

PEACEBUILDING AND VOLUNTEERISM:

Considerations for post-2015 development agenda

A growing number of organizations and countries are advocating for the issue of 'peace and security' to become integral to the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. The engagement of citizens through volunteerism can be powerful in promoting social cohesion and reconciliation and helping to develop national civilian capacities, all of which make a critical positive difference to peacebuilding processes and initiatives. It is widely recognized that peace and stability require legitimate institutions, a strong security sector and rule of law and justice. Peace is not limited to the absence of war, and ongoing peace requires that long-term institutional and regulatory changes find concrete expression in people's perceptions and actions. Civic engagement, particularly volunteerism, is an important complementary mechanism in this regard. This Issue Brief demonstrates, using evidence from post-conflict situations, how volunteerism can be a key means of supporting the progress of national peacebuilding and, ultimately, global sustainable development.



A Neighbourhood Volunteer (right) counsels a carpenter (left) in Kibera, Nairobi, on how to rebuild his business following the post-election violence in early 2008. © Harald Franzen, 2009

I. Peace, development and volunteerism

Violence and fragility are not issues specific to just a few countries; in fact 1.5 billion people live in areas affected by conflict, fragility or criminal violence.¹ Creating peaceful societies, especially under the legacy of conflict, is a process that is context-specific and varies by country and type of conflict.² It is now widely accepted that violent conflict, in whatever form, impedes developmental progress. In 2009, this connection was clearly made by the Report of the United Nations Secretary-General entitled 'Promoting Development through the Reduction and Prevention of Armed Violence', which highlighted that *armed violence undermines development and constitutes an impediment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals*.³ The World Bank's 2011 *World Development Report* highlighted

that, on average, countries that experienced major violence during the period 1981–2005 had a poverty rate that was 21 percentage points higher than those that did not.⁴

While 'peace, security and disarmament' was a key component of the Millennium Declaration in 2000, this commitment was not reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework.⁵ A group of conflict-affected states known as the 'g7+' are emerging as key advocates for the inclusion of peacebuilding goals in the post-2015 development agenda.⁶ The Peacebuilding Support Office of the United Nations has also called for a separate goal in relation to peace and a measurable target on violence.⁷

1 World Bank 2011, p. 3.

2 Coletta and Cullen 2000, p. 24; Denney 2012, pp. 15–16.

3 UNGA 2009b, p. 1.

4 World Bank 2011, p. 5.

5 UNTT 2012b.

6 g7+ 2013; Denney 2012; UNTT 2012b.

7 UNTT 2012b, p. 3.



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Box 1. Post-war reconstruction and reconciliation: the roots of international volunteerism

...since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed' (Preamble, UNESCO Constitution⁸).

Early international voluntary service movements, dating back as far as the 1920s, were founded with the horrors of World War I still at the forefront of people's minds. They focused on post-war reconstruction, solidarity and the reconciliation of people from different backgrounds through collective voluntary engagement as a way of recreating interpersonal linkages.⁹ After World War II, various international networks were set up based on the renewed realization that sustainable peace relies on solid connections and trust among people, which can be fostered through concrete joint actions for the common good.¹⁰

In the lead-up to the 2013 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator, affirmed that peace and stability should be at the centre of the new development agenda: *...peace and stability do not fall outside of the boundaries of development. The two must go hand in hand.*¹¹

To date, the post-2015 UN-related proposals have taken a comprehensive approach to peace and security, linking it to concepts such as governance,¹² responsive and legitimate public institutions,¹³ and disasters.¹⁴ The UN System Task Team¹⁵ has identified 'peace and security' as one of the core aspects of building an equitable and sustainable world,¹⁶ while the High-Level Panel¹⁷ recommended 'stable and peaceful societies' as a goal for the post-2015 agenda.¹⁸ The

8 UNESCO 1945, p. 2.

9 SCI 2013.

10 CCIVS 2010, pp. 4–10.

11 Clark 2013.

12 UNTT 2012a; HLP 2013.

13 HLP 2013.

14 UNDG 2013.

15 The UN System Task Team on the post-2015 UN development agenda, which assembles more than 60 UN agencies and international organizations, was established by the UN Secretary-General in 2012 to support the post-2015 agenda by providing analytical thinking and substantial inputs. It published its first report, *Realizing the Future We Want for All*, in June 2012.

16 UNTT 2012a, pp. 31–32.

17 The High-Level Panel of eminent persons was launched by the UN Secretary-General in July 2012 to advise on the post-2015 UN development agenda. The Panel assembled representatives from civil society, the private sector, academia, and local and national governments to reflect on new development challenges while drawing on experiences gained in implementing the MDGs. It submitted its Report to the Secretary-General in May 2013.

18 HLP 2013, pp. 52–53.

2013 report, which captured the conclusions of 88 national consultations, 11 thematic consultations and the MY World global survey on the post-2015 agenda, highlighted the message that people want to live without fear of violence or conflict. The national consultations in particular revealed a *clear understanding that there can be no development in the absence of peace and security.*¹⁹

It remains to be seen how the post-2015 development agenda will ultimately articulate peace and security in its framework. The issue area is an ever-broadening one as new forms of violence and conflict in the 21st century, involving non-state actors and multidimensional drivers of conflict, lend inconsistency to the scope of what constitutes security (Box 2).²⁰

Box 2. What is peacebuilding?

Peacebuilding generally involves a brokered peace agreement between parties formerly at odds and the implementation of that agreement.²¹ It became a familiar concept within the United Nations following former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 landmark report, *An Agenda for Peace*, which defined peacebuilding as action to solidify peace and avoid relapse into conflict. It is a long-term undertaking, not only involving a variety of stakeholders but also bringing together security along with political, economic, social and human rights elements in an integrated manner.²²

The end of conflict does not necessarily correlate with the arrival of peace, since a lack of political consensus, trust and security often persists — as may the root causes of the conflict. The threats to peace are greatest during the immediate two-year post-conflict phase when stability is fragile, but this period also offers crucial opportunities to shore up peacebuilding efforts and lay the foundation for sustainable development.²³

In 2009, the Report of the United Nations Secretary-General entitled 'Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict' called for the support of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme to identify civilian capacities in post-conflict environments and to establish a programme for deploying

19 UNDG 2013, pp. 32–35.

20 UNTT 2012c, p. 4; World Bank 2011, pp. 5–8; Denny 2012, pp. 2–5.

21 UNV 2012, p. 4.

22 UNPSO 2010, pp. 1–5.

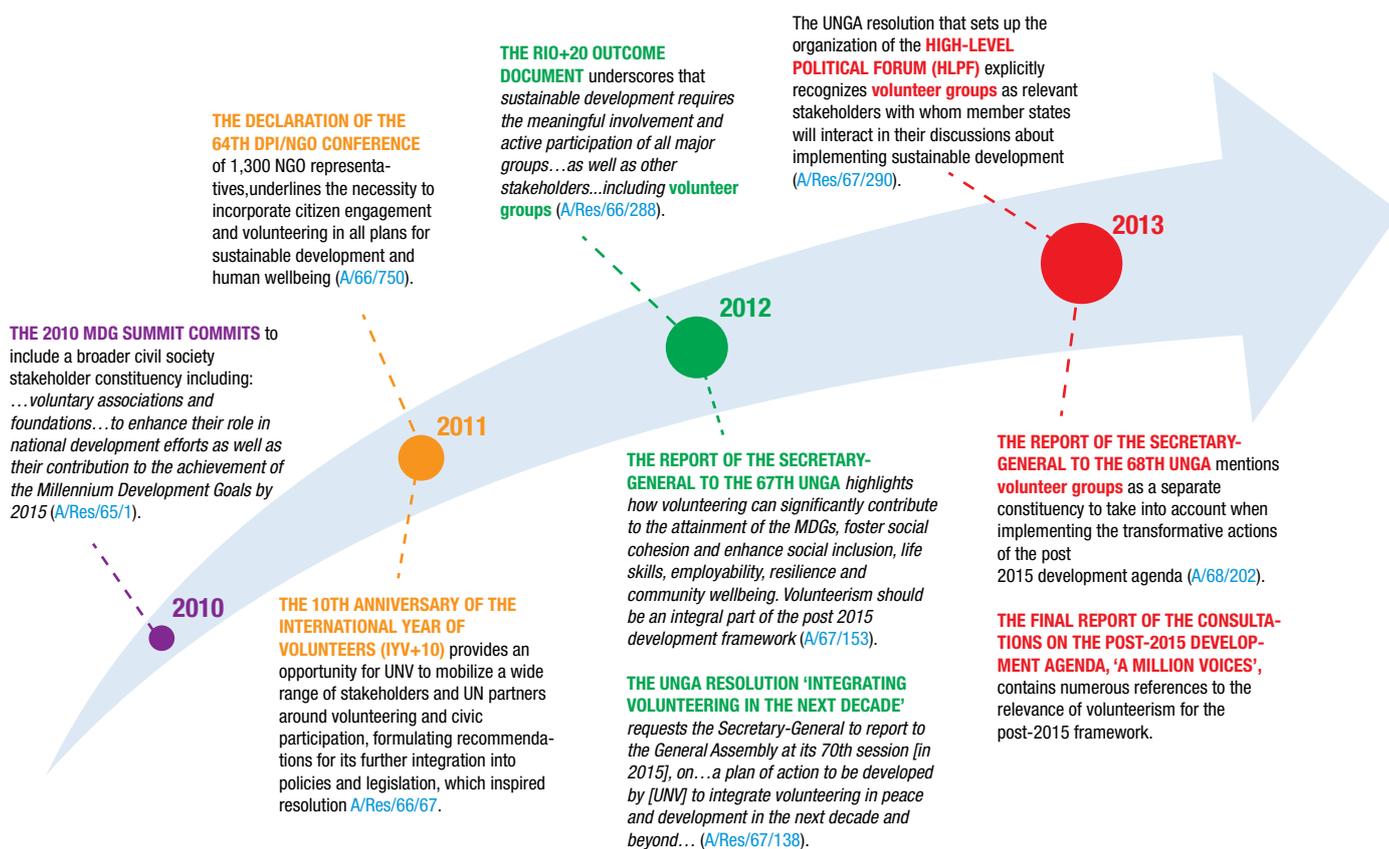
23 UNGA 2009a, pp. 3–4.

UN Volunteers with relevant expertise as peacebuilding volunteers.²⁴ A landmark independent review of civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict submitted to the UNGA in 2011 recommended more effective use of volunteers for strengthening civilian capacities for peacebuilding.²⁵ UNV was identified as a lead source of such capacity within the UN system, while volunteer mechanisms such as community-based voluntary action and regional and subregional volunteer rosters were also identified as offering potentially useful capacity.²⁶

Volunteerism has continued to be recognized by the United Nations as an important component in the range of strategies aimed at peacebuilding in post-conflict situations (Box 3). The UNGA's resolution in 2012 on integrating volunteerism into the next decade further called upon all member states and stakeholders to integrate volunteering into peacebuilding activities.²⁷

Box 3. Volunteerism for peacebuilding

The Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 5 December 2011 recognized that: *volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at, inter alia, such areas as poverty reduction, sustainable development, health, youth empowerment, climate change, disaster prevention and management, social integration, humanitarian action, peacebuilding and, in particular, overcoming social exclusion and discrimination (A/RES/66/67).*²⁸



GRAPHIC 1: VOLUNTEERISM MILESTONES

24 UNGA 2009a, p. 20.

25 UNGA 2011b, p. 17.

26 UNGA 2011b, p. 17.

27 UNGA 2012, p. 4.

28 UNGA 2011a, p. 1.

II. Why volunteerism is critical to peacebuilding

Volunteerism generates forms of social capital that are indispensable to peacebuilding, and it plays an important role in aiding the development of national civilian capacities. While every post-conflict situation is unique, volunteerism is known to help regenerate certain fractured or absent dynamics that the processes of reconstruction and reconciliation typically aim to address (Box 4).²⁹

Box 4. What constitutes volunteerism?

The terms volunteering, volunteerism and voluntary activities refer to a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor (A/RES/56/38).³⁰ Within this conceptual framework, at least four different types of volunteer activity can be identified: mutual aid or self-help; philanthropy or service to others; participation or civic engagement; and advocacy or campaigning.³¹

- **Volunteerism is based on mutual help and reciprocity, which generates trust.** When individuals or communities in post-conflict situations jointly address common needs through volunteer action, it reinforces mutual understanding and a sense of common obligations, and those involved emerge with strengthened trust and solidarity. The dissolution of mutual trust is one of the major consequences of societal fragmentation in post-conflict situations.³² A World Bank study that examines the nexus between violent conflict, social capital and social cohesion argues, using the case studies of Cambodia and Rwanda, that unless the issue of broken trust within conflict-affected communities is addressed, true reconstruction cannot take place.³³ Volunteering by giving time and engaging with others for the good of the community is essentially an act founded on trust, strengthening the fabric of our societies and defining the communities in which we live.³⁴ Accordingly, volunteerism opens up opportunities that help invest in civilian capacities, rebuilding mutual trust, confidence and cooperation among people and across communities.³⁵

- **Volunteering generates new networks** by providing the opportunity to make connections with others, and it deepens a society's existing social capital reservoirs by building relationships and widening webs of social interaction.³⁶ In the context of peacebuilding, this could mean moving from one-on-one support at a personal level to community service.
- **Volunteerism plays a critical role in developing and strengthening local capacity** during peacebuilding efforts. It works to counter post-conflict social, political and physical barriers which hamper the collective spirit and will of communities and individuals to restore their livelihoods.³⁷ It brings people together on the ground, galvanizing wider participation among community members and, very often, enhancing skills development through the exchange of knowledge and community work.

The diversity and impacts of volunteerism during peacebuilding: case studies

Social cohesion — Kenya

The degree to which a society is cohesive affects how its people react to the risk of violent conflict, how they respond when it actually breaks out, and their actions in its aftermath. Social cohesion is characterized by strong social bonds, networks of social interaction and norms of reciprocity. Volunteer actions define and consolidate these norms and social networks, which enables collective action. The stronger the sense of social cohesion in a community, the more likely it is that webs of social connections will play a role in lessening the risks that feed into violence, such as social fragmentation or exclusion.³⁸

The case of Kenya after its 2007–2008 elections is an example of how volunteerism, when well organized, can critically contribute to building social cohesion in a fragmented post-conflict environment. After the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections in Kenya, the results of which were disputed, the country found itself amidst an inter-ethnic conflict sparked by disagreement over the election results. Close to 1,300 people died in the post-election violence, and about 500,000 were displaced from their homes. A Neighbourhood Volunteer Scheme (NVS) was initiated in 2008 by UNDP, UNV and the Government of Kenya to respond to the crisis by enlisting the support of 928 'neighbourhood volunteers'. These neighbourhood volunteers underwent rigorous training to guide reconciliation processes at the household level throughout the country.

A later evaluation of the scheme indicated that the NVS

²⁹ UNV 2012, p. 5.

³⁰ UNGA 2001, p. 3.

³¹ UNV 1999, p. 4.

³² Coletta and Cullen 2000; World Bank 2011; UNV 2011.

³³ Coletta and Cullen 2000, pp. 27–33.

³⁴ UNV 2000, p. 6.

³⁵ UNV 2012, p. 4.

³⁶ UNV 2000, p. 6.

³⁷ UNV 2012, p. 5.

³⁸ UNV 2011, p. 65.

had made significant impacts in the districts in which it had been implemented.³⁹ The neighbourhood volunteers mobilized residents to receive internally displaced persons, and at least 65 per cent of displaced persons were resettled and reintegrated into their communities within a year of the scheme's initiation.⁴⁰ In Nairobi, the volunteers were particularly commended for their ability to reconcile landlords and tenants in the districts and for supporting displaced tenants in moving back into their homes. In Kwanza constituency, the interventions of the neighbourhood volunteers led some youth to surrender illegal weapons, enabling the return of peace in its neighbourhoods.⁴¹

The training component of the scheme facilitated the acquisition of new skills, not only among the neighbourhood volunteers but also within the larger community, in areas such as basic counselling, conflict management and the management of relief assistance. Skills imparted to communities by the neighbourhood volunteers led to the establishment of women and youth groups engaged in small-scale income-generating enterprises, some of which were registered with the Ministry of Social Services for access to finance and other support programmes.⁴² The implementation of the scheme was taken over by the Government of Kenya in 2010, which has absorbed its modality of employing community volunteer 'peace promoters' into Kenya's mainstream administrative structure for peacebuilding.

Capacity development – Liberia

Volunteer action can play a critical role in developing the depleted capacities of societies in post-conflict situations, where rebuilding is commonly needed at various levels. Young people may have been recruited by armed forces to perpetrate violence, and displaced persons, forced by war to flee their places of origin, may have been deskilled through their involvement in years of fighting. Providing the opportunity to volunteer to members of a society such as these marginalized groups strengthens the sense of self-worth of the individuals involved by valuing the knowledge and competencies they bring and allowing them to develop and expand their skills.

The National Youth Service Programme (NYSP) in Liberia, which UNV helped to initiate in 2007 in collaboration with the Government, aimed to reintegrate young people into civic life through volunteer service. It is an example that demonstrates how volunteerism can engage those typically rendered vulnerable by conflict and encourage their self-empowerment and growth.

³⁹ The evaluation was conducted by Africa Development Alternatives (ADA) 18 months after the project was initiated.

⁴⁰ ADA 2009, p. 27

⁴¹ ADA 2009, p. 22.

⁴² ADA 2009, p. 27.

In Liberia, a country that has experienced a 14-year civil war, people between the ages of 15 and 35 years constitute over 60 per cent of the total population. Youth unemployment, which is particularly high among excombatants, remains a major threat to Liberia's peace and stability.⁴³ The NYSP provided university-educated Liberian youth the opportunity to live in rural villages as community volunteers. They utilized their knowledge and volunteer training to provide basic educational and health services, advocating for volunteerism in development and peacebuilding, and strengthening civic participation through micro-projects that involved both communities and the students.

The NYSP deployed over 300 youth volunteers both within and outside their communities of origin period. Noticeable impacts in the education, health and community integration sectors were witnessed. The volunteers gained skills and networks and became role models in the very communities that had ostracized them in the aftermath of the conflict. An evaluation of the programme indicated that 91 per cent of NYSP volunteers reported significant skills improvements in areas such as leadership and conflict management.⁴⁴ In the cases where the host communities of the volunteers were different from their own, the work of the youth volunteers improved inter-community relations by facilitating dialogue and bringing people together.

The benefits of uniting international and local volunteers in the area of capacity development during peacebuilding cannot be underestimated. International volunteers bring with them diverse skills, knowledge and solutions, while local volunteers contribute local knowledge and understanding and serve as valuable conduits between their communities and authorities in charge of peacebuilding programmes. With their knowledge of local needs and sociocultural and political conditions, local volunteers can serve as ideal interlocutors to deliver constructive messages about participatory processes, reconciliation and civic responsibility.⁴⁵ Cooperation among mixed teams of national and international volunteers enables the transfer of knowledge and skills while retaining a focus on developing local civilian capacities and impacting sustainability of peacebuilding efforts.

