



To prevent the spread of COVID-19, UNDP donated personal protective equipment in Comoros, including masks, gloves and hand sanitizer to volunteer committees on the frontline of the fight against the pandemic.

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## Volunteerism in the fight against COVID-19 in Africa

Whenever disaster strikes, even before government and other humanitarian actors intervene, volunteers are usually on the frontline, helping with rescue and recovery efforts. When the Ebola epidemic ravaged West and Central Africa in 2014 or when Cyclone Idai hit Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi in 2019, thousands of volunteers were at hand to help save lives. □

In Africa, COVID-19 reinforces the communal value system of UBUNTU - expressing compassion, reciprocity and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining communities. This system has long been the hidden gem of Africa and the core value upon which most of the African society is built. In Kenya, for example, a group of 16 students from the Kenyatta University offered to manufacture up to 50 ventilators per week to support ongoing government efforts, demonstrating that volunteerism capital holds the greatest

promise and potential to buffer the continent from becoming the next epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Selfless service and support**

The COVID-19 pandemic is arguably the greatest health, humanitarian and economic crisis of our time. Its impact is currently being felt across the continent with, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 64,000 cases and 1,800 victims so far.

For Africa to be able to tackle the pandemic, human resources such as volunteers will be needed to reduce and curb the negative impact on health, development and the economy. According to the 2018 *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, produced by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, over a billion people volunteer every year globally, with many more willing to do so if given the opportunity. This translates to one in every seven people with an equivalent of 109 million full-time workers. In Africa, about 87% of the volunteers operate informally and in communities abandoned or excluded from central policy and decision-making processes.

For instance, during the Ebola outbreak in Central and West Africa in 2014, thousands of on-site and [online volunteers](#) supported the joint response efforts in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The majority of those volunteers were ordinary people from the community such as teachers, students, taxi drivers – who not only supported those who contracted the virus but also helped their families.

Additionally, about 1,000 on-site volunteers were mobilized to support the United Nations and the African Union's Ebola Emergency Response in various capacities such as medical doctors, lab technicians, data collection officers, coordination specialists among many other roles. [Research evidence](#) indicates that these volunteers had a significant impact, in some cases [potentially decreasing the scale of the outbreak](#) by as much as 36.5 percent.

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UNV is [a UN organization whose mandate is primarily to promote volunteerism](#) and mobilize volunteers within the UN system. Across Africa, volunteers have stepped up to the call to offer their selfless service and support during this difficult time.

For instance, in Madagascar, Guilaine Tchadieu - serving as a UN Volunteer with the World Food Programme (WFP), has been supporting with logistics for food distribution in vulnerable communities. The same is true of Annet Nakaliti, a UN Volunteer with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) in Uganda, who has been dedicating her skills and time to assist with efforts in leveraging mobile health to support COVID-19 response efforts in the country.

Urvashi Bundel and Nana Jgerenaia in Ethiopia and Rwanda are both serving with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and helping in limiting the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic to refugees. In Somalia, two UN Volunteer Medical Doctors are supporting the UN clinics in Bosaso and Galkayo regions treating COVID-19 patients.

In times like this, these and many other volunteers have opted to stay the course despite the risk and challenges to ensure that countries across the region and the world are supported in combatting COVID-19.

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As governments across the continent continue to fight against this pandemic, we hope that citizens will not be seen and engaged with as helpless recipients and beneficiaries of the response, but rather as part of the preparedness, response and recovery processes. Space must be created for vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities to operate as key actors alongside other stakeholders in an [emerging global paradigm](#) that blurs the lines between governments, businesses and civil societies.

To achieve the above small but important aspiration, African governments urgently need to publicly recognize the contribution of volunteers, develop a well-coordinated volunteer action plan in response to COVID-19 and include volunteers contribution as a central asset in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic.



<https://www.africa.undp.org/content/rba/en/home/blog/2020/volunteerism-in-the-fight-against-covid-19-in-africa.html>



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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 3: Good health and well-being](#) [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)