



Fahamiya Abdou (left), UN Volunteer with UNDP Comoros, distributing plants for a re-afforestation campaign.
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In the Comoros, volunteers are leading efforts to restore nature and build resilience

On 5 June 2021, World Environment Day, the UN officially launches the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, which runs from 2021-2030 as a global rallying cry to heal our planet. Experts are warning that failure to turn around environmental destruction in this decade will see humanity losing its last chance at preventing a mass, global extinction.

For Fahamiya Abdou, World Environment Day is special for more than one reason. As a highly experienced environmental professional, preserving nature and the environment has always been close to her heart. But World Environment Day also marks the anniversary of her journey to joining the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a UN Volunteer for an ecosystem restoration project.

"I remember well. It was during World Environment Day in 2018 that I had joined other community volunteers to clean up the coastline in the coastal town of Moroni. A friend told me about the call for applications for the position of a UN Volunteer Technical Advisor for a local environmental conservation project of UNDP Comoros. I immediately applied. This is the position I have been serving in since December 2018," she says with a big smile.

Fahamiya's position was part of [a project by UNDP Comoros](#) that works to strengthen the resilience of the Comoros to natural disasters and the effects of climate change. The Union of the Comoros, as it is

formally known, is an archipelago of volcanic islands between the eastern coast of Mozambique and north-western Madagascar.

“ For the citizens of the Comoros, one of the smallest and poorest countries in Africa, agriculture is an integral part of life. However, the island nation’s location, rapid deforestation, high population growth, and climate change have made it particularly prone to natural disasters. Many parts of the country are prone to prolonged droughts, bushfires, landslides, cyclones and a host of other environmental and ecological hazards.

Over the last 30 years, the Comoros has lost over 80 per cent of its natural forests. This has created a recipe for disaster, such as the Category 3 cyclone that wreaked havoc in 2019. Restoring the Comorian forests will be a challenge, but if reforestation efforts being championed by Fahamiya and other volunteers in the country are successful, it would make the island nation less vulnerable to such natural disasters. The cyclone affected almost half the population on Grande Comore — the country’s largest island — damaging homes, schools and roads. In the wake of the disaster, Fahamiya and her team were on the ground providing humanitarian assistance. The experience, she says, was life changing.



Fahamiya Abdou during an environmental clean-up activity to disinfect markets in Moroni as preventative measures for COVID-19. ©UNV, 2020

Since joining UNDP Comoros in December 2018, Fahamiya has been helping local communities build resilience to the effects of climate shocks.

She and her team have led reforestation campaigns and worked on bushfire mitigation. They have also been providing training on alternative income-generating activities so that families are less reliant on environmentally harmful farming practices.

"Thanks to volunteering, I have gained a lot of experience by participating in several activities that have impacted me personally and professionally. These experiences have helped me evolve as a person, and also acquire new skills," Fahamiya says.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted Fahamiya's field work and slowed down public awareness-raising efforts, she and her team have been actively involved in cleaning and disinfecting of outdoor markets to counter the spread of the virus. The work has been personally rewarding for Fahamiya.

“Volunteering, to me, means giving back and doing good things. This is a unique opportunity to contribute to society in a positive and meaningful way,” she says. “All of this, I can say, has been a very enriching and fulfilling experience. Long live volunteering!”

This article was prepared with the kind assistance of [Online Volunteer Zenab Bagha](#).



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