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Dominique Niava, UN Volunteer Associate Education Officer for the UN Refugee Agency at the Iridimi refugee camp in Chad, on the border with Sudan. He is conducting training for the camp teachers of the charter of conduct and professional ethics just before the start of the 2019-2020 school year.

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Recognizing volunteers advancing South-South Cooperation

South-South Cooperation and volunteerism share common values of solidarity and reciprocity, which enable developing countries to strengthen their relationships beyond trade, infrastructure investment and technology exchanges.[1] More and more countries are recognizing volunteering as a powerful mechanism to further such cooperation.

Can an individual significantly accelerate the development progress of a country and support its achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? Can a single person strengthen the bond among people from different countries in achieving the goals?

At UNV, we know it's possible. The answers to all the above questions is an emphatic "Yes", especially when it comes to volunteers working on South-South cooperation.

We find an example of this in [Zambia](#), where more than 1,000 local farmers

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in five districts benefited from training sessions on sustainable agriculture provided by 33 UN Volunteers. Serving through the Asia Youth Volunteer Exchange Programme, these volunteers were from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, the Republic of Korea, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Tanzania and Zambia.

Another example comes from Cambodia. UN Volunteers from China, India, the Republic of Korea and Thailand assisted in the implementation of a project for [poverty reduction among youth](#). They supported 14,172 young women and men in building skills through volunteerism, thus helping them find decent jobs.

Since its creation, UNV has promoted international volunteer exchanges to foster knowledge sharing and capacity building across countries in the Global South. The organization integrated South-South Cooperation into its Strategic Framework 2018-2021, to continue boosting south to south volunteer exchanges in a more structured way.

UNV also works with its partners to share these important contributions and knowledge through global channels. For instance, in collaboration with the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), UNV integrated two good practices into the [“Good Practices in South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development Vol. III”](#). This was launched at the high-level commemoration of the UN Day for South-South Cooperation on 10 September this year.

During the past years, the organization has facilitated numerous deployments of volunteers from the South to devote their skills and knowledge to the peace and development of other southern countries. These volunteers have exchanged and benefited from transformative experiences, engaged with local communities and built trust, ultimately contributing to the greater good and connecting countries and people.

During the implementation of the [ECOWAS Volunteer Programme](#), at the time of the Ebola epidemic, some UN Volunteers turned down offers to be repatriated, arguing that they could not leave their brothers and sisters at a time when they needed them the most.

This example hits home today more vividly than ever. During the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers have been engaged in pandemic response and awareness-raising campaigns, both virtually and onsite. As of September 2020, a total of 860 UN Volunteers – 52 per cent of them women – were deployed for the COVID-19 response in 94 country of assignments and with 23 UN entities. They serve primarily in the area of technical assistance,

medical and community services, as well as public information and IT.

In [South Sudan](#) and [Mali](#), UN Volunteers chose to remain at their duty stations to provide preventive and healthcare measures to people in need. In another expression of South-South collaboration, [Online Volunteers](#) from Côte d'Ivoire, Bangladesh and other countries provided immediate support to Senegal, Nigeria and Cameroon as social media specialists, researchers and microbiologists.

As David Shearer, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for South Sudan and Head of the United Nations Mission for South Sudan (UNMISS) attested: "These volunteers are working long hours in difficult conditions, far away from their families and friends, to make a difference to the lives of people in need. They really are unsung heroes."

Indeed, millions of volunteers worldwide are the heroes of our time, contributing tirelessly to the prosperity of the Global South.

[1] *Volunteering for Participatory Approaches to South-South Cooperation* (2017, unpublished), Thomas Bannister



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