results, the growth and role of local produce in the State's economy through individual and communities' sustainable production, and
- promoting and implementing a bottom-up community-based approach to environmental and welfare reforms, ensuring a shared responsibility towards a sustainable development of the State.

More specifically, Yap Fusion's mission and vision was the result of committees' discussions following Summit debates on "Consumers' choices as food security" and "linking subsistence activities and private sector," as well as "Anticipation on upcoming health and education challenges."

Some of Yap Fusion's products reproduce classic recipes such as pizza, pasta, or pie, but the ingredients that recreate these well-known dishes are different according to the season and the local market price for produce in Yap. With new processing methods for produce such as taro, yam, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, eggplants, and green tomatoes, Yap Fusion's production not only empowers farmers, but it creates opportunities to build a local food chain -- using innovative recipes to foster a food industry. These are benefits that provide employment opportunities while delivering healthy solutions to a changed consumer market that must reconcile western-style working modalities with traditional harvesting and caretaking practices. For more information, see the Yap Fusion article, "Pizza that grows on trees" at <http://yapfusion.blogspot.com/2013/04/pizza-that-grows-on-trees-grows-local.html>

Yap Fusion started informally as an initiative under the umbrella of Yap Women's Association (YWA) in November 2012. The startup phase lasted three months. It was based on volunteer exchanges between the women of YWA and myself. The volunteer exchanges

did not include any monetary transactions. The women of the YWA network provided local produce, which was processed on my own expense and returned to the women in order for them to taste to improve the new products. Actually, during the first months I was the only one processing the food, in my house at my own expense and then having the women taste-test to adapt dishes to the local palate. These volunteer exchanges supported the design of a shared process that involved local communities from the very beginning. Based on the success of these experiments in processing local food in an innovative way, Yap Fusion was then officially established as a non-profit cooperation under the YWA umbrella in February 2013.

### **Ensuring sustainability of locally felt beneficial results**

The project is contributing to the creation and production of new added value to products made with locally grown ingredients. The project will make an impact by supporting the local economy:

- reducing the expenditures on imported products, and stimulating local supply and demand for locally produced goods
- increasing agriculture and food processing capacity to benefit household, community, and private sector growth, and
- improving Yapese nutrition and health standards, and supporting the defeat of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in the State.

Different community stakeholders are involved in various phases of the project: local women in the resource and development start-up phase, local youth in the food processing and agricultural practices, the private sector in the production of semi-added-value products – such as the production of taro or yam flour – and sale of the final added-value product. Therefore, besides tackling the matter of poverty reduction and hunger, the projects stimulates the empowerment of women in the local commercial sector and highlights the vital importance of youth participation (+2015 agenda).

The possibility of increased production volumes through village networks consisting of workers, pounding machines and vegetable mills, will be the method for generating income while reducing time and cost of production. This will allow for capacity building, training, and the stimulation of new private sector enterprises. This approach has the ingredients needed to nurture the revitalization of sustainable agricultural practices while increasing the marketability of locally produced products. Additionally, these innovations will introduce a broader chain concept in the production of local added-value products such as:

1. harvesting
2. boiling and pounding
3. preparation of semi-added-value products, and
4. production of additional value products, branding, and packaging (with local products).

The end result will expectedly be that communities, typically so depending on foreign imported food production, will reevaluate and revalue this practice. There is a likelihood that proven locally successful agricultural crops, authentic wisdom and modern culture will melt together on behalf of a more sustainable Yap economy and culture.

### **Volunteer-based intervention is the most ‘local’ you can get**

The State Summit process that inspired Yap Fusion seemed to be a perfect synthesis of today’s world economic requirements, cultural values, and volunteer practices: it represented a significant example which helps understand and explain how volunteerism can become a bridge between tradition and a sustainable financial future, by rethinking the economy globally as a process through which we can “give value” to all that surrounds us and what we contribute to. Each individual was able to add their voice to the intention of merging tradition with modern financial needs, whilst participating voluntarily in the Summit. Volunteerism is crucial in this process because it reaffirms the intention of each individual in contributing to his/her society by starting from doing what he/she can do to achieve personal and common goals.

Yap Fusion’s concept is to tailor each step and each product to people and nature without intending to modify -- if possible -- people and nature themselves. Just as Yap Fusion’s recipes change slightly according to the season (e.g. from Yam Pizza to Taro Pizza), the actors involved in the process are different according to their social role. Each stakeholder contributed their time and resources in the start-up phase through volunteer activities, which ensures a strong community participation and commitment to the concept itself.

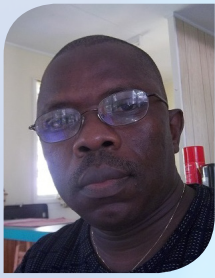
Currently Yap Fusion is providing free access to capacity-building to a limited group of people and provides inputs and tools to stimulate growth of individuals, communities, and private sector. This will be expanded to a wider audience in a second phase.

The objective of the start-up phase was to create recipes that could be prepared in each Yapese household to ensure community inclusion in the creative effort of the project, online recipe sharing, and volunteer cooperation. This turned out to be very successful. A laboratory and shop have been generously made available to Yap Fusion. The spaces have been renovated and furnished with appliances, and in the next month a group of six women will be trained to then start contributing to the sale of Yap Fusion products. The income generated from these activities will be used to provide free training to a wider audience.

### **What next?**

The rapidly-approaching second phase will increase the scale of what is already accessible, and will expand the project’s added value to other community stakeholders, such as the youth and the private sector, increasing the positive impact of this volunteer initiative. After all, to a large extent, Yap does not need imported food, yet certainly cannot benefit from its high cost and dramatic health consequences. It could be that Yap “just” needs to work a bit harder on merging tradition and new trends in a sustainable, creative and ethical way.

## MDG 2: Improving Access to Basic Education in Gizo, Western Province of Solomon Islands



Samuel Rogers

*Samuel Rogers serves as the UNV Provincial Adviser under the Provincial Governance Strengthening Programme (PGSP), based in the Western Provincial Government of Solomon Islands. The objective of the PGSP is 'Reducing Poverty and Attainment of Millennium Development Goals.' Samuel supports amongst others the development and implementation of educational infrastructure projects, and improves access to basic education in Western*

*Province. Samuel has a qualification in Social work and extensive experiences with government decentralisation work, both in his home country Sierra Leone and in the Solomon Islands. In December 2013, he finished his eight years engagement as UN Volunteer in various development initiatives.*

### Introduction

The Provincial Governance Strengthening Project (PGSP) has as one of its objective to develop the Provincial Government capacity for promotion and management of local development processes. The unique novelty about this project is its strategy of recruiting international project staff - mainly UN Volunteers - and deploys them alongside national counterpart at the provincial level. Here, tailored provincial development projects are implemented to support skills development and transfer as a capacity development strategy. In this way, productive educational initiatives will have the highest chance to survive and remain there.

### Problem Statement areas

After the 2007 Tsunami disaster in the western Province, services in the coastal communities including school infrastructure were broken down. Schools that survived this disaster, suddenly became over crowded, far exceeding the government approved student - teacher ratio in the schools. The associated social problems of overcrowding started to be very visible in school communities. Teaching and learning environment were no more conducive for both teachers and students. The consequent of this was a declining examination results and high rates of school drop outs. Teenage pregnancy was on the rise, together with drugs and substance abuse for both boys and girls. Parents, school managements and communities became concerned, and approached the Western Provincial Government for a timely intervention before the situation completely went out of hand. The response to the problem stated above by the Provincial Government, led to this education sector support.

I was recruited as a UNV Provincial Adviser to provide support to the implementation of Western provincial Government project activities, with a special focus on Provincial Capacity Development Fund (PCDF) projects under the PGSP. After the 2007 Tsunami, the massive damage to school infrastructures prompted the Provincial Government to carry out a needs assessment, upon which support to education infrastructure was prioritized as a means of improving access to quality education in the province.

### Intervention Outputs

The Western Provincial Government left no stone unturned

to quickly address this rising problem of school congestion. Stakeholders in school management were consulted as to what support can be provided, given the nature and magnitude of the problem. A package of the Education sector support was put together through the support of PGSP. This support included the construction of:

- Ten (10) classrooms for the Gizo primary School;
- Eight (8) Classrooms for Gizo Secondary School;
- Nine (9) Teachers Quarters for Gizo Secondary School;
- 160 set of Primary school set of chairs and tables;
- 160 set of Secondary school set of chairs and tables.

Extensive awareness was executed in the project communities, to ensure maximum participation from community members as direct beneficiaries. Voluntary contributions in the form of local building materials, setting up of community monitoring groups to monitor and evaluate the projects. That is also were I came in.

### Intervention Outcomes

The support to the education sector in the Western Province was well planned by all stakeholders with the aim of achieving the desired outcomes as per the strategic plan and direction of the province. This support to the development of school infrastructure epitomized the display of an effective participatory planning process backed by the support and commitment of the political will from the Western Provincial Government. The coordinated approach and support from all education stakeholders in and around Gizo was very encouraging. In project communities where building materials could not be delivered directly because of challenges of land and sea transport, community members volunteered to collect and carry them themselves. The huge construction work in the Gizo community also provided jobs for some unemployed youths and their families. This resulted in:

- Increased number of classrooms to cater for the growing population.
- Increased student passes in both internal and external examinations.
- Increased number of trained and qualified teachers on-board the Gizo Community High School staff list.

Based in the Western Province, my role as the International UN Volunteer in this education infrastructure project involved the following tasks:

- Support to the implementation of these projects,
- provide expert advice to the Planning process of the project activities,
- support the report writing on a quarterly basis,
- support capacity development related to project planning and implementation at both divisional and individual levels within the province.



One of the newly Constructed 4 classroom blocks for Gizo Community High school.

## Conclusion

The support to a conducive teaching and learning environment to the Gizo Community High School by Western Provincial Government was considered based on the need assessment done after the 2007 Tsunami disaster. The timely intervention of the Provincial Government through the PCDF averted the social and economic problems that were eminent after the 2007 Tsunami. Trained and qualified teachers in various fields from Solomon Islands National University (SINU) based in Honiara have already started applying to teach in this school as a result of the attractive school buildings and teachers quarters. The participation of youth in construction work may have also prepared youth better for construction opportunities that may lie ahead.

The end result of the project might therefore be an increase in the passing rate of students in both internal and external examinations, which in itself creates more future opportunity for students. The eventual goal of PGSP to increase education and skills and to improve the chances of young people for paid employment and subsequently reduce poverty, might therefore have become a very realistic objective.

### MDG 3: Achieving the water and sanitation goals in Pacific Island Countries



Brooke Yamakoshi

Safe water is a serious issue for community health and child survival. Globally, it is estimated that 2,000 children under the age of five die every day from diarrhoeal diseases. Ninety percent of these deaths are directly linked to a combination of contaminated water supply, unsafe sanitation conditions, and inadequate hygiene practices. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 7c, which is to

“halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation,” has increased global attention towards this issue since 2000.

While the world met the target of halving the proportion of people without access to improved sources of water in 2010, progress on sanitation has not kept pace. The access rates in the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) tell a similar story. Regionally, 52 percent of Pacific Islanders have access to improved water supply, while only 30 percent have access to improved sanitation. Within the region, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Vanuatu have the lowest access rates, and all four countries are off-track for achieving either the water or sanitation portion of Target 10.

Achieving the water and sanitation targets in 2015 in the PICs will require an annual level of effort nearly five times higher over 2006–2015 than the level seen over 1990–2006. Increased support to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in the Pacific will bring the region's countries closer to achieving MDG 7c by 2015 and contribute to meeting other MDGs, particularly reduction of diarrhea (MDG 6), improving maternal health (MDG 5), and reduction of child mortality (MDG 4). Support is also needed to address the impacts of climate variability and change, which cause death and disease through natural disasters such as cyclones, floods, droughts, and heat waves. The impact of

these disasters is exacerbated in the PICs due to the fragility and vulnerability of the water resources base in the countries' islands.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is the lead UN agency providing support to WASH programs in the Pacific. The UNICEF Pacific WASH Program encompasses 14 countries and around two million people, including 900,000 children. Those children are living on 25,000 islands and atolls across 10,000 square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean. UNICEF's program focuses on the least developed countries of Kiribati, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands (PNG is separately managed). UNICEF and its partners work in these countries towards two WASH goals:

1. Communities, schools, and health centres use improved water and sanitation facilities in rural and peri-urban villages; and
2. Communities and governments have the capacity in preparing and responding to disasters and adapting to climate change in the WASH sector.

### Sanitation in the Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands is off-track towards meeting MDG 7c for water and sanitation. Though some progress has been made on water supply, sanitation coverage is not keeping pace with population growth. Most recent official estimates based on national survey instruments put improved water supply coverage around 69 percent, with improved sanitation coverage still very low at 18 per cent. These figures are generally accepted to be overestimates, however, and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services recently estimated improved water supply coverage to be closer to 35 – 40 per cent, when accounting for system functionality. An updated survey of water and sanitation coverage is planned for this year to improve data quality for planning.

One of the key contaminants of fresh water supply is the practice of open defecation, which is the only option available to families without any form of toilet or latrine. Open defecation is often the norm because people do not understand how it impacts their health by spreading disease. Over half of people living in Honiara's poorest communities defecate in the open. In rural areas the situation is even worse with 4 out of 5 people not having access to a safe toilet or latrine. In addition to this, it is estimated that 70 per cent of all schools in Solomon Islands do not offer students with safe water supply, toilets, or hand washing facilities. Sanitation means access to functional toilets or latrines that ensure privacy and dignity, and are backed by a sustained and collective change in hygiene behavior within the entire community, contributing to a healthy living environment for all.

The consequences of the lack of sanitation in Solomon Islands are striking. According to World Health Organization, a Solomon Islander dies almost every day from water, sanitation and hygiene related illness. A recent survey undertaken by the NGO World Vision found that 1 out of 5 children under the age of five suffered from skin or eye infections in the previous two weeks due to poor hygiene practices and lack of access to safe clean water and sanitation facilities. In 2011, Amnesty International brought attention to the risks of physical and sexual violence that women and girls in Honiara face when they lack access to proper and safe sanitation facilities. On top of this, poor household sanitation creates the perfect breeding grounds for mosquitoes, which transmit malaria and dengue fever. The 2013 dengue fever outbreak, during which 1 per cent of the population was infected, illustrates the challenge of vector control in the context of urban

waste management.

UNICEF Pacific supports the increase of sanitation coverage in the Solomon Islands by helping to introduce new approaches that work with communities to act on the need for sanitation and to build their own household latrines together. One such approach, Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), is now recognized as one of the most successful and globally recognized approaches to accelerate sanitation coverage. CLTS facilitates communities' appreciation of the link between open defecation, faecal contamination of drinking water and food, and health impacts like diarrhoea and skin and eye infections. CLTS is now a key strategy in the Ministry of Health and Medical Services' proposed Rural WASH Policy. Once the Policy is approved by Cabinet, all WASH projects in the Solomon Islands will be required to include a component of sanitation "triggering," the process through which communities come to appreciate how open defecation spreads diseases.

As a first step to develop the capacity needed to support the policy, UNICEF partnered with Government and the World Vision to sponsor the first national CLTS training of trainers in March 2013. The training resulted in 35 CLTS master trainers from 10 different WASH agencies (including Government), who are expected to train CLTS facilitators at the provincial and community level as the national programme scales up. During the training, eight communities were "triggered" by the training participants. These communities are now working towards open-defecation free status, with support from community volunteers who will monitor progress against latrine-building targets. UNICEF will support the master trainers to encourage and develop their skills.



*In the Sun Valley community of Honiara, children map their community and normal defecation areas during a CLTS children's group session, facilitated by the newly-CLTS-trained trainers.*

### **WASH in schools**

The lack of water supply and sanitation facilities, coupled with poor hygiene practices, is a challenge throughout communities in the Solomon Islands, and schools are no exception. The majority of schools throughout the Solomon Islands lack water supply or sanitation for both teachers and students. In 2011, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development reported that only 43 percent of schools had water supply facilities, though in reality this figure is likely to be lower. The national average toilet-to-student ratio for all schools was 1:63 in 2011, with community high schools reporting a particularly low ratio of 1:94. Poor WASH facilities in schools limit children's general wellbeing, development, and education.

UNICEF is currently working with 12 schools in Guadalcanal and Malaita provinces to improve infrastructure and management of WASH facilities, and work with school children on healthy hygiene

habits such as hand washing. UNICEF has also worked with the Government and other partners to strengthen school-specific technical standards for WASH. Such standards will mandate that all schools include water supply and toilets for students and teachers, and that facilities are available for personal hygiene, such as hand washing and bathing (at boarding schools).

### **WASH and volunteerism**

Closing the gap in access to water and sanitation goals in Pacific Island Countries will require collaboration between governments, communities, international agencies and donors. Volunteers from within communities as well as international volunteers have a role to play in improving WASH in Pacific Island Countries.

In CLTS and other community-based sanitation and hygiene promotion methods, community volunteerism is a prerequisite for ensuring that the 100% open defecation free target is met. Women, men, and children volunteer to monitor their neighbors' progress towards constructing and using toilets, motivate and help them when they encounter problems, and celebrate their collective achievements once complete. In many successful CLTS programs around the world, these people will also volunteer to assist with CLTS "triggering" in neighboring communities to ensure that everyone's health benefits from cleaner communities. Similarly, when new water supply systems are constructed for schools and communities, many people freely give their time to help manage these systems by performing minor maintenance and raising funds for parts that need to be replaced over time. Without these groups of committed individuals, water supply projects frequently fall into disrepair and disuse. When this happens, children, women, and the most vulnerable suffer most.

As the least developed countries in the Pacific work on improving technical standards for WASH infrastructure, international volunteers can contribute their engineering skills to establish or strengthen standard infrastructure designs. Their skills are also useful for designing specific water or sanitation systems for communities and schools. In places where in-country engineering capacity is frequently insufficient to keep pace with targets for new water supply systems, these skills are critical towards closing the gap between supply and demand. International volunteers play an important role in bringing new ideas and approaches to Pacific Island Countries, and developing capacity to successfully implement such approaches.

As an international UN Volunteer with UNICEF in the Solomon Islands, I worked closely with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services on the introduction of CLTS in the country and the modernization of the policy framework to include community-based sanitation promotion methods. Though much work remains to build enough capacity to extend sanitation programs to every community, our collaborative work this year lays a foundation for increased attention and funding to sanitation initiatives.

I also partnered with health and education colleagues from government and community- and faith-based organizations to improve WASH in Schools and draw attention to the need for sanitation facilities that address the needs of girls. In a country where 65 percent of women report intimate partner violence, ensuring that the specific needs of girls and women are addressed at school is a prerequisite for building safe and healthy communities where all children can access education.



*Even where toilets exist at schools, they are frequently locked when no water is available for flushing, forcing students to go back to the bush.*

Looking ahead to the post-2015 agenda, it is likely that the world will commit to universal access to water supply, sanitation, and hygiene services. To meet this ambitious target in the Pacific island countries will require increased commitment and resources from everyone, including volunteers. The logistical challenges in extending programs to all islands and atolls make the contributions of community members or international volunteers based in rural areas critical to the sustainability of water supply systems and the introduction of sanitation and hygiene programs.

### **MDG 3: Achieving the MDGs by Advancing Human Rights**

*Since December 2012, Jin Wen has been working in Vanuatu as a UNV Human Rights Officer. She assists the Vanuatu government in human rights reporting and implementation, especially regarding the Universal Periodic Review and the UN Convention against Torture. This support is requested by the Vanuatu government and provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Pacific Regional Office.*



**Jin Wen**

*Previously, Jin worked for various international organisations and studied law in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and China. In this article she argues that respect for and implementation of human rights obligations directly contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).*

#### **Support for the Universal Periodic Review reporting and implementation**

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a human rights review mechanism created under the UN Human Rights Council, whereby all UN Member States have their human rights records reviewed every 4.5 years. The purpose of the UPR is to promote and enhance compliance with State's human rights obligations. The review takes the form of an interactive dialogue between the country under review and its peer countries, with a view to encouraging the exchange of experience and good practices on human rights protection and promotion. During a review session, the country under review reports on its human rights situation, and subsequently receives recommendations from peer countries on methods for improvement. The country under review decides to accept or reject a recommendation. By voluntarily accepting a recommendation, the country under review commits to its

implementation.

The first round of the UPR took place between 2008 and 2011 and 193 UN Member States were reviewed. The second round of the UPR commenced in 2012. The focus is on providing an update on progress towards the accepted recommendations, as well as on new developments in the country's human rights situation.

Vanuatu went through the UPR in May 2009 and received 48 recommendations (with 43 accepted by the Government). These recommendations include ratifying and implementing international human rights treaties, establishing a national human rights institution, combating and preventing torture, ill treatment, and violence against women, strengthening state institutions mandated to promote and protect human rights, and improving health care systems and child education.

The Government of Vanuatu, through its Ministry of Justice and Community Services in Port Vila, had requested assistance from OHCHR with respect to the UPR implementation. OHCHR, as the Secretariat of the UN Human Rights Council, supports countries that have gone through the UPR to implement its outcomes.

I work with OHCHR to provide the requested technical assistance to the Government. My work is to assist the Ministry of Justice and Community Services in the development of an overall strategy for implementing the UPR recommendations, in addition to implementing specific recommendations. These recommendations relate to the prevention of torture or ill-treatment, and the establishment of a national human rights institution. I work with a range of government ministries and departments, regional organisations, NGOs, and civil society organisations.

#### **UPR preparation and implementing recommendations for improving prison conditions**

Since my arrival in Vanuatu, I have helped OHCHR work with its regional partners in facilitating the UPR preparation process in Vanuatu. In November 2013, following a few months of preparation and consultation, the Vanuatu government submitted its national report to the UPR. Vanuatu is scheduled for review in January 2014 by the UPR Working Group of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

OHCHR also facilitated the government's consultation on integrating human rights standards, stipulated in international human rights instruments, into Vanuatu's domestic legislation and policies.

I work closely with an independent prison inspection team, which has been appointed by the Ministry of Justice and Community Services in an effort to implement UPR recommendations for improving the detainees' rights. The inspection team regularly inspects the prison conditions and detainee treatment in Vanuatu, and publishes reports with assessments and recommendations for improvement. OHCHR supports this initiative of the Ministry by providing the team with technical assistance. In August 2013 the team commenced its first inspections to prisons in Port Vila.

#### **Human rights implementation is key to the realisation of the MDGs**

The link between human rights, good governance, and development has been recognised by the international



community. In the Vanuatu example, there is a direct link between the attainment of MDGs and the UPR recommendations for improving human rights in Vanuatu. For instance:

Recommendation no. 41 that government should *‘Consider addressing the disparities in the delivery of and access to quality basic social services such as health, education, water and sanitation services’* relates immediately to MDG 1 (to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger).

Recommendation no. 42 to *‘Pursue its efforts to guarantee access for all its children to free and compulsory primary education by enhancing the implementation of its national action plan for education for all’* connects to MDG 2 (to achieve universal primary education).

Recommendation no. 39 for the Government to *‘Pursue efforts in order to further empower women and enhance their condition and participation in political life’* relates to MDG 3 (to promote gender equality and empower women).

Recommendation no. 40 to *‘Proceed with its efforts to improve the health system, combat diseases, improve maternity health and reduce child mortality rates’* mentions MDG 4 (to reduce child mortality).

Recommendation no. 40 to *‘Continue in its implementation of MDGs, with the necessary support of the international community, in order to improve maternity health, and strengthen the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria and other illnesses’* relates to MDG 5 (to improve maternity health) and MDG 6 (to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other illnesses).

Recommendation no. 47 for the Government, *‘with the support and cooperation of the international community, to seek to build up its capacities to effectively respond to natural disasters and adapt to the challenges brought about by climate change’* relates to MDG 7 (to ensure environmental sustainability).

Lastly, recommendation no. 46 to *‘Continue engaging members of the international donor community with a view to building capacity, particularly with regard to securing improvements in the economic and social rights situation of its population’* relates to MDG 8 (to develop a global partnership for development).

By fulfilling their human rights obligations, and incorporating human rights standards and principles into development plans and strategies, governments are more likely to be successful in meeting the MDGs. This was underlined by the UN Secretary-General at the 2010 MDG Review Summit. According to the Secretary-General, the MDGs can be accomplished by adhering to international human rights standards, as these norms and values “provide the foundation for engagement, in particular the key human rights principles of non-discrimination, meaningful participation, and accountability.”

In this regard, the UPR assesses the extent to which States have complied with their human rights obligations and commitments, including the efforts to work towards the MDGs. As an international accountability mechanism, the UPR complements the MDG accountability system, and, therefore, would contribute to the achievement of the MDGs.

Through my work, I hope to help the Government take advantage of the UPR process to tell their own human rights stories—the

successes and/or challenges in protecting basic rights and fundamental freedoms. The UPR also opens up opportunities, especially for smaller states like Vanuatu, to build partnerships with donor countries and international organisations that build capacity, provide technical assistance, and support the achievement of the country’s human rights commitments.

### **Contribution of volunteerism to the community**

I personally see that providing UNV support to the government to help meet human rights obligations will ultimately bring about improved service delivery and access for men and women, boys and girls, the young and the elderly.

In summary, development and the MDGs boil down to the enjoyment of basic rights: the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to food, the right to education, the right to life, women’s rights to equality, the right to development, etc. If public policy-makers and service providers integrate human rights standards and principles in planning and delivering public services, especially the basic services such as health, education, water, and sanitation services, at the minimum, discrimination would be reduced and the barriers that prevent equal and equitable access to services, information, and remedies would also be removed. Furthermore, individuals and groups with special needs would receive priority attention and resources, which might eventually close gaps in equality.

UNV support in the UPR process will also help build awareness on human rights standards and issues at levels ranging from government decision-makers to local communities. This is because the UPR is guided by the principles of participation and constructive dialogues, and aims to serve as a forum for human rights related discussions and consultations.

Last but not least, I firmly believe that the work of volunteers, local and international, contribute to improving human rights awareness and implementation, by either getting directly involved in promotion and implementation activities, or simply by ensuring human rights are practised and integrated in daily work and processes.

### **MDG 3: Volunteerism and Gender Equality in the Republic of the Marshall Islands**



Mary Treanor

Mary Treanor is a UNV Human Rights Coordinator, posted at the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). Mary is responsible for facilitating human rights treaty reporting and implementation in the RMI. Because the RMI has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the two main target groups are women and children. She supports four different agencies: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Women, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). These agencies are partnering in this project to facilitate the harmonization of treaty reporting and implementation and to meet the unique challenge of operating in the isolation of the North Pacific.

The RMI has ratified two human rights treaties: CRC and the CEDAW. Countries that ratify these treaties are then required to report on them. After an initial report summarizing the situation on the ground in the country and the compliance with the relevant treaty, countries are then required to submit periodic reports as a means of monitoring their progress on implementation.

This reporting process can often pose a significant burden for countries with limited capacity to monitor and record their implementation process. For example, here in the RMI, the initial report for CEDAW has not yet been submitted and several periodic reports for CRC are overdue.

Once reports are overdue, it becomes even more of a burden for countries to catch up. Some countries will then hire consultants to complete reports, as the RMI has done in the past as well. However, this is not ideal as it contributes to a lack of understanding of the human rights process here in country and makes it much less likely that the reports will be used for policy formulation and implementation in the future due to a lack of sense of ownership.

My position as a UN Volunteer working within the Ministry of Internal Affairs aims to facilitate the completion of the reports and strengthen the capacity of relevant government actors to eventually take on this task—and represents a unique solution to the issues outlined above. By working within the Ministry and in close partnership with co-workers at Internal Affairs and other ministries, I am able to help the RMI get caught up on their reports while continuing to build capacity and a sense of ownership in the process based on increased involvement in the reporting and increased understanding of the larger human rights framework.

Although my current assignment involves reviewing and reporting on human rights issues across sectors including health, labour, education and justice, I was introduced to these issues when I initially came to the RMI eight years ago as a volunteer. As an English teacher on the outer island of Enejet, Mili, I addressed the challenges that children, especially girls, faced on a daily basis when attending and aiming to complete primary school. Some children lived a significant distance from the closest school. This caused them to miss many days. As a result, some were forced to repeat a grade. If this happened often, family and social pressure often caused them to drop out before completing eighth grade, which was the highest level of school offered on the island. While these issues affected both boys and girls, girls were particularly vulnerable.

After I obtained my graduate degree in Hawaii, I returned to the Marshall Islands to work for a local women's NGO before assuming the role of UNV Human Rights Coordinator. My volunteer community-based experience in the outer islands has been very helpful to my current work. For example, one issue when reviewing data and reports on the RMI is whether or not they are reflective of life on both the outer islands and the urban centres or just the urban centres. The majority of the population is located on the urban centres, and the outer islands are often difficult to access, making it harder to involve them in projects and studies. I am able to use my experience living on an outer island to make sure that information we receive reflects life in the Marshall Islands on both the outer islands and the urban centres. One example of this is data and information regarding education. The challenges that outer island students face in completing their education are very different. If someone were making a decision based on the fact that substance abuse is a major issue

facing students, and this data was collected solely on Majuro, the resulting policy would not be applicable to outer island students, where substance abuse is much less of an issue.

This perspective gained from my past experiences has been very helpful as my work as the UNV Human Rights Coordinator progresses. As I work with members of government and NGOs, I am able to understand the real life implications of their work. With this understanding, I am able to better explain to them how the human rights reporting process can work in support of their work instead of as an additional burden. For instance, because the RMI is a very small country, many government and NGO workers already serve on a number of committees and have limited time to devote to participating in a new human rights committee. I am able to make connections between human rights and their everyday work, which helps show the stakeholders why participation in the process is actually a benefit to them. This better understanding also contributes to a more efficient process as everyone knows their individual role and where it fits in the process as a whole.

The members of the human rights committee are now more invested in making sure that the human rights reporting and implementation process works smoothly, even after my contract is over. All of this is relevant to MDGs and achieving gender equality because, by harmonizing the implementation and reporting processes for CEDAW and CRC, the relevant stakeholders and I have a real opportunity to fulfil the RMI's reporting obligations and make concrete changes in the lives of Marshall Islanders, especially the women and children covered by CRC and CEDAW. At the end of my contract, we will have completed accurate and up to date reports on the human rights situation of women and children here in the RMI. Access to better information in a central location will help decision makers at the policy level. It will also help NGOs and development partners as they decide on particular areas to target with projects. An accurate assessment of the current situation is the best tool to make sure that our limited resources are used in the most effective way possible.

I am especially fortunate to be placed within the Community Development Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Community Development Division bridges the gap between policy-making and implementation. Being able to work within this division means that I am able to both assist in policy development to protect the rights of women as children as well as see how these policy level decisions are realized at the implementation level. This further ensures the sustainability of my project. Additionally, there is a lot of motivation from my colleagues within the Ministry to assist in this project. In particular, many are very eager to understand more about human rights work and how it affects their jobs. As the RMI is a fairly small and isolated country, it can be difficult for government workers to access capacity building opportunities locally. The UNV human rights reporting project allows my colleagues within the Ministry and the wider government to build their capacity on human rights issues while continuing to do their everyday jobs.

As the RMI faces considerable economic and social challenges, it is more vital than ever to ensure that women and girls are empowered. We know that providing girls and women with access to educational and economic empowerment opportunities is a reliable way to improve the wellbeing of a community as a whole. I am very grateful that while my colleagues within the Community Development Division continue the empowerment work that they started years ago, I am able to complement their work by facilitating the human rights reporting and implementation

processes.

As I work now in the Ministry of Internal Affairs on issues of women's and children's rights, I find it impossible to forget my first experience in the RMI as volunteer within the community. It is a good reminder that, as we work at a policy level, the results are ultimately felt by individuals at the island, family, and individual level. From time to time, I run into former students. Some have gone on to the local community college; others have dropped out because of early pregnancy and other social and family pressures. No matter how high the quality of reporting, completing CEDAW and CRC reports will not automatically ensure that all girls are able to finish school or that all social and family pressures are removed. However, completed high-quality CEDAW and CRC reports will be valuable tools for decision making that will ultimately lead to effective programming to address these issues. I am confident that, as we continue the CEDAW reporting process and begin the implementation process, my colleagues and I can continue our productive working relationships so that eventually we can improve the number of girls completing high school and going on to college and university. I am honoured to be able to contribute to the movement for gender equality here in the RMI, and I am especially thankful that I have this opportunity to do so as a UNV.

### MDG 3:

#### Gender equality in voters registration campaigns in the Solomon Islands



Samuel Boadu

*Since July 2013 Samuel Boadu has been working as UNV Civic Education Specialist assigned to the Office of the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission under the Ministry of Home Affairs in Honiara, Solomon Islands. He supports the government in strategizing equal access and participation in the national parliamentary general elections 2014. He obtained his Bachelor of Science (Hons) at the University of Science*

*and Technology, Ghana and a Post Graduate Diploma in Public Administration at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration. "To reach the programme objective, Samuel believes that "electoral support needs to be tailored to the local cultural, social, educational, historical, and political context." Previously, Samuel Boadu has served 14 years as Electoral Officer in the conduct of Presidential and Parliamentary Elections. In 2005 he joined the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), served as an International UNV trainer and successfully trained UN Volunteers as officials on election voter education to guide the conduct of the Afghanistan chamber elections. After returning to Ghana, he was appointed as Deputy Regional Director specifically for elections operations in Ghana before joining UNV/ UNDP.*

I would like to quote a historical saying which reflects the conviction that guides the work I am tasked to realize: "God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female he created" (Genesis 1, 27). Subsequently, I would like to refer to the text of the American Declaration of Independence of 1776: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." However I have to admit that, even though we have progressed in our 'civilization process,' this equality is

still not reflected in many societies.

#### Gender equality in the political system in the Solomon Islands

Looking at the socially assigned roles and responsibilities in Solomon Islands, including the gendered division of labour for men and women, women usually hold an inferior position in most societies. As a result, women have less access to and control of resources, fewer legal rights, and are more often subject to physical violence. Women have little or no voice in decision-making; they have less education, work more hours, have less leisure, and poorer quality of life.

In Solomon Islands, there is no law that bars women from participating in political, administrative, social and economic life, but in practice the situation is different. The limited participation of women in politics and public service, where policy decisions are made, is a limitation in itself to women's full integration into national development agenda. Lack of formal education and the cultural perception of womanhood contribute to the subordinate status of women.

With regard to women's participation in politics in Solomon Islands, some women may not want to stand for elections because they may know very little of constitutional provisions. Some do not venture into politics because they think it is too risky and hectic. Others do not participate in politics because they fear a cultural barrier— women are supposed to behave, and contribute to society, in a certain way. Nevertheless, all women who would like to venture into politics are given all the encouragement they need.

Women represent 49 per cent of the total population of Solomon Islands, according to the 2009 population census. Yet during the National Parliamentary General Elections in 2010, no woman won a seat in any of the 50 constituencies. It was in a by-election that a woman managed to gain a seat to the National Parliament.

#### Volunteer interventions to instill new gender roles

The unequal participation of women and men in politics is evident in the predominance of men among parliamentarians, cabinet ministers, and heads of government. As in many countries, women and men have an equal right to register, file for nomination, and vote, yet few women are among elected representatives. The question is: do women and men have equal access, taking into consideration the socio-cultural limitations of women who may want to venture into politics?

Considering the limited participation of women in political processes, it is important to ensure that women fully participate in the up-coming voter registration exercise in Solomon Islands. This may be achieved by adopting several strategies that will put women and men on a platform of equal participation.

#### Key approaches to adopt gender equality in the registration campaign and the register

The Electoral Management Body (EMB) in the Solomon Islands will play a key role in highlighting gender issues in the registration campaign by identifying obstacles that hinder the participation of women and conduct a civic/voter education program aimed at women and men.

Since the level of illiteracy is often extremely high among women,

the following actions will be undertaken:

- The voter education teams will include a proportionate number of women — consisting of short-term employed people and volunteers who will be paid allowances — to present the message in such a way that women at all levels of education can understand, and deliver the message appropriately.
- The education campaigns should ensure that education reaches women as well as men, and promote respect in the community for women's equal right to participate in the registration campaign.

Women are said to work more hours than men. Therefore the venue for civic education outreach programs should be strategically planned and accessible such that it enables women to benefit in their preparation for elections.

- Public education materials like posters, which highlight the need for women to register to vote, a DVD on the Biometric Voter Registration processes, and brochures, will be published.
- Extensive awareness materials, including factsheets and an informative DVD, will be given to the civic educators for awareness-raising activities.
- An advocacy mechanism should be implemented for women's equal participation in the campaign for the registration process and the eventual registration of voters.

These approaches will do a great deal to overcome obstacles to participation.

#### **Community volunteerism in Solomon Islands**

One aspect of my assignment is to develop strategies for creating awareness of the Biometric Voter Registration in January 2014 for the compilation of a credible voter's registry for the 2014 National Parliamentary General Elections.

Since Solomon Islands is a male-dominated society, recruitment of civic educators for the registration campaign and registration officials for the registration of voters in the Provinces will target women who qualify for the voters register. The officials will enlist through applications submitted for consideration. The Civic Educator/ Registration Officials are volunteers who will be given incentives in the form of allowances to enable them do the work and sustain themselves.

My national counterpart and I decided to undertake an initiative that involved the development of a DVD film explaining all aspects of the electoral processes and the Biometric Voter Registration. This will create awareness and serve as the foundation for successful Biometric Voter Registration in Solomon Islands in January 2014. 155 volunteers who will act in the capacity as Civic/Voter Educators have been engaged and will be trained to create awareness from ward to ward and village to village in the 50 constituencies of Solomon Islands. They will use a DVD player, a generator, and a big screen to shoot and visualize the film in December 2013. The Volunteer Voter Educators will use the language best understood by the people while explaining the processes of the Biometric Voter Registration and will give the electorate the opportunity for their concerns to be addressed. Many female volunteers were involved in shooting of the film in order to show what women in Solomon Islands are capable of doing. The volunteers will be trained to exhibit the spirit of neutrality in their operations, a principle which will be of immense benefit to the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission as

an Independent body legally mandated in the organization and the conduct of elections.

Kakabona village in the West Guadalcanal Constituency of Solomon Islands was identified as a shooting site for the film. The village Chief was consulted to organize some members of his community as volunteers. The volunteers were to act as eligible electors who qualify to register as voters. There were approximately 40 volunteers who were organized at a village gathering scene. Key messages were explained to the volunteers, such as:

- The "What, When, Where, Why and How" of Biometric Voter Registration.
- eligibility criteria,
- non-eligibility, and
- registration offenses.

The volunteers were allowed to ask questions and their concerns were addressed. They went on to become resource persons for their communities at a later stage.

In another example, 20 volunteers were organized to simulate the actual registration process. The volunteers were taught what to do at each stage of the shooting. The volunteers received some incentives for the services they rendered.

#### **In conclusion**

Civic/voter education is critical in enhancing gender equality. Civic/voter education must be accessible to women as well as men. The information conveyed should be gender-sensitive and designed to be relevant to women's participation, particularly through the dissemination of positive images of women as voters, leaders, and participants in all aspects of the electoral process. The understanding of the socio-cultural limitations that have infringed upon women's general development and participation, and to some extent on men's development, will enhance a more participatory approach in Solomon Islands. What society must know and accept is that women have a voice in decision-making and they deserve to be heard to ensure their integration into the national development agenda.

#### **MDG 4:**

#### **Reducing child mortality by building capacity: accelerating immunization coverage in Solomon Islands**



**Robert Ninson**

*Assigned in July 2013 and hosted by Unicef, Robert Ninson is the UNV Expanded Programme on Immunization Officer to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in Honiara, Division of Child Health, Solomon Islands. He supports the Ministry of Health in implementing, monitoring, and maintaining its comprehensive immunization effort and control of other vital child health issues to reduce child mortality. He holds a Master's degree in Community Health from the University of Liverpool. He also successfully served as an Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) Consultant for the UNICEF Office in Kenya.*

Childhood immunization has become a fundamental strategy for achieving Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 4, in addition to representing a means of cost effective disease prevention. For

this reason, the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) is UNICEF's largest programme in the Pacific, covering 17 Pacific Islands. National vaccine programs in Solomon Islands have made notable progress, especially in reducing child mortality via vaccine-preventable diseases. In addition to actual vaccine delivery, immunization programs also focus on increasing awareness to increase immunization intake. Accordingly, communication and community play a key role in ensuring the success of immunization programs. The EPI program has been introduced in Solomon Islands, thanks to the assistance of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) vaccines and support for the September 2012 Measles Rubella campaign. This program is ideally an effective and efficient means of working towards MDG 4, particularly with respect to the goal of reducing the under-five mortality rate by two thirds in Solomon Islands.

Solomon Islands is highly committed to maintaining and achieving EPI global and regional goals for the reduction of child mortality and morbidity due to Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPDs). These goals include polio eradication, measles, and Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus Elimination (MNTE). Following the development of a National Comprehensive Multi-Year Plan 2011-2015 for EPI in Solomon Islands, the Pnuemococcus Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) will be introduced (targeting children under one year old in 2014 – 2015) and the Measles Supplementary Immunization Activity (SIA) vaccine campaign will occur in 2015 (targeting children aged 12 – 59 months).

GAVI has supported the Government of Solomon Islands in the introduction of Diphtheria Pertussis Tetanus (DPT) Hepatitis type b (Hep B) and Haemophilus influenza type b (Hib) DPT-HepB-Hib vaccine within the EPI's routine immunization services. Over the years the trend of vaccination coverage for Combined Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus vaccines was high (above 90%) the introduction of the new vaccine support facility to enable Solomon Islands to benefit introducing Pnuemococcal conjugate Vaccine type 13 and Measles Rubella Vaccine campaign s a means for assisting other countries in the introduction of new vaccines— with the ultimate aim of achieving total child immunization coverage especially on prevention of pneumonia, meningitis and other invasive pneumococcal diseases, as well as the elimination of measles and rubella, and reduction of Congenital Rubella Syndrome for Solomon Islanders' children.

*This will be achieved by ensuring that:*

- (i) 95 per cent of children under 1 year old will be routinely vaccinated with three doses of PCV13, and
- (ii) 98 per cent of children between 1-14 years old will be immunized with Measles Rubella (MR) vaccine through a nationwide catch-up vaccination campaign.

Despite the significant gains made in the reduction of infant and childhood mortality, in order to meet the desired immunization goals the following challenges are vital and must be addressed:

- improving access to quality health services across the country,
- ensuring sustainability of the provision of EPI Services, especially with regards to some Primary Health Care (PHC) facilities at the community level,
- ensuring sustainability of the provision of adequate supplies of essential drugs and equipment in public health facilities,
- addressing the retention of trained manpower in the public health system especially in the rural areas,

- training on the maintenance of an efficient cold chain for storage, and
- securing trustworthy transportation of drugs and vaccines for the Primary Health Care (PHC) system at village and community levels.

Currently, overall immunization coverage within the Solomon Islands is over 80 per cent, which is generally seen as good. However, there is considerable variation in the implementation of immunization. Some provinces have already reached more than 90 per cent for all vaccines, while other provinces are not reaching 90 per cent with any vaccine intake. Barriers such as sea transportation and inaccessibility of some of the islands have impacted negatively on vaccine transport and storage of vaccines and the insufficient number of EPI outreach services to be conducted, leading to the disruption of routine immunization services. Additionally, health facilities have experienced difficulties in sending safe and potent vaccines to the remote clinics in the right quantities, at the right place, and at the right time for immunization. There is a need for improved skills and knowledge on vaccine management among store managers and health workers, including vaccine stock control (logistics management), maintenance of cold chain equipment, and lack of transportation. Continued training oriented towards capacity-building training is required to facilitate and improve immunization processes— particularly cold chain equipment maintenance—and mobilize manpower to support these activities especially in rural areas.

EPI services in Solomon Islands currently offer supervision support for health staff. To supplement these activities, a conference on “Strengthening the Immunization Programmes in the Pacific Region” was held August 27-29, 2013, funded by Japanese Pacific Immunization Programme Strengthening (J-PIPS) and facilitated by the Ministry of Health and UNICEF. Its objective was to increase capacity of staff to provide quality EPI services to children and pregnant women. The training was successfully conducted in Kirakira, Makira-Ulawa Province. Such initiatives will increase involvement of health facility staff at all levels of service delivery in the provinces.

As part of the EPI programme, solar panels are distributed among selected communities. The benefit of a “SolarChill” installation is that vaccines can be preserved between +2 to +8 degrees Celsius. Often, community members volunteer to mount these solar panels even during a heavy downpour of rain, which shows their commitment to installing a solar-powered refrigerator on behalf of their community.



*UNV EPI Officer Robert Ninson and staff of the National Medical Stores, together with health staff of Lambi Clinic and community volunteers, help in installing a solar panel.*



UNV UNICEF EPI Officer Robert Ninson observing Group work during the JICA-Pacific Immunization Programme Strengthening Training.

The training in Kirakira focused on strengthening knowledge and management skills to improve vaccine delivery and cold chain maintenance as components of EPI. The training aimed at providing health workers with key concepts to improve the immunization coverage within their catchment area.

Specifically, the training provided the participants with knowledge, skills and tools such as:

- country profiling on EPI activities,
- cold chain and maintenance,
- vaccine forecasting and supply needs,
- vaccine stock management,
- monitoring of vaccines,
- safe delivery of vaccines and management of possible adverse events following immunization, and
- monitoring and analyzing immunization data.

### How UN Volunteers Help the EPI programme

UN volunteers in the Pacific support the EPI programme in many ways. Not only do they help to address gaps in urgently-needed skilled workers and work on capacity building of local staff, but UN Volunteers also play an important role in strengthening pre-existing mechanisms for actual immunization service programme delivery, targeting unreached (or difficult to reach) children within Solomon Islands' communities. They achieve this by enhancing effective and systematic coordination, reporting, and data collection as part of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services' efforts.

### MDG 8:

### Disaster risk reduction and climate change through the Pacific lens



Akapusi Tuifagalele

*In 2012, Akapusi Tuifagalele joined the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) Pacific Office as a National UNV Regional Disaster Risk Reduction Officer. His assignment objectives include provision of awareness raising, campaigning, advocacy, and coordination of disaster risk reduction processes across 15 Pacific Island Countries. Disaster risk reduction is a developing issue in the*

*Pacific, which needs more advocacies and campaigning to guide and encourage governments to endorse relevant policies and actions to reduce damages and losses from hazards, disasters, and climate change across the region. One of his past experiences was as a former Head of Fiji's National Disaster Management Office, and his contribution towards UNISDR has been quite unique.*

The Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management and relevant partners endorsed the Strategy for Disaster Risk and Climate Resilience Development (the "Strategy") in the Pacific in 2011, to be achieved in 2015. At the joint meeting of the Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management and Pacific Climate Change Roundtable in Nadi in 2013, countries reiterated their commitment to this Strategy. Other international and regional instruments are also coming to a conclusion in 2015, such as: the Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework for Action (RFA) 2005-2015, the Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change (PIFACC) 2006-2015, the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015, and the overarching Millennium Development Goals. Pacific leaders are eager to present the Pacific as a leading world region in the development of a strategy that integrates disaster risk and climate change considerations into a single strategy of action. This is extremely important to the region because of countries' Small Island Development Status and high vulnerabilities to natural hazards and climate change. My role is to advocate and coordinate with countries to help them consider the integration of risk reduction measures into their economic development policies, so that disaster costs on damages and losses can be reduced.

When I joined the UNISDR as a National UN Volunteer in 2012, I was overwhelmed to witness the progress that countries in the Pacific, along with other partners such as the Secretariat for Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, had made on the Strategy for Disaster Risk and Climate Resilience Development which would take the region to another level. My background in disaster risk management goes back to the early 1990's. I had seen the progress and changes already manifested to a very positive stance for Pacific Island Countries. In the 1990's, countries were encouraged to strengthen their institutional arrangements through the establishment and development of disaster legislations, disaster plans and procedures to name objectives, as projected in the UN General Assembly mandate for the 1990's that was declared as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). In 2000, the UNISDR was created by the General Assembly to replace the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction instrument and operated as its Secretariat on disaster risk reduction. In 2005, the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) was endorsed at the 2nd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Kobe, Japan, as the global disaster risk reduction strategy for 2005-2015. The HFA defined five priorities for action to be implemented by 2015:

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.
4. Reduce the underlying risk factors.
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

One of my first tasks was to coordinate and assisted reporting on the 2011- 2013 HFA review implemented for five countries; Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu. This task was important as Pacific countries' collective contributions merged with other nations globally to form the 2013 global assessment report on disaster risk reduction.

When I re-joined the disaster risk management fraternity, I noted the unique pace of progress made by countries adopting disaster risk reduction in their policies for socio-economic development. The HFA 2011-2013 review was part of the biennial review to gauge their progress. Along with a UNISDR consultant, I facilitated the review through direct visits and consultations with these countries. From a disaster reduction lens, I noticed different levels of progress made by countries. Although this was premised on their different capacities, I urged them to continue the good work as their positive progress meant saving lives and sustainable development for their countries. The Pacific contributed to a consolidated global assessment report for 2013, as noted earlier, which was tabled at the Global Platform for Disaster Reduction held in Geneva in May 2013 which I was honored to attend with Pacific delegates. The opportunity to participate in this meeting opened my eyes, and I witnessed firsthand a conference with more than 3,500 delegates from around the world—all occupied with finding disaster risk reduction solutions. On the positive side, the global assessment report produced by our UNISDR Geneva, and launched at this event, reported the global reduction of number of deaths by disasters. However, it reported an increase in the national economic costs of loss and damages. Pacific countries were no different and I am glad to be part of the process of advocacy and campaigning to assist our regional countries.

At the Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management Climate Change Roundtable in July 2013 held at Nadi, mentioned earlier, countries re-affirmed commitment on the Strategy to be implemented by 2015. UNISDR's strong view is that both disaster risk management and climate change complement each other and are both cross-cutting issues amongst sectors. There is tangible benefit to integrating these two processes into a single strategy. To elaborate, Pacific island countries are surrounded by the vast Pacific Ocean; some like Tuvalu, Kiribati, Tonga, and Marshall Islands are atolls and are already severely affected by sea level rise and climate change, and are in danger of becoming submerged under water 50 years from now. Islands' coastal beaches have been significantly eroded and salt water has actually intruded into arable lands and coastal villages. Some coastal communities have been recommended by their governments to relocate. This reality applies to the perils of the Pacific communities showing their extreme vulnerabilities and requires something to be done about it.

More work needs to be done at the national and community level to increasingly enable the platform for implementing the Strategy. A notable program that I coordinate, which brings out a feeling of positive commitment in disaster risk reduction practice, is the International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR) where there is inclusive recognition of vulnerable communities, for example people with disabilities. UNISDR advocates that more than a billion people across the globe suffer some form of disability, and the Pacific is no exception. However, the 2013 program theme was Living with Disability and Disasters. Some civil society organizations, namely Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation, Pacific Disability Forum, Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International and my office, served as key players in organizing the event in October 2013 in Suva. The program promoted and

raised the profile of disability inclusion through media campaigns and public awareness. This was a fulfilling experience for me as I was involved directly by leading, talking, mixing, and becoming a part of the disabled fraternity. It was not only an emotional experience, but to see their conviction I would summarize it with a quote from the closing oratory speech of a class eight student from Nausori, Fiji: "kindness is a message that a deaf can hear." This experience and program has changed my approach to disability and I am now a strong advocate of their campaign.

My work as a UN Volunteer has been very fulfilling experience that will linger in my mind for a long time. My office in UNISDR can definitely gain from this program, and I look forward to seeing more UN volunteers joining the disaster risk reduction and climate change fraternities to help out with Pacific communities.

## **MDG 8: Disability & development: "Nothing About Us Without Us"**



**Lanieta Matanatabu**

*Lanieta Matanatabu is a Project Facilitator attached to the Pacific Enable Project. The project aims to enhance Partnerships on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) for the United Nations and other stakeholders at the regional level. It is a two year joint UN, Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) project, funded by UNESCAP, UNICEF, ILO, WHO and UNV. Lanieta Matanatabu has a Bachelor in Applied Psychology and Sociology. She is a Counsellor, certified by the Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors, and has seven years of working experience as a research officer and as a counsellor.*

### **Becoming a UN Volunteer for the Pacific Enable Project**

After graduating from University in 2005, I worked for the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre as their research officer for three years collating and interpreting statistics for the Centre and for the general public, through which I had exposure to women and children's issues. I spent the next four years at Empower Pacific, formerly known as Pacific Counselling and Social Services. I was occupied with community, counseling, and research work. I joined UNV in March 2013 with the thought that this would be a new area of work for me.

I work as the UNV Pacific Enable Project Facilitator, based at the PDF. My role is to organize quarterly steering committee meetings with all partners, coordinating the research on the Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities (CRPD) in the Pacific and reporting to the UNPRPD. The countries currently involved in this project are Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and the Cook Islands. This is a pioneering regional project, which addresses four thematic areas of the CRPD. This includes:

- strengthening legislative and regulatory frameworks (Articles 4, 5, and 12),
- improving education outcomes for children (Article 24),
- increase work and employment opportunities (Article 27), and
- strengthening national-level data collection processes (Article 31).

Communities of the Pacific Island countries will benefit in the long term through this project as the rights of persons with disabilities will be recognized, protected, and promoted at regional and national levels. To a certain extent, work has already begun and results have been realized in the Cook Islands, Vanuatu, Palau, Nauru, PNG, Kiribati, and Tuvalu, as these countries have taken steps to ratify the Convention. However, the Marshall Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Fiji, and the Federated States of Micronesia still have a long road ahead to realize these objectives.

I can describe my current assignment as the most fulfilling and interesting journey that I have had so far. I enjoy working for and with people with disabilities, as well as coordinating the research on the Ratification of the CRPD in the Pacific. The research is one of the five components of the Pacific Enable Project, led by Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) in partnership with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). The other components of the projects are being coordinated by the other UN Agencies, namely, the ILO, WHO, ESCAP, and UNICEF. Their respective outcome goal addresses disability issues in the area of employment, community rehabilitation, legislation, education, and disability statistics in the Pacific. Being a Fijian working on a complex project I have the benefit of ownership of my Pacific Islander identity, with similar understanding of our cultural, social, political, and economic diversity in the region.

