Rosilândia is a community volunteer who contributes her time and efforts for the progress of women in her community in Cuntum, Bissau, as part of the UNDP UNV project Reinforcement of the capacity and coordination mechanisms of CSOs to attain the MDGs in Guinea-Bissau. (Yanira Santana/UNV, 2013)

"To invest in the progress of women is to invest in the progress of the entire community"

Bissau, Guinea-Bissau: Having grown up in her birthplace Cuntum, Bissau, Rosilândia spends time volunteering there to help better the future of the most vulnerable women in her community. She is one of the young women in the area who is convinced that equality for women is beneficial to the whole community. Rosilândia works as a community volunteer trainer, involved with helping Cuntum’s vulnerable women learn how to read and write.

With funding from the UNDP-UNV project Reinforcement of the capacity and coordination mechanisms of CSOs to attain the MDGs in Guinea-Bissau, the National Nucleus of Technicians on Social Intervention (NUNATIS) developed the pilot project Supporting literacy for vulnerable women and girls in Cuntum and Cuntum Madina, Bissau.

Why have I devoted so much time and effort to the future of women in my community?
Rasilândia asks with a smile. “Because I know that to invest in the progress of women is to invest in the progress of the entire community.”

It was four years ago that she began volunteering in the community, in efforts to spread change and development across Cuntum, through the women’s and youth associations with which she was affiliated. “I believe in change. It is possible. Working together makes it possible,” she says with conviction.

She embraced the opportunity to volunteer in the NUNATIS pilot project and provide literacy support for Cuntum’s vulnerable women. “In my community, illiteracy really took its toll on the women of my mother’s generation. Or even on the younger women; it is not easy for them to not have any more access to school,” she adds. For Guinea-Bissau, as the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) shows, data explains the correlation between the prevalence of early marriage, and other customary norms, and the lack of resources among the number of reasons keeping women from becoming literate.

“Women influence the development of this country, the community and their families. This influence involves their contributions to broadening the capacities in their homes. Literacy helps them support their families, and not just financially,” Rosilândia points out. “Literacy has made them realize how important it is to attend and succeed in school. As a result, it is in their own homes that they have begun instilling the importance of literacy: they help their children with schoolwork, with an awareness of their responsibility to show other women in their community how important it is.”

For Rosilândia, it is a matter of pride: “The reward for my volunteer efforts as literacy coordinator in this pilot project is the pride I feel when I see the women in my community developing their results driven activities and asking for money, contacting their clients by text, or doing addition with no hesitation. The pride I feel even when they show me their signatures on the identity cards they just acquired.”

“I am especially proud of what they represent for me: the drive, the motivation. I know that these are small contributions and baby steps, but I also know that these women play a strong, steady role in the development of my community.”

Story translated from French by UN Online Volunteer Mimi Chakrabarty.
Sub-Saharan Africa

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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 5: Gender equality, SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth