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International UN Volunteer Ines Rodrigues (with the green mask) analyzing COVID-19 samples in Sao Tome and Principe national laboratory. [genderequality](#), [UNWomen](#), [InternationalWomenDay](#), [COVID-19](#), [CoronaPandemic](#)

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UN Volunteers lead steps toward gender equality

In 2020 The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme achieved gender parity among all deployed UN Volunteers. As frontline responders or communications experts, national or international - these women UN Volunteers are making critical contributions to the fight against COVID-19. Here are some faces behind promoting gender equality amidst the pandemic in West and Central Africa.

Joanna Gbotoe is a Liberian nurse serving at The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in the medical section. Since the beginning of the COVID-10 outbreak, she has played a key role in the Mission regarding prevention activities. Her work involves

detecting suspected cases, providing essential treatment, helping in decontamination, and coordinating patient's evacuation.

“ Working as a frontline nurse during this COVID-19 pandemic is very challenging because we are at a greater risk of being infected as we deal directly with the disease. However, with the support from family and friends at large, I learned to overcome and build resilience which has kept me going”.



UN Volunteer Joanna Gbotoe, working the MONUSCO clinic in Goma

The same determination brought International UN Volunteer Public Health Specialist Inês Rodrigues from Portugal to Sao Tome to join the COVID Response Plan led by UNDP (United Nations Development Programme).

“As a biochemist, I am helping the National Reference Laboratory team on processing and analyzing samples for COVID-19 and other pathologies such as tuberculosis and HIV. Furthermore, I am strengthening the national laboratory capacities with my support in the laboratory management, and on-the-job training to establish a quality assurance system.”

Like Joanna and Ines, over 114 women volunteers are on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis in West and Central Africa. [According to the UN Secretary-General's Report for CSW65\[1\]](#), women are providing essential services, but in many countries, they carry double burdens and resources are being depleted.

The pandemic has intensified pre-existing inequalities and is threatening to reverse the gains of past decades. Prudentienne MUSABYIMANA from Rwanda is volunteering to act against this threat. She is assigned with the World Health

Organization (WHO) in Congo Brazaville as a UN Volunteer, Violence and Injuries Prevention Officer.

“As Gender Specialist, I am confronted daily with the negative consequences that the pandemic has on women and girls and its impact on gender equality. I thought that operating in my country of origin was not enough, so to expand my support I decided to become an international UN Volunteer and bring my experience and expertise to international tables to promote gender equality and diversity.” Prudentienne MUSABYIMANA, international UN Volunteer, Gender Specialist with WHO.

Prudentienne provides technical support to mainstream gender in development programs to meet women's needs in times of COVID-19. She is continually building and raising awareness of health service providers through remote training and meeting sessions. She is one of the 100 women UN Volunteers recruited under the [African Women Champions](#) initiative to improve health and gender equality on the continent.

In Nigeria, [two national women UN Volunteers](#)

[support UN Women to implement a Women Empowerment Hub established in Maiduguri](#) to help Internally Displaced Women regain a decent livelihood with income-generating revenues. They have helped more than 150 women acquire different work skills, such as cap and shoemaking and hand fan production. Similarly, [300 internally displaced women from Burkina Faso have been empowered through market agriculture and soap making, with the support of international UN Volunteer Deborah Benja.](#)

Celebrating the 44th International Women's Day is also an opportunity to pay tribute to male UN Volunteers who are empowering women through their assignments. Among them is Amadou Ba, one of the 20 Community UN Volunteers working with UNDP on the “COVID 19 Platform” project^[2] implemented in Senegal to support vulnerable groups affected by the pandemic. Amadou is working with more than 250 women from the commune of Ndiaffate.

“I helped the women apply for funding through the UNDP platform. Once their request was accepted, I then organized them into economic interest groups. Among the 250 women, 67 are working on market agriculture, 66 on milk processing, 22 on soap production, and

“ the others on retail business. I am on the ground every day to monitor their activities. I teach them how to manage their funds, how to save money, and how to improve their productivity. Seeing how efficient, motivated and committed these women are makes me think that empowering a woman is about empowering the world," Amadou states.



UN community volunteer Amadou Ba, visiting the women's soap production unit in Ndiaffate, Senegal.

25 years after the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted and six years after the SDGs and Goal 5

were agreed upon as part of the 2030 Agenda, no country has achieved gender equality. More and more women are accessing high-level positions but progress is too slow to reach gender parity (50/50) in many professions.

[1] The sixty-fifth session of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#)

[2] The Project "Platform COVID 19 for the support to vulnerable groups' productive sector" is implemented by UNDP in partnership with the Ministry of Trade and Small and Medium Enterprises through ADEPME and UNDP, FAO, UNIDO, UNCDF, UNFPA, and UNWOMEN.



West and Central Africa

• gender equality • International Women's Day • COVID-19 • Coronavirus

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 5: Gender equality](#)