UN Volunteers advocate for youth in West and Central Africa

Inter-generational solidarity has the potential, when tapped fully, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The young people of today face barriers in employment, political participation, health, and justice. These barriers, mostly age-related, leave a profound impact on well-being and sustainable livelihood, which is detrimental not only during youth, but also in adulthood. UN Volunteers in West and Central Africa advocate for a broader role of youth to tackle their generation’s challenges and ensure a better world for everyone.

Yasmine Diawara Affoue, David Roland (both from Côte d'Ivoire) and Samba Kante (Guinea) are all UN Volunteers who are passionate about advocating for young people. They provide
their expertise to youth and women-focused programmes of UN agencies such as the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Yasmine, 31, is an Innovation and Youth Engagement Strategist. She is part of the UNICEF advocacy team, along with 15 other volunteers. They help design a youth advocacy programme, which include workshops where youth learn life skills such as self-awareness, self-esteem, stress management, peer pressure and leadership. Another positive aspect of the workshops is building the resilience of adolescents and youth, and expanding their knowledge for socio-economic integration following the decade-long crisis in Côte d'Ivoire.

Yasmine trained 100 young educators on girls' empowerment projects to create a safe environment where the adolescents and youth who participate feel seen, respected, listened to, and cared for. This has allowed her to increase the engagement of the programme's beneficiaries.

Supporting UNICEF as a volunteer "is a wonderful and invaluable experience," says Yasmine. She draws pride and satisfaction in seeing the impact of her work in the lives of young people who attended a life skills training workshop for adolescents and young girls.

"I went through a traumatic situation in 2019. I was in third grade and was sexually assaulted. It was a very difficult time where I felt like my parents didn't understand me and my friends weren't there for me. I organized my escape from Soubré to Abidjan using the money from a class trip that I was the treasurer of. My parents found me and brought me back to Soubré. Through the workshops I attended, I developed life skills such as self-control, effective communication, decision-making and empathy, and most importantly, I regained my self-confidence. --A beneficiary of the life skills training of facilitators workshop for adolescents and young adults

Yasmine hopes to specialize in adolescent and young adult development programme management, so that she can be involved in policy and decisions that set priorities for adolescent and youth programme interventions.

Roland David Bissie, 32, from Côte d'Ivoire, joined UNFPA as Project Assistant with six other volunteers. With his background in sociological analysis, he helps to understand the factors
that inhibit contraceptive use among rural populations. He comes up with innovative ideas, and also supervises the activities of community health workers. He oversees community-based distribution agents, who conduct outreach activities in their communities to increase contraceptive prevalence, reduce preventable maternal deaths and increase girls' enrollment and retention in school.

In the workshops he facilitates in the commune of Bondoukou, Roland attempts to deconstruct stereotypes and preconceptions about contraception among men through communication and social behavior change activities.

In addition, he took part in the development of a research protocol to collect data on the impact of COVID-19 on girls' access to and retention in school, led the data collection and provided guidance for data analysis. Actions undertaken under the supervision of the project coordinator included the creation of two safe spaces in Bouna for more than 50 adolescent girls and young women aged 10-19; the mobilization of more than 200 women as part of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) acceleration programme to support the empowerment of women in the Bounkani region in the fight against GBV (gender-based violence).

Roland also succeeded in stopping the marriages of three underage schoolgirls, thanks to his technical support and the assistance of the members of the “Espace Amis des Femmes” de Doropo, an achievement he is very proud of.

“...I remember the story of a young mother who, after contracting a pregnancy and giving birth, did not know that she could be reintegrated into the school system. At an outreach session, she came to me for more information. After being advised and oriented by the mutual school social work service manager, the girl was able to return to school to continue her studies. --Roland David Bissie, UN Volunteer Project Assistant with UNFPA

As for Samba Kante, 32, he has played a transversal role related to the implementation of the different projects of the Economic Transformation and Sustainable Development Cluster of UNDP Guinea. As part of his mandate, this young Expert in Entrepreneurship and Youth Connection, tries to improve the living conditions of the youth of his community while offering them a sustainable socio-professional future.

Samba accompanies the partner ministries of the Economic Transformation and Sustainable
Development Cluster in the translation of the major axes of the strategy into programmes and projects such as: YouthConnekt Guinea Programme, and YouthConnekt for Women Project. He supports UNDP in the identification of key partners for the implementation of programmes and reference partners for the mobilization of funds (INTEGRA Program, YouthConnekt Programme, YouthConnekt for Women Project with 600 women entrepreneurs financed to date.

Through the UNDP Economic Transformation and Sustainable Development Cluster, he supported the development of value chains in the agriculture and livestock sectors, with the implementation of business and marketing strategies in line with market demand, including 500 women entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector on behalf of the Rapide Finance Fund (RFF).

On this International Youth Day, 12 August, from Benin to Liberia, and from Mali to Nigeria, and across Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and Guinea, UN Volunteers celebrate the potential of youth in sustainable development with partners UNICEF, IOM, and UNDP.

The message of inter-generational solidarity resonates loud and clear that youth must be included in every sphere so they are better equipped to address gender inequality, poverty reduction, social inclusion, health care and climate change mitigation.

In 2022, 89 UN Volunteers under the age of 25 served with 14 UN agencies in West and Central Africa.

West and Central Africa

- International Youth Day

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 5: Gender equality SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals