ACCELERATION MATRIX:

VOLUNTEERING FOR THE SDGS

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.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNV, or the United Nations Member States or any organizations partnering with the Secretariat of the Plan of Action.

All reasonable precautions have been taken by the Secretariat of the Plan of Action to verify the information contained in this publication. However, the published material is being distributed without warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied. The responsibility for the interpretation and use of the material lies with the reader. In no event shall the Secretariat of the Plan of Action be liable for damages arising from its use.

1.   Introduction

In the context of the [Decade of Action on the SDGs](#), policy makers and practitioners at every level are called on to activate, amplify, and scale people's commitment and contributions to the 2030 Agenda by engaging with volunteerism as a powerful accelerator of progress. UN Volunteers and Plan of Action stakeholders are developing a toolkit on SDGs Acceleration which will:

- **Inspire** policymakers to engage volunteerism as a transformative, people-based force for change;

- **Familiarize** SDG actors and policymakers with some of the distinctive contributions of volunteering for the 2030 Agenda;

- **Support** users with practical guidance and tools to leverage volunteering as an SDG accelerator in their own spheres.

As a first step to the development of this toolkit, this **Acceleration Matrix on Volunteering for the SDGs** will be discussed at the Global Technical Meeting 2020 (GTM2020) at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

2.   What is an SDG accelerator?

"Acceleration" has become an integral part of dialogue on SDG implementation. Yet there is no single definition in development thinking. UNDP's *[SDG Accelerator and Bottleneck Assessment Tool](#)* defines accelerators as "catalytic policy and/or programme areas that can trigger positive multiplier effects across SDGs and targets," and encourages the selection of actions that respond to national development plans and strategies, or areas where progress is lagging. This reflects the 2030 Agenda principles of indivisibility and integration, since complex problems cannot be dealt with in isolation.

The UNDP assessment tool also highlights the needs of the most marginalized groups as a criterion for selecting accelerator priorities. This responds to the 2030 Agenda commitment to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first. Acceleration efforts must challenge the forces of **exclusion and marginalization** both across and within localities and countries.

Acceleration is also linked to transformation, because the SDGs vision requires fundamental changes in **structures, systems, and practices** at every level. Our complex human and ecological crises call for novel ways of thinking and behaving that reflect the interconnectedness of human and planetary well-being. Development pathways must avoid future trade offs, ensuring sustainability and equity through "transformational social change". (IPCC 2019).

3.   Acceleration characteristics

Acknowledging that millions of people everywhere, everyday already volunteer on a wide range of development issues, this Matrix focuses on volunteering as a *transformative force* under the 2030 Agenda. To do so, it starts with four inter-related characteristics of acceleration.

- **Multiplier effects**: Identifying strategies that contribute to several Goals and targets through an integrated approach.

- **Tackling inequalities:** Supporting the most marginalized groups by addressing longstanding inequalities, and countering new patterns of discrimination, for example the "new great divergence" associated with digitalisation and artificial intelligence.

- **Systems-thinking:** Creating interconnected "local to global" systems to predict, shape and respond to economic and social change.

- **Acting within human and planetary boundaries:** Avoiding short-term trade-offs through more resilient foundations for equitable and sustainable growth.

4.   Distinctive contributions of volunteering

Volunteering involves time and efforts given freely to contribute to the well-being of others. Although volunteering practices and activities can look very different, they are all rooted in the motivation to organize, alone or with others, to respond to problems or issues. Human relationships are central to volunteering, because they shape both the needs that we see around us or in society, and the opportunities to act upon them. This "relational" foundation of volunteerism is at the heart of volunteerism's potential to contribute to the transformative shifts needed to advance the 2030 Agenda.

The self-motivated, relationship-based foundations of volunteerism link to many "social goods" that extend beyond the results of specific volunteering activities. Six main contributions can be identified in research on volunteering for development (Table 1).

Table 1: Distinctive Contributions of Volunteering

Solidarity	*Volunteering allows people from different backgrounds, groups or even nationalities to work collectively for a common cause.*
Ownership	*Volunteering can provide opportunities for people and groups to set the vision and priorities in their communities and societies, and to hold development actors to account.*
Participation	*Volunteering enables people to contribute and collaborate on development problems, through self-organized activities or engagement with existing structures.*
Innovation	*By looking beyond usual professional, geographic, and financing boundaries for problem-solving, volunteerism can foster new forms of collaboration.*
Inspiration	*Volunteers can raise awareness and generate optimism about the possibility of finding solutions, model new norms or behaviours, and inspire others to take action.*
Inclusion	*Since all types of people volunteer, volunteering has the potential to strengthen linkages between the most marginalized groups and formal social and economic structures.*

Source: VSO 2015; Author

5.   Acceleration matrix

To explore the potential of volunteering as an SDG accelerator the Matrix lines up the distinctive added-value contributions of volunteerism against the four acceleration dimension defined above. In doing so it helps identify possible points of intersection and synergy. Approaching volunteerism through the prism of SDG acceleration sharpens focus on the types of volunteer initiatives that might be leveraged to greatest effect to advance the 2030 Agenda

Annex 1 is a simple model of volunteerism as an accelerator, illustrating the intersection of SDG acceleration criteria and potential volunteering contributions. Here, the matrix is completed with sample content related to SDG 13 – Climate Action.

