How UNV helped ECOWAS set up its Volunteer Programme

By far the best part of my job is meeting volunteers. On Wednesday, I met Joseph. He is from Nigeria and a volunteer in Sierra Leone, as part of the Economic Commission of West African states (ECOWAS) Volunteer Programme (EVP), the first regional Volunteer scheme in the world.

Joseph Uzaka Munoye is a basic Science teacher at the oldest secondary school in the country, called Anna Walsh, since September 2017. He didn’t hide his appreciation that the joint ECOWAS-UNV team was paying him a courtesy visit to see how his assignment was going.

I was not only captivated by his contagious smile, but also by Joseph’s words on how this volunteer experience in Sierra Leone is enriching him.

Joseph Uzaka Munoye (centre, from Nigeria), an ECOWAS Volunteer serving as a Science teacher at a secondary school in Sierra Leone with his students and representatives of ECOWAS.
Alan Young, UNV Programme Officer in Sierra Leone is on the far right. (UNV, 2018)

During the past week, I travelled to Freetown to meet with representatives of the ECOWAS Sports and Youth Development Centre, who are based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

In 2004, ECOWAS approached UNV in Bonn for technical assistance to set up a regional volunteer scheme for youth from the 15 ECOWAS member states to serve as volunteers in the reconstruction of countries emerging from violent conflict, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, with the financial support of the African Development Bank (ADB).

Most people only know UNV as the UN entity that promotes volunteerism in the UN system through the deployment of UN Volunteers, and only few people know that UNV indeed provides technical programmatic support in setting up such schemes as the ECOWAS Volunteer Programme.

This week marked an important step in the maturation of the EVP. While at the start of the programme it was externally funded by UNV and ADB and managed by UNV, the EVP is now not only financed through its own resources, but it is run by and for EVP Volunteers.

The role of UNV is now focused on continuing sharing experiences and technical advice and facilitating a final set of residual logistical support. The objective is for the EVP to become fully independent from UNV where we will interact purely as institutional partners who both want to advance on the Sustainable Development Goals through Volunteerism.

Currently, there are 40 EVP Volunteers from 13 ECOWAS member states serving in the education and health sectors in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

In Sierra Leone, 10 additional volunteers will be deployed later this year, as well as a first cohort of 10 volunteers in Guinea Bissau.

"UNV is a proud partner of ECOWAS in realizing the aim to multiply as many volunteer opportunities to young women and men in West Africa to share knowledge and experience, and to learn about their neighboring countries in the years ahead."
I return back to the office with the smile of Joseph fresh in my memory, even more determined to promote volunteerism as a valuable way to engage people in the advancement of peace and development in West and Central Africa.

Sub-Saharan Africa

- ECOWAS • Liberia • Guinea-Bissau

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals