



Annex 4: UNV Discussion Paper

Volunteering as Essential in Achieving Sustainable Development:

UNV Responding to the 2030 Agenda

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Contents

Foreword.....	3
I. Volunteering as essential to the SDGs.....	5
II. How is UNV responding?.....	9
Annexes	13



Foreword

Seventy years after the foundation of the United Nations and the adoption of the UN Charter, the world has evolved in many ways, making it necessary to question tried and tested approaches to development and to redefine the relations between and within countries. At the same time, the introductory sentence of the charter has regained all its paramount importance: “We the peoples” expresses the necessity to engage people across the globe differently and more intensively. UNV contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. We work with partners to integrate highly motivated and well supported UN Volunteers into development programming.

Never has UNV’s mandate been closer to the priorities of a global development framework than with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The world is realizing that sustainable development is only possible when development gains ‘leave no one behind’. The very nature of volunteerism is a vehicle for achieving sustainable development. Volunteerism enables people to participate in their own development and peace-keeping; strengthening social cohesion and trust by promoting individual and collective action, leading to sustainable development for people by people.

The contribution of volunteerism to sustainable development is particularly striking in the context of the new SDGs because volunteering enables people to become responsible actors in their own development as well as being active models of change. Volunteerism is one of the most basic expressions of solidarity and societal cohesion, often arising out of long-established traditions of sharing and reciprocal exchanges. When the values of volunteerism are structurally integrated into global efforts to eradicate poverty and sustain peace and development, volunteerism becomes a powerful means of engaging people in these challenges. Well supported and facilitated volunteerism gives people and communities the opportunity to directly engage in their own development and to have an impact in the 2030 Agenda through their action locally, nationally and globally.

Together with partners, UNV will use the coming fifteen years to ensure that volunteerism moves from the ‘nice-to-have’ periphery into the centre of development practice, and that the true value-add of the concept is better understood and applied by decision-makers and practitioners, including UNV’s own internal and external audiences.

In September 2015, at the opening of the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda was held. Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2030 Agenda is **transformative, universal and inclusive in nature**, it’s **applicable to all countries and stakeholders** and its motto is to **leave no one behind**. It embeds strong linkages with **peace, security, human rights, justice and good governance** and underlines the fundamental nature of wide and diverse **partnerships** to deliver on its goals.

The 2030 Agenda rests on a set of universal principles, standards and values, such as human rights, which are applicable in all countries, for all people, in all contexts and in all times.





Prior to the adoption of the agenda, many debates have taken place to determine whether **gender** should be a cross-cutting dimension or a stand-alone goal. The 2030 Agenda reflects gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) in both ways. It has been largely recognized that none of the SDGs can be achieved without provision for gender equality and a full role for women in society. Specific gender related targets shall monitor the integration of the GEWE dimensions under the specific goals, while SDG 5 is a standalone gender goal, establishing minimum standards and pushing change forward in the three critical areas that are holding women back: ending violence against women, expanding women's choices and capabilities and giving women a voice within households and in public and private decision-making spheres. The goal underlines the necessity for structural and attitude changes.

The motto of 'Leaving no one behind' expresses the necessity to eradicate extreme poverty and to address increasing inequalities between and within countries. Leaving no one behind is a moral imperative in an overall affluent world, which has the knowledge and means to provide for a **life of dignity for all**.

South-South cooperation within and between regions receives increased attention for locally adapted solutions and knowledge transfer and is often considered preferable to classical North-South cooperation. Goal 17 specifically focuses on the need to 'enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism.' Where North-South cooperation occurs, it needs to be conceived in such a way that there is maximum transfer of expertise and knowledge to and capacity development of local and national actors and that interventions are sustainable in the long term. In the context of an enlarged notion of wealth and happiness, encompassing other aspects of well-being, new opportunities emerge for a universal exchange of practices, valuing experiences from across the board towards opportunities for learning by all countries from all countries, depending on the particular context.

Beyond the greater thematic convergence, the debate forging the 2030 Agenda has also been influenced by the changing political and economic context of the last decade. The **global economic crisis** has curbed the readiness of industrialized countries to upscale or even maintain their official development assistance (ODA). In this context, governments will have to ensure that business interests are aligned with sustainable development requirements and provide a favourable environment for the private sector, encouraging private financing and investment, while ensuring well-functioning tax collection mechanisms and redistribution systems and combating bribery.

In fact, both in the context of the resource constraints and also in acknowledgment of the complexity of context and overlap of thematic approaches, inclusive **multi-stakeholder partnerships** have emerged as a necessity, complementing governmental responses and leveraging new resources, whether financial or in kind. The sustainable development agenda recognizes more explicitly that development goes beyond pure economic growth and requires other dimensions such as capacity development, functioning institutions and an accountable government to provide conditions for a decent life for all. New thematic areas included in the 17 Goals, such as sustainable consumption also underline the need for measures leading to attitude changes at the individual level.

Similarly, a greater understanding has emerged that the **peace and development agendas** are intrinsically linked and overlap and better transition is required from peace keeping to peace building and long term



sustainable development interventions. Conflicts in the 21st century are often not easily addressed with traditional instruments, such as diplomacy or military means and the drivers of violence often include a wide range of factors, including political, economic, social and environmental issues¹. This requires a holistic response in terms of humanitarian and long-term interventions, including measures to influence the relations between groups and individuals, building trust and strengthening social cohesion.

Whether natural or manmade, disasters have taken a great toll over the last decades, underlining the need to develop holistic humanitarian responses. The notion of **inequality**, within and between countries, has emerged more strongly and with it the notion of **fragile communities**, whether in the context of developing or industrialized countries. Recent migratory movements, triggered by situations of conflict in Syria and elsewhere, have powerfully demonstrated that the world has become smaller. Conflicts and poverty anywhere have become domestic problems and potential threats everywhere.

People, all over the globe, are no longer ready to accept inequality and lack of opportunity as a sign of fate. Mobility and technology disseminate information and images about the situation in the world onto the screens of mobile devices in the most remote villages. The pursuit of individual happiness and the quest for a decent standard of life, compared to the image portrayed through the global consumer society is guiding life choices of people, and especially young people, everywhere in the world. The number of young people, ready to leave their countries to seek greener pastures elsewhere, bears witness to this development.²

This discussion paper looks at volunteerism as a powerful means of implementation and specifically examines the implications and role for UNV and how it can leverage its mandate to help achieve the SDGs through volunteerism.

I. Volunteering as essential to the SDGs

During the SDG planning phase, **volunteer engagement emerged as a viable mechanism to complement the action of governments in addressing development challenges, particularly at the local level.** Volunteerism increases the reach and inclusivity of action, it allows to scale initiatives from the local to the national level and beyond, it builds capacities and ownership and connects local communities to local and national authorities with the potential to develop more robust public-private approaches.

The SG Synthesis Report, summarizing three years of discussions and debates, has indeed identified volunteering in the context of capacity building as a ***“powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation.*** *Volunteerism can help to expand and mobilize constituencies and to engage people in national planning and implementation for sustainable development goals. And volunteer groups can help to localize the new agenda by providing new areas of interaction between Governments and people for*

¹ In: Peace and Security. Thematic Think Piece by PBSO for the UN System Task team on the post-2015 UN Development Agenda: http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/14_peace_and_security_20July.pdf

² The GMG (Global Migration Group, an inter-agency group of UN entities) states that young people comprise a considerably larger share of contemporary migration flows, compared to earlier periods. Young people's motivation is often linked to the search for decent livelihoods and poor economic prospects as well as restrictions on rights and other reasons. The report also underlines the growing desire of young people from programme countries to study in industrialized countries and improve their life chances and elaborates on the risk of brain drain, which this development entails. In: Migration and Youth. Challenges and Opportunities, UNICEF, 2014.



concrete and scalable action. This was finally carried over by Member States into a Volunteerism [UNGA resolution in November 2015](#).

Acknowledging that traditional means of implementation need to be complemented by participatory mechanisms that facilitate people's engagement, the 2030 Agenda explicitly names **volunteer groups as actors in their own right** among the means of implementation. Volunteer groups can be brokers of engagement, connecting institutional initiatives with concrete volunteer action at community level and strengthening local governance.

Volunteerism has been contributing worldwide to people-centred development through its very nature. Beyond 'getting the job done', the added value of volunteerism lies in its capacity to transform passive recipients and beneficiaries into active agents of change. The 2015 State of the World's Volunteerism Report (SWVR) on transforming governance highlights the potential of volunteers to act as catalysts for more inclusive development as an enormous but, as yet, far from fully tapped resource. Volunteerism can provide avenues for women to engage in spaces outside the traditional norms, hold authorities accountable and ensure responsiveness to their needs and those of their communities. Expanding participation of young people through volunteerism is indispensable for the long term stability of societies, as it strengthens their social integration and sense of belonging, while enhancing skills and capacities needed for their personal development and employability. Volunteers can also be seasoned experts transmitting their skills in any given thematic area.

Overall volunteerism contributes across all goal areas. As a means of implementation for all goals, it is intrinsically rooted in Goal 17. Volunteers deliver technical expertise - for example in areas such as health (Goal 3), education (Goal 4), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), renewable energy (Goal 7) or sustainable ecosystems (Goal 13, 14, 15). They can develop skills and build capacities, thereby enhancing the employability, especially of young people and people with limited access to the employment market (Goal 8 and all Goals). Volunteers also have a proven record of modelling attitudes and catalyzing behaviour changes - this applies for example to issues such as gender equality (Goal 5), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), sustainable consumption (Goal 12), climate action (Goal 13), as well as reconciliation, relationship and trust building, leading to increased social capital and strengthened social cohesion (Goal 16).

The **combined action of international, national, community volunteers and online volunteers** strengthens international exchanges, South-South and regional cooperation; and can trigger a ripple effect, inspiring others and reaching the most remote communities. The 2015 SWVR has highlighted for instance the existing evidence with regards to the contribution of volunteerism at the local level in terms of empowering women. The Report also underlines how **community volunteerism strengthens local alliances making governance processes more participatory and inclusive**. Volunteering strengthens **awareness for the common good and social cohesion**, which is particularly relevant in increasingly urbanized and diverse societies.

Beyond the implementation of the new SDGs, volunteers can also play an important role in **enhancing the accountability of the new SDG framework** by supporting quantitative and qualitative data collection at the local level as well as participatory forms of planning, monitoring and evaluation. UN Volunteer specialists, for example, can be deployed to assist national level machineries such as national statistical offices as they align their approaches and methods to the new framework, adjust the national indicator



framework and develop new methods to capture the data required to assess progress on the goals. In order to deliver on the 2030 agenda, there is a need for universal monitoring.

While the MDGs predominantly defined progress based on quantitative data, the SDGs - with their focus on inclusion and combating inequality - will increasingly have to take into consideration qualitative indicators of progress covering issues related to satisfaction with services provided, perceptions and attitudes. This will require an increased focus on and engagement of people at the local level *“Quality of life includes the full range of factors that make life worth living, including those that are not traded in markets and not captured by monetary measures... [These] provide an opportunity to enrich policy discussions and to inform people’s view of the conditions of the communities in which they live.”*³

In the next 15 years, the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) will review progress on the SDGs and provide Member States with political leadership, guidance and recommendations on sustainable development. The GA Resolution that established the HLPF ([A/RES/67/290](#)) explicitly mentions **Volunteer Groups** as ‘other stakeholders’ alongside the nine Major Groups, which were initially created to provide non-member state perspectives to the Commission on Sustainable Development. Therefore, volunteer groups have the opportunity to present evidence about volunteerism’s contribution to the SDGs at HLPF meetings alongside the progress reported by Member States. It will be crucial to engage with countries to determine ways to feature evidence and data related to volunteerism’s contribution to SDGs at national level within their reports. At the same time, volunteer organizations have been discussing the necessity to present separate progress reports on volunteerism’s contribution to the SDGs and look to UNV to provide guidance for an easy to implement measuring framework that can build on existing forms of data collection and is implementable in different contexts, including where data collection capacities are limited.

The triennial UN Secretary-General’s Report on volunteering, supported by UNV, on follow up to the International Year of Volunteering and subsequent efforts to recognize and promote, facilitate, network and integrate volunteerism in development policies and plans, provides an opportunity to collect and showcase related data in the future and could provide a basis for an aggregated report by Volunteer Groups.

Table 1: Volunteer actions and effects

Volunteers can contribute to SDG achievement by...	Volunteer action adds value to peace and development efforts by...
<p>...raising awareness about the 2030 Agenda through local campaigns and creative approaches, including in remote areas and with marginalized populations;</p> <p>...delivering technical expertise;</p> <p>...facilitating spaces for dialogue and action through participatory forms of engagement during planning, implementation, monitoring and</p>	<p>...widening inclusive spaces for engagement, including for remote and marginalized populations, as well as for youth and women;</p> <p>...enhancing capacities and developing skills;</p> <p>...building trust as well as ‘bridging social capital’ between diverse people who are not used to interacting with each other;</p>

³ Statistics and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda, UN Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, July 2013



evaluation of the Agenda at local and national level;

...**monitoring SDG progress** through citizen driven qualitative and quantitative data collection;

...**facilitating knowledge sharing** and transfer and **leveraging local expertise**;

...**complementing essential basic services** where they are lacking or where they are insufficient;

...**modelling behaviours** to inspire others and enhance willingness to contribute to SDGs locally.

...**developing a sense of opportunity and ownership** for local challenges, leveraging collective engagement;

...**strengthening local governance and accountability** through increased people's participation;

...**building resilience and preparedness**, enhancing knowledge and a sense of responsibility for one's community;

...**building an enabling environment** for volunteerism as a form of civic engagement.



II. How is UNV responding?

UNV has an opportunity to leverage its universal mandate for volunteerism two folds: as a part of the UN system and with its networks of partners globally in order to make an impact on the success of the SDGs.

The changes in the development paradigm over the years has seen the focus move from international technical cooperation towards the support of national solutions through the strengthening of national capacities. Similarly, the increased vulnerability of communities, due to exposure to recurrent natural disasters and conflicts, has required a much more robust humanitarian aid intervention globally. These trends have been reflected in patterns of volunteer mobilization. As the landscape changes, the typology of volunteering that is needed is also evolving. Since the mid-70s when UNV recruited mainly international volunteers through bilateral volunteer cooperation organizations from the North, there has been a decline of volunteer numbers since a plateau in 2005; the mix of international/national UN Volunteers stands at 66:34 in 2015 reflecting a rise in national volunteers - a possible trend that has emerged over the last couple of years. Over 80% of its volunteers from countries of the Global South.

UNV is honing its value-proposition for the achievement of the SDGs to the UN system in general, as well as to the work of specific UN agencies such as UN OCHA, UNHCR, UNDP and others. UNV is reviewing the kinds of volunteer modalities and initiatives it offers to partners with the objective of creating an enabling environment that allows partners to come together with UNV and co-create solutions that will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. This will ensure that volunteers are more clearly part of the solution for national capacity building (e.g. through strengthening national volunteer schemes and national volunteering) and South-South solutions.

With regards to the growing role of technology in volunteering, UNV has positioned itself in a timely manner through its Online Volunteering Service, which was created in 2000. Since then, over 76,000 individuals have served as UN Online Volunteers undertaking circa 127,600 online volunteering assignments. In 2014 alone, the service mobilized over 11,000 UN Online Volunteers, serving 33 UN agencies and 1,700 NGO clients in customized and flexible ways. The UNV Online Volunteers services has created a global volunteer pool of more than 450,000 people to-date, with a breadth of expertise and skills that is unparalleled in the field of online volunteering globally. UNV is thus investing in technology through a radical restructuring of its online volunteer solutions, to ensure that development actors can leverage technology-based solutions, identify development problems and co-create development solutions as well as new partnerships, including with the private sector.

To this end, more can be done to leverage the evolution of web based and mobile technologies. Further and deeper changes will be needed to bring to bear fruit from both onsite and online opportunities. The outreach and online consultation efforts of volunteers undertaken in advance of the Adoption of the 2030 Agenda, through the My World survey and other activities, have powerfully demonstrated how technology can render decision making processes more participatory. UN online and onsite Volunteers have played a key role in connecting online and offline approaches in this regard and can therefore be an essential mechanism for the domestication and localization of Agenda 2030.

Finally, the rise of Corporate Social Responsibility programmes has brought the private sector into the conversation with forms of engagement beyond the regular philanthropy or charity, including through the expansion of corporate volunteering. UNV is seizing this opportunity to strengthen its work on innovation by providing co-creation spaces with multiple and new partners, i.e. private sector, governments, the UN



and Volunteer Involving Organizations (VIO) with regard to the potential of corporate volunteering for the SDGs. This will allow for stronger volunteer modalities that speak to the challenges of the local and national context thereby allowing for a better skills set mixture to contribute to the work of the UN and complementing other UNV modalities.

Upon mandate by the UN General Assembly, UNV led and supported the development of a **Plan of Action for integrating volunteering in the next decade and beyond (2016-2030)**, which identifies three strategic objectives:

- strengthen people's ownership of the development agenda through enhanced civic engagement and enabling environments for citizen action;
- integrate volunteerism into national and global implementation strategies for the post-2015 development agenda; and
- measure volunteerism to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the engagement of people and their well-being and be part of the monitoring of the SDGs.

The Plan of Action is part of the [Secretary-General Report A/70/118⁴](#) about progress made with regards to the recognition and promotion, facilitation, networking and integration of volunteerism worldwide since 2012. The Plan serves as a road map for Member States to integrate volunteerism into policies and plans in the coming 15 years. Along with key organizations, such as the IFRC, UNV will facilitate multi-stakeholder efforts to deliver on the Plan of Action, including organizing a global volunteer conference in 2020.

UN General Assembly Resolution "[Integrating volunteering into peace and development: the plan of action for the next decade and beyond](#)", adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly and co-sponsored by 100 Member States during its seventieth session, recognizes that volunteerism can be a powerful means of implementation for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Through the resolution, the General Assembly also acknowledges the Plan of Action to integrate volunteering in peace and development during the next decade and beyond, calling upon Member States, the UN system and a wide range of stakeholders to support and resource the Plan, and recognizes UNV as the appropriate UN entity to support its implementation.

In the Resolution, the General Assembly appreciates innovative forms of volunteering and encourages Governments, the private sector and other stakeholders to support the United Nations Online Volunteering service. Governments and other stakeholders are also urged to incorporate volunteerism into gender mainstreaming strategies. The Resolution also emphasizes the opportunities volunteerism offers to young people to contribute to peaceful and inclusive societies and for personal development.

The Resolution concludes requesting the Secretary-General to report in three years (2018) to the General Assembly on further progress and on the Plan of Action.

UNV is well-placed to respond to the new dimensions of the sustainable development goals agenda. Many of the key features of the SDGs resonate with the very nature of volunteerism and with UNV as the UN entity placing volunteers in UN agencies for peace and development.

⁴ It constitutes chapter IV of the SG report



Being small, nimble and attuned to the opportunities offered by the SDGs, and having identified already some spaces over the past year, UNV sees the entry point in filling the gaps – of value of multi-stakeholder partnerships and to the UN as it seeks to engage with a broader range of stakeholders, and governments as they try to support the SDG agenda more effectively.

With a huge human resource capacity that includes over 6000 onsite volunteers and over 11,000 online volunteers annually, UNV is already thinking outside the box to envisage new ways of articulating its particular value add, but also new ways of ‘doing business’ and engaging more volunteers and more people in the 2030 agenda.

The 2030 Agenda calls for stronger efforts in the area of local level data collection and community engagement in participatory forms of SDG planning, implementation and monitoring. In this regard, UNV can support the UN Resident Coordination System and national authorities through targeted UN Volunteer profiles and technological solutions that contribute to align national plans and UN development frameworks to the new agenda, engage people and monitor progress in its implementation.

While UNV has started leveraging the strategic contribution of volunteerism in the five programmatic areas defined by its Strategic Framework: strengthening access to basic social services; community resilience for environment and disaster risk reduction; peacebuilding; youth; and national capacity development through volunteer schemes, the adoption of the SDGs provides a platform for stronger collaboration with UN agencies, governments and civil society at national level.

To ensure that the gains that UNV and other Volunteer Involving Organizations have made in terms of policy advancement are maintained and leveraged, UNV, in partnership with other VIOs, the private sector and governments, should continue to sharpen its narrative and that of volunteering for sustainable development. This will entail a continued engagement in policy advocacy at the national and global level, including positioning volunteerism as a viable mechanisms for SDG achievement in the context of the High Level Political Forum, the body tasked to review SDG progress.⁵

In conclusion, UNV is well positioned to leverage the momentum and engagement in the discussions leading to the SDGs at different levels:

- i) present relevant opportunities for volunteering linked to achieving the results of national development plans and strategies and the needs of UN partner agencies
- ii) continue to provide support capacities and tailored solutions in the context of UN development and peace programmes that are realigning to the SDGs
- iii) provide mechanisms for South-South learning through capacity exchanges and growing impact of volunteers from the South
- iv) continue positioning volunteerism as a viable mechanism for peace and development interventions through joint efforts with other global and national stakeholders;

⁵ Over the last three years, UNV has strengthened linkages between the national and global positioning efforts, steering exceptional advocacy action from international VIOs resulting in the development of four key advocacy documents:

- The [Call to Action](#)⁵ from the Board of IAVE in September 2014 in Australia.
- Forum’s [Lima Declaration](#)⁵ agreed during the IVCO Conference in October 2014 in Peru.
- The [IMPACT 2030 Declaration](#)⁵ delivered to the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Post 2015 during IVD 2014 in December in New York.
- The Forum [Tokyo Call to Action](#)⁵ agreed during the IVCO Conference in October 2015 in Tokyo.



- v) develop policy guidance and concretely work towards the integration of the concept in national development plans, UNDAFs, as well as national and global legislation and policies;
- vi) articulate and explore the specific contribution of volunteerism in the context of the current landscape through UNV's global programmes;
- vii) develop new and enhance existing UN Volunteer modalities to be better aligned with the SDG key features



Annexes

Annex I: Q+A Initial guidance document on volunteerism and the SDGs ([En](#); [Es](#); [Fr](#))

Annex II: [UNV Overview: volunteering and the 2030 Agenda](#)

Annex II: Overview presentation: [volunteerism and the SDGs](#)

Annex II: UNV Position Paper ([En](#) ; [Es](#) ; [Fr](#))

Annex III: [UNV key messages](#)

Annex IV: [Milestones of volunteerism integration graph](#)