



Newly trained village health volunteer delivers public health information to community in North Fly District, Western Province.

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Volunteering strengthens women's health and safety

On International Volunteer Day (IVD), we recognized the valuable contributions of the many individuals in Papua New Guinea who dedicate their time and expertise to supporting our communities. This year, as we look back on the people who supported the COVID-19 response and secondary impacts of the pandemic, we thank the volunteers who have worked to strengthen the health and wellbeing of women across the country.

In 2020, there has never been a more urgent need for members of our community to step up and support the health and safety of neighbours and friends as we united to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. United Nations Volunteers have assisted in sharing information and personal protective equipment (PPE), particularly to the most vulnerable – women and children experiencing violence.

Christopher Kageni (PNG), Mojisola Akinsanya (Nigeria), Jacinta Nakachwa (Uganda), Sita Gurung (Nepal) and Goodshow Bote (Zimbabwe) helped

distribute PPE, including masks and hand sanitizer. This PPE was critical to keeping essential services open when they were needed most. Together with National COVID Hotline, the volunteers have given hundreds of hours of service to people in need.

“ The many hours of volunteering that have been given during the COVID-19 response is incalculable. - Rachel Donovan, UN Volunteer

Rachel Donovan, an international UN Volunteer deployed under the fully-funded partnership with Australian Government, worked at the National Operations Centre in March and April 2020. "In even the smallest ways, offering some time or expertise has made a great difference. Back in March, we called out to our UN colleagues to help with translating some COVID prevention messages and, on top of the work they were already doing, several colleagues took this on to help us spread the right information to their communities."

“ Papua New Guineans are incredibly generous people and responding to the pandemic would have been an insurmountable challenge without their generosity. --Rachel Donovan

National UN Volunteer Melanie Raire has worked with the Disaster Management Team (DMT). Melanie's commitment has supported a coordinated, informed COVID-19 response that has been essential to controlling the spread of the virus in Papua New Guinea and ensuring that no one is left behind.



Melanie and Rachel ahead of UN Day event at APEC Haus. ©UNRCO PNG, 2020

UN Volunteers have also supported the EU-funded Spotlight Initiative. Launched at Gordons Market, Port Moresby, on March 8, the Spotlight Initiative aims to end violence against women. Three international UN Volunteers – Laura Ciudad (Spain), Joyous Begisen (Kenya) and Esther Osiel (Kenya) – are working to implement this project as it is rolled out in 11 provinces.

Meanwhile, UN Women’s Sanap Wantaim campaign engages a national network of volunteers who advocate for an end to gender-based violence in their communities. The Sanap Wantaim campaign is a powerful tool in demonstrating the collective drive against violence that permeates every region of Papua New Guinea.

Gender-based violence is not the only challenge that has been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. Access to quality healthcare has been an ongoing challenge for remote villages. In Western Province, UNFPA has trained village health volunteers to help share information on maternal and antenatal healthcare. The teams of volunteers have provided essential information to pregnant women and their families including early warning

signs of pregnancy complications and how to access assistance when it is needed. This information is critical to reducing the number of preventable maternal deaths.

In 2020, volunteers have made Papua New Guinea a safer, healthier place. These individuals are just a few of the hundreds of people giving their time and passion to a cause close to them. As we look to the COVID-19 recovery here in the Pacific, volunteers will become ever more valuable assets in public health awareness and advocacy.

This [article](#) was first published by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Papua New Guinea.



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