



Eric Nduwimana (right) is a UN Volunteer Covid-19 Response Programme Assistant at the Global Fund Project Unit of UNDP in Burundi.  
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## Enabling communities in Burundi to prepare for and respond to health emergencies

Eric Nduwimana is a UN Volunteer serving with the Global Fund Unit of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Burundi. As a COVID-19 Response Programme Assistant, he supports communities in preparing for and responding to health emergencies. We asked Eric about his volunteer experience in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in the below interview.

### What do you do as a UN Volunteer?

The Global Fund's COVID-19 response programme aims to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the fight to defeat HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, and promotes urgent improvements in health and community systems.

As a Programme Assistant, I make sure that all medical supplies purchased through UNDP to support HIV, tuberculosis and malaria interventions in Burundi have the necessary documentation before their arrival, so that they are processed quickly at the port of entry and they reach the target

populations on time. I support logistics processes to ensure that the supplies bought to support the prevention of COVID-19 reach beneficiaries on time to avoid the explosion of new cases.

### **What prompted you join UNDP Burundi as a UN Volunteer?**

“ Putting my knowledge, effort and time at the service of my community was my main motivation for joining UNDP as a national UN Volunteer. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the best way I found for supporting my community was through volunteering.

### **What is the most challenging aspect of your work?**

The most challenging part of my work is usually when the drugs, test kits or any other laboratory consumables we have ordered arrive in the country without the necessary documentation. Due to the pandemic, sometimes some public services may be delayed, because one or more staff have contracted COVID-19, and this may cause a delay in obtaining the necessary documents.

To address this, I usually have to request government customs colleagues to release the shipments while formalities are completed, due to the critical requirements for some of the shipments. For example, cold chain vaccines require specific storage conditions.

This means that I have to meet with authority representatives, explain the delay in obtaining the documents and justification for fast-tracking the release of the drugs into the country. The negotiations sometimes take too long. In many of the cases, delays in releasing the drugs would usually render the drugs useless due to short shelf lives, resulting into financial and time losses and significant health risks for the beneficiaries who usually need the drugs urgently.

### **What aspect of your work do you find most satisfying?**

Volunteering is all about the fundamental values that underpin our societies, such as care, kindness and friendship. At the end of the day, after a long working day, I go to bed with a satisfied feeling, knowing that I did not waste my day at work. Rather, my efforts and time contributed to improving someone's life somewhere in a remote corner of my country. Volunteering with the Global Fund Unit at UNDP Burundi has enabled me to discover capacities I thought I did not have.

**What are your thoughts on the COVID-19 pandemic?**

“ We surely have a long way to go. I think that it is extremely important to increase the levels of awareness on COVID-19 in the society, and to tackle misinformation, vaccine hesitancy and complacency among people.

When you remind people to put on their masks while in public spaces or to wash their hands regularly, some of them think you are crazy or too fearful. But the thing we must know is that safety starts with us. The moment we take the pandemic seriously and start protecting ourselves and others, others will follow our good example.

It is high time we start putting into action what we are preaching to others. Together, we shall overcome the pandemic.



• International Day of Epidemic Preparedness • COVID-19

Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 3: Good health and well-being** **SDG 10:**

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Reduced inequalities SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals