



Amanda Eyer (left), UN Youth Volunteer with UN-Habitat Ecuador, during a workshop about urban planning with the community of Puerto La Cruz in the Gulf of Guayaquil. (UNV, 2014)

Mutual learning, action and enthusiasm

Among this year's many enriching experiences as a UN Youth Volunteer, two particularly stand out. Participating in the organization of the first National Urban Forum in Ecuador was one of them. The other was learning about the most immediate needs of communities living under very poor conditions in the Gulf of Guayaquil. In many ways, I equate these experiences with the essence of the mission of a volunteer.

Quito, Ecuador: An experience away from home is challenging, a confrontation with a different culture at times confusing, and the lack of familiarity frustrating. I believe that during my yearlong UN Youth Volunteer assignment in Ecuador, all stars were aligned: rarely did I deal with any of the above.

The Andes, the city in its midst, and my host institution, the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, greeted me with open arms and slowly taught me the tips and tricks of living and working in Ecuador.

My UN Youth Volunteer assignment was funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and took place through UN Habitat Ecuador. UN Habitat Ecuador and the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing collaborate on certain urban planning issues.

A main focus of this partnership is to organize events or workshops with the aim of discussing the current state and future of cities in Ecuador, sharing knowledge and experiences in urban planning, and increasing the capacity of local governments to anticipate, control and plan the development of their human settlements.

My volunteer assignment consisted in helping to organize these training events, as well as supporting the Ministry in several other activities.

Among this year's many enriching experiences, two particularly stand out. Participating in the organization of the first National Urban Forum in Ecuador was one of them. With the participation of close to 250 urban professionals from all over the country, and the attendance of 25 urban experts who discussed urban planning instruments, land use planning techniques and how to improve the social aspect of public housing, the event was a success.

The other special experience was related to an intervention project by the Ministry taking place in the Gulf of Guayaquil. Together with a team of architects, urban planners and social workers, I visited the communities living in the Gulf under very poor conditions: no drinking water, precarious housing, little electricity, very little income, low access to education or health services, and very low mobility. During our visit, we held meetings in each settlement so that the villagers could tell us about their day-to-day life, their most immediate needs, and their vision for the future of the village. Together, we worked on a proposal for the necessary interventions to actually enhance their quality of life.

In many ways, I equate these experiences with the essence of the mission of a volunteer: mutual appreciation and learning, action and enthusiasm. While I will soon end my assignment as a UN Youth Volunteer, those values will continue to motivate and guide me.



• Ecuador • UN-Habitat • urban planning

Sustainable Development Goal: