

Interning at UNDP Indonesia

During most of my working years I was always told that United Nations (UN) internships are really hard to come by, and once you get them, you should not expect anything less than hard work. Turns out everything they said, was quite true. I still remember how it took me by surprise when I received an email from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) about my successful application. I heard within a month of applying and was completely amazed at their kind earnestness in forwarding me an offer so soon. I remember feeling extremely happy for the next few days.

For one it was a sense of achievement to join UNDP and also a brief spurt of joy to be able to live in a totally new country like Indonesia: the largest archipelago in the world which houses many active volcanoes, dwells the largest living species of lizard, the Komodo dragons, serves the famous salad *Gado Gado* and ofcourse *Bahasa Indonesia* - the language which by the way I still haven't mastered. Considering my stint was brief, I gathered as much as I could during my two months in Jakarta.

For my internship, I was selected for a highly specific role on the Indonesia Democracy Index (IDI) project at the Democratic Governance and Poverty Reduction Unit (DGPRU). My primary role was to work on developing, assessing and disseminating project's communication strategy, aside from the various other roles I undertook. A quick tip: one should consider developing a niche or a specialized area of expertise for oneself as an important career development tool. For instance, having an academic and professional background in development communication made me suitable for the role and was instrumental in getting me the internship.

During my time at UNDP, I was based full-time in Jakarta with regular off-site visits to Bogor, which is an absolute beauty and only an hour away from Jakarta's maddening chaos. Talking of chaos, Jakarta reminded me a lot of Delhi in India and brought me closer to the reality of life that I would face once I go back to India after my Masters in Public Policy at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKYSPP). A lot of my work at UNDP pushed me to discuss, analyse, and present my findings to the key stakeholders, which included UNDP officials, government officials, academicians, and practitioners. I could draw my experiences and skills gained at LKYSPP for different level of my work and learning from this convergence was a key takeaway for me from the internship.

UN internships can be very useful if one is considering working for the UN in the future. It doesn't necessarily guarantee a job but provides a glimpse of how the system works, which is a great learning in itself. I strongly believe that at the early stages of one's career, especially for me who has worked for around four years, internships are always a good way to upgrade existing skills and gain newer perspectives.

To sum up, my overall internship experience improved considerably because of everything Jakarta represents. There's chaos, there's haze, there's traffic but

people always have time for each other and know how to step back. Fortunately for me, I could experience Indonesia in its full glory during Ramadan. Also, the burden of being an unpaid intern – a painful arrangement for which UN is quite infamous - was shared by the generous funding I received from the newly launched Funded-Internship Programme for LKYSPP students. UNDP Indonesia gave me an opportunity to work in my own style and be creative with the work I was doing. Indonesia and particularly UNDP turned out to be one of the best experiences in my life in Southeast Asia, both professionally and personally. I would strongly recommend the future students to apply persistently because it is worth experiencing.

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