"Volunteerism is a way of life: a service to communities around us and to ourselves"

Rehana Bashir Butt (Pakistan) served as a UN Volunteer Associate Supply Officer with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Dadaab, Kenya, since 2018. She holds a Master’s degree in business administration and worked with several humanitarian organizations before joining UNHCR in the supply chain function. In her role, she handled procurement, warehousing, fleet and asset management. This year, Rehana concluded her assignment with UNHCR. For World Humanitarian Day, she shared why volunteering is essential for humanitarian work.

I joined UNHCR Kenya as a UN Volunteer in June 2018 and have just concluded my volunteer assignment. During this period, I worked closely with my colleagues at UNHCR Kenya in promoting sustainable cities and communities. Our aim has been to help and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.
Since my early years, I always had the desire to volunteer while serving the humanity in the United Nations because of its universal values of neutrality, impartiality, equality, justice and transparency. -- Rehana Bashir, former UN Volunteer Associate Supply Officer, UNHCR Kenya

Currently Dadaab camp hosts more than 230,000 persons of concern who need aid and support from UNHCR and other actors in the humanitarian sector. My day-to-day work involved coordinating, managing and supporting all activities pertaining to the supply chain functions at UNHCR operations, including planning, sourcing, warehousing, asset and fleet management in the operation. It was very challenging to source the goods and services required to run the operation in a timely manner in Dadaab, being a remote and hard duty station.

To efficiently manage the supply operations, I ensured effective supply chain logistics control measures, such as optimal stock control, sufficient storage and effective time management.

Together with my colleagues, we implemented control measures that put persons of concern at the centre of our operations, ensuring that they do not experience shortage of food and non-food items and services.

We also ensured that the health and educational infrastructure in the refugee’s camps are well maintained. Additionally, through affirmative action by UNHCR Kenya, we procured several goods and services from local markets, thus supporting local suppliers and helping boost their socio-economic status.
Working in humanitarian contexts such as Dadaab was daunting, but quite rewarding. I remember when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and refugees in the camps needed isolation centers, the UNHCR Supply unit took the initiative to organize and establish two isolation centres equipped with all facilities within a few days. The refugees were quite impressed to see the centres providing services in such a short time lead and appreciated the tireless efforts made.

Despite the challenges of working in the humanitarian context, one thing that always comforted me was the satisfaction that comes from standing with refugees in their most vulnerable moments. I learnt from my experience as a volunteer that every action counts, and that each one of us has a responsibility to contribute to making a positive difference in the lives of those who are vulnerable and needy.

“To me, volunteerism is a way of life: a service to communities around us and to ourselves. It gives me a sense of purpose for my existence,”
even as I give a helping hand to people in need. --Rehana Bashir

I am glad that as I conclude my assignment, my supervisor and senior management at UNHCR field office in Dadaab always appreciated my work and quoted me as a hardworking and passionate professional. My message to everyone for this year’s World Humanitarian Day is that the world is a village, and indeed therefore #ItTakesAVillage to support someone in a humanitarian crisis.

Today, someone far away could be trapped in a humanitarian crisis, tomorrow it could be anyone closer. Let us keep volunteering whenever we can to build better communities and support people in need. --Rehana Bashir

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