"If I have given a lot as a volunteer, I have received so much more in return from the experience"

Duekoue, Côte d’Ivoire: When I received the offer to serve as a UNV Electoral Advisor with the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB), all I knew about elections was that there were electoral campaigns and voting; and as for volunteering - I am speaking here of the program - I had only a vague idea.

The first few years were a true apprenticeship in which I was happy to learn how to do the work I had signed on for in a multicultural and diverse environment that was at times quite hostile, with regard to both my colleagues and the local population.

Today, I am a UNV Civil Affairs Officer with the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire. I am based in Duekoue, a city situated 502 km from Abidjan in the west of Côte d’Ivoire, where the population paid the highest price during the post-election crisis.
The job assigned to me each day is to work to restore the State’s authority and social cohesion, to promote national reconciliation through peaceful management of conflicts, as well as to raise awareness about the culture of peace and to organize intercommunity dialogue sessions.

As part of my work, I am in constant contact with the local authorities, the traditional and religious authorities, and the population in all its diversity. To do this work successfully, I rely on local NGOs, women’s associations, and youth groups.

If I have given a lot as a volunteer, I have received so much more in return from the experience. From one mission to another, I gained experience that I shared with other people in other missions. I had the pleasure and joy of meeting distinguished people from all over the world, to travel, to discover the cultural diversity that characterizes the United Nations environment and all the countries I visited, to make friends everywhere I went -enemies too, but not many.

As a UN Volunteer, I am proud to have made a modest contribution to development and to restoring peace in the world through the missions in which I have served.

On 8 March 2014, the women of Duekoue are celebrating International Women’s Day in an atmosphere of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous shopkeepers in the city’s markets, where as a result of the post-election crisis, many of them have been in conflict with each other.

This day is the apotheosis of a series of intercommunity dialogue sessions that I organized with my colleagues, in partnership with the local Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission under President Charles Konan Banny and the local NGO Bonne Action.

This reconciliation of the women of Duekoue will be the most cherished memory I will take away with me at the end of my mission.

Bio: Annie Michèle Wabo, from Cameroon, is a UNV Civil Affairs Officer with the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire. She has been a UN Volunteer for several years. A linguist by training with a doctorate in African language phonology, she was a temporary French teacher in Libreville, Gabon, before signing on as a UN Volunteer.

Story translated from French by UN Online Volunteer Denise Pavao.
Sub-Saharan Africa

• Côte d'Ivoire • ONUB • civil affairs • national reconciliation

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 5: Gender equality, SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions