POLICY BLUEPRINTS:

AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR NEXT GENERATION VOLUNTEERING

Reimagining Volunteering
for the 2030 Agenda

JULY 2020

This work was commissioned by the Secretariat of the Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda for the Global Technical Meeting on Volunteering in 2020.

To imagine and design the enabling environment for "next generation" volunteering support that is fit for the future, Plan of Action stakeholders commissioned the design of enabling environment blueprints focusing on two primary issues: **humanitarian volunteering** and **volunteering to address inequalities.** This document summarizes work done to date on the two blueprints as a basis for discussion at the Global Technical Meeting 2020.

Background and focus

An **enabling environment for volunteering works to maximize the benefits of volunteering for development outcomes and minimize the risks for volunteers**. Such an environment is based on number of underlying principles: the freedom to volunteer, gender equality in volunteering, the safety and security of all volunteers, and the voice and recognition of volunteer groups. These principles can be realized in a number of ways including through the realization of rights, the promotion of norms and values, and the implementation of formal policies and/or legislation.

Under the Plan of Action process stakeholders have been looking at **how the enabling environment for volunteering needs to adapt and evolve,** for example through**:**

    (i)   Support to all forms of volunteering, including the self-organized volunteering by grassroots and informal volunteers
    (ii)   Aligning volunteer efforts with SDG challenges and national priorities
    (iii)   Responding to and engage with changes in volunteering practices to 2030 and beyond
    (iv)   Addressing inequalities and risks in volunteering, particularly those associated with greater localization and decentralization.

In response, the blueprints summarized below are designed as nudges that can transform the policies that governments and their partners can use to volunteering flourish in these contexts. The term blueprint in this document is therefore used as a guide for issues that are emerging and a nudge for changes needed to be made in current approaches and systems. Each draws on ideas from many people involved in volunteering support and provides a common frame for our ambition.

Development process

The **humanitarian blueprint** has been developed by IFRC and the **volunteering to address inequalities blueprint** has been developed by the UNDP Accelerator Lab in Argentina. It should also be noted that there are two key differences between the blueprints as they are presented here:
- The humanitarian blueprint has been led by IFRC with significant input and ideas from a range of volunteering involving organisations. It has generated the hypothesis for change and recommendations based on case studies in the humanitarian context to date.
- The volunteering for inequalities blueprint is led by the UNDP Accelerator Lab in Argentina and is designed as an innovation prototype. The blueprint as it is presented is still a work in progress and presents the hypothesis of change it is seeking to test as part of the innovation process. Specific learnings and recommendations will be drawn after the innovation prototype is complete in the second half of 2020.

Blueprint A: Next generation volunteering in humanitarian contexts

This blueprint is based on six hypotheses that challenge some of the traditional assumptions that underpin humanitarian volunteering:

Hypothesis #1: Humanitarian crises and disasters are no longer just relegated to fragile, developing states. They are global and can happen in all countries and contexts.

Hypothesis #2: Humanitarian volunteers support disaster and crisis response when it is not suitable or appropriate for *states to do so*. They act as the bond between civil society and state structures.

Hypothesis #3: Humanitarian volunteers are frequently able to mobilize sooner than formal institutions and states.

Hypothesis #4: The localization of aid and technology are both major levers that are changing the nature of humanitarian volunteering. Whether it is the shift away from cross-border/international volunteering to hyperlocal volunteering, or from face to face to digital platforms - *where* and *how* people respond to crisis is shifting.

Hypothesis #5: *Who* is volunteering is as important as *how* and *where* they volunteer. If we are shifting our thinking about *how* and *where* volunteers are engaged, then we need to also widen the demographics of people whom we engage and support.

Hypothesis #6: Enabling environments and policy recommendations aimed at protecting humanitarian volunteers and the communities of people that benefit from their services should not hinder or make the very act of volunteering inaccessible.

Policy directions: Blueprint A

We are dependent on volunteers and civic action to keep our humanity flourishing, particularly in the time of crisis. Our work and the work of humanitarian volunteers will advance effectively into our new futures if it is marked by collective action in **four broad arenas:**

Whole of Society Approach
A flourishing society that can thrive despite crises and disasters requires a **whole of society** approach to civic action. To achieve this, states need to be able to mobilize different segments of its society to mitigate the fallout of crises. A whole of society approach requires a change in cultural expectation so that every person in society is prepared, inspired, and mobilized to respond. Significant investment in civil society is needed so that we can shift towards a model where civil society is a core pillar of resilience and recovery processes, not an afterthought.

Integrated Civil Society - State Response
Societies are more resilient in crises when there are strong systems already in place between citizens and the State. We must make it our goal to build such systems in advance to enable the rapid scale up and mobilization of humanitarian volunteers when needed.

Social Safety Nets
If we are to expand the ethos of humanitarian volunteering to be a broader, holistic, whole of society approach, then accelerating participation requires making access more even and protecting volunteers when their contribution puts them in harm's way (in as broad an understanding of *harm* as possible). By rethinking social safety nets for humanitarian volunteering, we aim to ensure that volunteers have *financial protection, physical protection, mental health protection, and liability protection.*

Safe and Equitable Digital Futures
Volunteering and civic engagement is now increasingly linked to digital connections. However, to volunteer or engage digitally should not cause more harm and more inequity through participation, particularly when digital and technology implications are inconsistently understood.

Blueprint B: Next generation volunteering to address Inequalities

Latin America is the most unequal region in the world [ECLAC, 2019]. The COVID-19 Crisis runs the risk of deepening inequalities by disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable. The current situation and future prospects are extremely alarming. Many policymakers agree that the pandemic requires new ideas on social protection that go beyond what governments can do [Lustig and Tomassi, 2020].

There are four main perspectives from which we could think the next generation volunteering in light of inequalities in the region:

Hypothesis #1: In Latin America volunteering is mainly done by people in their own communities, and as such can be an important tool for empowering voices in identifying the challenges, specific problems and needs of people who may often be excluded.

Hypothesis #2: Collaborative design approaches can strengthen the relationship between volunteers and the community to work together on issues related to inequalities.

Hypothesis #3: Volunteers can make a significant contribution by providing access to existing goods and services closer to the excluded populations thus building more inclusive systems.

Hypothesis #4: Volunteers from the most excluded communities can help develop knowledge by following up on the actions implemented, generating lessons and feeding into policy development.

Policy directions: Blueprint B

A number of models could help volunteering address inequalities while adapting to today's digital society, including:

Idea 1: **Volunteer-based crowdsourcing which through the incorporation of technology and collaborative construction of knowledge**, helps policymakers better understand the complexity of people's lives.

Idea 2: **Mechanisms for the integration of volunteer perspectives into ongoing inequality policies and programming** allows the development of bottom-up and personalized responses, tailored to each community.

Idea 3: **Empowerment of informal community organizers volunteering** through investments in structures and spaces to empower informal volunteering or "neighbourhooding", which remains the most prevalent form of volunteering particularly among target groups, helps develop and sustain adaptive capacity of communities.

All three models are explained in detail in the blueprint as a guidelight for those willing to take their volunteering programmes to the next level through combining volunteering and technology in different models such as volunteer-based crowdsourcing and by allowing more human-centred connections with excluded groups.

A common direction of travel on volunteering policy?

Though both these blueprints are at different stages of progress, they do amplify three common nudges towards more forward looking, equitable enabling environments for next generation volunteering. These are:

1. That people and citizen driven volunteering models are transforming how change occurs within societies: the need to align volunteer mechanisms with these citizen-led models are needed.
2. That state-based policy responses that are integrated with volunteering models can provide a more holistic safety net for societies.
3. That principles of equity and inclusion are integral pillars and determinants of volunteering and must be addressed in volunteering models.

What both these blueprints do indicate is a fundamental shift in how we think about how volunteering contributes to broader social and global change, and the pivotal role it plays in fostering inclusive growth. In order to achieve this, we need much more holistic enabling environments that go beyond just funding legal instruments or formal mechanisms but rather focus on *how* volunteers are integrated through policy processes and *how* they are equitably supported.

What next?

In the second half of 2020, each blueprint will be piloted in order to further develop guidance for UN Member States and their partners. In addition, the full draft blueprints will be made available online at knowledge.unv.org for consultation and inputs during the development and testing process.