29 May 2015

Being a Civil Affairs officer in Côte d'Ivoire

**Man, Côte d'Ivoire:** Originally from Niger, My name is Samira Keita and I am a United Nations Volunteer Civil Affairs Officer in Man, Ivory Coast. Having earned a Master’s Degree in NGO Management and Development from the London School of Economics in the United Kingdom, I was first introduced to the work of the United Nations while interning at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Geneva,
becoming a consultant in the aftermath.

I became a UN volunteer after having subsequently served in different NGOs where I worked for the promotion of democracy, enhancing the participation of women in political processes and empowering the national governance in Niger, my home country. I also served as an election observer in the Ivory Coast.

Indeed, I expressed interest in the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) Program. To my mind, becoming a volunteer was an entry-point: it would allow me to diversify my experience, increase my knowledge of the context in Ivory Coast and work more closely with local communities. I also worked on joint projects with the UN mission in Liberia on security issues across the Ivorian and Liberian borders.

As a UN Volunteer Civil Affairs Officer in Man, my mission aimed at backing the government through local authorities and local populations in the national reconciliation process. In this regard, empowering social cohesion was achieved through trainings, meetings, and sits-ins, bringing together community groups to share information and find potential solutions. In addition to that, I was the interim Office Coordinator for six months and was charged of managing the Man office, linking the field and regional offices as well as the headquarters.

During this time, I represented the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations for Côte d’Ivoire in her zone of responsibility across the political, civil, national and local authority’s spheres.

Routinely, as the only civilian woman in the field office of Man, I used to spend my mornings in office before meeting traditional leaders and local community groups at the Town Hall to discuss the daily problems they face, trying to further achieve social cohesion and dialogue through trainings in conflict management and capacity building.

When we identify conflicts in given areas, we undertake what are called inter-communal dialogues, where we meet with the different parties in conflict and talk with them, first separately and then together, providing the opportunity for the parties to suggest solutions to their problems. While there are several types of conflict, in my zone they are mostly land issues.

I particularly enjoyed interacting with local populations and responding to their needs and concerns through various activities in line with the mission’s mandate, describing the capacity-building workshop for traditional leaders in Bangolo, co-organizing as an achievement and success during my mission, on both substantive and technical levels. In fact, the meeting brought together 500 chiefs who ended up setting a peace committee.

To conclude, “The volunteer spirit can be indeed enriching. Anyone who goes through this experience comes out of it stronger and richer, with enhanced capacities and a broader vision of peacekeeping.” I highly recommend people to volunteer and contribute to the
empowerment of communities as much as getting a true hands-on experience and knowledge.

Sub-Saharan Africa

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