

Programmes

Story

08 December 2014

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Supporting the creation of West Africa's first law on volunteerism and providing education to the most needy

A groundbreaking partnership led to the development of the first national law on volunteerism in West Africa, and mobilized more than 13,000 youth volunteers to support national development in the region.



Christine Ouedrago, a volunteer primary school teacher with the Burkina Faso National Volunteer Programme, is one of the increasing number of young Burkinabé who are getting involved in the development of their country. Christine had more than 50 students in her class in the village of Worokuy in the Boucle de Mouhoun region. (Giacomo Pirozzi/UNV, 2010)

A groundbreaking partnership between the Burkina Faso Ministry of Youth and Employment, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme and France Volontaires in 2007 led to the development of the first national law on volunteerism in West Africa, and mobilized more than 13,000 youth volunteers to support national development, including more than a thousand young volunteer teachers who served in classrooms that otherwise would have been closed due to a lack of staff.

For Burkina Faso's large population of young people, social and economic conditions are difficult. Sixty-five percent of the unemployed are aged 24 and under, young people are often excluded from training opportunities, and young people and women are not always adequately involved in political and social decision-making processes.

The Programme National de Volontariat du Burkina Faso (PNVB) was developed to establish a mechanism for the promotion and development of national volunteerism in Burkina Faso. Specifically, it aimed to establish a national volunteer pilot scheme in six regions, in which a first group of volunteers for development would be fielded. By maximizing the engagement of volunteers, especially young men and women in the development of the country, the project aimed to contribute to poverty reduction.

UNV played a critical role as the implementing partner, providing technical support with regards to setting up the volunteer scheme, strengthening the government's capacity to recruit and field volunteers, and ensuring that a

monitoring and evaluation system was in place to capture relevant data for statistics, learning and decision-making purposes.

An international UN Volunteer led the overall project implementation until early 2009, working side-by-side with the national Director General of the programme, who later took over, supported by a number of national UN Volunteers in a range of monitoring and evaluation, capacity building, and training roles. UNV also assisted with training volunteers, and running public awareness campaigns.

The programme national de volontariat du Burkina Faso was made possible by contributions from the government of Burkina Faso, UNDP, UNV and L'association Française des Volontaires de Progrès (AFVP) now renamed 'France Volontaires'.

The project was highly successful in establishing a legal framework for volunteerism in Burkina Faso (Law 031-AN/2007 adopted in November 2007). In fact, it was the first in West Africa to lead to the development of a national law on volunteerism, and it provided a model for other countries such as Togo and Mali to develop their own laws.

In Togo, the Law on Volunteerism was adopted in February 2011 and two laws were adopted in Mali: one on volunteerism in general and another regarding the National Centre for the Promotion of Volunteerism (CNPV). Senegal and Burundi sent teams to visit Burkina Faso to study the project and, based on the PNVB experience, develop their own national volunteer programmes.

The project also achieved its objectives with regards to establishing youth volunteering initiatives in six regions. Critical to this was the designation, by government decree, of the PNVB as the country's first *Groupement Intérêt Publique (GIP)*. GIP is a groundbreaking type of public interest group which brings together local authorities, the state, public institutions, workers unions and public or private entities to work towards a single public goal, in this case volunteerism.

Importantly, while it gets subsidies from the central government, it has financial autonomy, which means that it can transcend political motivations to act in the public interest. PNVB is represented in eight regions by NGOs at the regional level, recruited in a transparent, consultative process. UNV's extensive experience as a bridge between government, civil society, and the UN system enabled it to provide an important technical advisor role in this process.

Finally, the project mobilized more than 13,000 youth volunteers between 2008 and 2012, 53% of whom were young women. The volunteers were actively involved in the education, health, environment and government sectors. According to PNVB, more than 66% of the volunteers recruited in 2013 were able to get decent paid jobs following their volunteering experience, which is a good indication of the programme's contribution to the improvement of youth employability.

One group of volunteers provided microcredit loans and financial training to young women in rural areas through women's associations, empowering them through greater financial independence and giving them the knowledge to manage their capital.

Therese Sankara, who produces a local millet beer called 'dolo', is one of many beneficiaries who managed to increase their income through the initiative. Her microcredit loan of 50,000 FCFA (around US\$96) permitted her to buy and stock a large quantity of millet just after the harvest when the price was several times lower than the rest of year. Now she can produce much more beer at a lower cost. "Before I earned 750 FCFA in a day... now I can [make as much as] 2,000 FCFA (US\$3.80). It helps me take care of my children's health and schooling", she says.

In 2012, working through PNVB the government was able to supplement a shortage of teachers in remote rural areas. Some 806 youth volunteer teachers were mobilized to provide young people (especially primary level students) with access to education. Thanks to the project, more than 30,000 elementary school students were able to attend classes in classrooms that would have otherwise remained closed.

The project, which is continuing to mobilize volunteers, was equally beneficial for the volunteers involved. Many of these were recent graduates unable to find work, like Christine Ouedraogo:

"After getting a degree from school teacher training, I was unable to find employment and didn't have an income. However, then I heard about the project and, after submitting an application and passing a test, I was selected to teach at the school Worokuy in the city of Dédougou, Province of Mouhoun. Today I earn \$85 per month and above all I am fortunate to serve others and to practice my skills."

The programme is also contributing to social inclusion, as indicated in this testimony of a parent of a student at a rehabilitation centre for people who are deaf:

"Since my son has been learning carpentry here, thanks to Wenceslas, their hearing-impaired trainer, I am not worried about his future. Two years ago he was always at home, instead of going to school with his classmates. Now, at 11 years old, he's learning a trade that could be useful to him. I can see that it's already been good for him as he has become less taciturn and much happier. I encourage young people to get involved with volunteering. I can't express enough how good it is for people with no financial resources like us."

Professor Justin Koutaba, former Minister for Youth and Employment, summarises the contribution of the programme to Burkina Faso in these terms:

"Personally I think very highly of the National Volunteer Programme of Burkina Faso. Given the results after the five years of the project phase, I think it's a useful programme— above all for the volunteers themselves. They have the opportunity to expand their talents and capabilities, as well as the opportunity to exercise good citizenship by improving their employability."

"Secondly, it is useful for public administration, the urban and rural municipalities, the associations and NGOs, because the national volunteers are a human resource that helps overcome the lack of staff and expertise. The support of PNVB for education, for example, is clear, without which many children, particularly in the remote areas, would never have been able to get to school."

In addition to fielding volunteers within the programme, PNVB also promoted other forms of volunteerism and organized post-volunteer training to prepare the former volunteers for an entry test in the public administration. By enabling young people to become national volunteers, the programme put their skills at the service of the community and helped them to develop a good sense of civic identity while gaining professional experience and increasing their employment prospects.

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