



Some of the UN Youth Volunteers serving in West and Central Africa.

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Empowering youth for an inclusive and sustainable development

This 21st International Youth Day is an opportunity to reflect on the importance of engaging youth to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Read more about how UN Volunteers are empowering youth to drive an inclusive and sustainable development.

While based in the Sahel - the most youthful region in the world, with 64.5% of youth aged under 25 [1] - I have had the opportunity to witness how youth volunteerism can empower young people and provide them with opportunities to actively participate in local, national, regional and global development activities.

Last April, I co-organized the Africa Breakout session of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) 2021 Youth Forum, attended by over 150 participants and focused on "Supporting the Culture of Innovation, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship of African Youth to Build Forward Better for Sustainable Development."

It was truly inspiring to listen to youth leaders from all corners of the African continent as they shared their experiences and spoke about existing challenges, such as persistent

inequality, poor infrastructure and bad governance.

Volunteerism was highlighted as a tool to build relevant skills and capacities and to ensure that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is inclusive and localized. As such, calls were made to integrate volunteerism into academic curricula to promote youth leadership and foster civic engagement from a young age.

“ We must increase our efforts to promote youth volunteering and civic engagement. These should be integrated into national recovery plans, to support the scaling up of recovery efforts, engage marginalized groups, and create opportunities to develop skills. --
Presidential Statement during the 10th ECOSOC Youth Forum

As the global population is expected to increase to 9.7 billion by the year 2050 [2], we need to urgently develop innovative ideas to prevent putting further strains on existing food production and supply chains.

[The story of Mame Diarra Sow](#), who is working as a UN Volunteer with UN Women in Dakar, provides an excellent example of how volunteerism and UN Volunteers working in the field of climate resilience and agriculture can enhance sustainable income generation and livelihoods from agricultural production.

Mame Diarra has been working with the Women's Economic Empowerment Unit, focusing on food autonomy through the Agriculture, Women, and Sustainable Development (AGRIFED) programme, to reach more than 50,000 women entrepreneurs in agriculture.

Similarly, [Michiko Terada, a UN Volunteer fully funded by the government of Japan](#), works on a “School Gardening for Better Nutrition” project that was established in five high schools in Nigeria. The project aims to build the capacity of schoolteachers on nutrition and gardening, and to integrate nutritional education into current school curricula.

The knowledge teachers received on agriculture, home economics and basic science will be shared with 500 students at the respective schools, ultimately also benefitting local communities.

“ Youth volunteering can be transformed from a coping mechanism to a strategic resource for building communities’ resilience, including youth-led sustainable local action for the SDGs.” -- Presidential Statement during the 10th ECOSOC Youth Forum

In 2020, 35% of UN Volunteers were under 29 years old. At the UN Volunteers programme, we recognize the value of young people's contributions, and provide the opportunity to amplify otherwise marginalized voices through volunteer action.

Recent shocks, such as the 2008 financial crisis, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, climate change-driven natural catastrophes, among others, highlight the interconnectedness of today's world. We must include all parts of society in the search for solutions and adopt a holistic approach to production processes and consumer behaviour if we want to reach the objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

“ I firmly believe that, through engaging the new generations, we will indeed be able to make accelerated advances towards the SDGs and improve people's lives.

[1] [UNISS Summary Report 2018](#), page 7

[2] [World Population Prospects Report 2019](#)



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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 4: Quality education](#) [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#)
[SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)