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UN Volunteer David Sema Sewa leading a campaign against conflict-related sexual violence in Gao, Diré, Bandiagara and Ménaka, Mali.

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Tackling HIV/AIDS in health and political crises

Over the past decade, 97 UN Volunteers have served with UNAIDS in 36 countries across the world. Their role? To stop new infections, ensure access to treatment for people living with HIV, defend and promote human rights and generate data to support decision-making.

“Volunteers have played a critical role in the response to HIV since the earliest days of the epidemic. UNAIDS recognizes their importance, values their engagement and will continue to support their contribution in joining global efforts to end AIDS. -- Tim Martineau, UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director, Management and Governance, a.i.

UN Volunteers David Sema Sewa, Programme Officer, and Kouakou Nestor Kouame (Côte d'Ivoire), HIV/AIDS Training Officer/Counsellor, serve with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). They support the mainstreaming of HIV/AIDS in the mission and beyond, including Security Sector Reform and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.

At the national level, David and Kouakou support the government in AIDS response, especially in conflict and post-conflict environments. The main objective they pursue is to reduce exposure to HIV infection, particularly among Malian defense and security forces, and women and girls in conflict areas.

The volunteers were both involved in the awareness campaign for the prevention of sexual violence related to conflicts organized in Gao, Dire, Bandiagara and Menaka, that reached 1,228 women and girls. They designed the project jointly with national partners serving in the Presidential Office and in alignment with UN Security Council Resolution 2480, which guides the implementation of the agreement on peace and reconciliation in Mali.

Despite the difficulties of accessing certain areas, particularly post-conflict territories, and the restrictions resulting from COVID-19, David and Kouakou have adapted to carry out their work. For example, Kouakou held virtual sensitization sessions for nine regional DDR focal points on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in the process.

“ Our main challenge is the lack of integration of the HIV/AIDS dimension in the process by national partners. My role is to help regional focal points better understand the challenges of mainstreaming. They will then be able to advocate with communities and guide those involved in the DDR process on sensitization, voluntary testing and referral of positive cases for care. --Kouakou Nestor Kouame, UN Volunteer HIV/AIDS Training Officer/Counsellor

Within the mission, David and Kouakou are challenged to minimize the risks faced by MINUSMA staff (peacekeepers, national and international staff, and UN Volunteers) at all duty stations to prevent them from becoming infected or transmitting HIV and other STIs while on assignment.

David oversees induction training and HIV mass sensitization sessions to newly deployed contingents. He also contributes to increasing staff awareness by developing messages and tools such as banners and posters, in collaboration with colleagues working on public information, procurement and supply in the HIV/AIDS Unit.

Through sensitization on the risk of AIDS, David reached 352 former combatants and 4,149 Malian armed forces and their dependents, to whom he provided voluntary confidential counselling and testing, as well as referrals for prevention, treatment, care and support services.

“ In the context of confinement and teleworking, we have carried out virtual training sessions and promoted staff self-testing. --David Sema Sewa, UN Volunteer Programme Officer

Despite COVID-19 and the socio-political situation in Mali, volunteers continue to support the fight against HIV/AIDS in a spirit of global solidarity and shared responsibility.

“ UNV's contribution to the achievement of our objectives is substantial. Indeed, the three volunteers assigned to our Unit conduct 80 per cent of the sensitization, training, capacity building and screening activities for MINUSMA staff members. They also contribute to the national response to HIV/AIDS in Mali. We truly appreciate their commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS. -- Dorcella Bazahica, Chief HIV/AIDS Officer, HIV/AIDS

Unit of MINUSMA



[UNAIDS and UNV signed a Memorandum of Understanding](#) in March 2020 to intensify collaboration between the two organizations. This new agreement defines the future of their cooperation in promoting volunteerism and attracting UN Volunteers to assist people living with and affected by HIV.



• HIV • World AIDS Day • United Nations Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 3: Good health and well-being](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)