Dear Friends,

On behalf of CorpsAfrica’s Board of Directors, I am excited to share with you this report on our COVID-19 response efforts and to recognize the heroic efforts of the CorpsAfrica Volunteers and staff in Morocco, Senegal, Malawi and Rwanda. Their courageous, selfless, and productive efforts in a time of crisis are a model for us all.

As Coronavirus restrictions are lifted, Volunteers are returning to their primary projects, with renewed focus on building resilience and local capacity. Most are extending their service in order to finish their projects and prepare their communities for a future crisis. We are learning as much as we can from this historic experience to build a crisis response curriculum into the core program and improve the CorpsAfrica model.

It is a great honor to give young Africans the chance they deserve to lead Africa’s development and to be of service to their fellow citizens in time of crisis. Together, with generous support from OCP Group, Mastercard Foundation, Open Road Alliance, Sanford Heisler Sharp, and all of our generous partners and donors, we are creating a model for national and Pan-African service and participatory, collaborative and accountable community development across Africa. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Liz Fanning
Founder and Executive Director
Founded in 2011, CorpsAfrica recruits, trains and sends college-educated Africans to live in remote villages in their own countries to facilitate small-scale, high-impact projects that are identified by local people, along the lines of the Peace Corps model. To date, CorpsAfrica has hosted almost 300 Volunteers in Morocco, Senegal, Malawi, and Rwanda, who have completed over 500 projects, including wells, schools, roads, irrigation systems, literacy programs, livestock farms, and many more.

CorpsAfrica Volunteers, trained in the methods of Human-Centered Design, engage the participation of all local people to facilitate projects that improve the resilience of communities, strengthening them so they lead higher quality lives, are better prepared to weather crises, and will recover from setbacks more quickly.

Even before the crisis, CorpsAfrica’s participatory process created strong bonds between the Volunteers and their communities and built trusting relationships that allowed for crisis response efforts to be better received. Having safe spaces for sharing information and providing basic supplies can be life-saving in remote, high-poverty areas where access is difficult.

_CORPSAFRICA IN BRIEF_

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_CorpsAfrica is designated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization by the Internal Revenue Service._

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When the COVID-19 crisis began to affect countries across Africa, CorpsAfrica Volunteers moved quickly to host community meetings, where they provided up-to-date public health information and guidelines. As the situation evolved and restrictions were put in place, Volunteers continued to stay in touch with their neighbors by phone, distributed face masks, made soap, built hand-washing stations, encouraged social distancing, worked as liaisons with local authorities, and served as models of calm, safe behavior for their host communities.

The pre-pandemic community projects facilitated by the Volunteers have also been helpful during the COVID-19 crisis. Farming and food production projects initiated by communities and supported by CorpsAfrica Volunteers provide a cushion against food insecurity. In Malawi, Volunteers helped young boys and girls set up “perma-gardens.” In Rwanda, Volunteers helped establish piggery farming projects and over 740 kitchen gardens on which some families depend entirely for food now that the lockdown has affected their livelihoods. The clean water project established by former Volunteers has also proven valuable to communities during the pandemic.

More funds will enable CorpsAfrica to leverage its unique model and to invest in expansion plans to develop resilience-building programs in other communities across Africa.
As soon as it became clear that COVID-19 was beginning to spread in Africa, the CorpsAfrica Volunteers in Morocco, Senegal, Malawi and Rwanda quickly pivoted to crisis response efforts. CorpsAfrica staff helped them organize awareness meetings and door-to-door visits to provide accurate information to their communities and prepare them to prevent the spread of the virus.

After the initial awareness-raising activities, as COVID-19 cases started appearing in Africa, CorpsAfrica swiftly launched a second phase of COVID-19 prevention activities, including:

- Making and distributing hand-washing stations, soap, and disinfecting materials.
- Providing patterns to teach local people how to make face masks.
- Using chalk to draw circles six feet apart on the ground outside of stores and other common areas so people would know where to stand to stay safe.
- Putting up signs throughout the villages to remind people to practice good hygiene, socially distance, and stay home.

Going forward, CorpsAfrica will continue to monitor the situation and work with the local communities to modify and innovate new projects as the needs of the communities change in response to the trajectory of the pandemic.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, the country offices will conduct thorough after-action reviews in each site to understand what worked and what didn’t, and to share lessons learned. Before Volunteers leave their sites, they will work to complete their primary project to build local resilience and prepare their community for future crises. This includes making sure that communication channels are in place, point people are identified, and supplies such as face masks have been stockpiled.

Visit www.corpsafrica.org to donate.
Access to reliable information is difficult for remote villages. In the case of a global pandemic, this absence of information can be a matter of life or death. That is why, when the crisis started, CorpsAfrica quickly organized COVID-19 awareness campaigns. Volunteers hosted community meetings at their sites to share the most up-to-date information in the local dialect. The content covered a variety of topics including general background on what COVID-19 is, transmission, prevention, and steps to take when symptoms are identified.

On March 6th, CorpsAfrica Volunteers across Morocco, Senegal, Malawi, and Rwanda hosted community meetings. 3,427 people attended and fewer than half of those knew how COVID-19 is transmitted or how to prevent it from spreading.
“The problem is the village was safe before the lockdown measures but now the situation is serious because many young people who worked in cities are obliged to go back to their village.”

Volunteer Gueye Samba, CorpsAfrica/Maroc

“Coronavirus is not news across the globe, at least I thought so, but I was surprised to learn at my first Coronavirus awareness meeting with my community that people did not know of its existence. Out of 39 attendees, only four were familiar with the name. I mean just the name Coronavirus. I paused for a second trying to take in that hard fact. I knew that there was a lot said about the virus in the media and I thought that maybe they got the question wrong. I hoped at least everyone did listen to the radio or owned a phone, but I was wrong. Not even half of the attendees listen to the radio and over three quarters of the people had no phones.”

Volunteer Chiukepo Mwenechanya, CorpsAfrica/Malawi

They have realized that our staying with them is helping them and has a big impact in their lives. They say we are their friends even in the hard times. This hardship has created an unbreakable bond between us and our communities.”

Volunteer Justin Nkunzimana CorpsAfrica/Rwanda

"The community was not aware of this disease with exceptions, most thought it was just a temporary cold but after the meeting they finally understood the severity of the disease and we started taking action."

Volunteer Bara Kamara, CorpsAfrica/Senegal

“The problem is the village was safe before the lockdown measures but now the situation is serious because many young people who worked in cities are obliged to go back to their village.”

Volunteer Gueye Samba, CorpsAfrica/Maroc
CorpsAfrica surveyed local leaders at the sites to gauge their needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. When we asked them to report the most pressing needs of their communities, face masks, soap, and washing-stations were cited most frequently as “Very strong needs,” closely followed by hand-sanitizers and food.

We also asked the local leaders how the CorpsAfrica Volunteers could best support their communities during the COVID-19 crisis. The table below shows that distributing hygiene kits and installing handwashing stations were by far the most requested activities.
Volunteers have been responding to the needs of their communities by channeling resources from local governments to their sites, devising creative ways to promote and implement preventive measures, and actively engaging in the making and building of hygienic and protective supplies (soaps, masks, and handwashing stations).

“People are eager to learn and curious to know things. My community is very responsive and reactive to new information, especially when brought to their attention by someone they trust or respect.”

Volunteer Mwenechanya Chiukepo - CorpsAfrica/Malawi

“We thank CorpsAfrica for saving our life through the Volunteers!”

Community member from Rwanda
By the end of March, as the number of cases continued to rise in Rwanda, the country office acquired and distributed hand-washing tools called Kandagira Ukarabe (“step and clean”), chosen in partnership with the local leaders and provided to all the communities where CorpsAfrica Volunteers are serving. After the Volunteers were advised to stay in their homes, they continued sharing vital information through daily phone calls to community members. They also took the lead in drawing circles in front of shops and markets to encourage people to respect physical distancing. Following video instructions shared by the country office, the Volunteers managed to find fabric despite shops being closed, and they successfully made and distributed face masks to the vendors in the local markets. The initiative unexpectedly created a business opportunity for some community members who learned to make face masks following the national guidelines and started distributing them for a small fee, to produce income.

Volunteer Justin Nkuzimana realized that despite understanding the importance of washing their hands frequently, the members of his community had difficulty accessing clean water. He reported the issue to the country office and received support to install tippy-taps in his village.

“When they finally were installed, I do not know how to explain the emotions I saw on their face. They all lined up to wash hands properly but they were so many on queues. Being a poor community, they were not capable of buying one. The community was so impressed with such heartfelt activity and they pledged to wash hands frequently and to help spread that message to the neighbor who didn’t manage to be present.”

Volunteer Justin Nkuzimana, CorpsAfrica Rwanda
COVID-19 arrived later for Malawi, but cases started rising at the end of May. Before stricter social distancing measures were enforced, CorpsAfrica/Malawi Volunteers conducted awareness meetings at schools, with youth and women’s groups, and with village leaders in addition to working on their site projects. They also organized meetings with local health centers to gather information to be relayed to their site community members. Other activities that the Volunteers conducted include reaching out to their local libraries to allow students to borrow books so that they can study at home, and setting up makeshift classrooms for students.

Volunteer Margaret Magombo knew it would be especially hard for community members to get access to disposable face masks so she decided to train the local Youth Club and the Mother’s Group (a school committee consisting of women tasked with keeping girls in school) to make reusable face masks.

“It’s been a month since I got acquainted with Nsondole Youth Club. The group's vigilance during this period of COVID-19 crisis cannot go unnoticed. The youth have been sensitizing the community on the spread and preventive measures of the COVID-19. Furthermore, the group is giving a hand to their fellow community members in the installation of tip-tap (foot operated) hand washing technology. Seeing the group's initiative I have recently introduced it to mask-sewing, taking their initiative a mile further from just an ordinary one.”

Volunteer Margaret Magombo, CorpsAfrica/Malawi
Since the first case of COVID-19 was identified in early March, Morocco has become one of the five countries with the highest cumulative number of cases in Africa (Africa CDC, April 2020). The government has put in place a number of progressively stringent measures including a mandatory nationwide lockdown and a curfew enforced by the police and the army, which requires citizens to limit their movement during the day to absolutely necessary activities (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2020). These especially restrictive measures are some of the most rigid in Africa and have affected the Volunteers’ ability to implement response activities.

Early on as the pandemic started hitting the country and before these restrictive measures were implemented, all Volunteers in Morocco were able to organize door-to-door awareness campaigns. They also helped local community leaders deliver special authorization to leave the village for emergency cases. Despite not being able to engage in community activities, however, they took advantage of the time on hand to work on proposals and secure funding for projects that will help their communities move forward after the global health crisis winds down. The Volunteers expressed a strong desire to return to their sites as soon as the travel restrictions are lifted.

Volunteer Ali Aksim was assigned to a village in the High Atlas mountains where most people are illiterate and speak Tamazight (Berber). Because most national TV programs are in Arabic and his neighbors had difficulties following the news and recommendations from the authorities, Ali has been using his talent for drawing to communicate with the community members at his site, placing signs and posters across the village. With the help of a local association, he also prepared a video to promote social distancing, show people how to wear a mask correctly, and encourage them to contact the hospital in case of an emergency.

“It’s good to use drawing to transmit positive messages to our surroundings. Drawings on walls is a continuous awareness and reminder for people to take all the necessary precautions. For example: someone may forget their Mask and the drawing may remind them.”

Volunteer Ali Aksim, CorpsAfrica/Maroc
Volunteers in Senegal were on their way to Dakar for In-Service Training when the national lockdown was announced on March 24th. All Volunteers except for one were locked out of their sites and were therefore encouraged to find creative ways to remain helpful to their communities. They stayed in close contact and have been collecting data on the evolution of the pandemic at their sites and creating social media content such as videos in local languages to raise awareness about COVID-19.

Faced with a situation where volunteers were unable to travel back to their sites, staff reached out to the Ministry of Youth’s National Civic Service to create a collaborative effort to train young people from high-needs districts of Dakar to produce hygiene products. In addition to producing 5000 liters of bleach, 5000 bars of soap, and 300 hand-washing stations for four high-poverty municipalities, volunteers trained youth so they could continue production back in their own communities.

Just before leaving his site, Volunteer Papa Sanou Faye organized workshops with the local women's group to teach soap and bleach production techniques. The activity, which was funded through individual contributions from the women, not only provided them with a source of income but also contributed to increase the community’s preparedness to fight against COVID-19. After being locked down in Dakar, Papa Sanou launched an initiative with the youth in his neighborhood to distribute flyers and brochures, participate in a series of radio talks, install hand-washing devices in public places, and distribute hygiene kits including masks and hand sanitizers.

"Without my engagement with CorpsAfrica/Senegal, I would never have been able to launch such an initiative and mobilize young people in my neighborhood to play their exemplary and civic partition in the fight against the coronavirus."

Volunteer Papa Sanou
The crisis is impacting rural villages hard. Stringent lockdown policies make it hard to earn a living and people are having a difficult time affording basic supplies to prevent the spread of the virus (like facemasks, gloves, soap, hand-washing stations) and meeting basic needs (like food). One of the Volunteers told us, “My community does not have the means to fight this virus.”

Fortunately, Mastercard Foundation is generously providing microgrants of $1,000 to Volunteers’ sites for COVID-19-related needs as part of the Foundation’s Covid-19 Resilience and Recovery program to help mitigate the impact of the pandemic and to support economic recovery so that communities can rebuild for the future. These life-saving crisis response efforts build upon the proven CorpsAfrica model, which is flexible, efficient, and responsive to the self-identified needs of the people. The CorpsAfrica Volunteers live in these rural, high-poverty villages for an extended period of time (approximately ten months of service). They know the people, understand the unique qualities and complex circumstances of the community, and have earned the trust and friendship of the local people. They are ideally positioned to distribute the resources carefully and fairly, to follow up with reporting on Key Performance Indicators and anecdotal impacts (pictures, testimonials), and ensure transparency and accountability.

The microgrants provided by the Mastercard Foundation will expand the Volunteers’ ability to help. These grants bring critical relief and prevention supplies in the form of food, improved nutrition, and public health supplies, which will improve outcomes from this global pandemic.
“After several Coronavirus awareness meetings with my community, I am happy with how people have responded to the outbreak. It is now a subject of talk in the streets, homes and market places. Some community members visit my place to seek information. These days I no longer organize Coronavirus awareness meetings, rather I am called to community meetings organised by community leaders in various villages. People are expressing fear and discomfort giving handshakes, they are making estimations about their distance apart when talking and encouraging each other to wash hands with soap. I do believe that sharing information is key in preventing the spread of Coronavirus. I do not think it will cost us anything to share with our friends, loved ones and community members on how to prevent the coronavirus. Trust me we can save many lives in our communities.”

Volunteer Chiukepo Mwenechanya from Malawi

“The community is happy that we have organized a prevention awareness meeting, they said it shows that CorpsAfrica cares about the well-being of its communities.”

Volunteer Rugira Benjamin from Rwanda

“I chose to stay at my site for two reasons: first, it is safer here as there hasn’t been any case of Coronavirus in my village; second, advising and guiding my community about the coronavirus situation in our county is my duty as a CorpsAfrica Volunteer in Morocco”

Volunteer Asmaa Berkia from Morocco

“I realized that people in my community don't listen to news. They are too busy looking for food and money for their families. However, they are good listeners and they care about their lives. They are courageous. After I informed them about the Coronavirus, they started implementing measures, most of them even bought a soap the very day of the awareness meeting. It is my responsibility to empower them. I have dedicated 12 months to serve this community, I still have a lot to do with them.”

Volunteer Israel Niyomugengwa from Rwanda
“My community is very worried about the outbreak but very appreciative for not abandoning them during these hard times. Thanks for sticking in our community. Despite the outbreak we still need to live and talk about development”

Chief Munyuthu, Mzimba from Malawi

"You stayed with us during good days and bad days, God bless you."
"CorpsAfrica Volunteers are caring, they are like mothers to their children."
“Without your assistance it could be difficult for us to cope with this pandemic."

Rwanda Community Members

“In Cyungo – Mukaka - Kantara with a total of 37 kitchen gardens, the community is thankful to CorpsAfrica as MUKARUKORERA Marie Jeanne one of the beneficiaries said that she is now eating vegetables with her family, which would have been hard to get during the lockdown. In Manihira Sector-Muyira Cell secretary said that 11 kitchen gardens are really helping people cope with the hard times."

From the Volunteer’s weekly updates from Rwanda

"We are very grateful to you for your generous support because vendors are using masks and therefore protecting those who buy food from them. The water stations are being used by people before and after entering the market. In addition, my people told me that the kitchen gardens built by the CorpsAfrica Volunteers are helping them prepare a healthy diet in this time of the epidemic that is threatening the world."

Claudine YADUFASHIJJE, a leader of Haniro cell in Rwanda

“We thank CorpsAfrica for your contribution to our lives."

A community member from Senegal
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