



Community volunteers in India support sanitary workers.

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## Supporting communities across the globe in fighting COVID-19

Volunteers are coming together in search of innovative solutions to help their communities, and across the globe, have become the forefront of the pandemic community response. Trained by the UN Volunteers (UNV) programme, community volunteers bring trustworthy information, innovative solutions and a sensitive approach when acting in response to COVID-19. They also become ambassadors of volunteerism, inspiring many others to do the same. This article showcases how volunteerism has played a critical part in grassroots efforts to educate and inform communities about the COVID-19 pandemic.

From India, to Uzbekistan and Zambia, the spirit and commitment of volunteerism is alive and well.

With the help of the network of District Youth Coordinators and online volunteers across India, UN Volunteers are supporting COVID-19 relief efforts in various ways. The coordinators are placed in 58 districts across the country, under the joint project “Strengthening Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan and National Service Scheme” supported by India’s Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Within two weeks of the project start in March 2020, they reached 700,000 people in their communities, promoting preventive measures and countering social discrimination experienced by those affected by the pandemic.

In Nepal, UNV, together with the World Health Organization (WHO), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNDP and the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) formed a Volunteer for Action group (V4ACTION) to respond to the pandemic. Comprising more than 500 volunteers from all seven provinces, it provides a platform for meaningful engagement of young people so that they can be educators and change agents among their peers and in their communities to fight COVID-19. The main aim of V4ACTION is to spread awareness among the people about COVID-19 with accurate, verified information.

UNDP has partnered with 18 universities and deployed more than 140 UN community engagement volunteers across the four provinces of Pakistan. They have directly engaged with more than 150,000 individuals, making it the largest youth volunteer intervention by any UN entity in Pakistan.

In Uzbekistan, health community volunteers included 400 medical workers, teachers, specialists in community mobilization, youth and pensioners. Trained and equipped by UNV through the UN Joint Programme on the Aral Sea region, they organized consultations for their fellow villagers, using materials from the Ministry of Health and WHO. Though they could not conduct live trainings because of the lockdowns, they found a way to be available 24/7 via Telegram channel and calls.

“ The good health of my community is my victory! Through our efforts, we have identified two family members who have been affected by the early stages of COVID-19 in my area. They were treated in a timely way at home and were completely cured. –Gulistan Embergenova, health community volunteer

UNV educated and trained 65 young Roma health assistance community volunteers within a joint UNDP and UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) initiative for improved social inclusion of young Roma. They enable access to drinking water or help people of their communities

obtain the personal documents needed to acquire health insurance or claim social welfare.

“ I’m rooting for the people. Young people need to work on themselves and not wait for someone else to fight their battles. Good deeds speak more than words. –Meti Kamberi, Roma youth community volunteer

Delivering the right information to the population is crucial to help stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In support of UNDPs’s response plan in Mali, 60 UN community volunteers led a campaign against fake news, misinformation, and exploitation of the crisis by cybercriminals in Bamako and Mopti.

In Zambia, UNDP, UNV, the Government and the National Youth Development Council, kicked off a mass community outreach campaign. The partners deployed youth volunteers for door-to-door work, as part of a UN-wide initiative in Zambia to strengthen community preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative aimed to mobilize, train and deploy 2,500 youth volunteers across the country, selected from some of the most affected communities in the country. They support ongoing efforts to help control the spread of the virus. 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 Iraq, a volunteer network of 150 local men and women took to the streets of Karbala to distribute humanitarian aid and food baskets to the most vulnerable during the lockdown that was enforced as COVID-19 began to spread in the country. They also helped raise awareness on hygiene practices and prevention measures among the population. Formed and trained in 2017 through a joint project between UNV and UNDP, the Karbala volunteer network was capacitated to respond in times of need such as during the pandemic, proving the value of community volunteer networks in enhancing preparedness and building resilience.

“ Volunteer opportunities at the community level, backed by UNV education and training has been a vital part of the fight against COVID-19 to date. Through information sharing, partnering and collaboration, volunteerism has proven a practical, effective and trusted initiative in pandemic preparedness and response across the world.



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