A compelling model for overlapping international expertise with local competency can be seen in the peacebuilding record of the UK-based NGO Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) in the Philippines, where VSO has been present since the 1970s. In 2001, VSO began actively working on peacebuilding in the Mindanao region, where antagonism between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation

⁴³ UNDAF Liberia 2013, p. 18.

⁴⁴ UNV 2012, p. 12.

⁴⁵ UNV 2012, p. 5.

Front (MILF) had fuelled conflict between Christians and Muslims.⁴⁶ For more than 30 years, this conflict had cost thousands of people their homes or lives. VSO's strategy in the Philippines relied on international volunteer placements to support activities and provide technical expertise in areas such as conflict mediation, strategic planning and human resource development.

VSO completed this peacebuilding mission in 2010, and its international volunteers were withdrawn. During the mission's final years, however, VSO had gradually shifted its focus from international to national volunteers, capitalizing on the advantages that national volunteers offered in terms of local knowledge, an understanding of community needs and their availability for stop-gap emergency responses. In Mindanao, for example, VSO had developed partnerships with local NGOs, hosting workshops and conferences, conducting training and promoting partnership activities that involved sharing documents and resources. VSO's promotion of national volunteers helped build a strong platform for ensuring sustainable progress in peacebuilding and development goals.⁴⁷

Leveraging community resilience – Papua New Guinea and Rwanda

Local people, the primary victims of any crisis, are generally also the first responders. When directly impacted by a crisis, they often cope by leveraging solidarity ties within the community through volunteer action, reacting with resilience for themselves and others. In the immediate period after a peace agreement, during which there is an expectation of peace and normalization, voluntary engagement represents a way for communities to directly support each other rather than wait for assistance from another party such as an international agency or through a centre-to-periphery approach. Particularly strong-willed and creative responses from affected communities have emerged through such grassroots voluntary action. Although they often occur as informal initiatives, these are in fact among volunteerism's most visible manifestations. Following are two examples of highly effective voluntary actions that arose during and in the aftermath of conflict.

- The Kup Women for Peace (KWP) initiative began in 1999 in the highlands of Papua New Guinea after decades of tribal fighting. The often brutal violence against women and children had included the burning of whole villages. After one particularly devastating battle, women from four antagonistic tribes formed the KWP with the aim of stopping tribal violence. KWP members, both male and female, collected stories from villages that highlighted the

desire for peace and shared them with men from warring tribes. They mediated peace agreements, conducted workshops on women's health and food production, and gathered local resources to help the survivors of violence.

- In 2003, when fighting broke out between two clans in Western Highlands Province, seven women and five men from KWP spent two weeks camping on the battlefield in an effort to restore peace. During the day, they used their loud hailer to call for a truce and advocate for reconciliation, while at night they stayed in a village of one of the warring clans and talked about peace. The warring men had never before heard strangers, especially women, talk about peace in this way. Eventually both parties stopped fighting and allowed the women to facilitate compensation payments.⁴⁸
- In Rwanda, where the genocide of 1994 had resulted in the decimation of the male population, the task of rebuilding the country fell to women. Many women who were left behind as sole breadwinners, without legal rights or access to land, started organizing themselves in response to their precarious situation to demand equal property rights. Women with access to land formed groups structured like the pre-war mutual aid associations with the purpose of helping each other with agricultural production, building houses and establishing savings and credit schemes to finance income-generating activities.⁴⁹ These reciprocal initiatives enabled women to gain social status outside their traditional roles and to secure entitlements such as greater power and economic independence.⁵⁰

III. Recommended actions

Peacebuilding, whether at the local, national or global level, relies on active civic participation. Volunteerism is a powerful mechanism that can support peacebuilding goals, MDG progress and the building of peaceful societies in a post-2015 world. It requires no massive financial capital investment by a society, only the mobilization of its human capital based on goodwill and commitment.

The UN Secretary-General's 2009 Report on peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict stressed the importance of delivering peace dividends during the immediate post-conflict window of opportunity.⁵¹ This includes the provision of basic security, increased confidence in the political process and strengthened national capacity to drive forward peacebuilding

⁴⁶ UNV 2011, p. 67.

⁴⁷ UNV 2012, p. 11.

⁴⁸ UNV 2011, p. 68.

⁴⁹ Sørensen 1998, p. 19.

⁵⁰ UNV 2011, p. 67.

⁵¹ UNGA 2009a.

efforts. Community volunteerism enhances and supports interventions that are critical to rebuilding human security and, ultimately, human and social capital.

Governments, development partners and civil society all have important roles to play in promoting volunteerism for peacebuilding in a post-2015 world:

- Civil society, through the mobilization of local and international volunteers, can engage communities to help each other while delivering constructive messages about participatory processes. Local volunteers can also act as interlocutors between different parties in post-conflict situations. The contribution of civil society must continue to be based on the 'do no harm' approach that has been streamlined into all of the UN system's programmes, operations and interventions.⁵² Due to the complexity of conflict and post-conflict environments, a deep understanding of both the context and the interaction between intervention and context is crucial.⁵³ The integration of community volunteer organizations and national volunteering committees to explore opportunities for volunteer engagement at an early stage should be part of any immediate post-war peacebuilding effort. Volunteer mobilization in peacebuilding efforts should therefore be considered as an indicator for any peacebuilding-related goal in the post-2015 framework.
- While the nature of international peacebuilding is a complex and evolving one, development partners can do more to promote the use of volunteers in national capacity development — a central tenet of peacebuilding — in post-conflict situations.⁵⁴ In the early days of a post-conflict situation, when peace is fragile, efforts by governments and development actors are often focused on institution building and consolidating activities at the centre of a given country. Community volunteerism during such processes can support the rebuilding of societal trust and confidence, aiding national authorities in their efforts to consolidate peace. This may require the support of national authorities to ensure a basic level of security and allow the use of informal spaces for dialogue and civic engagement.
- Volunteerism is resource efficient, not cost free. Investing in supportive public policies and legal frameworks will directly assist governments to tap into the enormous resource that volunteerism represents. Governments can proactively nurture an enabling environment for volunteerism through the creation of public programmes and schemes and the development of enabling policies and legislation for volunteerism. Budgets destined for

peacebuilding efforts should contain explicit allowances to enable the deployment of national and international volunteers.

The social cohesion, transfer of knowledge and skills, and cross-community engagement that volunteerism engenders, as highlighted by the examples in this Issue Brief, serve to strengthen civilian capacity development at the grassroots level. These benefits of volunteerism also plant the seeds for recovery and reconciliation, ultimately leading to sustainable peace and development.

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52 UNICEF 2003.

53 UN DPKO/DFS 2012, pp. 70–71.

54 UNPSO 2010, p. 6.

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About United Nations Volunteers

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide.

Volunteerism is a powerful means of engaging people in tackling development challenges, and it can transform the pace and nature of development. Volunteerism benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation.

UNV is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

www.unv.org

Volunteer Action Counts

In 2012 UNV launched the Volunteer Action Counts campaign to tell the world about the impact of volunteering by documenting the actions of volunteers across the globe. Over 64 million actions were counted by the time the Rio+20 summit took place — a remarkable testament to bottom-up, grassroots commitment [...] yet one more demonstration of how Rio+20 is mobilizing a global movement for change, as UN Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, said to the United Nations General Assembly in 2012.

UNV continues the Volunteer Action Counts campaign, building on the achievements of Rio+20, to further raise awareness about the contribution of volunteerism to peace and development and to promote the integration of volunteerism into the post-2015 development agenda. The Volunteer Action Counts website and social media profiles continue to gather stories about concrete volunteer action and provide information about upcoming events, opportunities and best practices.

www.volunteeractioncounts.org