



In 2017, with the financial support of the Global Fund, UNDP installed solar Photovoltaic systems in 405 health facilities across Zimbabwe, with a total installed capacity of 4,813 MWh.

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Pursuing transformative solutions for rural communities

In Zimbabwe, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is increasing access to quality health services through the installation of solar energy photovoltaic systems. Called Solar4Health, this initiative ensures constant and cost-effective access to electricity, while also mitigating the impact of climate change and advancing multiple Sustainable Development Goals. UN Volunteer Munyaradzi Kanjera shares the rural experience he brings to this partnership.

When I reflect on my life, I realize that my upbringing in a rural area largely shaped my decision to become a UN Volunteer. Growing up in Guruve, a rural community north of Harare, Zimbabwe, gave me an excellent grounding in local issues and a true understanding of the poverty and social exclusion that people in under-served communities suffer. Although rural life was difficult, it had several redeeming qualities.

I attended Magwenya Primary School – a local school in my rural village – at a time when it was common for children to come to school barefoot, without warm clothing or basic school supplies. Some of the brightest girls in school with me never had the chance to proceed to secondary education, mainly because they were married off early due to religious and traditional customs.

One of my most vivid memories of school, however, is attending a permaculture workshop

facilitated by [SCOPE Zimbabwe](#) – an environmental education programme in Zimbabwe. The project aimed to improve land use in the local community and help our primary school widen its income-generating options by growing its own nutritional produce. The project transformed our school environment. The school expanded its green spaces and set up a community garden.

I learnt the importance of such community empowerment initiatives at the primary school level, and I saw first-hand the requirements for their success: local ownership. In the spirit of volunteerism, I decided to dedicate my time then to inspire the younger generation at my school to embark on similar initiatives.

Outside school hours, I enjoyed a wide selection of fruits and activities that nature had to offer. Fishing was the activity that I enjoyed the most as I could help put food on the table or sell the fish to earn an income. However, this economic activity has since been abandoned, due to the siltation and drying of nearby rivers.

In the latter part of my education, I studied further away from my rural home, but this did not reduce my passion for finding ways of empowering people back home.

“ I realized that most of our poverty-related challenges emanated from a lack of knowledge of how to turn locally-available resources into enterprising opportunities. This instilled in me the desire to continue pursuing transformative solutions for my community. --Munyaradzi Kanjera, UN Volunteer with UNDP, Zimbabwe

As I started my career, I got attached as a UN Volunteer to [Solar4Health](#), an initiative of the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Even in remote areas, the initiative is enabling quality health services and climate-resilient systems. The stable, reliable and renewable energy supply is less prone to challenges affecting traditional power supplies, cheaper and reduces carbon emissions. This saves lives, the environment and money.

Through Solar4Health, UNDP supports governments to increase access to quality health services through the installation of solar energy photovoltaic systems, ensuring constant and cost-effective access to electricity, while also mitigating the impact of climate change and advancing multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

My assignment took me to visit other rural communities with similar development challenges as my own, such as child malnutrition, lack of access to quality education and poor electricity and communication infrastructure.

As a volunteer in the project, I trained rural community leaders, including women, who are

often marginalized, to actively participate in the development of their communities.

Additionally, I have been able to access vast learning resources on UNDP's website and its social media platforms, including UNDP's work on risk-informed development and social inclusion in Zimbabwe and around the globe.

“ At the end of the day, I believe we all are responsible for working towards thriving, healthy, cohesive and sustainable communities, with strong local economies.

I look forward to putting some of the lessons from my UN Volunteer assignment to initiate several community-based activities, especially in peri-urban and rural areas. Starting with my rural village, I hope to enable people who are often left behind in the process of development to meet their daily basic needs.

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• International Day of Rural Women

Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 3: Good health and well-being** **SDG 5: Gender equality** **SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy** **SDG 13: Climate change** **SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals**