Mercy Melody Kayodi, national UN Youth Volunteer, while discussing the role of civil society in addressing food security and its effects at the United Nations Association of Uganda. © UNDP, 2022

UNDP and UNV partner to empower youth in Uganda

It is often said that old age is wisdom, and youth is creativity and energy. How powerful would it be to have a fusion of these strengths in action for sustainable development! --Mercy Kayodi, national UN Youth Volunteer Youth and Innovation Programme Officer, UNDP Uganda

Uganda has one of the youngest and most rapidly growing populations in the world. At a 3.7 per cent population growth rate, 78 per cent of Uganda’s population is under the age of 30.

Considering the immense potential of youth to the country’s development, The United Nations Development Office in Uganda undertakes several initiatives aimed at empowering
the youth of Uganda. These include skilling, innovation and entrepreneurship as catalysts to broaden UNDP’s development agenda in Uganda.

Mercy Melody Kayodi, a 29-year old Ugandan, serves as national UN Youth Volunteer Youth and Innovation Programme Officer with UNDP in Kampala. She supports partnership building efforts at UNDP Uganda, with a focus on coordinating youth development activities.

Melody’s day-to-day work includes developing concepts and ideas for youth programming, as well as designing a database and profile of youth leaders in Uganda to inform effective engagement by the Country Office. As part of her assignment, Mercy regularly engages university and secondary school students in discussions around the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (SDGs).

“Over the years, volunteering has allowed me to interact and learn from various communities across the world. The wealth of experience I have gained has shaped the nature of discussions and solutions I propose at various levels and spaces. I have learnt to be more inclusive, thoughtful and practical, while still remaining optimistic about the future. --Mercy Kayodi

Today, UNDP Uganda has a database of youth leaders from across the country through which it easily identifies the right youth networks to engage in the country programmes. Mercy believes that youth engagement is no longer a choice for development programming, but a critical necessity.

To help ensure meaningful youth engagement, Mercy interacts with colleagues at the Country Office to design community sessions with youth leaders and suggest avenues for information exchange between youth networks and UNDP. Consequently, this provides UNDP with helpful insights on areas of possible collaboration with the youth.

She also regularly collaborates with the communications team at UNDP Uganda in bringing together youth voices to inform future programming and policy. She does so through the use of digital communication channels.

Additionally, to promote inclusivity, Mercy includes marginalized groups such as refugees in community activities. By including refugee associations, she helps integrate the often farthest left behind in expanding their capabilities and skills, for example in leadership and project management.
As a UN Volunteer, Mercy gains good exposure as well. She has learnt about UNDP and UN internal processes, development programme delivery and professional networking and communications.

“Beyond contributing to the wellbeing, peace and security of communities, volunteerism keeps your knowledge, experiences, and skillset up-to-date and provides you with a wealth of knowledge. Volunteerism is a very powerful platform to learn and reimagine; and to broaden one’s impact to themselves and the world around them. Today, many young people are asked for their work experience when applying for employment. Volunteering provides an important vehicle for gaining such experience while making meaningful contribution to communities around us. --Mercy Kayodi, nati

• International Youth Day

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 4: Quality education SDG 5: Gender equality SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth SDG 10: Reduced inequalities SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals