

16 August 2016



Amos Boiyo and Stanley Kiragu, UNEA-2 UNV Conference Volunteers providing technical support at the event. (UNV, 2016)

Volunteerism as a mode of enhancing youth engagement in environmental governance

Volunteerism, as a form of civic participation, can be a powerful mechanism for giving youth a voice in decision making and promoting social inclusion in environmental governance within the post-2015 development framework.

Nairobi, Kenya: The transition from the year 2015 to the year 2016 marked a remarkable moment in environmental governance for sustainable development globally. The world gained a set of universally agreed development goals, a financing for development agreement, and even more critical for the global environment, the Paris climate change agreement that finally promised to cap global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius.

The world now needs to re-shape the future and actualize the ambitions of low-carbon development set forth in the much sought after global agreements. The participation of young people becomes critical in all of these processes because of several factors, but mainly due to the fact that youth constitute more than half of the current global population of 7 billion people. As a result, youth stand most to gain with the accomplishment of the new development goals.

On the flipside, young people are among the most vulnerable to the challenges our societies face since they will live in the world shaped by the decisions made today. If properly mobilized and guided, young people could indeed provide a powerful resource that can catapult the world towards the much needed sustainable path of development.

Volunteerism, as a form of civic participation, can be a powerful mechanism for giving youth a voice in decision making and promoting social inclusion in environmental governance within the post-2015 development framework.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme mobilizes the energy of youth for sustainable development through volunteerism.

At the second United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-2) by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), held from 23rd to 27th May 2016, over 40 of these UN Volunteers were actively engaged in spearheading various tasks to make UNEA-2 a massive success. They provided varied support ranging from resolution drafting, communications to conference logistics. This background provided the framework within which additional capacity for the event was sought with the deployment of short term conference youth volunteers.

UNEA is the highest-level UN body ever convened on the environment. UNEA-2's overarching theme was focused on delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The organization of an event of such magnitude definitely required detailed professional, logistical and communication support to handle various elements involved.

UNEP and UNV in Kenya have a close working relationship with more than 50 UN Volunteers currently serving in different programmes in UNEP.

During a debriefing session with the UNV Kenya Field Unit one of the UNEA-2 youth conference volunteers, Eunice Migwi, said, *"UNV to me represents an opportunity to be a part of greatness; something bigger than any one individually; a chance to make a difference in every possible way that one can. Through this interaction with peers from different schools and a variety of career paths taken by each individual, I have learnt that everyone whether younger or older has something to offer."*

"Given a chance, youth can change the world and UNV is facilitating exactly that by offering young people with great minds opportunities to make a difference and change the world for the better, one volunteer opportunity at a time. I consider being a volunteer one of the greatest achievements in my life."

The UNV youth conference volunteers provided support to key components of the event, from the development of the event web platform, to the drafting of the global assembly's resolutions, to the engine behind the colourful side events and to the weeklong social media trending of the event. The youth volunteers were at the very core of the world's parliament for the environment.

However, what was even more crucial was the continued interest by the volunteers to contribute their time for the implementation of the outcomes of the assembly on a voluntary basis. The UNEA-2 UN Volunteers from the youth conference have started to form a national volunteer platform aimed at mobilizing community action for environmental conservation and climate change adaptation.

This year's International Youth Day provides an opportunity to reflect on opportunities for engaging young people for the realization of the newly adopted sustainable development goals. The Day provides an opportunity to focus on action and the positive changes that can be achieved together in our communities and globally.

To have a future we all need and want – inclusive action is needed by, for and with young people. Young people need to be provided opportunities to use their energy and commitment as catalysts and change makers for a sustainable and equitable society. Volunteerism offers one of the best modes of enabling this shift for young people.



East and Southern Africa

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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)