UN Volunteers conserving energy, forests and biodiversity in West and Central Africa

Environment-related issues represent one of the most pressing challenges worldwide, especially in Africa. To help communities achieve these goals, UN Volunteers in West and Central Africa are supporting sustainable livelihoods programmes that are eco-friendly or focused on waste management and wildlife conservation. Meet four UN Volunteers engaging with communities in Liberia, the Central African Republic, Nigeria and Senegal.

Ronald Cumberbatch is an international UN Volunteer from Guyana, serving as an Energy and Environment Specialist with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Liberia. He has been supporting the Good Grow Partnership (GGP) programme for almost 3 years.

Launched in 2017, the GGP programme is aimed at reducing deforestation caused by mass production of global key commodities. It also focuses on facilitating strong supply chains and creating an enabling environment in support of sustainable production.
Ronald’s main responsibilities go from policy development and organizing multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms, to leading a farmer land-use planning and development network. Ronald also contributes to the development of a national energy strategy, facilitates gender-equal access to land and oversees the implementation of a landscapes conservation agreement.

In the Central African Republic, UN Volunteers contribute to natural resources management, in support of MINUSCA peacekeeping operations. Linda Douania Mafodem is a UN Volunteer Environment Officer from Cameroon.

Linda works to rehabilitate the Kolongo landfill, the only active site in Bangui and supports community capacity-building efforts in waste management and recycling. Thanks to training sessions she organizes, she helps communities to earn an income from waste management, thereby developing livelihoods and integrating these activities in the local economy.

In close consultation with the Ministry of Environment, Linda’s efforts in rehabilitating the landfill address the alarming issue of waste recycling in the city. Within MINUSCA, Linda monitors environment issues through social activities.

Despite security concerns when travelling outside Bangui, Linda is passionate about the environment and is very committed to her work. She is also passionate about education.

In December 2019, Linda organized training for children on tree-planting initiatives and waste recycling. She has also trained cleaning teams within the mission on waste management and has educated 20 trainees through three sessions, 14 of whom were women.
Linda Douanla Mafodem, UN Volunteer Environment Officer with MINUSCA, raising awareness on waste management within the peacekeeping mission in Bangui. ©UNV, 2020

“I feel personal fulfilment from assisting low-revenue populations in finding complementary income sources through recycling. Also, thanks to all the projects I work on, I really want to bring strong assets to the host country. Globally, working with the UN is a personal achievement. --Linda Douanla Mafodem, UN Volunteer Environment Officer, MINUSCA

In Nigeria, Godfrey Oluka, an international UN Volunteer Energy and Environment Specialist
from Uganda, is serving with UNDP after many years of local volunteering in his home country. In November 2019, Godfrey joined the environment and climate change unit and is an active member of the climate change and forestry governance task force.

Godrey supports the Cross-River State’s forestry preservation programme through an investment plan and climate-related fund mobilization. So far, thanks to the team’s work, they have had to manage around 110,000 acres of forest, restored 10,000 acres of degraded forest reserve area, and managed to 364,000 acres of reserve landscape under the Cross-River state’s national park. The number of direct beneficiaries of the project is currently estimated at 2,000 people from 60 communities; 35 per cent of them women.

In the context of projects for the rehabilitation and restoration of environmental resources, UN Volunteers support communities with sustainable income generation and livelihoods from agricultural production. **Mame Diarra Sow** is a national UN Volunteer Programme Associate in charge of climate resilience and agriculture with UN Women’s regional office, based in Dakar.

For more than a year now, Mame Diarra has been working with the Women’s Economic Empowerment Unit, focused on food autonomy through the Agriculture, Women and Sustainable Development (AGRIFED) programme. This was launched in Senegal and Mali in close collaboration with rural women’s economic cooperatives.

In Senegal alone, 16,000 women have engaged in collaboration with REFAB – the network of women in organic agriculture – through financing, knowledge and technology transfer, and market creation.

Mame Diarra and her colleagues at UN Women aim to reach more than 50,000 women agriculture entrepreneurs by 2021 through the AGRIFED programme.

Mame Diarra’s contribution to the team, in addition to the level of complexity and responsibility of the tasks undertaken, has been increasing gradually. She is increasingly contributed to drafting important programmatic documents in the area of Climate Smart Agriculture. With the required support and supervision, she is able to produce high-quality technical inputs. Elena Ruiz Abril, Policy Advisor for Women's Economic Empowerment, UN Women Regional Office for West and Central Africa

Volunteering in the field of the environment remains a priority, especially in the COVID-19 context. The testimonies of Ronald, Linda, Mame Diarra and Godfrey highlight their
commitment and passion, regardless of the challenges. They work alongside more than 160 UN Volunteers worldwide, who share the same engagement in addressing climate change and protecting biodiversity and wildlife, together with host communities.

• Coronavirus • COVID-19 • Liberia • Central African Republic • MINUSCA • Nigeria • Senegal

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation, SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy, SDG 13: Climate change, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals