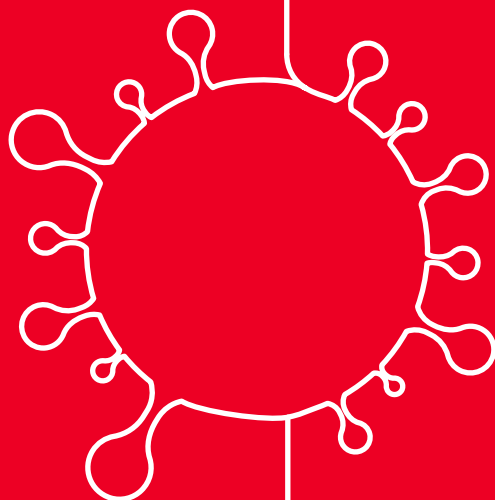




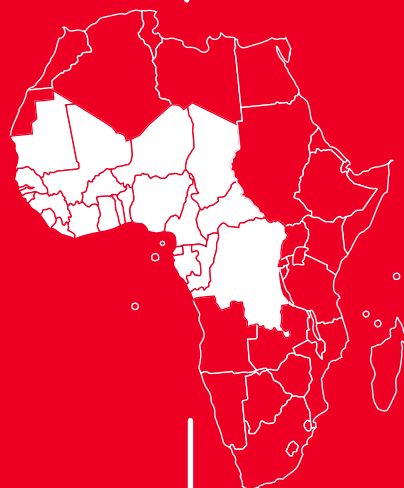
**UN
VOLUNTEERS**

West & Central Africa



COVID-19 RESPONSE IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Facts, Lessons learned and way forward



By Mareike Peschau and
Didier Muamba Kabeya

Overview: **AIM, METHOD, KEY FINDINGS**

This contributing paper takes stock of the UNV Regional Office for West and Central Africa's (ROWCA) contributions to the COVID-19 crisis response from March to December 2020. Based on a documentation review and interviews with UNV field units and UN Volunteers, the paper reflects on the organisation's response by highlighting results and deriving lessons learned in order to formulate strategic recommendations to respond better in 2021 as well as to strengthen future crisis response in the region. All findings were reviewed in a focus group discussion with ROWCA and field unit staff on the 17th of February 2021.

Strategic Positioning: **COVID-19 & ROWCA RESPONSE**

The UNV Regional Office for West and Central Africa (ROWCA) has actively contributed to the [UN System COVID-19 response](#) as laid out in [UNV's current offer](#) and supported national crisis response efforts through the knowledge and expertise of volunteers. The [UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19](#) highlights volunteer action as critical to socio-economic recovery and calls for an expansion of partnerships for greater impact. ROWCA supported the implementation of the framework by promoting volunteer-based solutions to partners. It thereby focused on two dimensions: First, quick and effective volunteer solutions were offered to partners by boosting the UNV talent pool and by rapidly recruiting/re-assigning already deployed volunteers. Second, community volunteers were mobilised to implement [community projects](#). UNV field units played a central role as they [supported UN and national entities](#), while shifting to telecommuting work. In that way, the pandemic has been a stress test for existing work routines and partnerships.

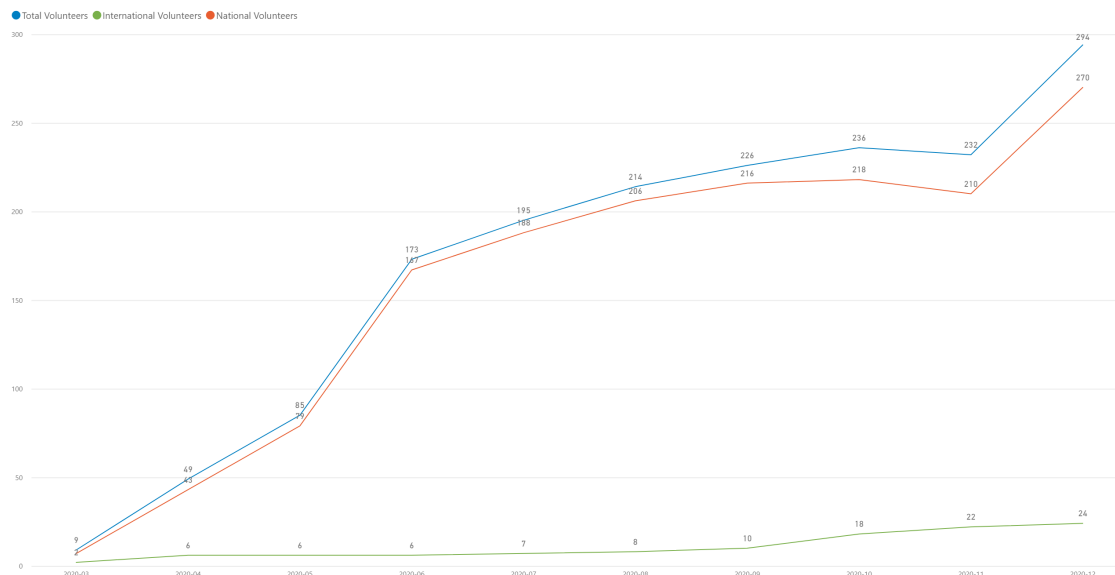


¹ Interviews were conducted between the 27th of October and 9th of November 2020 with one country coordinator and one national UN Volunteer.

² https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_framework_report_on_covid-19.pdf

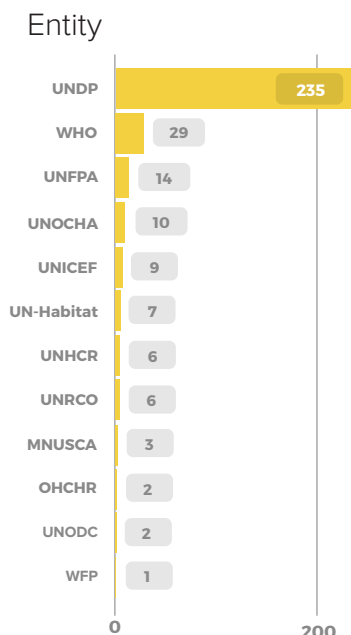
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Figure 1: Number of UN Volunteers deployed in support of COVID-19 response in West and Central Africa, 2020



¹Interviews were conducted between the 27th of October and 9th of November 2020 with one country coordinator and one national UN Volunteer.

Figure 2: Entities hosting UN Volunteers deployed in support of COVID-19 response in West and Central Africa, 2020

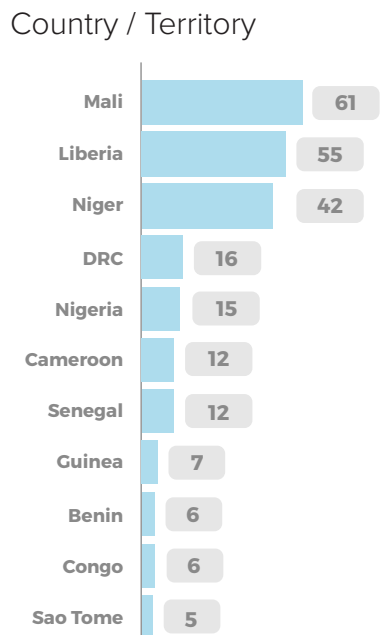


UN Volunteers Dashboard

Data as of 22/01/21, 07:59

Filtered by Year (is 2020), Tag (is COVID-19), UNV Region (is DAKAR)

Figure 3: Countries in which UN Volunteers were deployed in support of COVID-19 response in West and Central Africa, 2020



UN Volunteers Dashboard

Data as of 22/01/21, 07:59

Filtered by Year (is 2020), Tag (is COVID-19), UNV Region (is DAKAR)

Outcomes & Lessons Learned: **ONSITE**

GENERAL

Since the pandemic hit the region in March 2020, UN Volunteers were actively involved in the pandemic response on the ground. Throughout the year 2020, 324 UN Volunteers were deployed in support to COVID-19 related activities, especially in the second half of the year (see figure 1). The majority of UN Volunteers were hosted by UNDP (see figure 2) and mostly based in Niger, Mali, and Liberia (see figure 3).

According to [Volunteer Reporting App](#) (VRA) data, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that UN Volunteers mainly contributed towards, from the start of the pandemic until the end of 2020, were SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being – 85%), SDG 5 (Gender Equality – 10%), SDG 16 (Peace and Justice Strong Institutions – 8.9%) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation – 7.2%).

In addition to the recruitment of UN Volunteers, with a focus on national UNV modalities due to travel restrictions, an attempt was made to re-deploy UN Volunteers that were already on the ground to support COVID-19 response efforts. Furthermore, telecommuting arrangements were put into place to allow international UN Volunteers to remotely support COVID-19 related programmes of host entities. Overall, 123 cases of telecommuting were [reported](#) for the region.

