

# INTERVIEW

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## **ACHIEVING THE SDGS AND PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT IN EAST AND NORTH-EAST ASIA**

*with Charlotte Arribe*

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## *Interview with Charlotte Arribe*

*Charlotte Arribe is a Sustainable Development Consultant at the United Nations ESCAP East & North-East Asia Office, where she works on projects and policy research around technology, innovation, entrepreneurship, smart and sustainable cities, gender, youth, and inclusion. She is a core committee member for “Urban Innovation Challenge: Citypreneurs,” the only international start-up competition in the world that encourages young entrepreneurs to offer profitable solutions to urban challenges within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Prior to this, she worked as the CSR Creative Strategist for a Korean start-up, the Assistant Director of Korea Programs for the Youth Diplomacy & Language Institute (NPO), and a Youth Program Specialist in Singapore. During her time at Sciences Po, she also worked on the “Management of Social Transformations” (MOST) program, a Regional Integration project under UNESCO’s Policy and International Cooperation division in Paris. She received an M.A. of Global Affairs & Policy specializing in International Development Cooperation and Law & Organizations from Yonsei University, Seoul, and a B.A. in International Relations and Cultural Anthropology from University of California, Davis.*

*The Journal’s editor Sue Jeong sat down with Charlotte Arribe to discuss her perspectives on the SDGs.*

*\*All thoughts and opinions presented by Charlotte Arribe in this interview are her own, and do not reflect the views of the United Nations.*

**Y: Could I ask for you an introduction of yourself and what you currently do for UNESCAP-ENEA?**

CA: My name is Charlotte Arribe, and I am a French-Singaporean. I currently work as a sustainable development consultant for UNESCAP-ENEA (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for East and North-East Asia). It's a regional commission, and my office focuses on six sub-regional countries, which are China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, and the Russian Federation. At UNESCAP-ENEA, I research on policies regarding the region, entrepreneurship, and the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), and concentrate on themes of science, technology, and innovation. I'm interested in how frontier technologies have an impact on different societies, and how we can integrate the SDGs with new technologies to ensure that the United Nations Charter and International law are upheld. Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the SDGs, I contribute to different fields that pertain to development, such as gender, youth, the aging population, and climate change.

**Y: Has the integration of technologies with the SDGs been a very recent development?**

CA: It is quite recent because the United Nation's SDGs have only been implemented since its ratification in 2016. With the emerging issues regarding cybersecurity and intellectual property, scholars in academia and policy-makers have developed a keen interest on technologies and its challenges.

**Y: How did you attain your current position at UNESCAP-ENEA? What kind of efforts had to be made in order to work for the United Nations? How has previous work informed you of what you are currently doing? What has helped you the most in getting to where you are today?**

CA: I received my Bachelor of Arts in International Relations and Anthropology at the University of California Davis. I particularly focused on Northeast Asia in International Relations, and so I think I always knew that I wanted to be in this region. But, initially, my double major in Anthropology led me to an internship at UNESCO because I was interested in cultural preservation. However, I found

my experiences as an intern to the UN bureaucratic, and consequently worked as a youth program specialist outside of the UN. Through that opportunity that I pursued for about three years, I gained a skillset that is vital to the work I am doing now—planning, managing, and relating to people of different ages. Thus, even though it was not in the same field as development, the skills I learned were transferrable. I enjoyed what I did, and eventually wanted to do more and have a wider impact. So, I applied to the Yonsei University's Graduate School of International Studies, and studied issues pertaining to Asia. Having been educated in North American and Europe, my studies at Yonsei University GSIS gave me a better understanding of this region and the world.

At Yonsei University GSIS, I jumped at every opportunity to get to where I wanted to be. I was a GSIS Ambassador; worked part-time at a start-up because they were developing a platform for corporate social responsibility; became a part of the Directors Committee of a charity, called the Youth Diplomacy and Language Institute; and wrote a thesis on urban regeneration. Through these experiences and networking, I sought an internship at UNESCAP-ENEA. I started working for them as an intern a few days after submitting my thesis. I commuted for four hours and worked really hard, and applied for this position as a consultant when the opportunity arose. I think it was a combination of luck and putting yourself out there. While it is definitely easier once you know what you want to do, I would suggest that current students try to experience as much as they can, make connections, and get out of one's own comfort zone.

**Y: What are your perceptions or thoughts on development, intraregional connectivity, and the sustainable development goals? How does culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism play roles in achieving the sustainable development goals?**

CA: The UN is all about cultural pluralism. As an institution, it tries to encourage governments to cooperate despite differences in history, culture, and society. The SDGs are a crucial way in which various governments can work together to achieve a common goal. They allow us to take a step back, and think about the bigger picture. These issues concerning the SDGs do not simply affect one country, but every country. Countries would not get very far trying to solve problems on their own, making collaboration a crucial component to achieving the SDGs for an exponential effect. Through best practices, we can learn from each other's mistakes. There is no need to destroy an entire forest to learn that that does not work.

**Y: We are meeting during a time in which concerns regarding populism on the rise, protectionist trade policies, and national sentiments are increasing. How have such shifts in international politics affected the ways in which international organizations like UNESCAP-ENEA to see connectivity and the need for collective work in development?**

CA: The UN does not have specific policies per se to respond to these issues. While we make suggestions for governments on how to approach different challenges, the final decision is ultimately left to the state. We are not a law, but a body that comes together to discuss as a group, and to give recommendations about various relevant issues. While these trends do affect funding, it will not change the mission that the UN serves. Many still understand the importance of connection. The work of the UN and countries to achieve the SDGs demonstrate this. I think that these issues are connected to other concerns. Just within the Northeast Asian region, we have the fastest aging population in the world, and Korea has high youth unemployment. Despite conventional knowledge, Korea has the highest level of robots connected to jobs, couple that with the aging population. We will not be working in the same type of working environment that our parents knew. Many researchers state that jobs will disappear, and so now we need to focus on how to educate youth on creating their own sustainable businesses. While it is crucial for governments to try to understand what is going on and then adapt, it is also fundamental to learn how to respond to these shifts and changes.

**Y: What are the biggest challenges that currently exist in terms of development in East Asia and Northeast Asia?**

CA: In terms of the SDGs, within the sub-regions of development in UNESCAP-ENEA, the various member-states give us a good guideline of how they are progressing, and each country is different—socially, economically, politically, and historically. For example, Korea is doing well in developing “smart cities,” and it is an initiative that the country has been pushing forward. Smart cities have become an answer to overpopulation in urban areas. They are a way for the government to improve people’s lives. Improving public transportation, safety, education, access to resources and food, adequate hospitals and healthcare, and the implementation of smart technologies advance the quality of lives. Despite such developments in technology and innovation, however, more can be done about social and environmental issues. After all, development does not end at the solution of one issue, but the resolution of all.

**Y: What do you think are some of the challenges working for an international organization, like UNESCAP-ENEA, and what are some ways in which improvements can be made to a large organization that seeks to improve the efficient and effective delivery of the mandates of development-related activities.**

CA: In terms of international organizations, one of the key missions is to improve cooperation between regional countries—to pull resources together. For countries within UNESCAP-ENEA, some countries are advanced and have strong economies, and while others are more abundant in natural resources. Thus, cooperation strategies are best practices to create a better world. It might be challenging at times due to historical differences, diverse landscapes, and more, but it is very important to get the ball rolling, and to get people to talk about it and involved. People often think that the UN is a separate entity, but that is not true. All of us play a part in contributing to the world. All of it has an impact on development. The UN is a platform that highlights the issues that affect all of us and helps us mobilize.

**Y: What do you hope for as a person working in development?**

CA: My core mission is local empowerment and capacity building. Your best ally is yourself in the community. Even though I am working at an international institution, I believe that it starts at the local level and within communities. What happens at the local level has repercussions in the global scene. The UN Charter promotes for an inclusive world that can be really rewarding, and so I really encourage people to try and do their part. It's the little things, and what everyone does at their own capacity is important. For those who are interested in development, they should find topics they are compelled by, and others will see what they have to contribute. Focus on the wider message you want to send across, and go for it.