



"My contribution to the fight against COVID-19 started with distributing face masks in churches and sharing my story as a COVID-19 'survivor,'" shares Salawu Oluwatoyin, UN Volunteer with WHO under the Africa Women Health Champions Initiative.

"Overcoming COVID-19 infection reinforced my decision to volunteer"

A few months ago, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme launched the Africa Women Health Champions initiative, in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO) to promote health and boost gender equity across 47 African countries. Of the planned 100 UN Volunteers, UNV has already deployed 15, including Salawu Oluwatoyin, from Nigeria. Here, Salawu shares her experience in Ethiopia as one of the first volunteers deployed.

I have volunteered on campaigns to end Hepatitis B and "Peste des Petits ruminants" in animals in many inaccessible communities in Northern Nigeria. The Africa Women Health Champions initiative came at the right time in my professional career, as I was looking for opportunities to join UNV to broaden my experience and learn from others.

Moving from a national project assistant position in Nigeria to an international UN Volunteer assignment in Ethiopia to support country emergency preparedness and international health regulation was like climbing a ladder by skipping steps.

“ During my work in Nigeria, I was infected with COVID-19 and transferred to an isolation center. I received the clearance for my UN Volunteer assignment while on my way to the isolation centre, where I would be for 21 days. Going through this experience reinforced my decision to volunteer, because I could relate to COVID-19 patients and share my experience to fight the pandemic. --Salawu Oluwatoyin, UN Volunteer with WHO, Ethiopia

Being in quarantine without seeing the sun gave me a broader perspective on the importance of mental health in disease prevention. I was psychologically unstable during my first week in isolation that I was referred to a clinical psychologist for help

My contribution to the fight against COVID-19 started with distributing face masks in churches and sharing my story as a COVID-19 'survivor'. With the resumption of religious gatherings in Ethiopia, I would like to help others make informed decisions when it comes to this pandemic.


During the first weeks of my assignment in the country, I contributed to the development of guidelines for response preparedness to diseases such as High Pathogenic Avian Influenza and National Cholera Eradication. Having a veterinary background and public health knowledge put me in a good position to advise the Ethiopian One Health Core Group on priorities in terms of disease management. Ethiopian One Health Core group are multidisciplinary stakeholders that take a multisectoral approach to effectively plan and prepare for, detect, assess, and respond to health threats at all levels of the health system.

Public health response is becoming more challenging due to the scarce resources available to ensure that everyone can access health services. I believe that volunteers can be game changers to fill this gap.

“ Every time people ask me why I left my position as a national staff member in Nigeria to become a UN Volunteer, my answer is always the same: there are different paths to a destination and the Africa Women Health Champions is one of the best paths for early-career women to reach their goals, while contributing to the greater

“ good. --Salawu Oluwatoyin

Through the Africa Women Health Champions Initiative, UNV will recruit professionals from around the world to serve with WHO. We are looking for qualified women with at least two years of professional experience related to public health, epidemiology, health research, health emergency management, data management, statistics or other health related fields, as well as information management, innovation, communications or external relations.

 <https://www.unv.org/News/Africa-Women-Health-Champions-improve-health-and-gender-equality>

• WHO • COVID-19 • Coronavirus • Africa Women Health Champion's Initiative • women's empowerment

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 3: Good health and well-being](#), [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)