Health volunteers in Uzbekistan establish new approach to fight COVID-19

Health volunteers of Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan, trained by UN Volunteers through the UN Joint Programme on the Aral Sea region, are now part of the COVID-19 pandemic response. They use all feasible means to help people in remote communities stay healthy and informed.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, 400 medical workers, teachers, specialists in community mobilization, youth and pensioners, all health volunteers, immediately came together to establish a new approach of help. They organized consultations for their fellow villagers, using materials from the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO). Though they cannot conduct live trainings because of the lockdown, they found a way to be available 24/7 via Telegram channel and calls.
We regularly follow the news in official media, consult with representatives of the Ministry of Health and WHO, and share information with other community volunteers in remote zones. -- Gulnara Japakova, specialist on health issues, former UN Volunteer

In turn, these volunteers draw up lists of residents of their communities and call families daily to provide consultations, check the health status of each family member and, if necessary, refer them to the right specialist.

This collaboration evolved thanks to the UN Joint Programme on the Aral Sea region, under which more than 2,000 health volunteers were mobilized and trained to support the communities of Karakalpakstan.

Health community volunteer Halifa Zhaparova, who won best pensioner volunteer award, and Specialist on Health Issues, former UN Volunteer, Gulnara Japakova. ©UNDP, 2019

Help that grows

The people of Karakalpakstan were affected by ecological changes resulting from the disappearance of the Aral Sea, once the fourth largest lake in the world. The UN Joint Programme on the Aral Sea region, started in 2016, had the goal to improve the health of the people of this region.

At first, 60 volunteers from 12 communities were trained to visit their communities and spread information about the necessary measures to prevent tuberculosis and other diseases.

Later in 2017, when Gulnara Japakova joined the team as UN Volunteer to coordinate training sessions on preventing lung, gastrointestinal and cardiovascular diseases, as well as improving maternal and child health, the number of volunteers expanded.

We were able to train more than 2,080 medical volunteers in 10 districts of Karakalpakstan. Now, when lung health is under extreme risk, these knowledgeable people play essential roles. --Gulnara Japakova
UN Volunteers developed training modules, educational and sanitation manuals, calendars, posters, leaflets, as well as all the necessary equipment and tools for convenient and safe work with the population.

Later, trained and equipped health volunteers themselves created a Telegram channel, called "Volunteers of Karakalpakstan". Here, they shared experiences, results of meetings in communities, challenges they faced and how to prevent them in the future.

“Volunteering gave me a sense of belonging to the lives and destinies of people. With each training session, each meeting, I knew that I was bringing benefits to people, giving them vital knowledge. --Gulnara Japakova

Today, Gulnara is working closely with community health volunteers in a new role in the joint UNDP-UN Population Fund programme, Strengthening the resilience of local communities in the Aral sea region to environmental, economic, and public health vulnerabilities, funded by the Government of Japan. This programme will advance the work of volunteers in the region by bringing together the efforts of local volunteers with international expertise.

“I think the current situation in the world clearly demonstrates that volunteering in the field of public health should become the norm in the daily life of every community. --Gulnara Japakova

Check out this photo story on the work and latest achievements of health community volunteers.

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