

[Bonn: At UN climate conference, Congo Basin youth spotlight their work protecting fragile forest ecosystem](#)

9 November 2017 – Youth groups working in Africa’s Congo Basin countries are supporting economic progress in isolated rural communities while protecting the forest, and a young woman at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 23) in Bonn, Germany, said it is time their voices were heard.

Youth groups working in Africa’s Congo Basin countries are supporting economic progress in isolated rural communities while protecting the forest, and a young woman at the United Nations Climate Change Conference ([COP23](#)) in Bonn, Germany, said it that is time their voices were heard.

“Young people in the Congo Basin have been doing things on the ground that often go ignored,” explained Marie Tamoifo, President of the Cameroon Green Youth Association (Association de la Jeunesse verte du Cameroun – AJVC) and Regional Coordinator of the Youth Network for sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Central Africa (Réseau des jeunes pour la gestion durable des écosystèmes forestiers d’Afrique centrale – REJEFAC) in an interview with *UN News*.

REJEFAC brings together youth organizations from 10 Congo Basin countries –Burundi, Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe and Chad).

Its aim is to promote the effective participation of young environmental actors in decision-making in the Congo Basin and “to contribute to the emergence in the region of a new type of leadership, more sensitive and open to the requirements of sustainable development.”

“[As for] actions on the ground, there are reforestation, awareness and education programmes for young people. It’s about strengthening the work that is done by governments,” said Ms. Tamoifo.

A solar panel programme in isolated communities

For several years, AJVC has been developing a programme in Cameroon for the electrification of isolated rural areas with solar panels. The programme started in 15 pilot communities in the east, in the center and in the far north of the country with the installation of solar panels in homes and schools. A contribution is made by the community itself, representing 25 to 30 per cent of the cost.

“In these 15 communities, we trained 85 young people in solar installation techniques but also in psycho-socio-organizational methodology,” explained Ms Tamoifo. “When we arrive in a community, we first hold a discussion with that

community. We try to see with [them] what the glaring problems are.”

The youth participating in this programme are from the community. They are trained and they provide maintenance for the solar panels that have already been installed. “For now, they are not really paid. They receive a small allowance,” added Ms.Tamoifo.

The association needs more financial support to maintain and expand this programme. “We have received more than 100 requests from villages and we cannot answer them given [our] modest means. And young people who are trained today also need to make a living to be able to continue this work,” she said.

A ‘climate caravan’ in Cameroon

Among other actions carried out by young people in the Congo Basin region, the REJEFAC Coordinator mentioned a tree planting initiative by volunteers in the Republic of Congo, and a programme focusing on handicrafts and conservation of natural resources in Rwanda.

Before coming to COP 23, the network organized a ‘climate caravan’ in Cameroon with the participation of young people from the ten countries of the Congo Basin to show what youth organizations are doing in terms of sustainable development and protection of the planet.

“We organized this caravan which was named ‘the COP at home,’” said the Coordinator of REJEFAC. Young people have been designated as climate ambassadors.

The ‘climate caravan’ travelled in the Douala region, coastal areas and went to Equatorial Guinea. “It showed how we could talk about the theoretical aspect and go on the ground to experience the realities of conservation parks and conflicts between humans and elephants,” concluded Ms. Tamoifo.