

Sylvia Pitimbaye Interview

Chad

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What initially got you interested in working in the environmental welfare and/or the sustainability sector?

“The issue of environmental management is becoming increasingly acute in African countries. Most of the continent's environmental problems stem from poverty and lack of education. These countries, including Chad - a Central African country heavily affected by climate change and by far the least prepared to deal with its effects - must make great efforts and demonstrate education to prepare future generations to deal with environmental problems. In the face of these challenges, the public authorities have not stopped at national legislation, regulations, and the ratification of several international conventions and agreements on environmental protection. They pleaded for the mobilization of the educational community in the fight for the protection and restoration of the environment.

Marked by poverty and strong demographic growth, Chad is subject to strong environmental constraints (droughts, progressive drying up of Lake Chad, irregular rainfall, recurrent pollution, conflicts between herders and farmers, progressive advance of the desert, etc.), today amplified by disturbances affecting the whole planet (climate change). Faced with the alarming degradation of its environment, Toumaï Country has become aware of the urgency of becoming aware of environmental issues and the need to implement concrete actions to ensure sustainable management of its natural resources in order to ensure sustainable development.

Key figures to know about Chad:

- Area: 1,284,000 km²
- Population: 16.8 million inhabitants in 2021, (INSEED).
- Density: 13.1 inhabitants/Km² in 2021, (INSEED).
- Deforestation: 2.5 ha/year (FAO. Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020 - Chad - National Report. Rome - FAO, 64p) are destroyed each year due to bush fires and human activities.
- Lake Chad: the surface area of the lake has decreased from 25,000 km² in 1963 to 1,350 km² today. 80-90% of the livelihood of the population of Lake Chad depends on agriculture, livestock, and fishing (Ritimo, 2020).
- Households: 76% of households use wood fuels for household energy (Gunning, 2014) and among the poorest, only 6.1% use gas.
- Rural population: the rural population accounts for just over 76.7%.
- Population growth: 3.3% (2019).
- Adult literacy rate (15 years and older): 40.2% (2019).
- Human Development Index (HDI): of just 0.398, it ranks 187th out of 189.

Being a poor and underdeveloped country, Chad suffers enormously from plastic waste pollution, all cities are submerged by plastic waste, everywhere the environment is degraded playing negatively on the health of the population and animals. However, neither the producers, nor the importers, even less

the consumers, are sensitized or informed on the dangers related to plastic waste, hence the need for this awareness campaign and plastic waste management in Chad.

In Chad, 20 tons of plastic waste are produced annually. The city of N'Djamena alone generates 19,764 tons of plastic waste per year, according to official figures given by the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Fisheries (Association Agir pour le Développement Durable).

Driven by the entrepreneurial spirit since my childhood and guided by the love of nature I decided to specialize in recycling and environmental education because I am concerned about the environment and the well-being of the planet.”

Please describe the work you are doing around environmental welfare and sustainability.

“As I am passionate about decoration, I have created a recycling structure called "Noudji Décor and Art," a socio-educational project initiated with the aim of raising awareness and mobilizing the Chadian population in general, and Ndjamenana in particular, on the system of transformation of plastic waste (bottles) and used tires into useful objects, manufacturing of garbage bins and ecological paving stones. The decorative objects can be used for living rooms, offices, parties, etc.

The main mission is to protect the environment and introduce young people to the importance of waste recycling. Being an active member of the International Student Environmental Coalition (ISEC), which is a global youth-led network that provides youth with the resources and organizing power to engage in grassroots movements for climate justice, the main goals are:

- Unite youth to take action on climate change globally, with a focus on improving those on the front lines and in the global South.
- Mobilize youth to address the roots of the climate crisis, namely capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and racism.
- Challenge corporations, governments, and institutions responsible for the climate crisis.
- Promote holistic support for individuals and groups in their climate justice projects.

For ISEC, it is important to educate young children about the climate issue, because they are the ones we need to fight for today. The questions we ask today in relation to climate change are to ensure a better environment for future generations.

For ISEC CHAD, youth have the power to solve the challenges we face in our community. They are not only the actors of the future, but more importantly the leaders of today. However, they are often ignored and overlooked. With a diverse leadership team of the most dedicated youth leaders, including myself, and other visionaries, and dissatisfied with the space for socio-environmental progress in Chad, ISEC Chad strives to activate youth leadership so that they can lead the way in solving these challenges and defending their own hopes.

When it comes to climate justice, the question to ask is not Why? But rather Why not?

Our vision is to build a bridge between the actions our community needs today and a green future free of climate change, desertification, plastic waste, and fossil fuels. Contribute to building a world where young people can dream bigger and be fully engaged in achieving the UN's 2030 SDG's and updating the African Union's 2063 agenda.

ISEC Chad's approaches to sustainability are:

Education: We make environmental education for all and early awareness of future generations our main focus to enable young people to understand the issues of environmental protection from the ground up.

Leadership: We identify junior leaders, elevate them, and amplify their voices, equipping them with the tools and mindset to awaken their genius for creativity and green influence in helping their schools and communities solve environmental challenges.

Innovation: We continually strive to develop new ways to better solve our community's problems by thinking creatively and innovatively.

Impact: We aim to make a meaningful impact on a personal and collective level that can be measured, seen, felt, and touched at all levels of our community and beyond. Dare to invent the inspiring model of green schools through a school leadership program.”

Who is the target audience to get involved with your projects?/How do you engage your community in learning about these projects?

“We work with young people in the framework of training in recycling management, especially young girls who are more involved, raising awareness of the population on waste management and their implications as a key player in the management of the fight against climate change.

- Schools through environmental education in schools and universities.

- NGOs and state organizations through partnerships

- Households for recycling procedures.”

What is your favorite environmental education activity for your community?

“For recycling projects, we work directly with households through waste collection. We do training and awareness sessions where we have reached a large number of the population affected by our activities. Our products through recycling are intended for consumption by households, companies, restaurants etc.

For the school education project we do awareness sessions in schools from where we put ambassador clubs in schools for citizen actions towards the environment.”

Do you envision any ways in which your projects can be applied in the context of the United States?

“Yes, of course I strongly consider this alternative. Environmental challenges are now a global problem that knows no borders, no nationality, and no religion. To overcome these challenges, we all need strong, coordinated, and ambitious action. I believe this project is one that can make a difference here in the United States. For children who are well trained and equipped to protect the environment today are tomorrow's eco-responsible leaders who will provide the informed solutions and expertise for the sustainable development and betterment that we want to create.”

Are there any ways for people from the United States to get involved with your project?/What would you like our readers to know about your project?

“Well, that's my overriding goal, to have a forward-thinking cross-border collaboration to address our common challenges. It would be an opportunity to combine efforts and celebrate the creativity of Chadian and American youth for a just and worthy cause. This involvement should be possible through exchange programs, skills transfer, and professional mobility related to the critical issues of recycling, climate change, sustainable development, and nature conservation, drawing inspiration from each other, what can be done here in Chad and replicated in Chad and vice versa.

The U.S. Embassy in Chad can already be our first partner and could pave the way for other American organizations and foundations. We have many impactful projects but are too limited as a youth organization in a developing country and our capacity to respond is really low. Any constructive collaboration would only be of added value to us.

What I want readers to take away from this project is that there is no Planet B, and that to save the future of humanity we must act with solidarity, creativity, compassion and resilience as teammates and inhabitants of a single burning village.

There is an African proverb that says: **Alone we go fast, together we go farther.**”

Social media handles:

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/noudjidecorand/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/noudjidecor>, <https://www.facebook.com/isecc Chad/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/74993771/admin/>