



Two national UN Volunteers and twenty-three V-Force volunteers supported the cold chain work of UNICEF and the Ministry of Health in Sri Lanka, through data collection, validation and documentation.

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Strengthening cold chain management for vaccine distribution

With the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccines, Governments worldwide are challenged to ensure inclusive coverage during routine immunization. As part of the national immunization response, the Government of Sri Lanka and volunteers are gearing up to store large consignments of COVID-19 vaccines, as well as manage the large-scale and equitable distribution across the country.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been working with the Ministry of Health to support the country's preparedness to receive vaccines and rollout vaccination.

Through this collaboration, UNICEF provides technical support to ensure the immunization supply chain management system, including cold chain, is in place and ready to receive, store and rollout COVID-19 vaccines, even to the most difficult-to-reach communities. UNICEF requested UNV's support with volunteer mobilization for the cold chain equipment inventory, which requires data collection, validation and documentation.

The role of volunteers in data collection

In early February, UNV mobilized two UN Volunteers and 23 volunteers from the [V-Force programme](#) to support UNICEF and the Ministry of Health in preparing cold chain facilities to store and distribute a variety of COVID-19 vaccines with different cold chain requirements.

The V-Force volunteers were assigned tasks to coordinate with respective Ministry of Health, hospital or regional medical supplies divisions to gather information on available cold chain equipment. They proceeded to clarify, verify and validate information received against cold chain equipment databases, and proceeded to document data for each district.

UN Volunteer Dilini Ekanayake managed the V-Force volunteers dispersed across all districts of the as a Volunteer Coordinator. She is an experienced UN Volunteer who previously managed the V-Force programme through UNV. Based on her experience, Dilini coordinated volunteering tasks assigned to different regions.

“ I am glad that I could volunteer for this time-sensitive assignment and provide my expertise for this national cause. I had a positive experience both with the UNICEF team and the UNV V-Force team. It was amazing to see the contributions of the young V-Force volunteers towards achieving timely results through this innovative partnership. I believe that selfless volunteering in any capacity is essential in overcoming times of difficulties. --Dilini Ekanayake, Volunteer Coordinator with UNICEF, Sri Lanka

Meaningful impact and learning from volunteering

Despite some challenges, the commitment and teamwork between Dilini and V-Force volunteers led to the successful completion of the project within a tight deadline. For example, the volunteers had to follow up repeatedly to receive accurate information, in the absence of medical officials, misplaced inventory documentation or missing detail plates of cold chain equipment.

V-Force volunteers worked with dedication to retrieve as much information as possible. Accordingly, they succeeded in coordinating and documenting data received in 298 divisions across 25 districts.



V-Force volunteers deployed to Colombo contributed to collecting data from all different regions and validating them by reaching out to medical officers and chief pharmacists to fill in the gaps and identify problems requiring urgent resolution. ©UNV, 2021

Among 23 V-Force volunteers are Udari Nanayakkara, Dharma Wickremasinghe, Ahamed Athik and Adrian Vasu. They assisted the UNICEF office in Colombo in collecting data from the regions and validating them through collaboration with medical officers and chief pharmacists to fill in the gaps and identify problems requiring urgent resolution. These V-Force volunteers report that the experience helped develop their skills in teamwork, effective coordination and communication with government officials, as well as time management and meeting tight deadlines. I experienced the best teamwork during this assignment," says V-Force volunteer Dharma Wickremasinghe. "When a problem arose, we came up with answers and brainstormed to solve it together."

“ All of us were trying our best to be responsible, be on-time and support each other, since we were aware of the importance of our work and felt proud that, in this difficult time, we could help our community, give back and inspire others to join volunteering. --Udari Nanayakkara, V-Force volunteer

The data collected by V-Force volunteers was analyzed by UN Volunteer Sumaiya Iqbal, who serves with UNICEF as a Data Management Support Associate. Her role is to strengthen the cold chain equipment system at all levels across the country, in order to help effectively manage the vaccination programmes.

On 7 March 2021, based on the joint efforts of UN Volunteers and V-Force volunteers, Sri Lanka successfully commenced the distribution of 264,000 doses of vaccines. Procured through UNICEF under the COVAX facility, these target the most vulnerable persons above 60 years of age, in the most high-risk areas impacted by COVID-19. The teamwork, solidarity and responsibility that volunteers showed created a synergy and exemplified leading by example to ensure the safety of their communities.

“ I would like to express my appreciation to the young and dynamic professional UN Volunteers and V-Force volunteers, who supported the important UNICEF-Ministry of Health collaboration on cold chain equipment inventory data collection. The UNICEF Country Office in Sri Lanka is truly grateful for UNV’s role in strengthening the cold chain management system, which was accomplished through the mission and with the spirit of volunteerism. --Safina Abdulloeva, Programme Manager with UNICEF, Sri Lanka

Helping hands in the COVID-19 response in Sri Lanka

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, several UN Volunteers have been deployed with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, International Organization for Migration and UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Sri Lanka, in support of COVID-19 response. [UN Volunteer Dr Anjalee De Silva](#), serving with WHO, has been contributing to planning, coordinating and monitoring the COVID-19 response as Public Health Officer. Further UN Volunteers have helped or have been helping in mitigating COVID-19 risks and accelerating recovery in a wide range of areas, including promoting safety measures, [supply of PPE items](#), research on COVID-19 socio-economic impact, raising awareness of initiatives to assist migrant returnees affected by COVID-19.

Through these outstanding contributions, the efforts of volunteers are undoubtedly making a crucial contribution to building a fairer, healthier world as the world steps closer towards COVID-19 recovery.



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