Saana Ahonen, UN Volunteer Climate Change Specialist with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, during the National Policy Dialogue on Promoting Green Growth held in October 2019 in Kampala, Uganda

Supporting climate action in East and Southern Africa

Saana Ahonen is a Finnish-born global citizen serving as a UN Volunteer Climate Change Specialist with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Saana is the 500th UN Volunteer fully funded by Finland since 1974 and deployed through the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. Since October 2019, she has been assigned to the UNFCCC Regional Collaboration Centre in Kampala, Uganda. Saana shares her experience at the centre, which supports countries in East and Southern Africa in climate action.

Africa has been identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as the continent most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Ecosystems are already being affected and future impacts could be substantial.

East and Southern Africa has been experiencing more frequent extreme weather events and changing rainfall patterns, leading to droughts in some
areas and flooding in others. The region’s population is highly dependent on rain-fed agriculture, making it particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including potential effects on food security.

I have over seven years of experience in international development, specifically in designing, implementing and managing donor-funded development projects and programmes mainly in climate change mitigation, sustainable natural resources management, and innovation and private sector development. In my professional life, I am passionate about contributing to global low carbon, climate-resilient development, essential for economic prosperity, social well-being and environmental sustainability.

I decided to apply to the UNV programme as I wanted to better understand the challenges and needs arising from climate change in the East and Southern Africa region and to contribute my skills and experience to climate action, catalysed by the UNFCCC at local and regional levels through the regional collaboration centres (RCCs). The RCC partnership model plays an important role in ensuring a regional focus to achieve results for climate action through activities tailored to local circumstances, and engaging with relevant local and regional stakeholders to ensure their effective implementation.

RCC Kampala operates in collaboration with regional partners to support countries within the region to address the pressing need to become more climate resilient and steer their economies to low carbon development.

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To effectively deliver on its mandate, the RCC relies on financial and in-kind resources from different partners. Saana is one such resource and the RCC is very grateful to the Government of Finland, through UNV, for facilitating the deployment of a resource with highly relevant qualifications and skills at a very critical moment. Saana has hit the ground running, thanks to her great interest and pragmatic approach in seeking ways to contribute in key areas of work. Her output will certainly make a difference in the coming year, in particular in areas such as mitigation, reporting and verification, climate finance and carbon markets. –William Otieno, RCC Kampala
My work in the first two months of my assignment has included supporting the Clean Development Mechanism projects. These include various processes around climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as supporting climate-change related events and activities, such as the development of climate finance and mobilization access strategies.

As the first ever UN Volunteer to support RCC Kampala, I have been warmly welcomed by my colleagues, including introducing me to the delicacy of the rainy season in Uganda: fried grasshoppers! From my experience so far, I can warmly recommend the UNV programme to anyone willing to dedicate part of their career to support UN agencies in their work and interested in getting the life-changing experience of living and working in another culture. For myself, I look forward to many more memorable moments from my assignment and life here in the pearl of Africa. --Saana Ahonen, UN Volunteer Climate Change Specialist, UNFCCC

Next year will be particularly interesting as the negotiations at the ongoing COP25 are expected to provide guidance on various issues, including Article 6, which is a voluntary set of tools to support implementation to allow for higher ambition in Nationally-Determined Contributions under the Paris Climate Agreement.

RCC support includes connecting local and regional climate action to intergovernmental processes, enhancing regional and local participation in UNFCCC processes, promoting South-South exchange of information and good practices, facilitating finance frameworks to channel climate finance to the region, identifying gaps and barriers for effective implementation of
NDCs, and coordinating and aligning the regional response to climate change for achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals.

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Saana Ahonen holds a Master of Science degree in Environmental Science and Technology, specialized in renewable energy technologies, and a Bachelor’s degree in Environmental Engineering. She is a certified expert in Climate and Renewable Energy Finance. She started her career doing research on sustainable transport fuels in Finland and Estonia, and has since worked in Southeast Asia, East and Southern Africa and Eastern Europe.

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📍 Sub-Saharan Africa

- UNFCCC • Finland • full funding programme • COP25

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 13: Climate change, SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals