



Maurice (right), the UN Volunteer leading the volunteer initiative in Gemena, and Paola, a member of the community, are showing people how to press the grated cassava before it can be dried to produce the flour. (UNV, 2013)

Weeding, baking and pacifying

This summer UN Volunteers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) organized volunteering initiatives aimed at improving people's lives. After a call for projects by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme in DRC, several initiatives were put forward, each very different from the other, but all with one common objective: to improve the quality of life in the communities.

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One of these was an activity organized by UN Volunteer Maurice Mukenge in Gemena. In partnership with a local youth volunteer association, Planète Jeune. Les amis de la paix. (Youth Planet. Friends for Peace.), Maurice organized a two-day activity to reflect on the advantages of volunteering.

On the first day, volunteers from all over the region of Gemena got together to discuss the benefits of volunteerism for the community, for society and for the individual volunteer. After the discussion, they received training on conflict management – a theoretical course on mediation and negotiation with many practical exercises.

The following day, around 30 youth volunteers used machetes and hoes to weed the cassava fields of five widows of the community. After a couple of hours of intense and joyful work, all the participants - men and women, young and old - were trained on modern techniques to produce cassava flour. These new techniques make production faster and improve the final product, allowing an increase in revenues, but also advantages for its non-commercial use by families.

In Gemena, everyone had a taste of the new product by savouring doughnuts and lemon cake made with this new cassava flour. The participants who made the cakes were particularly satisfied. « No need to buy cakes anymore, now I can make them for my children myself », explains a young mother who travelled 75 kilometres to take part in this two-day activity.

This was only one of the volunteers' small-scale initiatives that allowed the achievement of modest but tangible results in areas as diverse as women's education, conflict resolution, access to school materials, or orphanage restoration.

How to make your own cassava flour

- Peel and wash the cassava roots;
- Grate them (if you need a rasp, take a sardine's tin and make a lot of holes at the bottom, it works really well);
- Put the grated cassava in a strong bag;
- To press it, insert a big stick in quincunx at each end of the bag. Turn each stick on itself and in opposite directions, as you would do to wring clothes. (This step is important as it takes the hydrocyanic acid out of the cassava);
- Spread the cassava powder on a clean tarpaulin, and let it dry in the sun for four hours;
- Sift the flour. The flour is now ready to be used for baking!

Sustainable Development Goal: