

ACTORS FOR CHANGE:  
**WOMEN**  
LEADERS FROM THE FAR NORTH  
OF CAMEROON



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This brochure tells the story of the extraordinary journey of the young women who were trained as leaders within the framework of the Inclusive Leadership Programme (ILP) implemented by Human Security Collective (HSC) and Dynamique Mondiale des Jeunes (DMJ) in the Far North region of Cameroon. Read on to discover how the programme has helped these women to unleash their potential and have a positive impact on their communities.

These courageous women now represent hope and a valuable resource for promoting women's rights and peace building in a region of Cameroon where women's rights are often overlooked.

They also play a key role in implementing projects aimed at improving living conditions within their communities and fostering harmonious coexistence. Throughout the Inclusive Leadership Programme, each of them has chosen a positive descriptive adjective that best represents her. Therefore, in this brochure, each woman's name will be preceded by this descriptive adjective.



# THE FAR NORTH REGION OF CAMEROON

The Far North region is the most populous region of Cameroon, located in the northern part of the country and sharing borders with Chad and Nigeria. The regional capital is Maroua, which has a population of over 300,000. The region is comprised of six departments: Diamaré, Logone-et-Chari, Mayo-Danay, Mayo-Kani, Mayo-Sava, and Mayo-Tsanaga. It is known for its cultural diversity and rich heritage.

Various ethnic groups inhabit the region, and agriculture and livestock farming are the primary livelihood activities for approximately 90% of the population.

From a cultural perspective, women rarely have the opportunity to express themselves in public and give their opinions on societal matters. The situation is even more challenging for young girls and women due to beliefs that developing a critical mindset may jeopardize their chances of getting married. In some regions, not getting married can still be a subject of mockery for young women. However, the precarious living conditions mean that marriage is not always a viable option.



# HUMAN SECURITY COLLECTIVE

Human Security Collective is a foundation based in The Hague, Netherlands working on development, security, and citizen engagement. We believe that the concept of human security allows for a focus on people, relationships, and human rights as a framework for action. With an emphasis on trust, local ownership, empowerment, and collective action, we foster conversations between civil society, policymakers, and other actors to promote innovative approaches to security.



## DYNAMIQUE MONDIALE DES JEUNE (WORLD DYNAMICS OF YOUNG PEOPLE)



Dynamique Mondiale des Jeunes (DMJ) is a Cameroonian organization pursuing the mission of mobilizing youth for the full realization of their potential, the promotion of integrity, and the development of national identity based on civic values and the law. It is an organization that prepares young people for the knowledge, understanding, and sharing of public responsibilities with the aim of citizen governance, democratization, and decentralization.



HSC and DMJ have established the Inclusive Leadership Program (ILP) with the aim of facilitating exchange among emerging young leaders from the Far North region. It specifically targets young people because they constitute a significant portion of the population. The ILP aims to develop the leadership of young individuals to act as mentors for other young people. This program is part of an initiative coordinated by Mensen met een Missie (MM) and Human Security Collective (HSC) together with a consortium of on-the-ground actors on Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB). The Far North region has undergone a longstanding crisis due to the Boko Haram insurgency, which is why FoRB aims to promote religious tolerance in communities by reducing prejudices and promoting dialogue between religious groups.

The ILP collaborates with other program partner organizations involved in FoRB, including the Council of Protestant Churches in Cameroon (CEPCA), the Supreme Islamic Council of Cameroon (CSIC), and the Diocesan Commission for Justice and Peace in Maroua-Mokolo (CDJP). All these organizations are members of the Faith and Liberation Network (RFL).

The four-year ILP consisted of a series of trainings for around 30 young people from crisis-affected communities throughout the region. As well as the trainings, the young people had the opportunity to design and implement local development projects together with their communities to promote interfaith dialogue, peaceful coexistence, and human security.



## MARANGABI

### **Merveilleuse Marangabi** **Logone-et-Chari**

I am "Marvelous" Marangabi Ouma Ali, originally from the town of Blangoua in the Logone-et-Chari department. Blangoua, located near Lake Chad, is characterized by particularly high temperatures and a dry climate, offering a very different scenery to much of the region. This part of the region becomes particularly challenging to access during the rainy season.

I was chosen to represent the local interreligious committee (CLIP) in my community. In Blangoua, several communities coexist, but the dominant communities are Christians and Muslims. Before the arrival of my CLIP, each community went its own way without any effort at collaboration or mutual coexistence.

Through the extensive training provided by the ILP program, I have gained confidence in public speaking. My knowledge has expanded across various topics, including human security, designing community initiatives, civic engagement, and building strong relationships with civil society actors.

As for our CLIP's project, we decided to address the challenge of natural disaster management during floods. We chose this project because in our community, it's a fairly dangerous situation which people tend to neglect. To carry out this project successfully, we organized several awareness campaigns. Furthermore, we established communal meals among young people from all religious communities, involving Muslim and Christian religious leaders, traditional chiefs, women's association leaders, youth group presidents, the youth delegate, and the sports delegate.



These various activities provided us with an opportunity to strengthen the bonds between the different communities while raising awareness about the importance of natural disaster management. A direct outcome of our work has been the establishment of a management committee responsible for the dike that channels water from the source to Blangoua's center.

Regarding the position of women, many traditions and prejudices still limit our role to the kitchen. However, I believe that we are not only meant for domestic chores and cooking, even though we take pleasure in doing them.



I have always thought that, like men, women have the right to go to school, work, and contribute to society.



Our daily lives in the northern region are marked by challenges. Many families prioritize marriage preparations over education for their daughters.



Instead of sending young girls to school, some parents prefer to instill strict traditions that restrict women from speaking in the presence of men, among other constraints, particularly within the Muslim tradition.

Today, I feel that I have truly become a leader and a mentor in my community. My voice carries greater weight among the community, thanks to my dynamism, honesty, and courage. The situation of Muslim women in the Sahel is very complex because, although they aspire to get involved in activities other than household management, they struggle to find their place.

This situation largely stems from the fact that most of us did not have the opportunity to go to school, and we are particularly working to break certain myths and traditions. Thus, my goal is to positively impact other women in my community through my experiences as a female Muslim leader.

My ongoing effort to secure a position in society and contribute to community development involves consistently expressing myself in public. I encourage other women to speak up about their contributions to our community's welfare.



## MERABELLE

### Kind-hearted Merabelle - Diamaré

My name is Merabelle Amoumoulam, and as a mentor, my defining adjective is "Kind-hearted," because I love to listen to others. I am originally from Godola, located in the Diamaré department.

Prior to participating in the program, I had never attended a prayer led by the Muslim community, nor had I ever considered such a possibility since I believed it might conflict with my religious principles. I held many biases against Muslims, and the thought of sharing a public space with them seemed unimaginable.



Thanks to this program, I had the opportunity of partaking in prayers alongside Muslims on multiple occasions, gaining a deeper understanding of some realities, particularly the fact that, irrespective of our religious diversity, we all pray to the same God.



Today, I have been able to set aside the prejudices I once held against Muslims and actively engage in dialogue, prayer, and even share meals with them.



The ILP program instilled in me the ability to identify the divisive issues within my community. Through the 'Learning by doing' approach, I was able to conduct mapping exercises, a skill I could never have acquired before due to a lack of knowledge and experience. The workshop on human security equipped me with skills and expertise in this area and helped me understand that security pertains not only to defense and security forces but to the entire community.

Human security can be approached from various angles, such as food security, health security, and environmental security, and everyone can contribute in their own way. The training on decision-making prepared me to not rush into decisions in any situation but to take the time to reflect and analyze for objective decision-making. Interactions with authorities also boosted my personal confidence by demonstrating that access to these individuals is attainable, serving as a significant motivational force.



As for my CLIP's project, we chose to implement several initiatives relevant to our community context. We began with a community reforestation and sanitation project in our canton. During the project's implementation, we cleaned public places such as Protestant and Catholic churches, mosques, wells, as well as the health center of Godola. This activity strengthened the bonds between different communities. We also conducted awareness sessions on the importance and use of latrines.

In the second phase, we launched an ongoing project aimed at revitalizing social cohesion in our canton. This project aimed to restore harmony among the members of the Godola football team, who had experienced disagreements during previous periods, resulting in the division of the community's sole team into distinct factions. Our hope is to contribute to reestablishing a positive atmosphere and social cohesion within this team.

Personally, I aspire to share the knowledge gained from the training with the youth in my community to collectively combat hate speech, radicalism, prejudices, and other factors that can divide our community. We all dream of an ideal community without discrimination, where living in harmony and collaboration is the norm, and where everyone works for the development of the community and harmonious social cohesion.

To achieve this goal, I plan to organize awareness sessions focusing on the concept of coexistence and its direct impact on sustainable local development. With a background in sociology, I am currently interning with DMJ. I joined this organization primarily to enhance my skills and acquire more knowledge, but also to benefit from this organization, which serves as both an academy and a platform for young people to unleash their full potential. Thanks to this opportunity, I have assumed the role of a facilitator, guiding various workshop activities.

It has been an exceptional opportunity for me to have been selected to participate in the ILP program. Through this inclusive leadership program, I have learned to embrace others' religious beliefs and foster a spirit of togetherness, regardless of our religious or ethnic differences. The training has transformed me into a competent and exemplary leader.



## ROSE

### Charming Rose - Diamaré

I am "Charming" Rose Medjimey Alamokwa, and I represent the community of Ouazzang, located in the Diamaré department. Representing Diamaré has been both a challenge and, above all, a true honor for me. I hereby share the enriching experience I have had during the three years of implementing the ILP program. Each workshop has brought me something special.

As young individuals, we were trained as mentors and received support to translate these new skills into practice by developing initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life in our communities.

We developed attitudes and abilities not only for ourselves and our families but also for our communities. Each training session was marked by rich content and participatory approaches that empowered us to develop our instincts, hone our skills, and, above all, awaken the leadership potential within us. Thanks to the ILP, I received invaluable support for implementing two micro-projects within my community.

My initial project was dedicated to mediating interreligious conflicts. This initiative was born out of the strife that had torn my village apart, where certain communities had allowed discord and bias to overshadow their shared heritage to the extent that they could no longer worship together or partake in cultural festivities as they had in the past. My fellow CLIP members embraced this project, and together, we successfully brought it to fruition. Through various peace-building and social cohesion activities, supported by my CLIP, the two communities in disagreement reconciled.

In celebration of this newfound harmony, these communities organized a heartfelt thanksgiving service.

Our second project was geared towards combating rural migration, and we have already completed four activities under this initiative. I conceived this project to alleviate parents' concerns and reduce rural migration. Previously, during holidays, young people would abandon the village for larger cities in search of more lucrative opportunities.

To address this, we launched project activities before the holiday season, involving the youth and offering them alternative activities in the village that would benefit all. Together, we set up activities to keep them engaged while remaining in the village and assisting their parents in the fields.

Today, many parents are proud of the mentor I have become as I was able to guide their children into a positive direction. To conclude this project, we organized a training session on compost production, recognizing that the community lacked the resources to buy fertilizers. This alternative solution aimed to boost agricultural yields, support the community's self-sufficiency, and, most importantly, discourage young people from seeking opportunities in the city.







My personal commitment and determination to contribute to the development of my community have never been stronger. This experience has transformed me into a valuable asset for my community, and partner organizations can now rely on me as a facilitator during on-site awareness workshops. This recognition fuels my determination and enthusiasm to contribute to the betterment of my community.

As a leader, I was honored to represent the ILP mentors at the pre-forum of the Lake Chad Basin Governors, an event that took place in Chad in June 2023. This event included the participation of Mensen met een Missie's focal point, civil society in the Lake Chad Basin, and other project partners in Cameroon. What stood out the most was the insight we shared on our collaboration with defense and security forces. Despite our three-hour presentation, time proved inadequate to cover every aspect of our exchanges.



**Our aspiration is to replicate such meetings with young individuals from various countries to exchange experiences and best practices.**



It was also validating for us, mentors, that the FoRB project integrated us at the international level because sharing our experiences through the ILP with young people from other countries is an honor for us. We have created a WhatsApp group to strengthen our skills and enrich our experiences in peacebuilding in our respective areas.

I am firmly convinced that, through my journey and experiences, I have been able to inspire other women within my community. Collaborating with the women in my CLIP, we have forged close partnerships with traditional leaders and authorities, and we have already successfully resolved issues surrounding birth certificates, issuing nearly 300 certificates for children and thus allowing them to participate in education and civic life—a significant source of pride for us. As time passes, the women in the CLIP are taking on more significant roles and are actively addressing conflict resolution among ethnic groups in our neighborhoods.



Today, in Ouazzang, conflict situations are managed with greater ease by the women in the CLIP, and I am confident that my leadership and skills have been successfully imparted to these dynamic women, even when I am not there myself.





## AISSATOU

### Attentive Aissatou Logone-et-Chari

I come from the Logone-et-Chari department, and I've had the privilege of representing the CLIP of Kousseri. Kousseri is a town located on the left bank of the Logone River, near its confluence with the Chari River, both of which form the border with Chad.

Over the three years of training within the ILP program as a young mentor, I have gained a wealth of knowledge. Among the knowledge gained during this program, the concept of human security and civic engagement has made a deep impact, to the extent that it has become a top priority for me. My project with my CLIP is centered around fostering social cohesion

in the Mawak neighborhood of my town. This is an area that brings together different ethnic groups, and they face numerous challenges when it comes to collaboration and coexistence. This project has been warmly embraced by the community in this neighborhood, particularly by the traditional and religious leaders we have had the privilege of meeting and engaging with. They are present at all the awareness activities we organize, and we hope that, together, we can contribute to restoring peace to this neighborhood.



**My personal goal as a female leader is to further enhance the social engagement of young people, especially women, and to share knowledge and skills on how to engage with society, practice collaborative communication, and collaborate within the community.**



Recently, I identified a measles outbreak in my neighborhood, and I approached the local chief to inform him of the situation, which could have spread within the community and posed a significant threat to the children. I also met with the center's chief to report the outbreak, and thankfully, the neighborhood benefited from a measles vaccination campaign. As a woman, being heard and encouraged is empowering for us. I aspire to receive more training to be able to positively influence other women in my community, as it is together that we can go far and change perceptions regarding the position of women in the Sahel.



## HAOUA

### Joyful Haoua - Mayo-Tsanaga

I am "Joyful" Haoua, a mentor from the community of Mokolo in the Mayo-Tsanaga department.



Personally, this training has been incredibly enriching. Before, I struggled to speak in public, I didn't know how to draft a project, let alone implement one.



Over the course of the training, I participated in four workshops that provided both theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Through these workshops, I expanded my understanding of human security, civic engagement, collaborative communication, decision-making, and, most importantly, how to build lasting relationships with key actors in civil society from different regions and countries.

One particular workshop that made a profound impact on me was the one focusing on engagement with diverse key stakeholders to foster trust and change power dynamics for more effective decision-making. We had the opportunity to meet authorities we once deemed inaccessible. These officials shared their experiences and best practices for managing their missions and important decision-making processes for the benefit of their community.

The training also equipped us with the skills to design and present projects. Prior to this training, I lacked the knowledge and courage to initiate a project.



However, by the end of the program, I not only created a project but also successfully presented it to a jury that approved and provided funding for its implementation.

My project focuses on the reintegration of former juvenile detainees into our community. In Mokolo, the security situation is challenging, compounded by the presence of Boko Haram. When a juvenile detainee is released, they settle in the market square and become a threat to the community, especially to young girls. They engage in fraud and sexually assault young girls and women who are in the market. This led to a climate of fear, especially for women, who were concerned about sexual assaults and theft when visiting the market.



To address this issue, we conducted a thorough community assessment to understand the challenges faced by youth in conflict with society. We also organized informative, educational and awareness campaigns to communicate the consequences of juvenile delinquency and promote social safety.

Over time, we have observed numerous positive changes in this high-risk area of Mokolo. Around 30 street children were identified by the project, of which 18 were able to return to their families, and some have resumed their education. Today, incidents of assault and rape have significantly decreased, allowing young girls to go to the market safely. We don't intend to stop here. The project aims to identify and train 50 young leaders in the concepts of leadership, mechanisms for prevention, and combating violent extremism. We also plan to support minors who have already fallen into delinquency and substance abuse, as well as those in pretrial detention.



## CATHERINE

### Comical Catherine - Mayo-Sava

I am originally from Mémé in the Mayo-Sava department. Thanks to the inclusive youth leadership program, I was introduced to the city of Maroua for the very first time.

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I come from a community where women and young people possess a strong desire to actively participate in the development process, but there is a need to further engage them and improve their living conditions.

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Following the various training sessions with the ILP, my CLIP and I launched a project focused on promoting coexistence. We organized multiple workshops in Mémé to raise awareness about coexistence and empower women. During these workshops, women decided to collaborate in soap production to support the less fortunate and vulnerable individuals, ultimately strengthening the spirit of coexistence.

Our CLIP regularly organizes public space and community field cleaning sessions. In the same spirit, we established a savings fund within our CLIP to ensure its smooth operation and enhance our support for beneficiaries. To reinforce and sustain our initiatives while empowering women, we plan to introduce new practical training, such as the production of natural ointments.

The inclusive leadership program has enabled me to boost my dynamism and increase my determination to improve living conditions within my community. We are working in collaboration with various authorities to establish peace. I returned from Mémé with a clearer vision, and the high-quality training content enriched my knowledge. These acquired skills will continue to serve me throughout my life. Each day, I strive to pass on these skills to the youth, enabling them to take the lead and advance together.





## MARTINE

### Marvelous Martine - Mayo-Sava

I am "Marvelous" Martine Swahkalbe, originally from the community of Kourgui, located in the Mayo-Sava department.

Kourgui is one of the regions that host a large number of internally displaced people who have been affected by the security crisis associated with Boko Haram. The atmosphere is often charged with tension between the local population and these displaced individuals because international organizations frequently provide donations of resources and infrastructure.

These donations are often desired by the local population, who believes that they should also benefit from them. Moreover, tensions exist between Christians and Muslims. To help resolve these disputes, we decided to initiate a project aimed at rehabilitating a well that was a source of conflict among various communities. We organized intercommunity dialogues focusing on coexistence and religious tolerance. We also maintain regular oversight of the fair use of this well, which proves beneficial to both the local population and the internally displaced.



Thanks to the training I have received, I am now capable of leading and facilitating meetings and workshops within my community.



The ILP program has particularly helped me improve my ability to speak in public. Prior to participating in the program, I did not have the courage or motivation to speak in public because I lacked confidence and did not feel up to the task.



“

This brochure is dedicated to the memory of **Gloria Virgini**, a young mentor from the community of Waza in the Logone-et-Chari department. She was a cherished member of the women leaders of the ILP until her untimely departure in 2021.

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Conceptualization of the brochure, research, and text by **Jacqueline Saapong Mouna** for Human Security Collective (HSC).

With the cooperation of partner organizations within the Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) project:

Mensen met een Missie

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