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Akatio, a Choice that Widened my Horizon

Ulrich, Director of Studies of the Akatio Vocational Training Project in Ivory Coast, recounts his experience from his arrival in 2017 to the present day. Through his job he has had an important impact on the lives of many young people.

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In January 2017, I graduated with a Master's degree in law from the University of Félix Houphouët Boigny in Cocody. In the same year, I

received a job offer to work as the Director of Studies at the Akatio Vocational Training Project (note at the end of the article), where courses in masonry, electricity, air conditioning, and plumbing were taught. Anyway, the Akatio Vocational Training Project was initially planned to last for two years (from 2017 to 2018). I accepted the offer without knowing precisely what my responsibilities would entail.

Indeed, my main task was to ensure the successful completion of the qualifying trainings, which involved tasks such as registering the young people, planning and monitoring the courses, and recruiting instructors, among others. However, like any new endeavor, things were not easy. It was during these challenging moments that point 359 of *The Way* came refreshingly to my memory: **"Put a supernatural motive behind**

your ordinary professional work, and you will have sanctified your work".

Although the project was initially expected to conclude in 2018, I am still working at Akatio to this day. Because Akatio challenges one to big life adventure. Six years ago, I would never have imagined this.

One day, while talking about my job with a friend from my graduating class, she asked me: "Is Law practiced here?" This made me smile because she would never have imagined me working in a place where law is not practiced. And I am very happy with the choice I made because it opened unexpected horizons for me.

As the Director of Studies, my job consists of supervising all the activities that take place in the training center, seeking external partnerships, and overseeing the

purchase of necessary materials for the center's proper functioning. In this sense, my training as a lawyer and manager provides the necessary support.

Young beneficiaries with varied conditions

At Akatio, we receive various profiles: young people who left school early and are looking for a reference point, young people seeking a qualification in a trade, and even individuals who want to make a career change.

We try to help this young people by providing them with practical and theoretical training for four months, all supported by personal development. Afterwards, we assist them in finding internships and jobs.

In the case of Alexis, he was unable to complete his primary education. However, upon hearing about the

training at Akatio, he enrolled to obtain a professional qualification that could open doors for him in the future. Two months after his training, he testified that it gave a new impetus to his life. Today, he carries out construction works with more autonomy and ease, showcasing the positive impact of the training on his life.

For others, who have entrepreneurial ideas and capacities, we grant them a fund for the creation of an income-generating activity in accordance with their business projects after their training. These funds come to us from donors.

Thanks to this job, I learn a lot from my students during the conversations I have with them as part of the training. The fortitude they show daily, and sometimes with joy, despite their many problems, always impresses me: particular

family situations, difficulty in making ends meet, difficult living conditions, an uncertain future, and so forth. These conversations have personally helped me avoid feeling sorry for myself and reach out to others.

Also, as any Christian who wants to put Christ where he is, I encourage my students, even if most of them are not Christians, to live the human virtues, knowing that they are the foundation of the supernatural virtues, as St. Josemaría put it. And for those who are Christians but not actively practicing their faith, I invite them to get closer to God and frequent the sacraments.

Many lives impacted

It is true that not all the graduates of Akatio excel in their professional life immediately after graduation, but many of them testify that what they

learned at Akatio has a positive impact on their lives.

For example, Basile, a former student in electricity, recently told me how the training opened his mind and how he can now plan all his actions. He was chosen by his manager to train his colleagues in the good manners he learned during the soft skills courses at Akatio.

Justin, who went from being an apprentice bricklayer to a chief bricklayer and now has several building sites, is also a source of pride for us.

Patrick, on the other hand, has found the desire to continue his studies after having stopped his studies in high school. After his training in masonry at Akatio, he decided to further his studies. He was able to obtain a Diploma of Advanced Technician in Civil Engineering and

is currently working in an architectural firm.

To date, Akatio has trained nearly 1050 young people.

Looking back, I clearly understand that it is God who planned the circumstances so that I could collaborate in this project that never ceases to do good to an entire society.

Every day, when I open the entrance gate and see the smiles of the students, it gives me the strength and joy to continue this magnificent work.

If I were to sum up my experience here at Akatio, I would say that putting God at the heart of my job, as I am learning in Opus Dei, allows me to open myself to so many young people who need attentive ears, assistance and people who show them real affection.

By Ulrich Koman

Note: The Akatio Vocational Project is the brainchild of the Akatio Centre, an institution of the Association for Social and Cultural Development (ADESC), an Ivorian non-profit association recognized by the Ministry of the Interior of Côte d'Ivoire. Akatio aims to provide vocational training to young men, combat unemployment, and contribute to raising their standard of living. They have been operating since 2015, primarily offering courses in bricklaying, air conditioning and electrical work. The individuals they serve come from challenging backgrounds, with the majority having not completed school and facing various struggles. An institution similar to Akatio in Nigeria that offers comparable opportunities to young individuals is the Institute for Industrial Technology, located in Isheri-North

Residential Scheme, Kosofe
Government Area, off the Lagos-
Ibadan Expressway, Lagos.

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