Youth volunteerism for sustainable peace and development in West and Central Africa

Dakar, 24 September 2018 – The future lies in the hands and minds of youth. Currently, over 64 percent of our region is under the age of 25 years old. While, according to the UN report "World Prospects 2015", half of the under-25s in the world will be African in 2100.
Understanding how to tap into the young population in West and Central Africa is essential to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Most of youth in the region are facing several major challenges; including access to education, employment and health care, which causes some to emigrate or even to radicalize. Whereas engaging young people’s imaginations, talents and energy for the future is the way we can achieve the SDGs for all.

Through volunteerism, better career prospects are provided to young minds. There is no faster, more efficient and rewarding way than volunteerism, which is a world of "giving and receiving", which promotes social inclusion,
capacity building and access to new opportunities.

The United Nations Volunteer (UNV) programme is convinced that youth engagement and participation through volunteerism is also essential to ensuring lasting peace and stability within communities. Youth volunteerism helps people gain more confidence in their own societies, improve their skills, and provides a meaning to their lives.

UNV is a United Nations (UN) organization that contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for recognition of volunteers, working with partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing an increasing number and diversity of volunteers throughout the world.

Since 2014, 173 UN Volunteers have been deployed in Senegal, including 83 UN Volunteers in 2018, who are currently working with different UN partner agencies.

UNV has created and implemented initiatives for young people, such as the UN Youth Volunteers Programme and the UN Volunteers University Volunteers programme, which the organization plans to expand in West and Central Africa.

Recently, UNV signed a partnership with Institut supérieur de management (Higher Institute of Management – ISM) in Senegal to provide volunteering opportunities for ISM students as UN University Volunteers. The main goal of this joint project is to enhance the capacity and engagement of youth in development issues and prepare them to be actors of change.

UNV is strengthening its partnerships with United Nations partners and the private sector in Senegal and the region, to encourage young people to participate in the fulfillment of the United Nations mandate in many areas. UN Volunteers assigned in the region are volunteering along UN staff in areas such as: the access to health care and basic education, the fight against poverty, environmental degradation, social exclusion and violent conflict, disaster risk reduction and gender equality.

In the region, UNV's commitment to youth has had a direct and positive impact on the environment and people's lives.

For example, in Senegal, Ramatoulaye Dia is a UN Youth Volunteer serving as Executive Assistant at the UN Women Regional Office in Dakar. In her view, volunteering with UNV is a great opportunity to gain experience and contribute to development.

There was a moment when I wondered about my future, about what I would do, and then I came across this great opportunity to serve as a UN Volunteer advocate for women. I am really grateful to UNV for this, says Dia.

Rokhaya Ngom, from Senegal, is also a UN Youth Volunteer serving as a youth advocate with UNICEF. She acts as the focal point between UNICEF and youth associations throughout Senegal and works to increase young people's engagement in development issues. Rokhaya uses social media as a key tool in strategies for sustainable development. In her view, building on youth's skills in terms of innovation can help reach higher and better results.

I just wanted to work with UNICEF to get more young people involved in development issues in Senegal. Working as a UN Volunteer made me realize that I can accomplish even bigger objectives. To me, volunteerism is a door open to numerous opportunities to learn, develop, help, participate, accomplish and be successful, says Ngom.

UNV will continue to encourage and promote youth empowerment across the region and beyond to participate in the development of their communities and the achievement of the SDGs for everyone.

EDITORS NOTE
Toily Kurbanov, Deputy Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is in Dakar on a two-day official visit to Senegal (23-24 September). He will hold meetings with officials of different UN agencies and government departments to understand more how UNV can promote volunteerism to further enhance efforts to peace and sustainable development in West and Central Africa.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. UNV works with partners to integrate qualified, highly motivated and well supported UN Volunteers into development programming and promote the value and global recognition of volunteerism.

In 2017, 6,501 UN Volunteers from over 100 different professions, including 1,820 UN Youth Volunteers, served with 35 United Nations partners on the ground worldwide. The UNV regional office for West and Central Africa covers 24 countries, offering volunteering opportunities to populations and helping different partners implement projects and programmes through various modalities of UN Volunteers.

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