Tackling COVID-19 through online volunteering

Four Online Volunteers supported the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Accelerator Lab in Pacific to identify significant events, innovative solutions as well as interventions that can be implemented in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Asia Pacific region, to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNDP generally provides support to the Small Island Developing States across a number of different thematic areas to address economic difficulties and development imperatives. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the vulnerabilities of SIDS countries in many ways including supply chain disruption, food insecurity, inadequate supplies of fresh water, and fragile biodiversity.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the UNDP Accelerator Lab in the Pacific, engaged Online Volunteers for 3-6 months. The Volunteers supported the Accelerator Lab team to source web/digital information such as web pages, blog posts, multimedia, social media conversations and more, which fed in to a “Horizon Scan” a tool, which is used for the identification and information of new science and technology. The Online Volunteers were responsible for one key component of the task each
complementing each other and contributing to the UNDP Accelerator Lab’s efforts.

Shweta Arora from India, with expertise in Financial Risk Management, and Nina Baijens from the Netherlands, with a background in International Business Economics and Commerce and Marketing, used their skills to support the UNDP Accelerator Lab by researching publications, research articles, visuals, and videos around COVID-19 responses, and developing materials for different internal communications channels and sharing best practices of the SIDS in dealing with the pandemic.

“Simply said ‘what you seek, is seeking you’. This is an organization that we all look up to with respect and gratefulness being devoted to the greater good. The opportunity was intriguing as it brought to surface content for small island developing countries. Being able to contribute as a volunteer with UNDP was an honour and a great learning opportunity for a young banker like me. --Shweta Arora, Online Volunteer

With a background in Commerce and International Science, Boyuan Wang from China, used his experience and skills to design the post-COVID-19 digital transformation map for countries in the South Pacific community using online visualization tools. Whereas Siyu Liu also from China, made use of her fast experience from working as a data scientist to provide data visualizations and insight summaries for Pacific Island Countries to understand the COVID-19 impact in multiple disciplines.

“It was a rewarding experience. Through the collaboration and comprehensive research, I was able to explore the major impacts the pandemic had on Small Island Developing States and utilized various resources to support the architecture of the solution. --Boyuan Wang, Online Volunteer

The findings from the work of Online Volunteers have been used in discussions on several UNDP SIDS-focused platforms which has helped them to better anticipate future opportunities and threats. It has also allowed them to generate strategies - “Strategic
Foresight" - for decision making as existing portfolios were repurposed for UNDP’s COVID-19 response and translated into databases such as the UNDP Data Futures Platform or documents such as the International Telecommunication Union’s (ITU) "Measuring Digital Development – Facts and Figures 2020".

With their efforts and contributions, the Online Volunteers helped me find novel and unexpected issues as well as persistent problems, trends, new and emerging technologies happening across SIDS countries. Our collaboration led to identification of more effective solutions that added value for the people affected by COVID-19 in SIDS—people and their governments. Their contributions have been valuable in our response to the pandemic. --Victor Ladele, former Head of Exploration, UNDP Accelerator Lab in the Pacific, Fiji

Many candidates, with a wide range of skills, willing to support organizations worldwide are registered on the UNV Unified Volunteering Platform (UVP). UVP is a platform for solidarity and collaboration, which you can join from anywhere in the world, from any device. Like the volunteers engaging with UNDP Accelerator Lab, if you wish to team up with organizations to address sustainable development challenges or provide support to COVID-19 response efforts from your home, join now!

Asia and the Pacific

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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 3: Good health and well-being SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals