



Mohamed Ahmed Hussein, 33, national UN Volunteer with UNEP, during data collection and training activity on ocean observation for local communities off Kenya's coast

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## Protecting the ocean and livelihoods off Kenya's coast

The ocean covers over 70 per cent of our planet. It is our life source, supporting humanity's sustenance and that of every other organism on earth. However, 90 per cent of big fish populations are already depleted, and 50 per cent of coral reefs have been destroyed. Mohamed Ahmed Hussein, 33, has been serving with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as a national UN Volunteer for over two years now. With a background in marine science and management, he is working on coastal marine ecosystems, including coral reefs, mangroves and seagrasses. He shares with us his experience in ocean conservation.

### **What are your key responsibilities in this assignment?**

My main focus at the moment is the conservation, protection and restoration of coral reef ecosystems, mangroves and seagrasses. I also support research work on the development of management guidelines for ecosystem management. Having grown up in Kenya's coastal areas, where most of our work is focused, I bring in local knowledge and represent youth in the sustainable management of coastal ecosystems. I am very proud that my supervisor and colleagues trust my knowledge and passion, and appreciate the inputs I bring to the team.

### **How has your work impacted the people you serve?**

I mostly support efforts to raise the profile of underappreciated ecosystems, such as seagrasses or blue carbon ecosystems (mangroves and seagrasses) though influencing policy. We work with local communities in developing local marine managed areas – for example, the development of the community-based Payment for Ecosystem Services project, where local communities receive payments for their efforts in managing ecosystems. This ensures the continual flow of ecosystem goods and services. A great example of a project I have worked on is the blue carbon offsetting project in Gazi Bay, off Kenya's coast.

### **What have been your greatest lessons in your work?**

I have learnt a lot about the ocean and how humans relate to it – how we are deeply connected to it and how the livelihoods of millions of people directly depend on the ocean. Professionally, I have developed my research and reporting skills, including publication of scientific papers, which will be extremely helpful when I begin working on my Doctor of Philosophy.

### **What are your thoughts about what it means to volunteer?**

Being a volunteer is great opportunity to showcase one's capabilities and skills. It exposes to a lot of exciting experiences and career development opportunities. Being passionate about ocean conservation, this has been an excellent learning opportunity for me.



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