### Community Work and MDGs

In addition to being a UNV facilitator for the Pacific Enable Project, I also work with the Psychiatric Survivors Association on their projects, on the counseling networks they have built up over the years for Persons with Disabilities, and to discuss further support they need in order to provide a holistic approach to their programs. Working in partnership with the association not only raises their profile, but also strengthens their partnership with development partners such as the Pacific Disability Forum and UN Volunteers.

On a voluntary basis, I also support the development of young people at community level with mentoring and psycho-social support, to enable them to make informed choices in their daily life. They are a part of church youth groups, in which I aim to encourage reaching for academic excellence, as well as being able to make better life decisions relating to sexual reproductive health and relationships. My support was requested by able-bodied young people and youth groups from the community.

### Importance of Volunteerism

I always realize that when you have the passion and compassion to help the vulnerable population, volunteerism will come naturally. Volunteerism gives us a sense of fulfillment, a sense of belonging and purpose, knowing that at the end of the day, someone else is benefiting from your work, at individual, community, national and regional level. Specifically for Persons with Disabilities (PWD), the execution of projects such as the Pacific Enable Project is unique, in the sense that it illustrates the importance of involving regional development partners in including PWD in every aspect of community development work. At national levels, the project implementation also recognizes the importance of including Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) to be implementers in development work and not only beneficiaries, so DPOs can have ownership of the project itself. The phrase “nothing about us, without us” is a reality to them, and to the Pacific region as whole.

Being the facilitator of the Pacific Enable Project has taught me a lot about regional lessons, the challenges as well as the benefits we face in terms of our geographical, cultural, economic, political and social diversity. Recently I had the opportunity to meet all the other nine project officers engaged in work through the UNPRPD fund around the world during a special conference held in Dublin, and we were able to learn from each other. The knowledge sharing was phenomenal, and I was able to adapt best practices learned into my daily work.

### MDG 8:

### Reflections on and legacies of volunteerism in peace and development



Addisu Eyader

*Mr. Addisu Eyader serves as UNV Programme Specialist Peace and Recovery for the Human Security Project for Tension Reduction, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation, based in Honiara. He is of Ethiopian origin, holds a Master of Arts in Sociology, and further specialized in post-conflict rehabilitation and peace operations. He has approached volunteerism as an invaluable part of peace-building in peace reconciliation processes. His objective for this assignment is also, therefore, to integrate community mobilization as an integral part of self-owned community rehabilitation.*

The achievement of sustainable development is an issue that receives global attention. An approach with the ingredients of volunteerism to attain peace and development is becoming a key in the agenda to enable sustainable development.

The exemplary work of volunteers is significant for introducing and/or developing existing practices of volunteerism. I noticed this when I was at an elementary school observing the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) volunteer health professionals conducting an eye surgery mission in Ethiopia, which gave sight to sightless community members. This work inspired me to cultivate the culture and philosophy of voluntary service in my own life. Thus, I began my first career steps in Ethiopia as a volunteer civic and ethical education instructor at community schools. Further, I served as volunteer Social worker and Health Education agent at Ethiopian Red Cross and Red Crescent Society and Ethiopia anti-Malaria Association respectively. The aforementioned experience has enabled me to acquire professional experience, life skills and attributes of self-reliance.

Volunteerism is an attractive tool for achieving sustainable project deliverables. For example, the voluntary education project launched in my village 10 years ago resulted in introducing a living practice of engaging college students in voluntary community services and strengthening community support system to equip schools with books. I learned the same key lesson between 2004 and 2013 when I was coordinating development and peace-enabling programmes for four international Non-Governmental Organizations in Ethiopia and United Nations in south Sudan as their peace-building officer. The engagement of volunteer peace activists and a peace committee in managing conflicts in refugee camps in Ethiopia is a best-case scenario I have experienced signifying the role of volunteers in conflict management. For instance, the then South Sudanese refugee religious institutions of the Nuer and Aguak community organized peace dialogues between the aforementioned two ethnic groups which resulted



in peaceful co-existence of refugees in Pugnido refugee camp in response to the 2005 conflict in the Refugee camp, situated south west part of Ethiopia bordering South Sudan.

I joined the UNDP Solomon Islands as a UNV Program Specialist working for UNDP on 15th September 2013. Solomon Islands is a country in the South Pacific region with a population of 523,000 people. The country has more than 70 language groups, which signifies its cultural diversity, and with the natural consequence of multiple diversities of community priorities, demands and supplies.

The project I am working in is called the “Human Security Initiative for “Tensions” Reduction, Reconciliation, and Rehabilitation in the Solomon Islands” which is financed by the UN Human Security Trust Fund and implemented by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and International Labour Organization (ILO). Since October 2011, the project has been operating in the Provinces of Malaita, Guadalcanal, and Honiara. It is particularly important to ensure human security in the Solomon Islands to address effects of the ethnic conflict or “tensions” that gripped the small island nation during the period 1998-2003. This joint UN project has a specific focus on:

- (i) the promotion of peace building activities and mechanisms to foster social cohesion at the community level
- (ii) improving access to water and sanitation for schools in conflict affected communities, and
- (iii) strengthening the skills of youth, women and entrepreneurs to increase their chance of having access to viable income generating activities.

UN Volunteers have been engaged in implementing project activities on the above priority areas to support peace building processes in Solomon Islands.

The project will leave a lasting legacy of key accomplishments in peace and development in Solomon Islands by making recommendations to government ministries and local community institutions on sustainable peace building policy and strategy, conflict sensitive programming, community peace education, psychosocial support and peace building coordination; and through a volunteerism programme and mainstreaming strategy.

I conducted a rapid participatory assessment on initiatives pertinent to community volunteerism in Malaita, Guadalcanal and Honiara. The assessment deliverables identified the need for volunteerism mainstreaming strategy. To implement this strategy, 25 key volunteers were identified as key players of outreach community peace building work which will be executed through capitalizing existing capacities and initiatives of community volunteers. Remarkably, advocacy work is underway to integrate volunteerism as a key implementation approach of the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace (MNURP) draft peace-building policy framework. In addition, I am ensuring quality human security project delivery, as a program specialist, by assisting in the planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and coordination of the joint UNDP, ILO and UNICEF Human Security project.



*Facilitating post-conflict recovery psychosocial support, and community volunteerism mainstreaming workshop at Visale, Guadalcanal on 25/10/13 and Honiara on 11/11/13.*

More importantly, promoting UNV approaches to peace and development in the Solomon Islands government MNURP is worth mentioning. Significantly, the Ministry leaders are committed to scaling up volunteerism approach. The Ministry under Secretary Peter Mae has this to say: “We must work together to enhance the practice of volunteerism in Solomon Islands. Let us institutionalize this approach through creating an indigenous organization named Solomon Islands Voluntary service ... Australians have this system in place, Australian Volunteers Service.” To this effect, I am working on a project concept note to make this vision come true. *The realization of this project idea will contribute to indigenous skilled human resource capital development which will be capitalized upon by government, NGOs, and other development actors to execute projects in context-appropriate and sustainable ways.*

To conclude, volunteering, as a people-centered approach to peace, empowers change through bottom-up approaches. The Human Security Project’s implementation approach of top-down protection and bottom-up empowerment will be best realized by engaging volunteers at all stages of project cycles.

### *Post 2015 Agenda:*

*“Together on the Great Canoe of the World.”  
“Youth as partners on the journey towards sustainable development in the post-2015 development agenda*



**Jean Choi**

*Jean Choi is a UNV Youth and Participation Officer at UNICEF. Her work encompasses facilitating youth participation in the post-2015 debate, and how in particular the Pacific Island countries (PICs) can address the challenges beyond 2015. Below she narrates how the youth population will play a vital role by becoming either the economic engines and human capital, or a threat to the security and growth of PICs in the post-2015 world. Furthermore, she relates how volunteerism can play a part in mobilizing the positive energy of young people as partners in achieving sustainable development in the Pacific.*

### **Introduction**

At the dawn of the new millennium, the largest ever gathering of political leaders took place at the United Nations (UN) in New York. The result of that meeting, now called the Millennium Summit, was the Millennium Declaration . This Declaration put into writing the principles and values that mattered to world leaders in the year 2000. This Declaration outlined the eight

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs, put together by a team of people charged with that responsibility by the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, attempt to turn the words of the Declaration into goals for action, with specific indicators and targets to measure progress, to be achieved by 2015.

Currently, thirteen years after the Millennium Summit, we see the fastest poverty reduction in human history: there are half a billion fewer people living below an international poverty line of 1.25 USD a day. Child mortality rates have fallen by more than 30 per cent, with about 3,000,000 children's lives saved each year compared to 2000. Deaths from malaria have fallen by one quarter. This progress has been driven by a combination of economic growth, better policies, and the global commitment to the MDGs.

Nevertheless, the work is clearly not finished. There is a need for global dialogues and action around what happens after the MDGs expire. The first of these global dialogues happened at Rio+20 in 2012. There, world leaders agreed that new goals and targets needed to be grounded in respect for universal human rights, to finish the job that the MDGs started. Another outcome of the Rio+20 summit was the articulation of a way for the Pacific islands to take part in the dialogue. As agreed at Rio, the Third International Conference for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) was confirmed to take place in September 2014 in the Pacific island nation of Samoa.

