



Volunteer Groups' thematic position paper to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) 2020

Accelerating action and transformative pathways through volunteering: realizing the decade of action by volunteers' delivery on sustainable development goals

Volunteers, and support for their efforts, are essential to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda). According to the *State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2018 (SWVR 2018)* produced by the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV), an estimated one billion volunteers are freely giving their time to make a difference on the issues that affect them and their communities, often in the most difficult of circumstances.¹ As recognised by the synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, the ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be realised without the 'contributions of millions of properly supported and enabled volunteers'² and volunteer driven organisations in both developing and developed countries. The transformative power of volunteering particularly has the potential to contribute to the Decade of Action if properly championed.

Volunteering is a universal phenomenon, but it does not occur at uniform rates, nor is it uniformly effective. It is strongest when it is recognised and supported. National and local governments, the United Nations (UN) system, the private sector, civil society, volunteer groups, and volunteers themselves have a role to play in **creating and sustaining an enabling environment for volunteering**. When this succeeds, we unlock the power of volunteering and enable volunteers to make the greatest possible contribution to eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity.

¹ UNV (2018), *The thread that binds – Volunteerism and community resilience, State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2018*, available at: https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/UNV_SWVR_2018_English_WEB.pdf

² United Nations (2014), *The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet, Synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda*, available at: <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/publications/files/2015/01/SynthesisReportENG.pdf>

Volunteering is often the first step towards active citizenship³ and can help strengthen people’s ownership of their community’s development. We commend those governments that recognise the value of systematic legislation, policies, structures, and programs for volunteer engagement and that have structures to enable more people to volunteer. Where governments have created a conducive environment for civic engagement, and more particularly for volunteers to participate – or where they have been responsive to volunteer-led community initiatives – volunteers are more effective in SDG implementation. Volunteers, too, are important for holding Member States accountable for their commitment to the SDGs.

The social, legal, and political context in which volunteers operate matters greatly for what they can or cannot contribute to eradicating poverty. The political bargain between states and citizens; the constitution and legal framework; the social fabric in different countries; the interaction between local, national, and global governance; and the diversity of governance actors working at various levels are all elements that affect who can and cannot enter spaces, whose voices are heard, and who influences decision-making.

Embedded in communities, volunteers can often get to places that others cannot, forging links with local communities and forming a bridge between formal and informal provision of public services. Volunteers are at the forefront of responding to disasters, and they not only extend support to the most vulnerable but also empower marginalised people to take an active role in addressing the challenges they face.

Recommendations

The Stakeholder group representing volunteers offers the following recommendations to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) for 2020, and beyond:

1. Formally recognise the contribution of volunteering to the implementation of the SDGs in Member States’ Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the HLPF 2020

Volunteers are instrumental in building a strong civil society that is active in implementing the SDGs. As such, their work should be recognised as a valuable contribution to achieving the SDGs. In 2019, countries around the world as diverse as Cambodia, Chile, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Iceland, Mongolia, Oman, Pakistan, and Sierra Leone all included volunteers in their VNRs, and in Cameroon, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe volunteer groups were key stakeholders in national VNR committees.

³ Burns, D et al. (2015) *The role of volunteering in sustainable development*, IDS and VSO, available at: https://www.vsointernational.org/sites/default/files/the_role_of_volunteering_in_sustainable_development_2015_vso_ids.pdf
UNV, “Integrating Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda in Africa” (2019), available at:

Taking Mongolia as an example, volunteers play an important role in achieving the SDGs. In 2018, more than 27,000 volunteers contributed nearly 4 million hours, which can be valued as ₮5.5 billion of benefits to the economy, and cooperation with volunteers could be directed towards achieving the SDGs (Civil society network, 2019.5.10.). In Madagascar, the National Institute for Statistics found that volunteers contributed over 360 million hours in one year.⁴ We encourage all Member States to include the contribution of volunteers in their VNRs.

2. Ensure that volunteer groups are fully recognised and supported in national plans and strategies for implementing the 2030 Agenda

We encourage every country to build volunteering into their plans and strategies. When volunteers are included in countries' strategies for implementing the SDGs, volunteers are more likely to be supported and engaged effectively. Several Member States have already passed legislation which supports and promotes volunteering. Currently, some 90 countries throughout the world now have policies or legislation on volunteering.⁵ For example, Chad passed a law establishing a national volunteers corps in 2019, and a draft law on volunteering in Kazakhstan will be developed by the end of 2020. Cameroon has adopted a National Volunteer Strategy. Volunteer-involving organisations stand ready to work with member states to support the development of frameworks and laws which promote responsible and impactful volunteering.

3. Follow the lead of Member States by affirming their full support for the implementation of A/RES/67/290, which supports the participation of non-governmental actors

Volunteer groups are one of the key stakeholder groups with rights and privileges to participate in the HLPF. We encourage all governments to continue to engage all stakeholders as contributors to and beneficiaries of policies that will allow us all to work towards the 2030 Agenda.

At the HLPF 2020, a General Technical Meeting (GTM) will be co-chaired by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) on July 14-16 to discuss "Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda." The GTM 2020 will be informed by a Global Synthesis Report that will analyze evidence gathered by the Plan of Action Secretariat in 2018 and 2019 (see [information about the Plan of Action](#)).

Additionally, in 2018, resolution A/RES/73/140 -- which was co-facilitated through the Third Committee of the General Assembly by the Permanent Missions of Brazil, Chile, Japan, and

⁴https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/print_pdf/Plan%20of%20Action%20Synthesis%20Report_UNECA_EN.pdf

⁵ UNV (2018), *The thread that binds – Volunteerism and community resilience, State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2018*, available at: https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/UNV_SWVR_2018_English_WEB.pdf p.104

Russia, and co-sponsored by 124 Member States -- commends volunteers and calls on Member States to increasingly cooperate with volunteer-involving and civil society organisations. It also calls on Member States to include information on the scale, contribution, and impact of volunteering in future VNRs, and to engage volunteers for the monitoring of progress towards achieving the SDGs at the national and subnational levels and as part of wider citizen engagement.⁶

4. Ensure that the accountability, transparency and review framework for the SDGs involves community consultation at all levels, including representation of the most marginalised voices, as well as the volunteers who work most closely with them

Volunteers and groups organising volunteers are working daily to meet the SDGs in their local communities. As such, they must be afforded an opportunity to be included in the drafting and tracking of policies that affect them, and they can offer valuable insights to duty bearers about the implementation of the SDGs. Some Member States have been open to actively including the voices of the most marginalised in their SDG review processes and accepting citizen generated data as part of their official processes.

We encourage and urge all Member States to consult with volunteer groups and include volunteer voices and civil society groups as part of the mechanism to review the SDGs at national and local levels.

Volunteering and the focus for HLPF 2020

Volunteers will be essential to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, and their work can be vastly improved with active and legislative support. The result of ‘individual and collective action’ is a critical lever for the six entry points to achieving the SDGs based on the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR). As the Covid-19 pandemic hits countries and societies around the world, millions of citizens are stepping forward to respond to the challenges facing their communities in a spirit of mutuality and reciprocity. Here are a few examples of how volunteers are currently contributing to each. We share these examples with two goals in mind: 1) to highlight the varied and impactful work of volunteers around the world, and 2) to educate Member States on the power of volunteering.

⁶ United Nations General Assembly (2018), *Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, available at: <https://undocs.org/A/C.3/73/L.13>

Advancing human well being: ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions [most closely related SDGs: SDG 1, SDG 4, SDG 6, SDG 16, and SDG 17]

In Bangladesh, 3,000 people supported by youth volunteers are engaged in activities to promote the SDGs, monitor services and hold duty bearers to account for their delivery with a specific focus on health and livelihoods services. Young volunteers supported by VSO have run national campaigns on important issues facing their communities, including on child marriage and climate change.

In Iran in 2015, the ‘wall of kindness’ phenomenon started as a response to the increase in unemployment rates. The concept later extended to Pakistan, China, Italy, Jordan, and Lebanon. With SDG 1 in mind, the Girl Guides decided to implement this concept by building a wall in the centre of Byblos. The Wall of Kindness is a phenomenon for social work that usually took place by hanging excessive clothes that were no longer needed outside the houses, as donations to those who needed them most. Girl Guides established a wall next to a public garden in Byblos and hung coloured boxes that the girls decorated, so that the donors could freely place anything that exceeded their needs, and other people could get what they lacked.

The Youth Empowerment Transformation Trust in Zimbabwe and the Students and Academics International Assistance Fund in Norway ran an exchange for young people to strengthen academic freedom. The collaboration has initiated and enhanced projects such as scholarships for students from the global South in Norway, support for jailed student activists in Zimbabwe, the global database of human right breaches against academics and students, and continuously engaged students, teachers, policymakers, and other stakeholders in improving the quality of tertiary learning institutions to enable students to be successful on the job market.

Ending hunger and achieving food security for all: strengthening livelihoods of the poor, ensuring sustainable and healthy food production systems and improving the lives of all [most closely related SDGs: SDG 2, SDG 3, and SDG 17]

In Kenya, networks of youth volunteers are mobilising their peers on safe public health messages, using radio, peer networks, and social media to create awareness about the Covid-19 pandemic. Over 1.2 million people have been reached through their radio messages, and hundreds of thousands of people have engaged with the #volunteersagainstcovid campaign.

In the USA, community volunteers are supporting innovative methods of community testing for Covid-19, and in the UK, over 750,000 people signed up to support the National Government’s Volunteer responders programme to support vulnerable people who are self-isolating.

In Zimbabwe, Chikurubi Maximum Security prison is the largest prison averaging 2,600 inmates, many classified as high risk with long sentences, and 17% of the prison population is HIV positive and in need of HIV health services and peer support. VSO has trained 178 volunteer peer educators to train inmates about the importance of adherence to antiretroviral drugs and set up support groups to provide psycho-social support for prisoners. The result has been an uptake in ART treatment (increased from 50% to over 95%) and a sharp reduction in prisoner deaths.

Protecting the planet and building resilience: pursuing policies, investments and innovation to address disaster risk reduction and protect the Planet from degradation [most closely related SDGs: SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 14, SDG 15, and SDG 17]

Volunteers play a critical role in both disaster relief efforts and in supporting communities to become more resilient to the shocks and impact of natural disasters. In Mozambique, community volunteers supported by VSO mobilised to provide emergency relief to over 1,300 people after Cyclone Idai. In Nepal, 10,600 youth volunteers were mobilized in the devastating earthquake affected areas for rescue, relief, and rehabilitation work.⁷ In Uganda, volunteers have supported nomadic pastoralists to strengthen access to water and health care for livestock, while introducing diversified crops.

Created in 2011, the Envol Vert association has been active in France, Peru, and Colombia, and it is constantly looking for solutions that allow human beings to live more in harmony with the forests. A true activist, Envol Vert has mobilized many volunteers over the years and operates every year thanks to the involvement of a hundred volunteers and field volunteers. In Peru, 40 field volunteers succeeded each other over periods varying from 6 to 10 months, with the support of France Volontaires, in order to promote the coordination of projects and the monitoring of activities. Since 2016, the arrival of an international solidarity volunteer has made it possible to stabilize activities and strengthen the impact on the ground thanks to the long-term mission.

In Oman, due to the fact that many students get rid of their leftover food after the daily school break, a project was launched to cover the ‘Responsible Consumption and Production’ sustainable development goal, with the purpose of developing the Cubs’ and Brownies’ social side, instilling Islamic values and principles, and raising students’ awareness of the importance of not wasting food. The leftovers are collected and sold to livestock owners, and the money obtained from livestock owners is distributed to students in need.

Ensuring access to sustainable energy: ensuring access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services for all and making energy sustainable [most closely related SDG: SDG 7, SDG 12, and SDG 17]

Flora upper secondary school in Norway and Nkhotakota youth organisation in Malawi have conducted an exchange with young entrepreneurs, resulting in the formation of a solar power company Kumudzi Kuwale. The company has expanded its reach, providing electricity to over 80,000 persons and almost 50 schools, and providing jobs for 125 people.

Since 2016, the City of Lille in France and the Municipality of Oujda in Morocco have jointly led the Decentralized Cooperation Project for Sustainable Energy. It aims to promote renewable energy and improve the energy efficiency of buildings in both cities. Involving all local actors (research and high education institutes, companies, civil society, residents, and local authorities), the project is delivered by international volunteers of France Volontaires who have come to offer their expertise. One of the flagship actions is the establishment of an ‘Energy Information Service’ in Oujda, on the model of the ‘House of Sustainable Housing’ in

⁷ UNV (2019) Integrating Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda in Asia-pacific”
https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/POA_UNESCAP_Synthesis%20Report_2019.pdf

Lille, which intends to inform, guide, and raise awareness among inhabitants on the reduction of their energy consumption (electricity, water, and fuel) and the challenges of climate change.

Sharing economic benefits: addressing inequality within and among countries, decoupling growth from environmental degradation, and achieving sustainable development for future generations [most closely related SDGs: SDG 5, SDG 7, SDG 8, SDG 10, and SDG 17]

In Bolivia, the Country Program Office (CPO) of Cuso International started working on masculinities with the objective to sensitize and include the masculine side to the gender discussion. The activities have been realized between different partner organizations, and once the topic raised interest, training material was developed. This training material has been developed and translated so that it can be transversalized throughout Cuso International offices within the SHARE program and others. Working in conjunction with other CPOs of Cuso International, learning from each other, and scaling up successful activities on important topics can secure continuity even if some CPOs are closed or change to other activities.

In Nepal,⁸ volunteers have translated official messaging about the Covid-19 pandemic into sign language and worked with community volunteer mobilisers to ensure that the deaf community is able to access accurate public health messaging around the response, reaching over 300 children with disabilities across three districts.

In Jordan, as women are facing all forms of violence, Girl Guides launched a project with the purpose of spreading awareness among the Girl Guides, school students, and local community of women's rights as stipulated by religion, constitution, and human rights, as well as empower women throughout society in all social, economic, and political fields. Women became more aware of their rights within society by 80%, and Girl Guides provided training to the students on small economic projects to support the empowerment of women.

In Ecuador, the Bank of Guayaquil created the Compañeros de Banca volunteering scheme which engaged employees to provide training on financial education to 15,800 people.⁹

Bolstering local action to accelerate implementation: empowering and supporting cities, local authorities and communities; addressing issues related to sustainable urban development, infrastructure and people-centred services [most closely related SDGs: SDG 9, SDG 11, and SDG 17]

In many countries such as Kenya and Zimbabwe, national structures for volunteering -- such as the Volunteer-Involving Organizations Network (VIONet Zim) and the Volunteers Federation (VF), both members of the International Association for Volunteer Effort's Global Network of

⁸ <https://thehimalayantimes.com/temp/kids-with-disabilities-and-covid-19-awareness/>

⁹UNV, "Integrating Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda in the ELCAC region" (2019) https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/print_pdf/ECLAC-final-www.pdf

Volunteering Leadership (IAVE's GNVL) -- host annual activities gathering civil society to reinforce a collective narrative in the promotion of volunteer contributions towards the 2030 Agenda. The work of these organizations is essential to develop and implement grassroots community volunteering initiatives achieving a number of SDGs.

In Morocco, led by the Moroccan Collective of Volunteering, a national association promoting volunteering and a member of IAVE's GNVL, 21 organizations have united to gain recognition of volunteering as a tool to achieve the SDGs. They have an interest to focus on youth, and it is in their plans to write policy about this, as it is particularly relevant because the population in Morocco, and overall in the Middle East, is very young.

Salt Lake City Prayasam in India and Slum Dwellers International Kenya exchange media volunteers who provide technical training and skills to youth of slum dwelling communities, as well as local TV channels and media outlets. As a result, the slum-dwelling communities are more aware of local and citywide issues that concern them.