



Mariagiovanna Costa, then a UN Volunteer Programme Officer, delivering cash transfers to internally-displaced persons in Djenne, Mali.

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## UN Volunteers are valuable resources to tackle food crises

In 2018, Mariagiovanna Costa started her assignment as a UN Volunteer Programme Officer with the World Food Programme (WFP) in Mali. She was part of a team delivering food assistance to the population of Mopti, a region affected by terrorism. Mariagiovanna is now a Portfolio Specialist with UNV's Regional Office for West and Central Africa. On the occasion of World Food Day, she shares insights from her volunteer assignment.

Three years ago, I left Italy to join the WFP team in Mali, a magnificent country of around 19 million inhabitants. As I had visited the country while attending the Bamako Sub-Regional Conference on Female Genital Mutilation in 2006, I was excited to rediscover the its unique culture, beautiful nature and vibrant marketplaces.

However, Mali looked different from the country that I had experienced in 2006; though people were friendly and made me feel at home, they were now facing a humanitarian crisis. Increased terrorist attacks on villages in the north and centre of the country had forced people to flee their homes. Thirty-five percent of the population needed humanitarian assistance.

Together with local authorities and humanitarian actors, WFP organized the humanitarian response and established the 'CAN 2002 Socoura' camp to accommodate internally-displaced people and provide basic social services.

I was immediately impressed by people's solidarity and generosity, despite their situation. I remember one family who hosted 20 other families in its courtyard, sharing everything they had – the less afflicted spontaneously organized informal camps to host others.

“ I was proud to be a part of the WFP sub-office of Mopti. In 2019, we provided food and cash, thus supporting more than 400,000 people to overcome challenging circumstances, while preserving their dignity. --Mariagiovanna Costa, former UN Volunteer Programme Officer in Mali

In addition to dealing with food emergency response management and the Mopti food security sub-cluster, I contributed to the launch of an integrated programme to boost resilience at the community level.

In close coordination with the local authorities and implementing partners, we worked to strengthen food chain systems, deliver school meals and support local milk production. We also provided malnutrition treatment and prevention for mothers and children. This was done by ensuring three meals a day to mothers accompanying children in the most critical conditions in hospitals, to enable them to care for them. It was rewarding to witness the distribution of treatment against moderate malnutrition in health centres.

“ My UNV assignment opened my eyes to the role of

“ humanitarian actors at the frontline, working hard to enable better lives and richly rewarded by the gratitude of those who are less fortunate. Indeed, UN Volunteers – especially national and community volunteers – are meaningful and valuable resources to address humanitarian issues. --Mariagiovanna Costa

It showed me the value of volunteerism in crisis management and inspired me to join UNV's West and Central Africa office. Currently, I manage a portfolio of five countries of the Sahel region, including Mali, where 402 UN Volunteers have been serving peace and development since the beginning of the year. Promoting national expertise and youth engagement within the region is my motto.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 2.1 million people are experiencing [food crises and emergencies in the Sahel region](#). In UNV's talent pool for West and Central Africa alone, we currently have 20,695 candidates ready to support UN partners with emergency programmes, including nutrition, food security, supply chain management and humanitarian assistance.



## West and Central Africa

• World Food Day • food security

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 1: No poverty](#) [SDG 2: Zero hunger](#) [SDG 3: Good health and well-being](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)