



Ruth Cleopatra Engmann, UN Volunteer Liaison Officer assigned to the Resident Coordinator's Office, during a group discussion with school girls in Grand Bassa County, Liberia.

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## UN Volunteers improve the access of youth to education in Africa

In West and Central Africa, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme promotes youth education by facilitating youth access to capacity building, education and professional opportunities within the UN system. In this region, where over 30 per cent of the population is between the age of 10 and 24, UNV invests in youth volunteerism as a means to empower and enable youth to contribute to peace and development.

### Promoting girls' education in Liberia

Ruth Cleopatra Engmann serves as a national UN Volunteer Field Liaison Officer for the Resident Coordinator's office in Liberia deployed in Grand Bassa County, 140 km from the capital city Monrovia. One of her key activities is to provide timely and factual situation

reports, on the political and socio-economic situation, trends and emerging issues in her area of responsibility. She thus ensures that the Resident Coordinator, UN partners and other actors are well informed, and understand the perceptions and concerns of the local population.

In the course of her work, Ruth realized that young people in the local community are facing many challenges, especially girls' access to education. In her view, there is an urgent need to raise awareness on the importance of education.

“ Some of the girls are self-supported, some drop out of school due to financial constraints, some parents do not understand the importance of the girls' contribution to society and economy, so they prioritize the boys' education more than girls. --UN Volunteer Ruth Cleopatra Engmann, Liberia

Ruth made it her objective to help as many girls as possible to access education and encourage them to stay in school. She goes frequently to the field to talk with youth especially females of different communities on many issues such as Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) or education. At times she invites prominent females to group discussions to provide mentoring platforms and tips about building confidence and self-esteem at the girls' club at Schools.

“ My passion is to see more girls taking the lead in development issues. I am proud to volunteer and work with various people and institutions in the county, to achieve this goal.

Since the beginning of her assignment as a UN Volunteer, Ruth has impacted directly on over 150 girls countrywide, including 30 girls in Grand Bassa County. In her view, the result achieved so far is that most of these girls are now outspoken, able to express themselves freely. Most of them now understand the importance of formal or informal education and are willing to engage in self-empowerment activities.

Ruth's contributions can have a meaningful impact on efforts to make education more inclusive and accessible for all youth, if replicated on a larger scale. Like Ruth, there are nine (9) other young Liberian UN Volunteers who work in the Resident Coordinator's Office, on projects engaging communities and contributing to development issues across the country.



Ruth Cleopatra Engmann, UN Volunteer Liaison Officer assigned to the Resident Coordinator's Office, after a group discussion with schoolgirls in Grand Bassa County, Liberia. ©UNV, 2019

### Transforming education through volunteerism

The education challenge is bearing on youth in Sub-Saharan Africa. Of all regions, it has the highest rates of education exclusion. According to UNESCO, almost 60 per cent of youth between the ages of 15 and 17 are not in school, while over one-fifth of children between the ages of about 6 and 11 are out of school.

For Veronique Zidi-Aporeigah, Regional Portfolio Manager UNV Office for West and Central Africa, one way to deal with this situation is to promote volunteering as a tool for young people to develop their skills and contribute directly to their communities.

“ Volunteering enables young people to work directly with communities, identify issues and find inclusive solutions to the challenges facing youth, especially education. They can, for example, promote access to informal or formal education. --Veronique Zidi-Aporeigah, UNV Regional Portfolio Manager

Clara Sagna, a Youth UN Volunteer at the UNV Regional Office in Dakar, could not agree more with the above and adds :

“ I believe promoting youth volunteerism can have an impact on the education system to allow effective promotion of equality especially for girls' rights to be educated. We need to connect education with humanity, and volunteerism can be the link".

In West and Central Africa, 180 UN Youth Volunteers serve with the various UN agencies providing support as peer educators, or officers in innovation, gender community advocates among others. Their contribution is essential to advance the efforts of UN partners to service youth and enhance access to education.



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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 4: Quality education](#) [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#)  
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