In 2020, ROWCA received two allocations of almost USD 400,000 from the Special Voluntary Fund (SVF) Response Mechanism for COVID-19 that was provided by UNV HQ. The first allocation of USD 161,691 issued in April, allowed the funding of 12 UNV positions in support to UN entities such as UNDP, RCO, OCHA and WHO. The second allocation of USD 196,727.80, received in November 2020, funds the deployment of 12 UNVs in 2021 who will provide support to 6 UN Agencies with a focus on information management. According to 2020 data retrieved from [VRA](#), UN Volunteers whose assignment was related to the COVID-19 response reported to have reached 736,962 beneficiaries. These were mainly elderly, youth and people living below the (absolute) poverty line.

Based on [UNV field units' reporting](#), a total of USD 19,400 from the Volunteer Promotion Initiative Fund (VPI) was spent on activities supporting the COVID-19 response. The VPI funds were spent to support community and volunteer initiatives for awareness-raising and COVID-19 prevention campaigns, including amongst others the procurement of soap and handwashing facilities, protection masks, production and distribution of information material aimed primarily at communities and vulnerable groups. All activities involved community outreach in order to raise awareness on COVID-19 and to prevent its spread. 9 campaigns were organised in collaboration with international and national volunteer involving organisations (such as France Volontaires, Réseau des Acteurs du Volontariat et de la Solidarité Internationales, Bobo Bénévolat in Burkina Faso, Young African Leaders Initiative Central African Republic, Agence Nationale du Volontariat Jeunesse Guinea, Volunteers without Borders in Liberia, Centre National de Promotion du Volontariat Mali, Jeune Chambre Internationale Mali, Plateforme des Organisations de volontariat et d'échanges de jeunes au Bénin) as well as ministries (e.g. Ministry of Youth in Cote d'Ivoire). Throughout the region, UN Volunteers supported UN entities and national partners in the response to COVID-19, both onsite and online.

EXAMPLES

Mali

In order to support the national COVID-19 response, UNDP Mali deployed 60 UNV Community Volunteers in order to [raise awareness for COVID-19](#) transmission and protective [measures at community levels](#) in the regions of Bamako and Mopti. To further support these efforts, a micro project was established using VPI funds which allowed the distribution of sanitary kits in two Displaced Persons Camps in Bamako and provided 159 women and 157 children with re-usable masks. All in all, using VPI funds, USD 5,175 were



spent in collaborative efforts with UNDP community volunteers, MINUSMA volunteers, as well as the local partners “Centre National de Promotion du Volontariat au Mali (CNPV)”, “France Volontaires”, and “Jeune Chambre Internationale (JCI)”. The initiative was supported by online volunteers who developed flyers and awareness posters, thus, complementing the work of volunteers on the ground.

Liberia

In Liberia, 50 UNV Community Volunteers, including 6 refugees, were mobilised and deployed across 6 border counties as contact tracers and case finders for a joint UNDP/IOM and UNHCR Border Surveillance COVID-19 Response Project. Moreover, in collaboration with the Liberian volunteer organisation “Volunteers Without Borders”, 5,245 community members were [informed about COVID-19](#) modes of transmission, preventive measures as well as available services. [3 international UN Volunteers](#) serving with the UN Office of



the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and assigned to monitor the impact on human rights during the COVID-19 state of emergency in Liberia, assisted 6 pregnant students to resume classes and attend the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE).

DRC:

In support of the UN’s COVID-19 response, 11 national Experts (doctors) and 3 national Specialists were hired by WHO whereas UNICEF hired 2 national Experts.

EXAMPLES

Niger:

In support of the COVID-19 crisis response, UNV Niger deployed 3 epidemiologists, 4 nurses and 2 laboratory technicians for WHO and UNDP. In addition, an [awareness-raising campaign](#) named « ("Stopper la propagation Covid-19 au Niger" ("Stopping the spread of Covid-19 in Niger") was organised in collaboration with a community organisation "Cadre de Concertation des Associations de Jeunesse" in June. Using VPI funds (USD 1,000), the campaign included awareness-raising, the installation of handwashing facilities and prevention kits in three city markets of Niamey, [reaching more than 25,000 persons.](#)



Chad:

To help stop the spread of the pandemic in her community, Benedicte Nekinguem, a national UNV Administrative Assistant sewed 7000 face masks on a small budget and distributed them for free in hospitals. At the same time, she organised awareness-raising events to increase the understanding of social distancing measures as a means to overcome the pandemic within her community. Moreover, in collaboration with UNFPA and other partners, the UNV field unit organized the distribution of masks and disinfectant to 4,000 students and teachers of the Lycée Félix Eboué and trained the staff of reception centres for vulnerable children to make and sell liquid soap as an income-generating activity. This demonstrated UNV's ability to network, to be close to people's needs and, thus, giving visibility and importance to volunteers on the ground.



Cameroon:

The field unit supported the "All Against COVID-19" campaign which promoted citizen engagement as an effective tool for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. By strengthening the capacities of 80 members of the association "Réseau des Acteurs du Volontariat et de la Solidarité Internationale, the distribution of prevention kits to vulnerable individuals and families in the regions (East, Littoral, Centre and West) where the network is established was made possible. Overall, 5,000 people were made aware of prevention measures and received cotton masks.

EXAMPLES

Nigeria:

The field unit organised a [COVID-19 prevention campaign](#) in the communities of Dakwo and Kabusa. In partnership with other volunteer involving organizations, awareness was raised for COVID-19 and COVID-19 prevention champions were trained that will further spread the message in their communities and beyond. 400 people, mostly women, were reached and face shields as well as hand sanitizer were distributed.



Congo and Gabon:

The [“Mask4All” initiative](#) was implemented together with “France Volontaires” and “Réseau des Acteurs du Volontariat et de la Solidarité International” which consists of 10 volunteer involving organizations. 2,500 masks were made by 10 local female dressmakers, a way to promote female entrepreneurship during the crisis period. The masks were distributed to 1,100 vulnerable people living with disabilities, the elderly and pregnant women in less advantaged communities in Moundou and Madi-bou (Brazzaville). In partnership with other agencies, UNDP (UNDP AccLab) organized the hackathon “Hack 4 COVID-19” to identify COVID-19 solutions for the recovery plan. 2 UN volunteers supported the coaching and mentoring of the selected teams. Moreover, 7 COVID-19 related volunteers were deployed out of which 3 were national Specialists funded through the SVF mechanism to support the UNRCO, UNICEF and WHO country offices in their COVID-19 response.

Benin:

With a budget of USD 500, 6 UN Volunteers deployed for WFP manufactured 500 litres of liquid soap, which were made available free of charge to 43 schools with school canteens in the commune of Toffo. Moreover, in collaboration with the national platform of volunteer organizations in Benin the field unit organised the anti-COVID-19 awareness campaign “#StopCovid-19”. With a financial contribution of USD 500 from UNV, this campaign made it possible to reach more than 2,000 vulnerable people in the precarious neighborhoods of Cotonou and Porto-novo and to distribute masks (1,000), liquid soap (50 liters) and hand washing devices (10). Finally, 10 national UN Volunteers, including 7 doctors and 3 psychologists, were mobilised for UNDP and deployed in prisons for the medical and psychological care of prisoners.



EXAMPLES

Senegal:

With a budget of USD 3,000 allocated from VPI funds, the field unit distributed 700 children's masks and 350 school supplies at the start of the school year. The activity was organised in collaboration with the national COVID-19 platform lead by UNDP (UNIDO, UNV, UNFPA, UNCDF, FAO and UN Women) and was executed by Community Volunteers deployed to support the platform's activities. The field unit also supported the volunteers of the DAFI programme, organised by an association of DAFISTES and former DAFISTES, in the acquisition and distribution of food and hygiene kits from which 25 refugee families (107 people) benefitted.

LESSONS LEARNED

Comparative Advantage of National UNV Modalities

Overall, 300 out of the 324 UN volunteers supporting the pandemic response were recruited under the national UNV modality which enabled ROWCA to provide fast and localised solutions. In light of the travel restrictions imposed in the beginning of the pandemic, national volunteers could quickly be deployed in their own communities and ensured an effective crisis response based on their local knowledge.

Build on Long-Term Efforts: National Volunteer Schemes

UN agencies and national governments relied on volunteers from existing national volunteer infrastructures, highlighting UNV's achievements regarding the support of national governments in developing such volunteering schemes. A best practice is Burkina Faso where UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF made explicit use of the existing national volunteer scheme, the PNVB (Programme National des Volontaires au Burkina Faso). Same in Mali, where national volunteers were mobilised as community volunteers through the support of the CNPV, to support the COVID-19 sensitization campaign in Bamako, Sikasso and Segou.

The Assets of Volunteering in Contexts of Crisis: Expertise and Commitment

As the pandemic progressed, the crisis exacerbated the need for additional capacities due to the increased workload for many UN partners. For example, UNHCR in Mauritania recruited an international UN Volunteer public health technician to work with national authorities and health partners to coordinate and implement public health response activities in the integration of refugees into the national health system and the COVID-19 response. In Guinea Bissau, a UN Volunteer was the team lead in the coordination of the UN's COVID-19 response and another one was temporarily providing technical support to WHO.

Maximise Impact through Volunteer Mobilisation

Interventions at community level showed that impactful results can be obtained with small financial resources. For example, the field unit in Cameroon managed to reach more than 5,000 people and to distribute masks, soap and water buckets with a budget of around USD 2,400. Especially, during the pandemic, the key to prevention was community sensitisation. Mobilising volunteers to hold information sessions allowed UNV to maximise its impact using limited resources.

LESSONS LEARNED

Plan Ahead

Activity reports from UNV field units in Mali and Nigeria state that outreach projects often experienced a higher turn out and, thus, a larger number of beneficiaries than expected, making the observation of social distance challenging. In these cases, a larger budget could have generated an even larger impact. Moreover, a key lesson is that during a pandemic, more careful planning is required in order to ensure the safety of all participants.

Play to Strengths: Network and Resources

At national level, major volunteer networks such as the Red Cross were a preferred option to UN partners (e.g. UNICEF) based on cost effectiveness and flexibility (as compared to UNV modalities). In the specific context of Guinea Bissau, the lack of clear coordination of the national crisis response made it difficult to identify points of entry for UNV. Nonetheless, the positioning of national volunteer infrastructures supported by UNV and VPI funds allowed the programme to support partners and act as a facilitator to support coordination within local volunteering organisations. As a result, 11 out of 15 reporting field units organized sensitization and outreach campaigns with active engagement of local volunteer organisations. This highlights how embedded UNV field units are in local volunteering infrastructures as well as how responsive these networks are in mobilising for joint action.

Promote options for telecommuting for International UN Volunteers among UN Partners

In light of travel restrictions, the organisation of telecommuting arrangements for international UN [Volunteers was proposed to UN partners](#) but was not always used according to field units' reporting. Further analysis into the details of the arrangements as well as into the experience of UN Volunteers and host entities is therefore needed.

ONLINE

GENERAL

Overall, ROWCA represented 36,56% (394 in total) of all online volunteering opportunities requested by UN agencies in 2020 through the UNV online volunteering platform. Compared to other UNV regional offices it is therefore the second most active regions for online volunteering, behind the regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean which registered 553 opportunities. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 404 Online Volunteers were recruited in West and Central Africa in 55 different opportunities across UN agencies, civil society, public and governmental organisations. 18 of these opportunities were provided by UN agencies who engaged 28 Online Volunteers. The largest number of opportunities were created by the Cameroon Association of Active Youth (l'Association Camerounaise des Jeunes Actifs – CAMAAY). The majority of Online Volunteers supported the communication around the impact of COVID-19 and its response programmes. Others supported fund-raising, research, the writing of project proposals, and even offered remote medical support.

EXAMPLES

In Bamenda, department of Mezam in Cameroon, 10 skilled [Online Volunteers supported 1,000 Cameroonians](#) through the Cameroon Association of Active Youth (CAMAAY) with online fundraising for an awareness-raising campaign on COVID-19 which resulted in the distribution of soap and reusable face masks. Moreover, Online Volunteers - medical doctors, lawyers, students, engineers, computer scientists and financial analysts - provided support to the community, which is impacted by the pandemic and its economic, social and political consequences.

LESSONS LEARNED

Capitalise on Talent Pool

While many parts of the world were in lock-down, online volunteering provided an opportunity to tap into the availability and willingness to help from more than half a million volunteers worldwide in order to support crisis response. While ROWCA has actively made use of this opportunity, Online Volunteers are an immense resource that could be exploited more widely. In fact, field units reported that Online Volunteers hardly played a significant role in the COVID-19 crisis response. By exploring and showcasing a wider variety of opportunities for digital collaboration, for example in the form of best practices, more partner organisation could be encouraged to seek support from Online Volunteers.

Improve User-Friendliness

According to field units' feedback, the process of creating a profile and publishing volunteering opportunities through the UNV online volunteering platform is still too labour intensive and time consuming. Based on a time vs urgency analysis, field units and UN partner agencies are therefore reluctant to make use of Online Volunteers. User-friendliness could, for example, be improved by reluctant to make use of Online Volunteers. User-friendliness could, for example, be improved by providing templates for certain types of assignment or through offering greater support from ROWCA.

Obstacle: Language Requirements

In the region of West and Central Africa, proficiency in both English and French is often a necessary requirement for Online Volunteers. Finding suitable candidates is therefore challenging. Indeed, the quality of Online Volunteers' applications still varies greatly. Better quality control regarding the relevance of candidates' profiles to the opportunity would facilitate recruitment and increase user-friendliness for organisations. As a result, UN entities and local NGOs would be able to make better and more targeted use of Online Volunteers to strengthen their COVID-19 or future health crises response.

²All data was retrieved from the Online Volunteering dashboard for West and Central Africa

COMMUNICATIONS

GENERAL

Communication has been at the heart of ROWCA's COVID-19 crisis response. While it has been an essential component at the HQ management level in order to coordinate between UNV's different organisational units as well as partners, it has also been at the core of community volunteers' action on the ground. UNV field units strategically used their social media presence to raise awareness on the spread of the virus and to sensitise local communities while also exploring it as a tool to advertise volunteer assignments. Especially on Twitter, field units shared social cards on COVID-19 to sensitise their followers as well as highlighted their own activities to encourage further action. For example, the field units of Niger, Congo, DRC, Benin and Nigeria actively shared on the ground achievements, receiving up to 25 retweets per post. Further communication efforts focused, for example, on the production of videos - e.g. Nigeria, where videos on gender-based violence during COVID-19 were shared - and the creation of posters and flyers - e.g. Liberia, where posters were spread across three major slum communities in Montserrado county - in order to sensitise communities.

EXAMPLES

Nigeria: National UN Volunteers helped create a [social media campaign](#) that supported COVID-19 prevention. Translated into the local languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), information was shared on how to keep safe and avoid the spread of the coronavirus. All in all, the campaign consisted of 4 posts on twitter which were retweeted 33 times.

SAFETY TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS DURING COVID-19

- WEAR MASK WHILE VOLUNTEERING
- CLEAN YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY
- KEEP A 2 METER DISTANCE
- RESTRICT THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN A SPACE
- AVOID PHYSICAL CONTACT
- ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU FEEL SICK
- TAKE CARE OF YOUR PHYSICAL AND
- ELIMINATE NON-ESSENTIAL GATHERINGS, SUCH AS MEETINGS AND TRAINING CLASSES

#TogetherWeCan
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TRANSCENDING VOLUNTEERISM

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Domin gaggawa, a kira NCDC

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0800 9700 0010

Call: +234 703 670 8970

UN VOLUNTEERS
Nigeria

Yana hana yaduwar Covid-19 a Matakai Bakwai 7

- Guji teba idanunku, hanci da bakinku
- Wanke hannuwanka akai-akai.
- Rufe tari ta amfani da tankiware ta gwirne hanku ko a falci falen takarda
- Zauna a gida idan kana jin rashin lafiya.
- Guji wuraren cike cunkoso da kusanci da duk wanda ke da zazabi ko tari
- Samu bayanai daga tsauraran aminattatu
- Idan kana da zazabi, tari da wahalar numashi, nemi likita da wuramma ka kira farko

NCDC
Toll Free Line 0800 9700 0010
Call: +234 703 670 8970

UN VOLUNTEERS
Nigeria

LESSONS LEARNED

Communicate for Impact by Supporting Field Units

The evaluation of UNV ROWCA's Twitter account statistics show that overall, its most successful posts related to the advertisement of open positions. For example, in May, when the account achieved most impressions, the most successful post called for applications and received an engagement rate of 6.3% as well as 6,950 impressions. Feedback that was repeatedly voiced by field units during the Mid-Year Review was the need for greater support on social media by ROWCA. Indeed, just over half of the field units reported explicit efforts to communicate on COVID-19. Thus, while there was a heightened engagement on social media in the beginning of the pandemic, an opportunity was missed to use the momentum and to support on the ground activities through strategic communication. ROWCA could support field units by offering a centralised platform for the exchange of best practices and the sharing of readymade templates which field units could easily replicate and use. For example, this could take the form of a trello board that is updated once a month.

