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Ichumar Sylvia Lorot, a UN Youth Advocate for education with UNICEF in Uganda, works with fellow youth volunteers to create an enabling environment for education in the region where she grew up in Karamoja, North Eastern Uganda.

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## Young Volunteer with UNICEF creates education opportunities in her home region in Uganda

Ichumar Sylvia Lorot is a UN Youth Advocate for education with UNICEF in Uganda. Below Ichumar tells her volunteer story of how she gives back to her community through advocating for SDG 4, and the right to education for every child.

The conditions in the pastoral community of Karamoja region in North Eastern Uganda, reliant on subsistence agriculture, make it difficult to prioritize children's education without sensitizing the population to the long-term importance of school for every child. According to a 2017 survey by UNICEF, only 60 percent of young people are in school. Girls are largely looked at as a source of bride wealth while boys herd cattle for most of their lives - both responsibilities denying them an opportunity to study. Having been born in this region, I have had firsthand experience of what this means for young people. I would come home for holidays to find my peers married off or having dropped out of school. Little by little our paths were growing divergent - my girlfriends already mothers.

As I transitioned into secondary school and then to University, I realized that what I thought was a modest problem was not only regional but a national

issue. Thousands of children each year were missing out on an education for several reasons.

Thus, I developed an ardent passion towards promoting education in Karamoja and began a mentorship program for school adolescents in my community to promote education and empower them to make informed decisions for their lives. I also volunteered with Save the Children International and later joined Welthungerhilfe as a project officer in a livelihoods project that supported women through small scale businesses and entrepreneurship skills training. I loved my work, but I was more passionate about young people.

The call from UNV office was a life changing opportunity for me to contribute towards my passion on a larger platform. I was no longer a volunteer for only my small community but for thousands of children in the Karamoja region who needed an education and someone to fight for their right to it. I would also contribute to *SDG 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*

As a UN Volunteer, I advocate for better learning opportunities and outcomes; prioritizing education and development of youth lead initiatives to promote adolescent development. The assignment has given me an opportunity to influence girls and parents to pursue education. Among others, we conduct mentorship in schools to promote life skills and girl child education by engaging young people and listening to the issues that undermine their access to education. The feedback from this engagement humbles me. Achuka Paul one of the mentees wrote, *"Thanks for the program for it has been very interesting and motivating for me. Thank you so much, I have learnt a lot. It will change the lives of our young people. God bless you."*

I have learnt that there is fulfillment in selflessness and it takes willingness, positivity, and commitment to make the world a better place.



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