

Summary of the thematic position paper from Volunteer Groups submitted in advance of the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2019

- 1. Volunteers and support for their efforts are essential to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda.** According to the United Nations Volunteers State of the World's Volunteering report¹, 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. As recognised by the UN Secretary General's Synthesis report on the post-2015 agenda², the ambition of the SDGs will not be realised without the "contributions of millions of properly supported and enabled volunteers" and volunteer-driven organizations in both developing and developed countries.
2. 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 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 them to make the greatest possible contribution to eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity.

Promoting active citizenship and strengthening people's ownership of the SDGs

3. Volunteering is often the first step towards active citizenship and can help strengthen people's ownership of their community's development. Some governments recognise the value of systematic legislation, policies, structures, and programmes for volunteer engagement and 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.
4. 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.

Promoting inclusion

5. Embedded in communities, volunteers can often get to places that others cannot and can form a bridge between formal and informal provision of public services. Volunteers are at the forefront of responding to disasters, as evidenced in the recent Cyclone idai in Mozambique. They extend support to the most vulnerable and also empower marginalised people to take an active role in addressing the challenges they face.

¹ United Nations Volunteers, State of the World's volunteering report, 2018, available at: https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/UNV_SWVR_2018_English_WEB.pdf

² UN Secretary General Synthesis report on the Post-2015 agenda, (2014), available at: <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/publications/files/2015/01/SynthesisReportENG.pdf>

The stakeholder group representing volunteering offers the following recommendations to Member States:

- 1. Formally recognise the contribution of volunteering to the implementation of the SDGs in the Member States' Voluntary National Reviews at the HLPF**
- 2. Ensure that Volunteer Groups are fully recognised and supported in the national plans and strategies for implementing the 2030 Agenda**
- 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**
- 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 closest with them**