Build Synergies between Field Units

Field units developed great ideas, like for example, a video mission to document UNVs' support to COVID-19 in Cameroon, which could have easily been replicated in other countries. Therefore, further efforts should be undertaken to facilitate exchange and support between field units. Next to strengthening the communications network through regular meetings and exchanges, organising a virtual coffee break or brown-bag lunch on a specific issue could be an effective measure to develop UNV's communication in the region.

MANAGEMENT

GENERAL

In order to directly translate UNV HQ's strategic positioning into relevant contributions to the UN System COVID-19 response into the region, ROWCA developed 1-pagers providing UN entities with an overview of how UN Volunteers can contribute to the implementation of their respective COVID-19 response plans. In addition, the regional office put in place a knowledge management system on SharePoint in order to centrally collect national as well as UN agency's response plans which enabled it to respond to the needs identified in the region.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted work routines while at the same time demanded decisive and effective management in order to develop a strategic response. UNV field units had to overcome the challenge of working remotely, facing obstacles such as issues relating to internet and electricity access, forcing them to reorganise their work in a short period of time. Moreover, a shift in priorities in 2020 due to a focus on COVID-19 required that other programmatic engagements were put on hold.

EXAMPLES

- The field unit in Cameroon reported of internet and electricity shortages that limited the work of its personnel while working remotely as well as of the effects that these have had on their ability to deliver outcomes.
- Similarly, the work of the field unit in Congo and Gabon was impeded by travel restrictions which slowed down the speed of deployment of international UN Volunteers. This required the team to quickly put alternatives into place, such as recruiting volunteers at community level.
- In an effort to maintain regular communication remotely, all field units created mailing lists and WhatsApp groups to support UN Volunteers and to keep up their moral.
- Aside from posing challenges, the situation also offered new opportunities. The field unit in Liberia started online engagement to encourage more qualified youth candidates to sign up to the UNV database in order to expand the pool of candidates for national community volunteer modalities.

LESSONS LEARNED

Proving Organisational Crisis Resilience

Overall, the quick management collaboration between UNV HQ, the regional office and field units allowed the formulation of speedy responses to the pandemic as well as to support UN agencies' and governments' response plans. Among others, this was achieved through the development of a dedicated [offer](#), administrative guidelines for the management of UN Volunteers, as well as the allocation of SVF funds which allowed the swift recruitment of UN Volunteers. The recruitment took place in less than two months to support WHO, UNDP, OCHA and RCOs in the first phase of the pandemic response.

Monitoring Volunteers

As field visits were no longer possible, the monitoring of UN Volunteers especially for the Community Volunteers became difficult. In addition, working from home made it more challenging for field units to stay in touch with volunteers. Better coordination of Community Volunteers on the ground is therefore needed, for example, through the recruitment of a national UNV coordinator and through the establishment of a regular reporting system. A best practice was developed by the field unit in Nigeria where Community Volunteers were submitting monthly reports on their activities which were being validated by UNDP. In addition, the use of information provided by UN Volunteers in the [VRA reports](#) should be a priority for UNV field units and the regional office to assess levels of engagement as well as the support provided by both UNV and the host entities.

Improving Telecommuting

The forced transition to telecommuting arrangements demystified it for many. Nonetheless, the feedback from field units indicates that teleworking was not without difficulties. Additional stress was imposed by an unreliable internet and electricity supply which caused delays and disrupted

work routines. To ensure the best possible working conditions, a survey among all WCA personnel should be conducted to assess in how far stable internet access as well as general conditions to work from home are given. Moreover, aspects of teamwork, e.g. motivation and team building, need to be reflected in order to ensure the functionality of teams as well as team members' wellbeing in context of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Operationalise Administrative Guidelines

The administrative guidelines issued by UNV HQ were essential to ROWCA's COVID-19 response. Nonetheless, their utility could have been improved through a greater operationality. In particular, field units would have benefitted from more concrete crisis response guidelines, including best practices, particularly regarding communication and the repatriation of volunteers.

Communicating with Volunteers

Keeping in touch with volunteers, via WhatsApp messaging or virtual meetings, has proven important to offer regular support as well as to ensure volunteers' well-being. Many field units have started hosting regular townhall meetings with UN Volunteers and some continue to do so even after the immediate crisis response. In addition, online communication tools could be used more strategically to respond to volunteers' needs more directly. Creating community of practice groups on Teams or WhatsApp, for example, would allow volunteers to enter a conversation with each other, to share experiences and build capacities.

WAY FORWARD

The analysis shows that the overall infrastructure of partnerships, workflows, and communication between UNV HQ, the regional office, field units, and partner organisations was fit to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. All in all, 72.2% of the field units and the regional office assessed the UN Volunteers programme's COVID-19 response as good, 22.2% as excellent, and 5.5% as fair. Key achievements are the mobilisation and deployment of national and Community Volunteers as well as the organisation of awareness-raising campaigns led at community level, including in remote areas. The greatest challenges that field units thereby faced were travel restrictions, ensuring a continuation of work routines while working remotely, as well as a sometimes poor coordination of the COVID-19 response at national level.

The pandemic intersects with other crises in the region, caused, among others, by conflict, natural disasters and political instability. A challenge therefore lies ahead in contributing towards the third dimension of the UN system COVID-19 response, namely, a transformative recovery process that leads to a better post-COVID-19 world. In the upcoming months and years, a strategic focus should therefore lie on supporting efforts to recover in order to make up for the setbacks caused by the pandemic in regard to the realisation of the Agenda 2030.

OTHER STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue community sensitisation: Interventions organised by field units, including awareness-raising and the distribution of sanitary kits, have shown to be impactful and have identified a large demand for masks and soap. Future projects should therefore be planned on a bigger scale, in budgetary as well as in more general organisational terms, in order to reach their full impact while ensuring the safety of all participants. Moreover, parts of society that have been neglected by the response so far, for example street children and people with disabilities as was reported for Chad, should be targeted more specifically.

Promote COVID-19 Tandem Teams: The partnership between UNV and the UNDP Crisis Bureau launched [a COVID-19 Tandem initiative](#), whereby an international UN Volunteer expert working remotely is paired with a national UN Volunteer expert. This initiative has shown impact, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, Arab States, and Asia and the Pacific, and should be promoted/replicated in the West and Central Africa region in cooperation with UNDP country offices.

Support volunteers' initiatives: There is potential in formalising ways through which UN Volunteers can initiate projects in order to foster inter-agency collaboration and develop more targeted interventions. It is also an opportunity to diversify the spending of VPI funds.

Promote volunteer solutions: Worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic [threatens to set us back by 30 years](#) regarding the progress made on the fight against poverty. Volunteers already play a key role in realising the Agenda 2030 and could become vital in the COVID-19 recovery. ROWCA needs to position itself strategically vis-a-vis its partners by showcasing volunteers' impact, identifying opportunities and promoting volunteerism early on.

Develop Crisis Response Mechanisms: In order to facilitate the recruitment of UN Volunteers in emergency situations, certain exceptions could be put in place, such as for example, authorising field units to support VSC colleagues in the identification of candidates from the database. Moreover, a part of the crisis response mechanism could be the presentation of a targeted, context specific offer to partners as well as regular regional meetings to support UNV personnel.

Ask partners for feedback: In order to improve future crisis response, a dialogue with partners is needed in order to be able to respond to their needs more adequately.

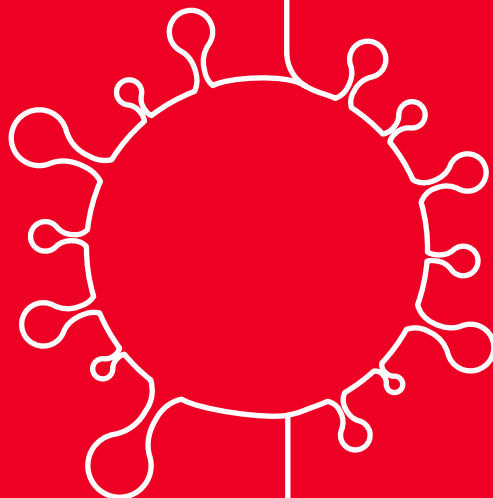
Capture results: The systematic monitoring and reporting of results is needed to increase the impact of volunteers on the ground as well as to strengthen ROWCA's communication towards member states and UN agencies. A centralised reporting system that is functional and easy to use should be developed to facilitate the capturing of results. A digital solution, similar to VRA, could complement lengthy reports and ensure that results are being acknowledged. Moreover, it will deliver a high return on investment as evidence and tangible results will increase the demand for volunteer solutions. In particular, more qualitative data needs to be collected on following aspects:

- o The process of redeployment
- o Effectiveness of telecommuting arrangements



UN VOLUNTEERS

West & Central Africa



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