



Community Youth Volunteers deployed by UNDP and UNV in Zambia in response to COVID-19 .

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Reaching the unreached: Youth in Zambia help lead COVID-19 response

In May of this year, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, the Zambian Government and the National Youth Development Council, kicked off a mass community outreach campaign. The partners deployed youth volunteers for door-to-door sensitization, as part of a UN-wide initiative in Zambia to strengthen community preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development and its network, the initiative aims to mobilise, train and deploy 2500 community youth volunteers across the country, selected from some of the most affected communities in the country. They will support ongoing sensitization efforts by the Zambian Government, the United Nations, Development partners and other key stakeholders to help control the spread of the virus.

Speaking at the launch of the campaign against COVID-19, the UNDP Resident Representative in Zambia, Lionel Laurens highlighted UNV's comparative advantage in the success of the project.

“UNV's comparative advantage is determining the success of this project. By placing the core values of volunteering at the heart of action and response in the midst of an unprecedented crisis threatening lives, young Zambians are given an opportunity to meaningfully contribute and give back to their community. --Mr Lionel Laurens, UNDP Resident Representative

“Local young men and women volunteering have become role models and advocates within their communities, undertaking door-to-door community outreach interventions and strengthening COVID-19 surveillance across Zambia,” Mr Lauerns continued. “This targeted approach has helped ensure we are able to break down the communication barriers which are often experienced in such emergency situations.”

Today, the door-to-door initiative has reached an estimated 700,000 households with more than 833 community youth volunteers on the frontline debunking myths and spreading life-saving messages in Lusaka and surrounding communities as well as Chirundu in Southern Zambia and Chipata in the Eastern Province.

The volunteers have shared life-saving prevention measures, including up-to-date messaging on COVID-19, ranging from educating on precautionary steps to keep families safe from infection, providing information on medical assistance and managing stigma associated with the virus. Many at-risk and vulnerable communities have also been targeted through this initiative, with Mr Emmanuel Mulenga, Zambia's Minister for Youth, Sport and Child Development noting, “The support from UNDP has also targeted vulnerable communities in Lusaka and at-risk districts including border areas and transit points in Zambia.”

UNDP Resident Representative Mr Laurens said that without community

engagement and ownership, it would be difficult to fight and defeat COVID-19. Zambian youth, who constitute over 82 per cent of the population are acting as critical agents of change, whose volunteerism in containing the spread of COVID19 will make the difference in community response efforts.

“ Our rallying cry as the United Nations is to leave no one behind. We have therefore aligned our response to the Government of the Republic of Zambia COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral, Contingency and Response Plan and the call by the World Health Organization (WHO) to ensure that the prevention and control measures are implemented and adhered to. –Mr Lionel Laurens

The Resident Representative underscored the role of youth as volunteers, activists, innovators and citizens, whose contribution to build a better future can make a difference in the world. He further commended their commitment in assisting vulnerable communities to be better prepared against the virus while promoting the values of volunteering, tolerance and solidarity.

Mr Laurens also reiterated the importance of the engagement with UNV in the campaign. “UNDP Zambia is proud of its partnership with UNV to implement the project, 'Reaching the Unreached Through Community Youth Volunteers for COVID-19'. In collaboration with communities most at-risk of COVID-19 local transmission, youth volunteers are identified and equipped to promote the adoption of preventive measures, basic precautions and safe behaviours.”

“ Defeating COVID-19 demands a community approach. I had to take action by volunteering to save my friends and family from dying. So far, it has been a wonderful experience going door to door,

“ creating awareness in my community on good hygiene practices and telling people how to stay safe. I feel accomplished. --Stella Nyendwa, Community Youth Volunteer in Garden community, Lusaka

As part of its initiative to contribute to community outreach efforts, UNDP committed US \$250,000.00 of its core resources to deliver an adapted and effective package of interventions for COVID-19 preparedness and response for vulnerable groups, which include people living with HIV/AIDS, differently abled people, youth, women and victims of gender-based violence.

The project, which aims to ensure no one is left behind in the prevention and control of COVID-19, recognized that Zambia's youth are a high risk and vulnerable group themselves but are possible champions of solutions. The success of the project so far acts as a blue-print on how youth can be catalysts of solutions against COVID-19 if effectively engaged.

"Thanks to UNV's demonstrated worldwide experience in promoting volunteerism and strengthening capacity of volunteers, young Zambians enrolled in the project were given an opportunity to enrich their own life in so many ways," Mr Laurens said.

“ Volunteering offers new life experiences and insights into social and developmental issues, as well as the inner workings of non-governmental and community organizations. Volunteering has also helped boost the self-confidence of many young people, getting them out of their comfort zone and dealing with real-world problems such as COVID-19. --Mr Lionel Laurens

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