



UN Youth Volunteer Fannie Elveljung (holding a yellow folder) meets communities to assess their needs with UNDP Cameroon.
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Overcoming gender gaps to reduce food insecurity and biodiversity loss

UN Volunteer Fannie Elveljung (Sweden, 26) travelled to Cameroon to serve with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Unit as Women's Empowerment and Inclusive Economic Development Support Officer. Prior to this, she studied Economics and conducted her bachelor's thesis on women's economic empowerment and intimate partner violence in El Salvador, which motivated her to learn more about the issue. Her assignment is fully funded by the Government of Sweden.

As someone who aspires to gain experience in a new culture, I was looking for a field

experience on women empowerment in Africa. This led me to the UN system, and I couldn't have got a better opportunity than this UN Volunteer assignment. In my day-to-day work with UNDP, I am trying to bring more inclusive development work to the table.

In Cameroon, there are some great challenges connected to gender, where the roles and power relations are very traditional. Women usually depend on men and are less represented in the political arena and the formal workforce.

Currently, I am supporting the reformulation of a Global Environment Facility (GEF) project, which aims to develop more sustainable and inclusive forest conservation activities in the South and Eastern Forest areas of Cameroon. I analyse the reformulation through a gender perspective, to see how the project can be more inclusive for the local communities throughout its activities.

“ The independence of women would not only benefit them but the whole country, especially when recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In total, I have spent more than two weeks on the field with colleagues, stakeholders and communities, discussing the project, identifying what they see as opportunities and obstacles in implementing the project, and preparing for its activities accordingly.

We also focused on widespread malnutrition. From a global perspective, malnutrition is not always the result of a lack of food, but of old habits and incorrect knowledge. Wherever discrimination against women is evident, malnutrition problems are exacerbated. Thus, a general long-term solution to improving child nutrition can be found in strengthening the rights of women and girls.

In a similar context, access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is an essential part of this work. In the communities we visited, we observed that access to these rights is lacking. In the long run, access to contraception and family planning also results in reduced malnutrition, so discovering the reasons for these problems and acting on them will be of great value for reformulation.

“ Through my work, I am gaining a lot of insights into gender issues and women's empowerment. For development to have a positive effect on the lives of people and communities, we need to include everyone.

Although I do not have as much experience as my fellow colleagues who have been working with the UN for many years, I feel included in the whole process of the project, just as I do in other tasks in the office, which supports my professional development.

My previous professional and personal experiences have been in Latin America, and this is my first time living and working on the African continent. I did not even speak any French upon my arrival, but developing my language skills ‘peu à peu’ (little by little) has helped me find new ways of living.

“ This volunteer opportunity not only brings new cultural experiences, but also helps me develop my own values, thoughts and views.



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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#) [SDG 13: Climate change](#)