



# ITEMS FOR ACTION

COMMISSION ON VOLUNTARY SERVICE & ACTION

## Grassroots Volunteers Mobilize in Response to Community Needs During COVID-19 Pandemic

In the face of catastrophic medical, economic and environmental damage to communities across the U.S. since March of last year, the burden of organizing aid and relief for the millions in need has largely fallen upon non-profits, volunteer associations and organically grown self-help mutual aid organizations resulting from a noticeable absence of federal coordination and relief.

In the course of contacting organizations over the last ten months for up-to-date information to include in the new edition of *INVEST YOURSELF: A Guide to Action*, Commission on Voluntary Service and Action (CVSA) volunteers have gotten reports on how organizations have stepped up to meet these challenges and the massive needs in their communities, even as many of them lost traditional funding sources and their usual pools of volunteers due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Extended government shelter-in-place orders in response to the pandemic resulted in many volunteer organizations losing



Photo: CVSA

*Jennie Perez, CVSA Volunteers Coordinator, and Susan Angus, CVSA Executive Director on phone conference with member organizations.*

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See the 2030 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS on page 13.

## Small Businesses + Volunteer Organizations: Natural Allies CVSA Develops Extraordinary Benefit: PPP Loan Advice

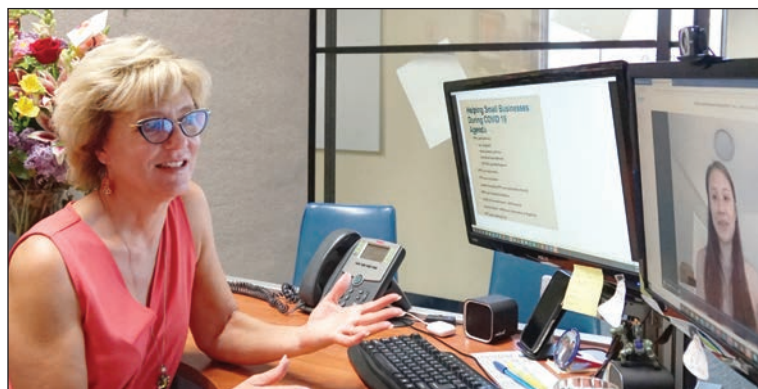


Photo: CVSA

*Christina De Bono, Executive Committee member and small business owner, and Thuy To (on screen), volunteer, leading one of the CVSA sponsored webinars about the PPP Loan for small businesses.*

In April and May 2020, CVSA organized a series of free webinars to assist supportive small businesses in applying to the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) for a loan. Then and now, these businesses have struggled to survive through the economic crisis and pandemic. These webinars provided expert assistance to almost two dozen small businesses that enabled them to successfully access forgivable loan funding from the Payroll Protection Program established in late March 2020 by Congress as part of the CARES Act. CVSA Executive Committee member Christina De Bono initiated the free webinar benefit via Zoom at convenient times for the small business owners who said they needed this guidance.

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### ORGANIZATIONS FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

Alderson Hospitality House, Alderson, WV  
Appalachian Voices, Boone, NC  
Friends in Deed, Pasadena, CA  
Hour Children, Queens, NY  
Let There Be Light International, Buffalo, NY and Uganda  
Sioux YMCA, Dupree, SD  
Universidad de Oriente, Santiago de Cuba, Cuba



## ITEMS FOR ACTION

COMMISSION ON VOLUNTARY SERVICE & ACTION

**ITEMS FOR ACTION** is published quarterly by **Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA)**. CVSA's mission is to promote, interpret, coordinate and extend the field of independent voluntary service and action programs serving people and communities in need of systemic solutions to economic, social and environmental problems.

**CVSA** is a consultative and coordinating body of nongovernmental, voluntary service organizations based primarily in North America as well as around the world. CVSA publishes **INVEST YOURSELF — The Catalogue of Volunteer Opportunities**; works to expand the ability of individuals to donate their time and services to people in need through organization and free of government restraint; and promotes full-time volunteer service as a vocational choice toward achieving social change.

**CVSA** holds Special NGO Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, thus provides a voice for independent, nongovernmental voluntary service and action organizations and the constituencies they serve, bringing local needs into global context and global context to local efforts. **CVSA** affirms the tenets of the UN Charter and is committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the U.S. and around the world. **CVSA** mobilizes involvement of U.S.-based volunteer organizations and their allies for the achievement of the universal, transformative and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals in the U.S., in order to end all poverty in all its forms everywhere.

**ITEMS FOR ACTION** is **CVSA's** newsletter information service for organizational members. **ITEMS FOR ACTION** reports and provides analysis of news related to the voluntary service field on a national and international level, as well as political and economic developments relevant to the independent voluntary service sector.

Your submissions to **ITEMS FOR ACTION** of information, news, advice, photographs and graphics depicting your work or simply your comments and concerns are instrumental to the process of growth and advancement of voluntary service as a whole. We always look forward to receiving them.

**ITEMS FOR ACTION** is free to **CVSA** members. Subscription rate for U.S. residents is \$20/year. Canadians and those abroad please add \$20 for additional mailing costs. Send your order and submissions of articles for publication to **CVSA**.

Publisher..... Susan Angus  
Editor.....Christina De Bono  
Production.....Jennie Perez  
Contributors..... Caryn Maxim, Rory Xanders  
Photography.....Bernie Maxim

Founded in 1945, **CVSA** is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable corporation with an all-volunteer staff. Volunteers are needed in all aspects of CVSA's work. Your financial contributions are also urgently needed and tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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**Editorial:**

# “Test, Test, Test...Isolate, Trace.” Why Aren’t They, *Still*?

In early March 2020, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, head of the World Health Organisation, emphatically stated to all national leaders, “Our key message is: test, test, test... isolate and contact trace.”

The U.S. has now surpassed 500,000 deaths due to COVID-19. Harvard University and other scientific studies have estimated that 70% to 99% of these deaths were avoidable had that early testing, isolating and treating been done. The U.S. accounts for roughly 21% of all confirmed COVID-19 deaths around the world despite having only 4% of the world’s population.

Now in its twelfth month, the COVID-19 virus spread in the U.S. is still not under control due to the federal government’s refusal to do what has worked in other countries that, within months, successfully beat it back and stopped it from reviving. We cannot talk about or plan for “when the pandemic is over” because there is no indication of when that will be accomplished in this country based on current lack of action at all levels of government. We continue to suffer more “spikes” and reoccurring outbreaks requiring repeated shutdowns, as more small businesses go under, more low-income children whose families can’t home-school miss getting an education and more people die. This is despite knowing *exactly* what needs to be done to isolate and break the spread of the virus everywhere. Stopping the spread is *very* doable.

We urge you to take action to help make this happen: 1. Join with other organizations, schools and faith groups, and with the businesses in your area to demand your towns, cities and counties conduct the only approach that beats the virus.

In addition to making sure that everyone wears masks and practices social distancing, we must: have free tests for *everyone*, frequently, not just those with symptoms; isolate those that test positive while providing them with necessary support during that period; trace who they had contact with; do more testing and provide treatment; and repeat these steps throughout the entire community until there are no new cases for several weeks. That is what it takes to break the chain of spread of the virus. It has worked everywhere it has been done in other countries. If the municipalities don’t have the funds for this, they must band together to demand it of their state, and state leadership must demand support from the federal level.

Now that a vaccine that works is available, the government must get it to *everyone* — not just those with money.

We must also demand that our government assist other countries, particularly the developing nations, to have free access to vaccines. If we don’t stop the spread in every country, no country is safe.

Until this approach is taken, we will never defeat the pandemic. Our livelihoods, health and our children’s futures will continue to be destroyed as we endanger the rest of the world with our recklessness in allowing it to spread.

2. For long-term, systemic solutions to all of this, join with CVSA to promote the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and demand they be implemented in the U.S. as promised in 2015. The 2030 SDGs (see page 13) are a call for action by all countries — poor, rich and middle-income — and a road map for each country to promote prosperity for all while protecting the planet. The Goals recognize that ending poverty must

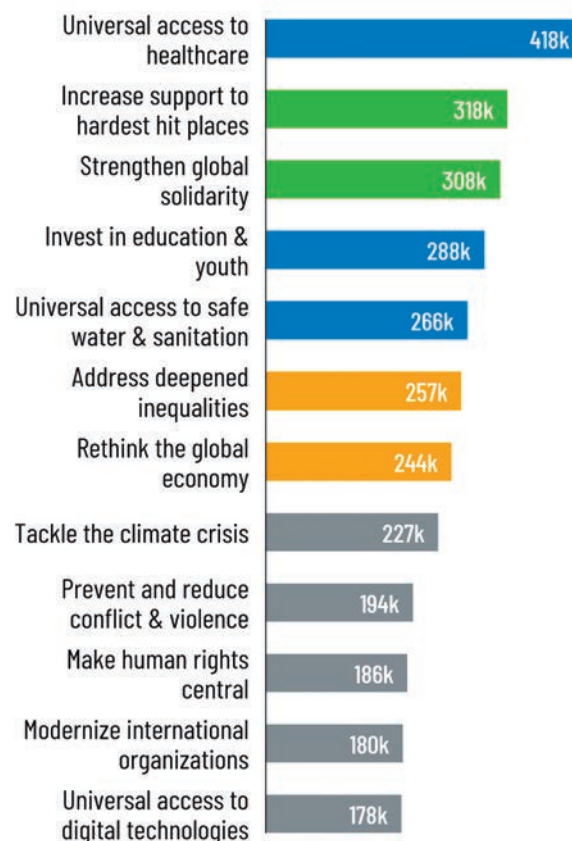
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## “What should the international community prioritize to recover better from the pandemic?”

Between April 22 and May 21, 2020 the UN gathered online responses to this question from people around the world in every continent and region.

Top three priorities:

- 1. Access to basic services
- 2. International support & solidarity
- 3. Tackling inequalities



## Grassroots Volunteers Mobilize in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

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in-person access to their volunteer ranks. Senior citizen volunteers, for instance, could not leave their homes for months, and, in most areas, remain cautious and avoid socializing with groups of people. Organizations that were counting on teams of students and church groups to come volunteer during spring break and summer vacation had to cancel those plans and find other ways to address immediate needs in the communities they serve with local volunteers.

As Jeff Smith, Development Associate at Hour Children in Queens, New York said, "It really forced creative thinking."

For instance, an important component of Hour Children's program is regular visits to mothers who are incarcerated in state prisons in upstate New York to stay apprised of and advocate for their needs, facilitate their ability to stay in touch with their children and prepare for rebuilding their lives when they are released. The prisons have now been closed to any visitors since March 2020. Because of the pandemic, Hour Children had to close their childcare and after-school programs at their home base in Queens. Instead, they inspired regular visits to the women's families throughout New York City, bringing food, books and toys for the children, while maintaining communication with the families about their needs and the needs of their loved ones in prison. They were eventually able to get some COVID-19-targeted funding to pay for laptops and set up a volunteer online tutoring and mentoring program for the children.

Jeff also acknowledged that their dedicated, paid staff worked double-time or more for months, around the clock, to make up for the lack of volunteers able to participate.

Many volunteer-run community health centers had to cancel their clinic sessions, and develop ways to conduct online consultations as effectively as possible. Some organizations, such as Remote Area Medical, based in Knoxville, Tennessee, deployed their volunteers to help with COVID-19



Photo: Hour Children

*Staff and volunteers with Hour Children, in Long Island City, New York, prepare the mobile food distribution.*

testing and tracing in the state, which was not being done as extensively and as urgently as needed.

Some organizations temporarily reorganized and replaced what they normally do — whether it be repairing run-down homes for low-income people or doing environmental clean-up and reclamation work — with organizing and delivering food daily to people in their community who are now out of work and stuck at home without income.

For instance, Alderson Hospitality House, in Alderson, West Virginia, an entirely volunteer-run organization that provides free housing, meals and support to families who travel from other states to visit loved ones in the Alderson Medium Security Women's prison, could not bring guests into their facility during the pandemic, and the prison was closed to visitors, so they turned their attention to advocating for testing that was not being done in the prison; joined with other organizations in the county to form a Task Force that procured and delivered food to children at home from school as well as to their families; and carried out a campaign to support the local businesses that had always donated supplies and funds to them over the years, asking people in the county to continue to patronize the closed businesses by



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## Public Utility and State Responses to Covid-19

Data current as of April 2, 2020

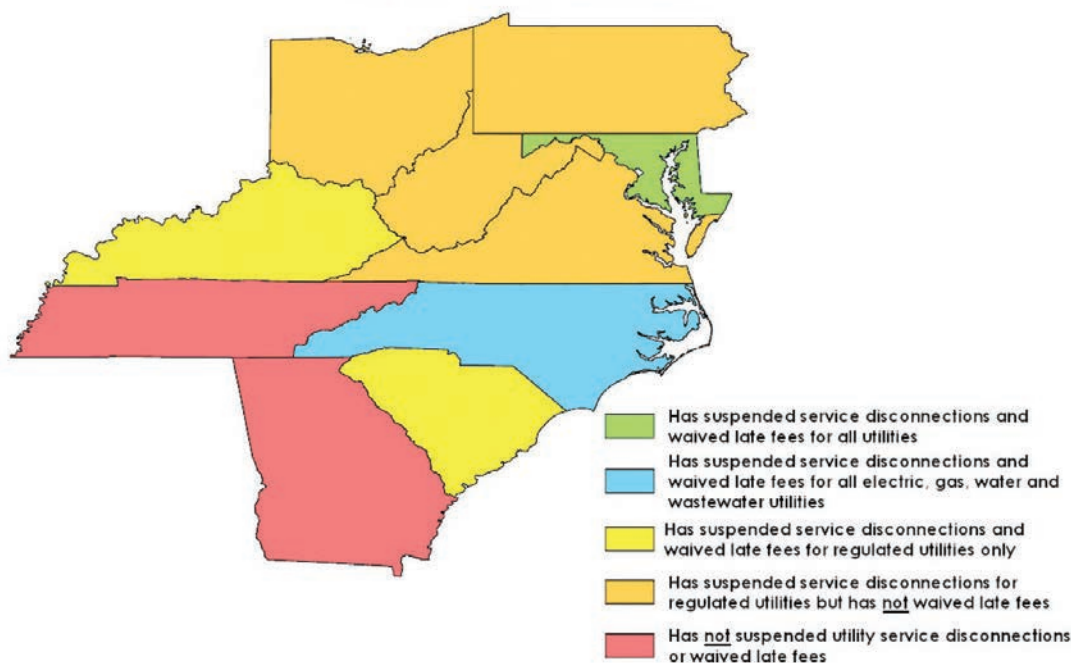


Photo by Tommy Embers

*Appalachian Voices has been working with other grassroots organizations in the region to monitor utility shutoff policies and rate hikes in the region, and to demand no shutoffs during the pandemic. The above chart was used in their campaign. Above right photo: Protesters drove outside the Tennessee capitol building in April 2020 honking their horns while others flooded the livestream comment section during the governor's coronavirus update, demanding a moratorium on utility shutoffs.*

paying in advance for services they will use once those businesses re-open. The Task Force even set up a platform for giving the tips to the service workers at these businesses who rely on tips, but were now furloughed.

Friends in Deed in Pasadena, California told us that everything had changed for the organization: volunteers, working practices, and the ways their programs are run. In their food pantry, which would usually operate as an open grocery store where people could enter and pick out food, they now ask people to wait outside, practicing social distancing while staff brings the food packages out to them. Friends in Deed started a temporary program delivering hot meals by working in partnership with local restaurants and donors who gave money to be spent at these restaurants — volunteers pick up and deliver the meals. This helps both the people in need and the restaurants. They have also been working with other organizations to monitor people who had COVID-19 symptoms, get them tested and into motel rooms if they need to be isolated. They saw the number of people using their services increase over the last six months as people who never needed their help before came to them. With their usual volunteers — seniors and school groups — sheltering in place, the small staff managed without volunteers for awhile, then reached out to other organizations in the area to form new partnerships and work together.

Appalachian Voices, in Boone, North Carolina, an organization that has been fighting to shut down mountain top removal mining and other fossil fuel energy production replacing it with renewable energy systems throughout the region to protect and restore the environment, creating new jobs. They turned to stopping utility and water shutoffs in the region during the pandemic and continue to do so. Usually, the organization has an army of volunteers distributing their newspapers throughout the region, but they had to suspend physical distribution, along with suspending their community events and outreach tabling, replacing that in-person on-the-ground work with digital media, social media and phone contact.

We learned from the Sioux YMCA in Dupree, South Dakota on the Cheyenne River Reservation, that they were keeping strict rules on distancing, not leaving the reservation, and keeping others out of the reservation. At first they only had 10 COVID-19 cases on the reservation. The cases went up to 60 or so in May 2020, but there was no testing being offered by the state or county, and without testing being done, there was no way to really monitor and contain the virus. Finally, they raised the money themselves to pay for 1,000 tests to be done on the reservation, but this is still an ongoing urgent problem on Native American reservations across the country. This reservation has managed to keep the cases lower than Rosebud or Standing

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Rock reservations, to their south and north respectively, who did not maintain roadblocks or keep outsiders off the reservation. In South Dakota, American Indians account for 14% of all coronavirus cases, but they represent just 1% of the overall population.

Many organizations determined that they had to organize to keep government agencies accountable to provide testing and access to care, while countering the lack of information and dispelling the misinformation on COVID-19, including by providing information and education on how people can best protect themselves and their families from COVID-19.

Not all organizations had the ability to switch to remote or online activity. While some revamped their activities quickly — making individual food deliveries with masks, health clinics moving to online consultations and providing advocacy on the phone — others simply shut down, with staff maintaining minimal communications, working from home for months, not knowing how long they would be closed or if they would have the capacity to reopen.

Further difficulty was created for many when grant-giving foundations and other funding agencies they had previously relied on began directing resources away from their work if it was not directly related to specific COVID-19 emergency response work.

### Resiliency Depends on Goal-orientation of Staff and Volunteers, and Strong Roots in the Community

As of September 2020, organizations were beginning to bring their volunteers back in while following strict protocols of social distancing, limiting the number of people working in their centers at the same time, wearing masks, washing hands and monitoring temperatures, in order to respond to the greatly increased needs in their communities.

There is much to be learned from organizations that have been able to transform their activities rapidly, such as some that are free and voluntary membership organizations of low-paid workers in various parts of the country, like Western Service Workers Association in Sacramento, California which involved volunteers in massive no-contact food distributions, including home deliveries to those with no transportation, or those confined due to disability or age; advocacy to stop utility shutoffs, advocacy for people being denied needed medical care; and advocacy to assist members in accessing unemployment and other benefits that were supposed to be available. Resiliency in the face of disaster and the ability to turn emergencies into opportunities for growth, bringing people together to fight for long-term systemic solutions to problems, requires having strong roots in the community and structure that allows for robust processes of outreach and communication to your constituencies.

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### Where To Go From Here

As *ITEMS FOR ACTION* goes to print, over 500,000 people in the U.S. have died from COVID-19, and the spread of the virus is still not under control. Due to the lack of adequate testing, tracking and isolating to break the chains of transmission, and prevention enforcement with adequate protective equipment available to everyone, the end is not in sight. Hundreds of organizations are still operating in this ad hoc or reorganized manner, still responding to the urgent and growing needs caused by a collapsed economy and the absence of a public health system.

On top of this, unparalleled natural disasters are mounting: over 4.2 million acres burned in California in 2020, forest fires wiped out whole towns in Oregon and Washington, while Louisiana was hit with the worst hurricane recorded in the state's history last August, destroying entire communities. Since then, the Gulf coast states have been repeatedly hit with more and even bigger storms, threatening more lives and the economy of the region.

"Current efforts to save the environment and stop the causes of global warming must expand. The alternative will be an increase in destructive extreme weather events, heat waves, pollution of our rivers and further destruction of our biodiversity. All of this will only add to the poverty and conflicts our communities face and increase the chances of more deadly viruses developing in an environment whose natural balances have been broken," said Susan Angus at the CVSA staff meeting (held remotely) on November 21, 2020.

Angus notes that low-income and minority communities suffer the most in hurricanes, floods, fires *and* pandemics, because they have fewer resources with which to get out of harm's way and little to fall back on in the face of lost jobs, housing and the necessities of life. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated the health care gap between

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## Small Businesses + Volunteer Organizations: Natural Allies

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De Bono is the President of ClearTech, in Altadena, California, an audiovisual company with 16 employees. She joined the CVSA Executive Committee in 2018, bringing with her four decades of experience organizing with grass-roots associations of low-paid service workers in low-income communities in Southern California; experience that affords her unique insight to the economic relations between local businesses and the communities they service.

"Although the Small Business Administration (SBA) defines 'small business' as any company with 500 or less employees, these were businesses with 4 to 22 employees, whose owners live in the community and are always there with local community groups to help fight injustices and inequalities and support volunteer efforts to improve the community. They were not getting the assistance they needed to succeed in obtaining a PPP Loan to help keep them open and their employees paid, despite the fact the program was supposed to be for them, and they were having to lay people off during this public health crisis," said De Bono about the business owners who participated in the CVSA webinars.

De Bono spoke to the business owners from the experience she and her staff had, to get their PPP Loan and keep their staff working. Thuy To, Operations Manager at ClearTech, who volunteered with De Bono in preparing the webinars and answering the specific questions from participants, had done most of the research, meetings with local banks, and paperwork that succeeded in obtaining the PPP Loan for ClearTech. She continues to stay abreast of changes in regulations, available funds and other developments that could help small businesses, and is volunteering her time to continue to answer questions, provide information and guidance or referrals to the small businesses referred to her through CVSA or CVSA member organizations.

De Bono and To enlisted Zhen Wang, their finance and tax credit consultant who specializes in small business finance and taxes, to volunteer in the final webinar in the series in May 2020 to explain exactly what to do to make sure the loans each business received from the PPP program were forgiven as promised. All participants found this extremely helpful.

As De Bono said in the opening and closing of each of the CVSA webinars for business supporters, "We have to stick together, we are the real economy, we have to organize."

### Natural Allies

Most community-based, volunteer-driven organizations rely on the support of concerned local small businesses. Businesses sponsor local events, publications or special projects that serve the community. They donate supplies, food, and services to community organizations to help

improve their community and strengthen local organizations that are serving people and communities in need. The people who own the small local businesses often live in the community themselves and the community is commonly their primary customer base. When there are environmental problems, health needs, social and economic injustices impacting the people of the community, local businesses are also impacted and are allies with the nongovernmental organizations addressing these problems.

### U.S. Small Businesses Provide Over 50% of Private Workforce Jobs

In the U.S., small businesses employ 47.3 percent of the U.S. private workforce and provide over 50% of all jobs. The survival and health of small businesses in our communities is critical to any notion of recovery in the coming years.

Large companies, corporations and corporate chain stores have ways to weather economic shutdowns or downturns. Some are profiting greatly from the crisis, depending on what they manufacture or what service(s) they provide. Many get away with increasing the prices of services and goods that are suddenly and desperately needed in the crisis. The oil and gas industry, less than two weeks after the March 12, 2020 declaration of emergency, compelled the White House to issue executive orders to relax the enforcement of many Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) health and environmental protections during the COVID-19 outbreak, citing possible staffing shortage problems. This saved power plants, factories, refineries and other companies millions of dollars while allowing illegal air and water pollution to go on unchecked, at the expense of our health, according to media news reports and many environmental groups.

Even without any nefarious schemes, larger companies are able to obtain financing, use reserve capital, change their supply chains, consolidate their divisions or outlets, or if more beneficial, choose to go bankrupt without losing everything they worked for over many years.

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## Grassroots Volunteers Mobilize in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

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those with resources (such as uncrowded homes, heat and air conditioning, nutritious food, good health care) and those without. The death rate from COVID-19 is much higher in Black and Hispanic communities and among all low-paid service workers, including farm workers, and their families, who must continue to work and do so without adequate protection.

With over 50 million people officially unemployed, parents having to attend to children unable to go to school and 42% of small businesses expected to close permanently, creating further job loss, not to mention loss of the tax base for municipalities, the problems are going to keep multiplying. The need for a transformation of our economy and our national priorities is clear. Volunteer groups can be motors for change, and effective fighters for getting to the root causes of these problems. Organizations such as those described above certainly have the knowledge of conditions and the expertise needed to forge solutions to these problems; they care enough to do the work, and have abundant creativity born out of the necessity to work with whatever resources they have. But none have the power or resources to transform the economy and shape public policy on their own.

CVSA helps by connecting organizations in different parts of the country doing similar things, or doing things that others might want to learn, to share experiences and information developing ways to work together on common issues. Any organization that needs help in how to involve more volunteers in your work during these times of constant change can contact CVSA at (323) 933-2872.



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## Small Businesses + Volunteer Organizations: Natural Allies

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Not so with small family-owned and run businesses. They work daily to keep their businesses going, but don't have the capital to make it through a crisis of this duration without assistance.

An April 2020 report from the Center for Responsible Lending found that about 90% of businesses owned by people of color "stand close to no chance of receiving a PPP loan through a mainstream bank or credit union" because of a lower likelihood of having a relationship with a bank that will process their application, the digital or accounting skills needed to successfully apply, or distrust of government. Many of the small community-based businesses that CVSA volunteers invited to participate in the webinars did not know they were eligible to apply, assumed they were not, or didn't attempt to apply because they were not aware the loan was forgivable so did not look into it, as they didn't want to go deeper into debt. Others applied but never received a response from the banks they applied through, or were turned down for not filling the form out correctly.

Each of the business people who participated in the hour-long webinars, then applied or reapplied, succeeded in getting a loan. They received no advice from the banks or the SBA, and just needed guidance through the process and answers to their questions.

### Still Not Enough Assistance

The government program was only intended to carry the economy through a short interruption from the pandemic, which has now become a long-term economic disaster due to the government's failure to contain the virus. The Treasury Department initially required the loans to be spent within eight weeks of receipt, then later extended the timeframe to 24 weeks. The small business people who got the loans and used them as directed for the 24 weeks still may face permanent closure if more assistance is not made available. Even where they are allowed to reopen, businesses like local restaurants, dress shops, auto repair shops, copy/print shops are not surging back strongly because of the huge increase in unemployment leaving millions of people without disposable income to spend. Most people are in greater debt than they were before the pandemic, and don't have the money to spend on anything but essentials. Businesses near closed college campuses or large office buildings left empty when people began to work remotely from home lost their stable customer base.

As of August 2020, when the PPP program closed, the program had disbursed \$521 billion to nearly 5 million small (500 employees or less) companies and organizations



through banks and other financial institutions that acted as the processors of the funding. Most of the funds went to the businesses that could afford to hire lawyers or teams of people to make sure their applications got in quickly. And according to a survey by SCORE, a national nonprofit network of volunteer expert business mentors dedicated to helping small businesses, 47.8% of White-owned businesses applied for the forgivable payroll loan, and 63.7% received the full amount; while 53.4% of Black-owned businesses applied, and 20.3% received the full amount. Of the Latino-owned businesses that applied for the PPP Loan, only about 10% had their loans approved through the program.

### Some Cities and Counties Tried to Fill the Gap

Many counties and cities across the country, recognizing the critical role small local businesses play in the economy and therefore in the health of the whole economy, took unprecedented steps to try to fill the void, pouring millions of taxpayer dollars into a patchwork of loan and grant programs to help small merchants that are a major driver of the local economies and tax bases. Unlike the federal PPP Loan program, these local efforts had far fewer hoops to jump through. All that applicants needed to qualify, was to be in good standing with their property taxes and located in that jurisdiction.

For instance, in Harris County, Texas, the third-largest county in the country and home to Houston, more than 7,000 applications requesting \$150 million in loans were received in just 28 hours of opening such a program in April 2020. Only \$10 million was available, taken from the county's rainy day fund. Now this Texas county is faced with an urgent need for those "rainy day" funds for disaster relief, having been hit with another series of mega hurricanes and floods.

### The Grim Statistics for Minority Owned Businesses

A poll by Small Business Majority that surveyed 500 small business owners in August 2020 said 70% of business owners were experiencing a revenue decline of at least 25% or more, with 5 in 10 businesses experiencing losses of 50% or more. An October 2020 Small Business Majority survey found that without additional funding, more than 1 in 3 (35%) small business owners would not survive past the next three months. The number was even higher for small business owners of color: 41% of Black and Latino-owned businesses would not make it through the next few months without additional financial support. And 1 in 5 small business owners reported they had considered filing for bankruptcy.

### Don't Mourn — Organize!

"How could they have run out of money and closed the program before most businesses could even learn how to make the application?" asked Alisa Reynolds, owner of

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CREDIT UNIONS

One possible resource for local businesses is community development credit unions, if there are any in your area. Inclusiv (formerly the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions), is a member of CVSA and listed in *INVEST YOURSELF: A Guide to Action*. It is a national network representing over 300 community development credit unions in 46 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, serving 12 million people in the low-income communities and communities of color. Inclusiv considers true financial inclusion and empowerment to be a fundamental right, and is dedicated to closing the gaps and removing barriers to financial opportunities for people living in distressed communities, or "financial deserts" as they call them. They are committed to facilitating the resources necessary to help credit unions serve the people and small businesses who need them now more than ever. Find more information about that at <https://www.inclusiv.org/>.

My 2 Cents, a popular soul food restaurant in the Mid-City area of Los Angeles and a sponsor chance. "We have to organize!" said De Bono.

Volunteer, nongovernment and nonprofit organizations that work to solve economic, social and environmental injustices and inequalities, and fill otherwise unmet urgent needs of people and communities, are called on to do all they can to assist the local businesses that have supported them. Talk to the businesses that support your campaigns and your programs. Find out what they need, what you might be able to do for them and talk about what you can do together.

Contact CVSA if you want to refer a business that has helped you over the years, and we will try to assist with information and consultation.



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# Reports from the 2020 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

by Susan Angus, CVSA Executive Director, and Caryn Maxim, Executive Committee member

Commission on Voluntary Service and Action (CVSA) has Special NGO Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, responsible for advancing the three dimensions of sustainable development — economic, social and environmental. It is the main body for debate and innovative thinking, forging consensus and coordinating efforts to achieve internationally agreed upon goals.

ECOSOC also oversees the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which meets annually for eight days, bringing nations together to review the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs at the global level, hear national reports, and facilitate sharing experiences, such as successes, challenges and lessons learned. ECOSOC also offers political leadership, guidance and recommendations for follow-up. It ensures that the 2030 Agenda remains relevant and ambitious and focuses on the assessment of progress, achievements and challenges faced by developed and developing countries, as well as new and emerging issues.

A central feature of each year's HLPF are the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) that it receives from Member States on their implementation of the 2030 SDGs. Regularly undertaken by both developed and developing countries, the VNRs also

provide a platform for partnerships and participation of major groups, and other relevant nongovernmental stakeholders.

In the last four years CVSA has submitted two of its own reports to the HLPF — in 2016, 2017 — on CVSA'S work to promote the implementation of the 2030 SDGs in the U.S. and that of member volunteer service organizations in communities throughout the U.S. These were the only U.S. reports, as the U.S. government is the only government from among the developed nations that has not submitted any reports. In July 2018 we attended numerous sessions and side events to the HLPF bringing our experience in the U.S. to those discussions.

In 2019, CVSA held an exhibit in the main hall of the Secretariat building of the UN during the entire eight days of the 2019 HLPF. The CVSA team of Executive Committee members — Christina De Bono, Caryn Maxim and I — with the help of volunteers Renee Larios, Rory Xanders, Alex Walsh, Zuri Cadena Jimenez, Krystina Jeron and Rob Garcia staffed the CVSA table and exhibit throughout the eight day conference. This access made it possible for us to talk with hundreds of people from all over the world about their work, our work, and how we can work together. Over 150 people signed up to stay in touch with CVSA's campaign. Since the HLPF about a dozen organizations have sent in descriptions of their volunteer programs to be included in the upcoming edition of *INVEST YOURSELF*, and others will help publicize and distribute the catalogue once it is printed.



Photo: CVSA

At the opening of CVSA's exhibit in the United Nations, New York, July 9 through 18, 2019, (left to right) Susan Angus, Executive Director, Alec Walsh, volunteer, Rory Xanders, Advisory Board member, Renee Larios, Advisory Board member, Christina De Bono, Executive Committee member.



Photo: CVSA

Alec Walsh, CVSA volunteer (left, hand extended) speaking with visitors to CVSA's exhibit, Christina De Bono (in foreground), Executive Committee member getting contact information from exhibit visitors.



It became clear through these conversations that CVSA — as a U.S.-based international NGO representing grassroots volunteer-involving organizations in communities throughout the U.S. as well as the rest of the world — is carrying out an important role in making the 2030 SDGs realizable to people in the United States. We are helping to bring the reality of the struggles of working people, the disenfranchised and minority communities in the U.S. whose voices are not otherwise represented at the UN, to the international arena.

### This Year was Different

This year was very different. The 2020 HLPF was planned with the theme “A Decade of Action” as the kickoff for accelerated action over the next ten years, to achieve the 17 Goals by 2030. Normally, the HLPF brings together delegations at the UN from over 175 countries, along with thousands of participants from NGOs, other stakeholder groups and UN agencies, to review the progress towards achieving the 17 Goals in each country and the world. The HLPF also provides a platform for partnerships, through the participation of major nongovernmental stakeholder groups.

In July 2020, however, the HLPF had to be held remotely due to COVID-19, and the theme shifted from “Decade of Action” to “Decade of Recovery.”

It still attracted over 72,000 viewers who followed the sessions online. Over 240 remote side events took place, including numerous special events; and 47 nations presented their VNRs on their implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in their country.

**Following are the remarks made by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres at the opening of the Ministerial Segment of the 2020 HLPF on July 14, 2020:**

*“Today, as the High Level Political Forum meets to review progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, our world is in turmoil.*

*We were already facing many challenges — unacceptably high levels of poverty; a rapidly worsening climate emergency; persistent gender inequality; and massive gaps in financing.*

*Today, we face another massive global challenge: COVID-19. The gravity of the crisis should not be lost on anyone. Close to 13 million people have been infected by the virus; over 560,000 have died. Working hours equivalent to some 400 million jobs were lost in the second quarter of 2020.*

*We are experiencing the sharpest decline in per capita income since 1870. Between 70 and 100 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty.*

*Some 265 million people could face acute food insecurity by year’s end — double the number at risk before the crisis. And the impacts of this pandemic are falling disproportionately on the most vulnerable.*

*At a time when we desperately need to leap ahead,*



*COVID-19 could set us back years and even decades, leaving countries with massive fiscal and growth challenges.*

*The crisis is taking us further away from the SDGs. I am not here today to tell you that everything will be OK. We need to be honest with ourselves. The COVID-19 crisis is having devastating impacts because of our past and present failures.*

*Because we have yet to take the SDGs seriously.*

*Because we have put up with inequalities within and between countries that have left billions of people just one crisis away from poverty and financial ruin.*

*Because we haven’t invested adequately in resilience — in universal health coverage; quality education; social protection; safe water and sanitation.*

*Because we have yet to right the power imbalances that leave women and girls to constantly bear the brunt of any crisis.*

*Because we haven’t heeded warnings about the damage that we are inflicting on our natural environment. Because of the shocking risks we are taking with climate disruption.*

*And because we have undervalued effective international cooperation and solidarity.*

*But we can turn this around. With the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, we have an enduring and unifying vision; a framework to guide our decisions as we look to respond and recover better....*

*...From the awakening that this crisis is providing, we have a chance to create an inclusive, networked and effective multilateralism....”*

*Guterres elaborated further on the importance of multilateralism at the July 17, 2020 closing of the session:*

*“...We must also reimagine the way nations cooperate. The pandemic has underscored the need for a strengthened and renewed multilateralism:*

*A multilateralism based on the powerful ideals and objectives enshrined in the Charter and in the agreements defined across the decades since.*

*A multilateralism built on trust, that is based on inter-*

*Continued on page 14*

# Transforming Our World: The 2030

On September 25, 2015, all 193 member nations of the UN, including the United States, voted unanimously to strive for the achievement of these Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in every country — developing and developed — as national domestic and international policy priority. Each country, including the U.S., signed on, stating: “On behalf of the peoples we serve, we have adopted a historic decision on a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centered set of universal and transformative Goals and targets. We commit ourselves to working tirelessly for the full implementation of this Agenda by 2030...”

## From the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Preamble and Call to Action:

*“...All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.”*

*“... We can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we may be the last to have a chance of saving the planet. The world will be a better place in 2030 if we succeed in our objectives.*

*“...We the peoples” are the celebrated opening words of the Charter of the United Nations. It is “we the peoples” who are embarking today on the road to 2030. Our journey will involve Governments as well as parliaments, the United Nations system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community — and all people. Millions have already engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people — and this, we believe, will ensure its success.*

Read the complete 35-page document “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” at: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

## CVSA’s Call for the Implementation of the SDGs in the U.S.:

CVSA calls on the U.S. government to carry out its pledge to implement the 2030 SDGs in the U.S. and form a national SDG Coordinating Council.

Municipal and state councils should also be set up to oversee data collection, draw up implementation plans, coordinate policies and monitor the progress or implementation in their local area and state and submit those to the national coordinating body. *Make the process public and open.*

Members on the councils at all levels should include representatives from nongovernment volunteer organizations, faith-based service organizations, social service administrators, educators, labor leaders, scientists, poor people’s representatives, family farm leaders, health advocates, legal justice specialists, environmental specialists, religious leaders, credit unions and community banks, small business representatives and other stakeholders.

In the absence of governmental action to date commensurate with the task, we call on CVSA member organizations to “take ownership” of the SDGs in your work. CVSA provides consultation, coordination and tools to assist you.

- Promote the SDGs in your community through the work your organization is already doing. Bring more people into this discussion and build alliances.
- Make plans to advance the SDGs locally; monitor and keep government accountable to them.
- Contribute information for CVSA to include in reports to the UN on status of implementation of these Goals in your area based on your organization’s direct experience.
- Join CVSA in building this movement to increase our collective strength and transform our world, insuring no one is left behind.



# Sustainable Development Goals



**Goal 1.** End Poverty in all its forms everywhere.



**Goal 2.** End Hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.



**Goal 3.** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.



**Goal 4.** Ensure inclusive and equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.



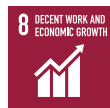
**Goal 5.** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.



**Goal 6.** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.



**Goal 7.** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.



**Goal 8.** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.



**Goal 9.** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.



**Goal 10.** Reduce inequality within and among countries.



**Goal 11.** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.



**Goal 12.** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.



**Goal 13.** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.\*



**Goal 14.** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.



**Goal 15.** Protect, restore, promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss.



**Goal 16.** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.



**Goal 17.** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for Sustainable Development.

\* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

**Join CVSA's nationwide  
Community Education Campaign  
for the  
Implementation of the 2030  
Sustainable Development Agenda  
in the U.S.**

**and in solidarity  
with the rest of the world**

**Call CVSA (323) 933-2872  
to schedule a presentation (remote or  
in person) to your organization, school,  
workplace or place of worship.**

**Bring the SDGs home  
to your community  
and into  
your organization's work!**

**Get your CVSA SDG Local Organizer's  
Tool Kit with posters, flyers, graphics  
for your website and  
PowerPoint presentations  
about the 2030 SDGs and how to organize  
for their implementation locally.**

## Reports from the 2020 High Level Political Forum

*Continued from page 11*

*national law and is geared towards the overarching goals of peace and security, human rights and sustainable development.*

*We need a networked multilateralism, in which the United Nations and its agencies, the international financial institutions, regional organizations and others work together more effectively with stronger institutional links. And we need an inclusive multilateralism, drawing on the critical contributions of civil society, business, foundations, the research community, local authorities, cities and regional governments....*

*...At this pivotal moment, with COVID-19 still spreading, geopolitical tensions rising, and the cry for racial justice, social justice and climate justice ever more urgent, we have a responsibility to respond to the anxieties, fears and hopes of the people we serve."*

We agree; and CVSA will continue to expand our community education campaign for the implementation of the SDGs in the U.S. and promote volunteer opportunities throughout the U.S. and the world through organizations striving to reach the SDGs, listed in the new updated *INVEST YOURSELF* catalogue coming soon.

CVSA Executive Committee members attended several HLPF sessions and events from our offices and homes via the live online UN webcasts. Caryn Maxim, Executive Committee member, provides reports on two of the sessions:

### Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda

"Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda" was an online special event held July 13 to July 16, 2020 during the HLPF 2020, that lived up to its name! Organized by the UN Volunteer Programme (UNV) and the International Red Cross (IRC), representatives from around the globe who are immersed in volunteering spoke about the positive contributions volunteers are making towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, particularly as part of the response to COVID-19.

This was the first event of its kind since the inauguration of the 2030 Agenda in 2015. The UN reports that over 4,000 people from 179 countries participated in one or more of the sessions of the four-day event.

Not only are volunteers being taken more seriously by many government actors – particularly in the global south – but they are also being considered a vital part of the solution for the achievement of the 2030 SDGs. Though there is a distinction between the volunteers associated with organized NGO's and what they call "informal" volunteers at the



Photo: UNV

Borem Kim from the United Nations Volunteer Program headquarters in Bonn, Germany, moderated the final session of the four-day conference on Volunteering and the 2030 SDGs.

community level who pitch in to get things done, there is a new recognition of the importance of both, as well as the need to coordinate and support their work.

Volunteer response to the pandemic around the world, well reported in the news media, has highlighted the role volunteers can play in transforming our societies into the societies we envision with the 2030 Agenda when they are well organized and structured.

The reimagining pointed to the need for governments, civil society organizations and the private sector to understand the potential contributions of volunteers in this necessary transformation, harnessing their skills and their potential for contributing to solutions, and providing all volunteers with necessary resources (digital access, for example) and appropriate protections (physical and mental health for example) to perform their work.

It is important to begin to incorporate informal volunteers into the network of formal volunteers to strengthen their impact, through training and access to resources. All communities have informal volunteers, but they do not identify themselves as volunteers, they are just doing what you do when you see people in need, in solidarity with your community.

Speakers in the meetings came from government, civil society, academia, and the private sector, representing many different countries and regions. They highlighted the many examples of volunteer efforts from around the world.

Local volunteers in Peru, responding to the COVID-19 crisis, demonstrated to the government their value in being able to reach communities in their own languages and customs to be able to identify their needs and help deliver the services. The channels that were opened this way look as if they will continue in place. There was an explicit recognition that community level volunteers have an important role to play if a government (at any level) wants to effectively address social issues.

Mauritius relies on local volunteers in identifying and resolving all of the dangers they confront from cyclones, etc. The volunteers are trained and are involved in contingency planning. They are valued for their local knowledge (they are



Over 4,000 people from 179 countries participated remotely in the “Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda” conference.

the ones who recommend evacuation routes, for example). They were involved in food distribution for COVID-19 response.

These were both examples of the specific ground level knowledge and skills that volunteers might possess to reach the community. This can be incorporated into the plans around the SDGs. Governments can request this input, on the other hand, in order to improve their policy-making.

The Thai government promotes volunteering and it is well integrated into their social and political fabric. Their community level health volunteers were important in the COVID-19 response.

A volunteer from Afghanistan gave calm testimony about the work being done around women’s rights. Imagine that against the devastation from the war in the background.

The most heart-rending report was from the volunteer from Yemen who explained that they weren’t really working on the SDG’s, since they are actually more focused on their survival from famine, illness, and war. She spoke about work that volunteers do to resolve local conflicts over water or land.

The concluding session identified the need for better documentation of the accomplishments of volunteers, including the informal ones. Most importantly, there is a need for a new social-political compact. While volunteers are recognized



Strengthening people’s ownership of the development agenda through volunteering, and support for informal volunteering were among the topics discussed.

for their ability to implement policy, there is also an important role for them to play in making policy.

The session closed with launching a Call to Action, and launching several toolboxes and matrices. The purpose of these tools is to provide data-based analysis to demonstrate to policy-makers the contribution of volunteers and their potential contribution to policy-making. Through integrated national, sectoral and local plans, all types of volunteers can contribute as innovators, entrepreneurs, leaders, experts and valued partners to drive SDG action and progress.

CVSA contributed to the content of discussions for this Special Event with submission of an article posted by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) on the opening day of the HLPF, titled “Grassroots Action for SDG Implementation When Your Government Isn’t Taking Action” and can be found at <http://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/guest-articles/grassroots-action-for-sdg-implementation-when-your-government-isnt-taking-action/>.

The article provides an overview of the important role of volunteers in the U.S., who are already on the frontlines at the local level, addressing the growing needs due to poverty, hunger, unemployment, homelessness, inequality in access to

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**Cory Schaeffer**  
 Director, Strategic Industry Relations  
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## Implementing the SDGs: Global Examples

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by all 193 member nations of the UN in 2015 including the U.S., represent a shared vision as expressed by hundreds of millions of people in societies the world over, seeking to build positive programs and avoid environmental, economic and social catastrophe. This column offers glimpses of the achievements being made as governments, businesses, volunteer organizations and the people in need of these solutions, are working to achieve the SDGs.

We start with two examples. One is from Cuba, where a CVSA delegation had the opportunity to participate in the first International Convention on Science and Conscience held by the Universidad de Oriente in the city of Santiago de Cuba in April 2019, which brought together hundreds of professionals of the natural, social, medical, educational, economic and business, juridical, technical and agricultural sciences, to promote the exchange of knowledge and build collaborations related to studies of sustainable development and the environment. Thus, we gained first-hand knowledge of the Caribbean island nation's challenges and accomplishments towards achieving the 2030 SDGs, through their practice of sharing knowledge with other countries.

The other example is from Uganda in eastern Africa. CVSA volunteers met the director of Let Their Be Light International at our exhibit in the UN during the July 2019 High Level Political Forum, and learned about their successful solar projects in energy-poor areas of Uganda, consistent with Uganda's National Development Plan.

### Advances in Sustainable Agriculture and Coastal Restoration in Cuba per Goals 2, 13 and 14

Worldwide, the industrial model of agriculture contributes at least 24% of total global greenhouse gas emissions due to the use of petrochemicals, clear-cutting of forests and monoculture practices. In Cuba, no petrochemicals are used in agriculture. Forests are not destroyed to make room for industrial agriculture. Instead, farming is done consistent with the ecological landscape of each region in the country. Ninety per cent of fruits and vegetables consumed in Cuba are grown in the country. Urban farms supply 70% or more of fresh vegetables consumed in cities such as Havana and Villa Clara. Havana alone has more than 318 intensive urban gardens.

Cuba's system of organic urban gardens is so successful that it is being promoted by UN agencies as the model for others to follow. Their current model of agriculture is one of the factors in the country's reduced carbon emissions. Due to the country's policies on food production and distribution, it is the only nation in Latin America and the Caribbean, as of 2018, that has eliminated severe child malnutrition. It ranks fifth among the first 14 countries to reduce the Hunger and Malnutrition Index on a sustained basis for several years, in line with Goals 2 and 3.

The eastern end of the island has been enduring severe drought for over three years. In Santiago de Cuba province, many of the vegetable crops grown there and in surrounding provinces that have historically been part of the people's diet no longer grow well due to climate change—the increase in average annual temperature and diminished annual rainfall.



Photo: Sierra Maestro Newspaper



Photo: CVSA

A testing unit at "La Calabaza" Agricultural Teaching Cooperative in the town of Il Frente, Santiago de Cuba, which works in close collaboration with the Universidad de Oriente. Polycropping, the mix of fruit trees and bananas varieties, as well as the planting of short cycle crops have allowed delivery, an average, of 5 tons of food for the region.

At the community meeting hall of "La Calabaza" cooperative, Amauris Benitez, Deputy Director, (center in the striped shirt) with instructors and staff to his right; to his left, Susan Angus and Christina De Bono with Claudia Sanchez and Claudia Perez, language students at Universidad de Oriente and excellent interpreters.

The science departments of the Universidad de Oriente collaborate in a project called “Pon tu Ficha”—Project Life. Initiated in 2017 by the Council of Ministers, this is the country’s most ambitious project addressing climate change, and is led by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment. Through this project, the university professors and students team up with leaders and members of local agricultural cooperatives to do research and development, with the mission of reducing the impact of drought and climate change on water provision, as well as food and nutrition security in the region.

The university works in close coordination with the People’s Councils in the affected municipalities, the agricultural cooperatives, construction cooperatives and coastal land

management councils to achieve Goals 2, 6, 13, 14 and 15. Professors and students work in the field with the local councils, and their research priorities are based on what they and the people in the affected areas determine are the biggest needs. Students gain their degrees in their chosen areas of study based on the practical application of the theories put forth in their theses, advancing Goal 4 and consistent with the growing ability of the nation to achieve all of the SDGs.

The CVSA delegation had the opportunity to visit one of the agricultural cooperatives in the Segundo Frente mountain region of the Santiago de Cuba province, where they saw cultivation methods being tested and education being conducted on the cultivation of new crops consistent with the changing climate.

In addition to the work in agricultural resiliency and sustainability, scientists and technicians in Project Life have also developed various methods for avoiding damage to the coastlines due to rising sea levels, and the increased ferocity and frequency of hurricanes — something all Caribbean island nations are facing. In order to protect marine ecosystems and forests, and prevent saline invasion into agricultural land, local provincial governments work cooperatively with the scientists in the universities. They are planting mangroves in coastal areas and fostering their natural regeneration, imbedding live stake lines to reduce sea surges, cleaning canals for better flood control and promoting coastal forest growth through education and sustainable activities.

Cuban scientists, resource managers, lawyers, policy-makers and local communities working together, have made great achievements in the identification and implementation of collaborative strategies for coral reef conservation, the management of fisheries and sustainable coastal development in the country. Cuba is the only place in the Caribbean with intact coral systems; elsewhere in the region the erosion caused by tourism development has severely damaged coastal regions and negatively impacted marine life. Pon tu Ficha has been an example of good practice in Cuba and its tools are being applied throughout the country by the government, which will ensure that the project is sustainable.

Cuba also shares the methods they develop across the globe, in line with Goal 13 on climate change, Goal 17 on fostering partnerships, and in line with their policy of international solidarity, despite the 60 year old economic, financial and commercial blockade against Cuba by the United States.

## Advances in Local Sustainable Energy and Integration of Refugees in Uganda per Goals 7 and 17

In areas throughout Uganda, rural electrification rates range from 5% to 19% of the population having access to electricity. The primary source of the lighting in these off-grid communities is kerosene, which is expensive and responsible

*Continued on page 18*



Photo: Bernie Maxim

Attending the first International Convention on Science and Conscience at Universidad de Oriente, (l to r) Diane Rosa Ruiz Madrazo, Deputy Director of the Construction Training Center in Santiago de Cuba, Christina De Bono and Caryn Maxim, CVSA Executive Committee members, Susan Angus, CVSA Executive Director, Mariela Fujishiro Cascanet, Director of the training center and two colleagues. Madrazo explained how the Center builds alliances between government, the university and community leaders in the People’s Councils to provide on-the-job training in construction projects needed for development that are sustainable environmentally and socially.



Photo: Bernie Maxim

CVSA organizers had the opportunity to meet Dr. Ofelia Perez Montero (right), Director of the Multi-disciplinary Studies Center of Coastal Zones at Universidad de Oriente, responsible for Cuba’s Eastern Coast Region, and coordinates with Project Life.



## The SDGs: Global Examples

*Continued from page 18*

for high rates of house fires, childhood burn injuries, poisonings, respiratory infections and headaches. Kerosene use is also a major contributor to global warming.

Let There Be Light International (LTBL) is a U.S.-based NGO setting up and managing community-based solar programming in partnership with local governments, community health workers, Solar Health Uganda (SHU, a grassroots NGO in Uganda) and other stakeholders, to introduce sustainable energy solutions that serve the needs of community members.

Together with SHU, LTBL distributes safe solar lights to individuals and families, prioritizing handicapped and orphaned children, women and the elderly. They also install solar energy to electrify front-line, but off-grid health clinics in these communities, and host free educational and outreach forums about how solar lighting offsets the dangers of kerosene.

Currently students are suffering from the compounded issues of school closings due to COVID-19. All transportation was restricted and only “essential” workers (like health and government workers) were allowed to travel to work, which meant many parents of young children could not earn money. As kerosene is expensive (even in small quantities a household spends 10-30% of their income on lighting), in addition to being unhealthy and dangerous, access to extra kerosene for studying at night became impossible. Having safe solar lights in their homes makes studying at night possible, and eliminates the fumes and danger of fire.

The work of LTBL and SHU is consistent with the multi-stakeholder National SDG Coordination Framework that was established in 2016 by the Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda, which is guiding the delivery of the 2030 SDGs in the nation.

In July 2020 at the UN, Uganda presented (virtually) its second report since 2016 on their work to achieve the 2030 SDGs, sharing with the world the structures it has set up, priorities, plans, achievements so far and obstacles.

### Largest Refugee Population in Africa

While working to eliminate poverty within its own population, Uganda has the largest refugee population in Africa and the third biggest in the world — 1.42 million refugees. The country’s favorable legal environment and policies for refugees include freedom of movement, the right to work, the right to documentation and access to government services on a par with nationals. With refugees making up three percent of the population, the government points out in its report to the UN that the SDGs cannot be achieved without actively including refugees in the development process.

In March 2017, the Government launched the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. This Government-led, multi-stakeholder approach aims to provide comprehensive support for refugee and host communities alike, contributing



Photo: Let There Be Light International

*Frontline health clinics receive solar systems to improve healthcare access and delivery by increasing the hours of operation and improving the quality of care possible.*



Photo: Let There Be Light International

*Mothers in the community are educated on ante-natal, birth, and postpartum care, highlighting the benefits of giving birth under professional supervision in a health clinic.*

to attainment of the SDGs. Since the introduction of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework in September 2018, Uganda launched its Education Response Plan, followed in January 2019 by the Health Sector Integrated Refugee Response Plan, and in March 2020 by the Water and Environment Sector Response Plan.

Uganda faces many challenges, surrounded by less stable conflict-involved nations, recovering from its own past wars and now contending with results of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is exemplary, however, using the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a roadmap towards sustainable development “leaving no one behind” in the development of their nation as framework for partnering with organizations like LTBL, per Goal 17. The results reflect steady progress and many lessons to share with other developing — and developed — nations.

Let There Be Light International is a volunteer-involving organization and will be listed in the upcoming edition of *INVEST YOURSELF*.





## Commentary

## It's Up to Us



Photo: CVSA

Rory Xanders with Christina De Bono, CVSA Executive Committee member, at CVSA's Exhibit at the UN July 2019.

by Rory Xanders

In July 2019 I attended the UN's annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development as a representative of CVSA. I helped staff CVSA's exhibit, "Organizing for the SDGs at Grassroots Level in the U.S.," through which we highlighted the work grassroots organizations in the U.S. are doing to promote the SDGs, even when (or especially because) our government is not.

I was surprised by the sheer number of attendees

we met at our table who were pleased to learn that an organization like CVSA exists in America, for they knew firsthand how little our government applies the SDGs to the U.S. and how little our media promotes the Goals. My conversations with people at CVSA's exhibit reinforced to me the importance of the SDGs, as I could see how strongly the global community has mobilized towards achieving the Goals, growing collaboration among nations and NGOs, and establishing global networks around shared issues. The exchange of knowledge and expertise at the HLPF was urgent and real.

While I only attended three days of the two-week conference, those three days fundamentally transformed my view of both the UN and the U.S., especially in how the U.S. relates to the rest of the world.

### A Lesson in Diplomacy — and Lack Thereof

After learning about the UN in school, I expected to witness a well-oiled machine full of engaged participants who conducted lively discussions aimed at achieving a common goal. I can see now that my preconceived notions of the UN were unrealistic and naïve. I had placed the UN on a pedestal, disregarding the fact that, like any other organization, the UN is composed of a diverse array of people — not to mention delegates from 193 different countries — all with their own experiences, beliefs, priorities, and agendas. Sometimes there can be hidden agendas — as I quickly saw — that can be counter to the common good or the universal goals.

For example, during an event on SDG 4 (ensuring inclusive and quality education for all), at which many countries presented their progress towards this Goal, the U.S. delegate quickly revealed ulterior motives through her statement. She started by claiming that the United States was committed to expanding education access for all, especially for "vulnerable and marginalized populations," but then painted the American

education system as a great system without enumerating any of the disparities in American school funding between wealthy and impoverished communities, not to mention the high level of student debt, school closings, and illiteracy rates far higher than most industrialized countries. I found her statement to be misleading and untruthful, as, from what I have seen growing up, the U.S. must work harder to ensure all of its own citizens (let alone people from other countries) have access to quality education.

If the U.S. delegate had enumerated the problems with the American education system and actual ways the government is trying to solve them, it would have been helpful to other countries with the same problems and fostered a collaborative environment. However, instead of addressing areas of weakness, room for improvement, or plans for achieving SDG 4 in the U.S., the U.S. representative exploited this session as an opportunity to attack America's perceived opponents, revealing her true agenda.

The U.S. delegate spent the latter half of her allotted time condemning China for their alleged mistreatment of the Uighur people and Russia's alleged "occupation" of Crimea. By blatantly hijacking the meeting and shifting gears away from discussing progress towards achieving Goal 4 in the U.S. to criticizing other nations for matters out of context and not directly related to the subject, the U.S. delegate drew attention away from the American education system and the global Goal of improving access to quality education for everyone. All in all, the U.S. delegate's unhelpful contribution discouraged me because it highlighted that Americans cannot rely on our government to provide positive and constructive leadership in venues like the UN or to help further global progress towards the SDGs.

### Crucial Role of the UN

While my time at the HLPF did open my eyes to some cracks in the UN's shiny facade, it was also clear to me that the UN plays a critical role if we hope to achieve the SDGs, or at least significantly progress towards them, by 2030. The UN is one of a few forums where delegates and citizens from around the world can discuss various global issues face-to-face. And, while certain participants can be unhelpful or resistant, others enthusiastically work to address common issues and goals. These thousands of passionate participants left me with faith in the UN, even after experiencing my rude awakening.

During a side event hosted by Caribbean organizations and delegates called "Building Back Better: Reckoning with Size in Pursuit of Resilience," chaired by H.E. Lois Young, Permanent Representative of Belize to the UN and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), I was inspired by the enthusiasm and dedication of the participants. This discussion was about

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## It's Up to Us

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the integration of resilience-building into sustainable development planning and practice in the Caribbean. The hosts made factual presentations that illustrated various challenges Caribbean countries face, like high damage to roads and buildings caused by a combination of frequent and intense natural disasters due to climate change and generally non-resilient infrastructures. They then tried to identify solutions to these problems – with the resources they have and what they could do if given access to further needed resources. There were around 20 people attending this event, all from various Caribbean nations and UN agencies. Although smaller than the larger sessions in the big UN conference halls, this event impacted me the most because of the passion and dedication of the participants.

The participants actively listened to each other, took notes, asked questions, and contributed knowledge. They shared concrete data, indicating that this was not just some theoretical problem but a concrete, life-threatening issue that they were actively and materially working to solve. This meeting made me hopeful that through similar dialogues at the UN, countries across the globe can work together to tackle monstrous problems like climate change. It illustrated that meetings can be productive, especially when everyone is working to achieve a common goal.

### US Sanctions on Developing Nations Hold the World Back

There was another instance that stood out to me. During a session that assessed whether we were on track globally for “leaving no one behind,” a delegate from Iran stated that “unlawful, illegitimate unilateral measures” against developing countries (in reference to unfair sanctions imposed by economic powerhouses) have increased in frequency, creating “untold human suffering” and preventing developing countries from implementing the SDGs. I immediately recalled how the U.S. government has historically imposed numerous sanctions against Iran, among other countries, whenever the U.S. government disagrees with their government or policies. While the Iranian delegate undoubtedly had an agenda (like the aforementioned U.S. delegate), unlike the U.S. delegate, the Iranian delegate maintained a respectful tone (by not explicitly naming and condemning the U.S. or other economic powers) while making a point that supported the common goal of the meeting.

I appreciated the Iranian delegate's insight because I believe that we (meaning Americans) cannot expect less developed nations to designate sufficient resources or funds towards implementing the SDGs when the United States and other economic powerhouses cripple, or at the very least stifle, the economies of certain developing countries with



To celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations, in January 2020 UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres launched a yearlong, global initiative of discussions to listen to people's priorities and expectations of international cooperation.

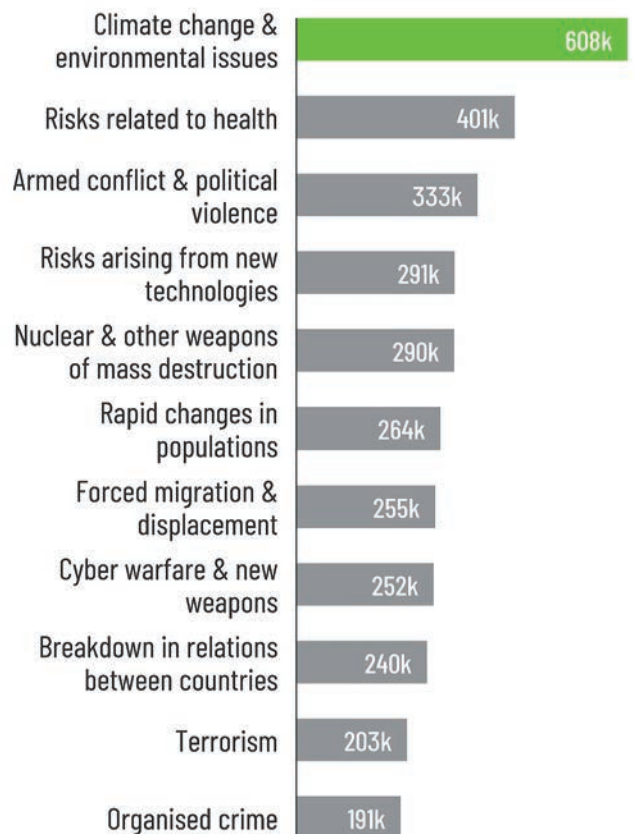
While many worried that the pandemic would dampen the UN75 conversation, it had the opposite effect. The number of people who joined the initiative multiplied as the year progressed. The UN75 conversation became even more important as people across the world not only discussed their longer-term priorities, but also the immediate socio-economic struggles they faced with the pandemic, as well as their concerns about the lack of international cooperation to address COVID-19.

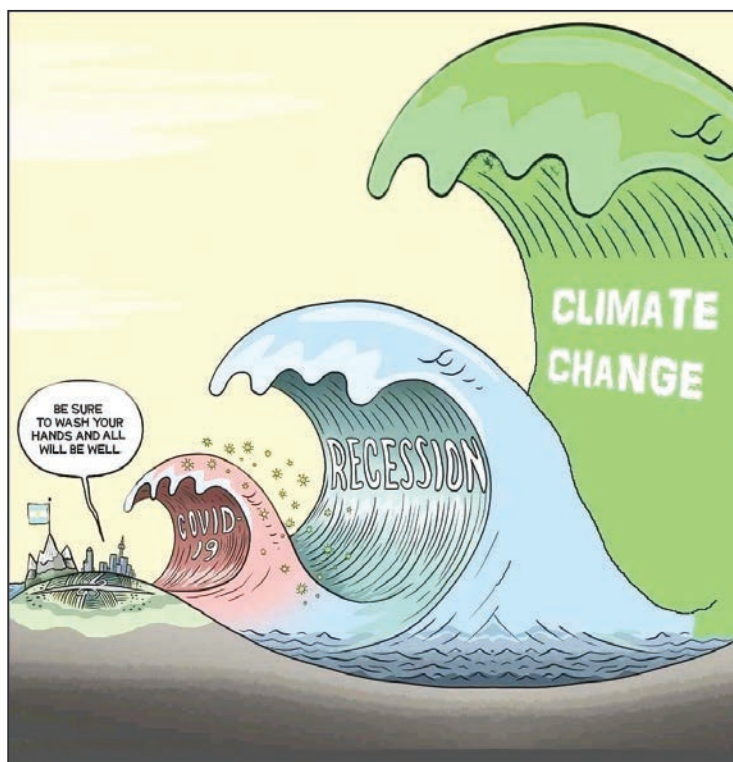
More than 1.5 million people from all 193 UN member and observer states took part in the UN75 virtual conversations and surveys between January and December 2020.

The concluding report was issued in January 2021. This is one of many charts contained in the report and shows the results of one of those surveys:

### UN75 survey: Which of these global trends do you think will most affect your future?

1,222,848 people from all continents responded;  
participants could pick up to 3 categories.





Graphic: Australia Climate Action

economic sanctions. While I acknowledge that politics are complicated and sanctions might occasionally serve as useful political tools, we must consider that the constant and persistent use of sanctions might be more harmful than beneficial to our long-term goals. The Iranian delegate's candid comment reinforced that countries are, in fact, being left behind, influencing me (and hopefully other audience members) into rethinking the way countries should relate to each other.

### The UN Is An Important Arena for Participation

While this article is based on just my three days at the UN, I do believe that my experience carries important lessons. First, while the UN is not perfect, it plays an important role in advancing progress towards the implementation of the SDGs worldwide. As I saw during the side event on building resilience in the Caribbean, the UN can be an important venue for people across the planet to share information and advice. The UN therefore aids countries in their ability to creatively and strategically implement the SDGs by providing delegates with new ideas and knowledge to incorporate into their programs.

Second, American citizens cannot necessarily rely on our government to do the best thing for the majority of people worldwide (including the majority of Americans). My experience at the HLPF illustrated how the U.S. government, or at least our current administration, does not prioritize the SDGs. For example, instead of aiming to further progress towards SDG 4, the agenda of the US representative at the event on SDG 4 was to undermine political opponents, distracting from the global goals.

As American citizens, we are responsible for educating

ourselves on the SDGs in addition to our government's actions abroad in order to both hold ourselves and our government accountable. As implied by the Iranian delegate, American sanctions can significantly limit another country's growth and limit their ability to implement the SDGs, even though implementation of the SDGs is globally beneficial. We must recognize that our government often sets sanctions when they disagree with a foreign government (think about American sanctions against Cuba, Venezuela, and Iran) and that these sanctions can be shortsighted (and ineffective).

### It is Up to Us to Build Solidarity and Cooperation with the Rest of the World

If we want a better future, where nobody is left behind, then it is up to us to do something about it.

American citizens have historically used our rights of freedom of speech and freedom of association to fight during certain key periods in history (like during the civil rights movement of the '60s, the labor movement, the climate change movement, and even the recent resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement). While these movements might not have created end-all solutions, they have typically resulted in steps towards a better future. Once people believe that change is possible and see that the current status quo is untenable, with strategy and organization, we can succeed in enacting change by organizing together. And, if we hope to create a better, more sustainable future for everyone across the planet, Americans must get involved, work together, organize, and fight for this change by actively holding ourselves and our government accountable to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

*Rory Xanders had just graduated from Polytechnic School (high school) in Pasadena, California when she participated in CVSA's delegation at the 2019 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at the United Nations before leaving for college at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. While home last summer (2020), she volunteered with CVSA full-time to coordinate membership outreach and communications, gathering updated listings for the new edition of INVEST YOURSELF: A Guide to Action. Rory now serves on CVSA's Advisory Board.*



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## 2020 High Level Political Forum Reports

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education and health care – now all exacerbated by the lack of containment of COVID-19 across the U.S., and increasingly made worse by all the record-breaking natural disasters striking the U.S. due to global warming, where people already on the edge of surviving are losing even more from massive fires, mega-hurricanes and super-floods. The grassroots volunteers being coordinated by community-based organizations know best the urgent need to take the 2030 SDGs seriously and put them in as policy. They also have the experience and insight on how we can and must achieve these Goals here.

### Local Governments Call for Global Solidarity to Fight COVID-19 and Achieve

The Local and Regional Governments Forum held July 13, 2020 dramatically illustrated the important role of local governments around the world in addressing COVID-19 and the SDG's – and the overwhelming need for global solidarity to address both.

Mayors and other representatives from cities and municipalities in regions from every continent were among the panelists and speakers in this three-day event, including the Mayors and representatives of Rome, Italy; Barcelona and Madrid, Spain; Banjul, Gambia; Polokwane, South Africa; Iriga, the Philippines; the Dannah Municipalities, Lebanon; Xi-an, China; Quito, Ecuador; Esteban Echeverría Partido, Argentina; Kigali, Rwanda; Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; Kitchener, Canada and a representative from the Mayor's office of New York City. Over 200 representatives from around the world participated in panel discussions transmitted via UN Webcast service, and thousands logged into the various events.

The third Forum of its kind, this one was dominated by the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis and the critical role of local and regional governments in confronting the pandemic, and as primary agents in the achievement of the SDG's.

Wim Dries, Mayor of Genk, Belgium, said if the SDGs had already been achieved, the global health crisis and its social and economic impacts would have been far less severe.

Representatives from local and regional governments spoke about the challenge of delivering basic services of health, energy, water, food, shelter and digital access during the pandemic, and the resulting implications for achieving the SDGs.

However, they also highlighted the creativity and innovation demonstrated at the local and regional level that can

be leveraged to achieve the SDGs. Equally important, the strong connection that local governments have with everyday people is important to achieve the SDGs. The necessary transformations will be sustainable if they are built from the ground up. A theme that ran through each presentation was the recognition of the interconnection between the environment, sustainability and resilience. Running through all the presentations was the clear fact that the local governments cannot do this alone.

Although local governments are on the front lines of delivering and financing basic services, this became dramatically more difficult during the pandemic as their sources of revenue disappeared, including transfers from higher levels of governments, along with the loss of economic activity and the increased need for access to basic services.

#### Call for Increased Global Solidarity

The resulting financial crisis highlights the need for a strategy for sustainable financing at the local level and the weakness of the current market-driven economic system, with its focus on short-term goals, to be able to provide human needs such as housing, water, food, energy and sanitation. Dr. Linda J. Bilmes, of the Harvard Kennedy School and the United States member of the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA), pointed out that \$1 spent at the local level created \$2 of economic growth.

In all discussions during this forum, access to basic human services – housing, water, sanitation, energy, digital resources – was portrayed uncontroversially as a human right. The U.S. is among a small minority of governments in the world that do not recognize these basic necessities as human rights.

Speakers pointed out the need for capacity building and the critical role of digital resources. Collaborations among various regions in sharing knowledge about possible strategies to address the problems highlighted by the pandemic have created an informal structure of solidarity. However, these structures must be expanded to enable local governments and their constituents to recover from the pandemic and to continue the work to reach the SDG goals. The need for global solidarity in the area of sustainable financing and capacity building was clear.

The speakers also underscored the need for new forms of distribution, participation and parity in political representation in the post-COVID-19 era to build more just, inclusive and resilient societies. The COVID-19 response shows the fragility of our societies, the results of the economic exclusion and social inequality, and the results of environmental degradation.

The overall consensus from this forum was that local authorities play key roles in responding to the pandemic, and they have those same key roles to play in the development required by the SDG's from now on. Only with an increase in global solidarity to address capacity building through sharing expertise, accompanied by financing to implement the strategies for development, can we "Build Back Better."



## “Test, Test, Test...Isolate, Trace.”

*Continued from page 3*

go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth to raise the bottom up (not relying on it to “trickle down” – it never has!) and addresses social needs, including education, health, job opportunities, affordable safe water, food, air and housing, while tackling the causes of catastrophic climate change and putting environmental protection over private profit. More important than ever, the Goals provide a critical framework for COVID-19 recovery *now*.

The pandemic is laying bare deep systemic inequalities that existed before COVID-19 in much of the world, including in the U.S. It has exposed precisely the economic, social and environmental failures in policy that are addressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which every nation agreed to implement in 2015. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are vital for a recovery from the pandemic and will lead to greener, more inclusive economies, stronger, more resilient societies and the chance to stop the causes of rapidly increasing climate change that is causing catastrophic environmental and weather disasters around the world.


### **Lack of Funds is Not the Obstacle — Political Will and Priorities Are**

Lack of widespread action on both points above is not due to lack of money or technology. It is a matter of priorities. The money to fund all of the necessary COVID-19 testing and other measures needed, and to implement all 17 Sustainable Development Goals exists.

For example, funding could come out of the budget that gives roughly \$20 billion per year of direct tax subsidies to the fossil fuel industry (a conservative estimate according

to Environmental and Energy Study Institute, a non-profit organization founded in 1984 by a bipartisan group of members of Congress); or from the over \$600 billion that goes to the U.S. military annually, which accounts for 54% of all federal discretionary funding, and is the largest military budget in the world, spending more than Russia, China, India, France, Germany, UK, Japan, South Korea, Brazil and Saudi Arabia combined.

We cannot wait and hope for change to come. We have to organize for the changes we need and lead in building the solutions that show how to do it. No matter who is in the White House, we need to continue to strengthen our volunteer-driven, grass-roots organizations that are on the front lines of materially addressing day-to-day the dire social, economic and environmental needs and problems we are facing.

Contact CVSA for more information and for tools for this campaign. Also, call with accounts about your activities and suggestions that we can share with other organizations. 



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## Volunteers Needed!

Volunteers are urgently needed to complete the new edition of *INVEST YOURSELF: A Guide to Action* and expand our campaign for the 2030 SDGs.

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### **Organizing Our Volunteer Power to Build a Better World!**

**Volunteers are urgently needed to participate in the office. (All COVID-19 protocols enforced.)**  
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#### **Organizer Training & Education**

All CVSA volunteers and staff of CVSA member organizations are welcome to participate in our organizer training programs which include on-the-job practical training as well as classes in history, strategy and methods of organizing and current world affairs.

#### **Publications Production**

Weekly work sessions to produce CVSA's publications: *INVEST YOURSELF*, the catalogue of volunteer opportunities, and CVSA's membership newsletter at the CVSA office — learn to do all aspects of desktop publishing. If you have these skills, you can become one of the trainers!

#### **Community Outreach Events**

Volunteers participate in information tables and speaking engagements (remotely or in person), CVSA's most valuable means of connecting with people from all walks of life looking for meaningful and productive volunteer opportunities.

#### **Membership Organization Communications, Consultations and Training**

Volunteers participate in our site visits, consultations, and training workshops with member organizations of CVSA, help develop on-line webinars and other organizing tools, and maintain communication with member organizations around the country and collect news for the newsletter.

#### **Nationwide Community Education Campaign for the Implementation of the 2030 SDGs**

Volunteers learn to give presentations to community groups (in person and remotely); coordinate the collection of reports to be submitted to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at the UN; do research and develop tools for CVSA member organizations; mobilize community groups, businesses and faith-based groups to build a groundswell of involvement for implementation and monitoring of the 2030 SDGs in the U.S. On-the-job training provided.

Call us at (323) 933-2872 for more information on how you can participate in and support CVSA's efforts.

*Labor donated*