In this global debate, youth must be squarely at the table as partners in efforts towards achieving the sustainable future of the world. The legitimacy of the process demands that young people be counted and considered. Globally, more than half of the population is under 25 years old, and will inherit the outcomes of the post-2015 development agenda. It will be today's young people who will bear the most responsibility for the post-2015 agenda, and the success of its implementation will depend on the active engagement and ownership of this process—from planning and implementation to monitoring.

This article illustrates briefly the work done so far to ensure that young people of the Pacific have their chance to create a strong, impactful and ambitious Pacific youth platform in a global development framework. It also highlights the role volunteerism can play to mobilize the energy and passion of young people to move beyond "business as usual."

### **Why Youth?**

*"Youth could either be our greatest asset in economic development or our greatest threat to national security in the years to come."*  
– Ambassador Robert Aisi of Papua New Guinea, Permanent representative to the UN when speaking of the need to address the Youth Bulge during Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) Preparatory Meeting, Nadi, Fiji, July 2013

The UN defines youth as those people between the ages of 15-24 years. This group accounts for nearly 2,000,000 people in the Pacific region, which is close to 20 per cent of the region's total population. As many as a third of the adult working-age population are aged 15-24 years.

Rapid urbanization in all Pacific Island countries over the last 40 years has made it much easier, for young people in particular, to access senior secondary schools, tertiary education, high-quality health care, and improved water and sanitation services, as well as electricity, mobile phones, television, live entertainment and employment opportunities. Even those with little or no basic

education still have a better chance of getting work in a town than they have in the rural economy.

There are, however, widening disparities between the rich and poor in urban centers, affecting the quality of schooling and access to community facilities such as sporting and recreational outlets. However, congested and often unsanitary living conditions for those with low incomes are a major threat to health and well-being. Urban life in many Pacific countries can be threatening and often violent. A survey of high school students in Marshall Islands, for example, highlighted that a significant reason why children did not go to school was because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to and from school in the past 30 days.

A large urban youth bulge, together with few job opportunities, growing inequalities, and government instability, produces conditions ripe for social conflict. An event such as a sudden increase in food or fuel prices can provoke protests and violent outbursts. The pressures of managing changes enforced by globalization have erupted in the Pacific in recent times. Political uncertainties in Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands have precipitated greater unemployment and delayed the pace of economic and social development. This lack of opportunity for productive work creates a dependent population which itself becomes a major burden on communities and on government expenditure.

Overall, the situation of young people in the Pacific region has changed little since the onset of the MDGs. While there has been a large reduction in child deaths and improved access to primary schooling, safe water and medicine, unemployment and lack of access to services in many Pacific island countries remain major factors for significant numbers of young people. High population growth, rapid urban expansion, political volatility, underperforming economies, now further weakened by the impact of the global economic crises, and the rising cost of food have made challenges facing youth more critical and point to a future for many young Pacific Islanders that holds an increased risk of entrenchment of poverty and broadening disparities, which will cause widespread discontent.

It is in this context that young people must make their bid for a better future in the post-2015 agenda. In the new development agenda, youth issues must be better taken into account, as the stakes for not addressing these gaps will be too high. Young people can either become the economic engines and human capital for a more robust Pacific region, or they may become a threat to the security and sustainability of the region as a whole.

### **Youth and Volunteerism in SIDS 2014 and Post-2015**

*"We must find a way to make sure youth and women are both agents and beneficiaries of sustainable development"*  
– Ambassador John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda, President of 68th UN General Assembly, Opening speech on SIDS interregional Preparatory Meeting, Barbados, 26 August 2013

The Third International Conference for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) is scheduled to convene during September 2014 in Apia, Samoa. The SIDS platform is the main channel for the Pacific to make interventions into the Post-2015 development agenda.

As a UNV Youth and Participation Officer based in UNICEF, I have contributed to this process by 1) coordinating and facilitating the design of the three regional youth workshops in June 2013, Fiji,

2) supporting the Pacific SIDS Youth Workshop in July 2013 in Fiji, planning and guiding the high-level interventions by youth delegates at the Pacific SIDS Preparatory Meeting in the same month in Fiji and again 3) at the Interregional SIDS Preparatory Meeting in Barbados (August). Currently I am also supporting the coordination of the SIDS Youth network members in the lead up to the Samoa 2014 conference.

The key message from young people at these workshops to governments and development partners was for them to see young people as partners in sustainable small island development and not as an issue. To effectively address the priority areas, the Pacific youth raised the need for a solid foundation of good governance and freedom of information, and the creation of an enabling and inclusive environment, free from crime, violence and discrimination that provide equal opportunities for all. This approach should be inclusive of young people with disabilities, rural and outer island youth, young people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, young men and young women. They prioritized:

**1. Quality Education** - There is a need to have access to affordable and holistic education, where they are provided with the tools from an early age to become critical thinkers, active learners, innovators and strong leaders. Environmental issues such as climate change should also be mainstreamed in the education system.

**2. Youth Employment** - The limited opportunities for decent work are a major challenge for young people in the Pacific. They have called on the private and public sectors, in both formal and informal economies to provide decent work for young people, as well as provide access to finance, skills-building, and training to encourage self-employment.

**3. Health** - Young people need greater access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health information and services; the inclusion of both social and biological aspects of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) at age-appropriate levels from pre-adolescence; the creation of safe spaces to be creative and talk openly about their issues to foster healthy emotional development. Child, adolescent and youth nutrition needs to be urgently promoted to reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) especially for islands that are more dependent on imported and unhealthy food.

**4. Climate Change** - Children, youth and persons with disabilities must be included in climate change adaptation and disaster risk management projects and policies; a move towards 100% renewable energy is essential; as is an investment in the creation of green jobs for young people. Beyond coordinating and facilitating young people to effectively advocate on behalf of their issues, my work also aims to empower and enable young people to become social actors who have the power to bring about impact on the ground.

Currently over 70 young people from 30 SIDS from the Pacific, Caribbean, and Atlantic, Indian, Mediterranean and South China Seas (AIMS) are pursuing the commitments they made at their respective regional youth workshops. In their commitments they were careful to balance their ambitions to see real change and their ability and capacity to deliver those results. It was a clear message to governments and development partners that young people were not going to wait for their elders to enact the change they want to see. Young people are going to start implementing

and building movements from the ground upwards. As such, from leaders of national youth councils, to peer mental health educators and climate change advocates, these young people are showing how through the spirit of volunteerism, passion and energy, young people can produce grass roots momentum, to enact greater changes for a more sustainable future.

As part of these efforts to empower young people as social actors, I also coordinate the UNICEF Youth Mediactivist program. This is a volunteer roster that facilitates the production of youth-led radio programs, radio spots, videos, visual artwork (paintings, illustrations), feature stories, and blogs on a wide range of topics and thematic areas relating to protection, health, education, climate change, gender and more. This roster also facilitates the mobilization of youth volunteers to support activities on the ground where necessary. Over the last six months, close to 200 young Pacific island media producers have joined the program. These UNICEF Youth Mediactivists have been instrumental in contributing to the post 2015 debate. They have been the main drivers of collecting, and processing offline votes for the post 2015 agenda, and also raising awareness about post-2015 consultations in the Pacific through peer-to-peer communication. To date, those UNICEF Youth Mediactivists have collected and processed over 1500 votes.

### Meet Elenoa

Elenoa is one of our UNICEF Youth Mediactivist MYWORLD 2015 Campaign volunteers. I asked her to share her experiences as a MYWORLD volunteer, and she replied:

“Our MYWORLD campaign is mostly collecting offline votes. Our favored method is to work in schools and street voting. We utilize our networks to get young people already in schools, to take on MYWORLD as a project. In terms of street voting, we stand at bus stands, neighborhoods, markets, and strike up a conversation with anyone to get them to vote.

Of course, we canvassed our nearest and dearest first of all. Our most successful partnership has been with the Laucala Bay Secondary School, where one of our task force members, Sera, is the head girl. She was able to coordinate a MYWORLD campaign that resulted in 100 per cent of the school voting, with 600 votes. To date, we have collected and entered 1000 offline votes from Fiji manually into the database. Because we are just students and young people with limited resources, we tend to make and do with what we have – for example taking pictures with our cell phones. Our campaigning is nothing fancy; just a lot of elbow grease, time, and passion.”

When I asked her to tell me one memorable story from her experience of promoting the MYWorld survey, she told me:

“Friday evening, our grandfather asked the family to meet up. I thought it was a good opportunity to get my family members to vote for MYWORLD. I brought out the voting forms I had prepared. They started filling it out. The kids had no problems, but the older folks - my uncles, aunts, etc. - started badgering me with questions. “If I fill this out, will my answers really be taken seriously? Will this make a difference?” asked an aunt. “Whose survey is this? Are you doing your supervisor’s work for them?” asked another uncle. These were difficult questions that I did not have ready answers to. I knew the process, but it was a legitimate inquiry: were any of these individual votes going to make a difference when it comes to setting the global agenda for post2015?

I continue my campaigning to get as many people to take part in

**This publication was edited by UN Online Volunteer Sandra Kerr,  
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