



UN Volunteer Muhammad Waqas, centre, during a community feedback session on CERF winter seed distribution.

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Coordinating the humanitarian response to drought and COVID-19 in Lesotho

I am an international UN Volunteer from Pakistan serving in Lesotho as a Humanitarian Coordination Officer with the UN Resident Coordinator's office. I am responsible for the coordination of humanitarian responses among the UN agencies, government counterparts and partner organizations.

I joined the UN in Lesotho in 2019 to lead the drought emergency coordination efforts in the country. The country had just been devastated by drought at the time, leaving more than half a million people (about a quarter of the total population of Lesotho), mostly women and children, experiencing severe food shortages. [Tens of thousands were 'one step away from famine'](#). While farmers experienced droughts, rising temperatures, and extreme weather, the changing weather condition was forcing people to migrate.

“ I assisted the UN Resident Coordinator in launching the flash appeal for Lesotho and developed the UN Drought Response Plan with support from UN agencies in Lesotho. The US \$34 million flash appeal

“ [will provide life-saving interventions for 260,000 people.](#) --Muhammad Waqas, UN Volunteer Humanitarian Coordination Officer

My role was critical in Lesotho's [Central Emergency Response Fund \(CERF\)](#). The CERF is a pool of contributions from donors around the world, [established in 2005 as the UN's global emergency response fund](#) for humanitarian responders delivering life-saving assistance in places affected by crises.

As a CERF leader in Lesotho, I coordinate the CERF secretariat, allocate funds, develop interim and completion reports, monitor projects and assist recipient agencies with modification or extensions. We have completed the first round of the CERF and secured an ongoing second round.

“ Humanitarian coordination can be nerve-racking, but is quite a rewarding experience. Now, I am leading efforts to finalize the COVID-19 response plan for the UN in Lesotho. I assisted the UN agencies in re-programming some of the ongoing projects, especially CERF, to address the immediate needs of people hardest hit by COVID-19. -- Muhammad Waqas, UN Volunteer Humanitarian Coordination Officer

Organizing meetings of sectoral and working groups, disaster risk management and humanitarian country teams and with the government disaster management authority are part of our coordination efforts. Seeing the results of immediate response when humanity needs it most is most rewarding for me. Through the CERF project, for example, [we established food distribution points at the community level](#), after consulting the local councils and chiefs. Today, other programmes, such as general food distribution and education campaigns, have used these points to make food available in time for the needy in Lesotho.

Throughout my thirteen years working as a humanitarian and development coordinator in countries such as Pakistan, Sudan and now in Lesotho, I have managed different emergencies such as droughts, floods, internally displaced people, refugee crises and disease outbreaks. My extensive experience, academic qualifications and training in response management and context analysis has strengthened my resilience even in the toughest times.

“My current UN Volunteer assignment has offered me a timely opportunity to refine my skills and learn new ways of coordinating and managing crises for the benefit of humanity. --Muhammad Waqas, UN Volunteer Humanitarian Coordination Officer

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 <https://cerf.un.org/sites/default/files/resources/18-RR-LS>



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