Judite Silva is a UN Youth Volunteer with the UNDP Accelerator Lab in Angola.
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# Angolan youth at the forefront of the COVID-19 response

There is no need to call a specialist to find out what the most searched topic on the internet is these days: Coronavirus. Since its outbreak last December 2019, in the central city of Wuhan in China, the virus has spread all over the world, becoming a pandemic, as stated by the World Health Organization (WHO) last month.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) does not discriminate by race, gender, geography, income, age or sex. Regardless of who you are, the type of job you have, or the lifestyle you lead, COVID-19 has shaken societies around the world and upended lives and livelihoods. It has forced governments to respond rapidly and develop response and recovery plans.

As cases rise and spread, requests for assistance from affected countries to UNDP have increased as they seek support to prepare for, respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The so-called *Three by Three UNDP response*, focuses on the most vulnerable and follows the same pattern.

This ongoing work, in partnership with the World Health Organization, is part of an integrated approach and built on the three principles of prepare, respond, recover. It has been developed to support countries to prepare for and protect their people from the impact of the pandemic, both in terms of health but also humanitarian and development outcomes. It also equips countries to respond to outbreaks and build resilience to the economic and social impact.

The three principles are directly proportional and interlinked – weak preparedness and response in the early phases shows in recovery and resilience. Like many countries around the world, Angola has been deploying its response mechanisms and finding effective ways to convince people to stay at home, comply with quarantine, adhere to official state of emergency laws and, of course, social distancing and good hygiene practices.

> **"** It is widely known, and accepted by some, that through activism, young people are fueling change. In Angola, youth are instrumental to building COVID-19 response capacity and helping to stop a crisis that sees no color, no gender and no race.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 joins many other obstacles already faced in Angola, including other deadly diseases, such as Marburg, Ebola and Malaria and still present serious public health challenges and are underreported by the media.

The response to this pandemic has, in many cases, been compared to a war that must be won, thus requiring the mobilization of all. Elders are particularly vulnerable to this disease however it is important to emphasize young people are also not immune to the disease.

Sadly, some young people act with a degree of invincibility and have been unwilling to modify and adapt their behavior, potentially contributing to the transmission of the disease.

Calling on young people to modify their behavior is vital as parents or elders in general, along with people who have other chronic illness or respiratory

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diseases are at higher risk and need protection.  It is clear that young people can have a positive impact and play a critical role in helping to manage this global crisis.

> ❝ The Accelerator Lab Angola, which is part of the next generation network of innovation and digital solutions, reached out to youth groups and innovators.

It has been working at the ground level and tracing local solutions collectively with young people to help inform the pandemic response. It has been deconstructing the issue and generating knowledge, actions, ideas, or projects that can be scaled up as part of the response.

Several youth organizations have been reaching out to share their experiences in support of the COVID-19 response Angola. For instance, a group of young volunteers are building mobile wash basins, so people can wash their hands on the streets. Others developed a Facebook chatbot for disease information and mobile apps to help track symptoms.

Currently, these innovators have shifted their focus to the frontline of the pandemic, helping the country respond to the social and economic impact of this crisis through grassroots, innovative digital solutions.

An example is AppySaúde, a digital health platform that offers users the opportunity to access the profiles of health professionals online, search and reserve medicines, among other services. Through the platform, youth have been delivering medical supplies and implementing online medical appointments, thus reducing the number of people seeking needing medical assistance for "controllable" situations.

However, 72.6 per cent of Angola's youth population rely on informal sources of income and are becoming one of the groups most vulnerable during the pandemic in socio-economic terms.

The positive news is that increasingly, existing e-commerce platforms, such as Sócia or Roque Online and digital service delivery apps like Tupuca, are helping youth cope with the current socio-economic hardships by providing

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opportunities for additional income. Many new digital platforms with a focus on the informal sector are coming up every day.  These platforms have been adding value to the innovation ecosystem which is growing as internet access also expands.

It is quite important to highlight that innovation does not need to be technological or digital. Many simple ideas and actions can make a difference, especially in a country where most of the population do not have internet access – still only 20 per cent of the population have internet access – and radio and television are still the main channels for communication. Recycled washbasins, handmade masks or even painted circles on the floor in the market lines or at the bank are good examples of non-technological actions that can make a difference.

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

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