6.   Next steps

The Matrix will be discussed at the Global Technical Meeting on Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda in July 2020. Based on feedback and inputs, the next step is to develop the toolkit, including step-by-step guidance, tools, examples and case studies and links to additional resources, for practitioners and policy makers who want to apply volunteering approaches to accelerate progress on selected SDGs priorities. Stakeholders are encouraged to send feedback and ideas to planofaction@unv.org

References

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2019): *Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty.* Geneva: IPCC

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2017) *SDG Accelerator and Bottleneck Assessment tool.* New York: UNDP

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2015). A/RES/70/1. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New York: UNGA.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (2018). A/73/254. Report of the Secretary-General. Plan of Action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New York: UNGA.

Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and Institute of Development Studies (IDS) (2014). *The role of volunteering in sustainable development*. London and Brighton: VSO and IDS.

Annex 1: Acceleration matrix SDG13

		SDG ACCELERATION CRITERIA			
		Creating multiplier effects Reinforcing positive change across multiple SDGs and targets	**Tackling inequalities** Supporting marginalized groups to challenge exclusionary processes and structures	**Systems-level change** Shaping institutions and organizations that from local to global that underpin equitable and sustainable development	**Respecting human and planetary boundaries** Building resilient foundations and avoiding (future) trade-offs across economic, social and environmental domains
DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING	**Solidarity** Volunteering enabling people to work collectively across national, social or economic divides for a common cause		**Green alliances:** Generating greater ambition in climate commitments, for example through citizen alliances between countries or cities unevenly impacted by climate change		
	Ownership Volunteering providing the spaces and channels for people to contribute to development vision and priorities and to hold duty-bearers to account	**Community energy ownership:** Shifts to greener energy can simultaneously support wealth creation for the most marginalized groups and give them greater control over their own natural resources. These models rely on significant community engagement and other forms of volunteering, from education and awareness-raising activities, development of community governance structures to manage resources, data collection and monitoring.		**Participatory policymaking:** New spaces for civic participation at local, national or even international level around climate action can help move debates to non-partisan lines, and improve the use of both scientific evidence and citizen perspectives.	
	Participation Opportunities created through volunteering to contribute and collaborate on development issues, both self-organized and those created with others				**Green city planning:** Participation opportunities, often in the digital sphere, to shape local planning and priorities in relation to low-carbon development at city level and beyond.
	Inclusion Volunteering facilitating the economic and social engagement of those who tend to benefit least from development processes		**Realizing rights:** Expert volunteers and community advocates can play an important role in securing rights relating to climate change, and to work with governments on innovative legal frameworks such as futures legislation.		
	Innovation Creating new ideas, products and processes through different forms of voluntary collaboration	**Green solidarity economy:** Social solidarity and green economies require volunteer efforts from campaign and awareness to organization of governance and (non-) market structures.			**Knowledge and data:** Open and inclusive processes to develop insights for example through hackathons, or combatting disinformation online both require the inputs of climate volunteers
	Inspiration Volunteers modelling new norms and behaviours within their communities and societies				

Annex 2: Examples from the matrix

Community energy ownership: Green energy initiatives are not only important for low-carbon development but can support wealth creation for the most marginalized groups and give them greater control over their own natural resources. These models **can rely on significant community engagement and voluntary action, from education and awareness-raising activities, development of community governance structures to manage resources, data collection and policy engagement with authorities.** They have further potential to draw on volunteer efforts: for example, volunteer in-kind contributions can demonstrate local buy-in and reduce risks to investors. A number of relevant models have been tested over the last decade. For example in **South Africa,** *Just Energy* worked hand in hand with low-income communities on wind energy, to secure their long-term ownership and benefits from investment projects. The *CHOICES community energy project* helps communities to identify options to increase access to clean energy while also creating livelihoods opportunities.

Green solidarity economy: Ideas around the solidarity and circular economies are gaining traction in many parts of the world. Although models and practices vary, **many of these require significant volunteer participation: from raising awareness and influencing norms in "Buy Local" campaigns; to governance of systems and/or common resources; to the time spent preparing goods for donation or exchange in local circular systems; to the use of time banks and skilled volunteers to fix and repurpose good and items.**

Participatory policy development: New forms of volunteer-led civic participation around climate action create space for non-partisan dialogue, improving the use of both scientific evidence and citizen perspectives in policy-making. For example, in **New Zealand**, the Aotearoa Climate Emergency promotes citizens' assemblies as a way in which government can consult and engage effectively on climate issues with the people it serves, following the Māori tradition of *hui,* a term for formal public discussion. **Fiji's** youth-led Alliance for Future Generations brings together urban and rural young people around SDG issues, with a focus on climate, oceans, and environment. The Government of Fiji supports Alliance members to accompany the official delegation to the yearly COP Climate Change Conference. On returning, members share their experience with their peers and communities. The Alliance builds the capacity, and motivation of young people to act on climate issues and amplifies their voices in national and international policy venues.

Green city planning: Cities have been at the forefront of testing and implementing a range of ways in which citizens can input into planning and other processes. For example in Rio de Janeiro, the Mapeando platform allowed citizens to suggest physical changes in the city, such as the positioning of bike lanes as part of the wider LabRio project run by young volunteers in the city.

Green alliances: Inequalities between and within countries shape the both impacts of the climate crisis, and the respective capacities of people and their governments to act. In addition to the global movements on climate action, **citizen partnerships between a small group of cities or countries can help ensure greater understanding, empathy and solidarity across contexts.** This in turn addresses the issue of impacts being felt unevenly e.g. between lower and higher-income countries, with the potential to build domestic support for greater ambition in national climate commitments. A number of leaders are already undertaking twinning and exchange experiences to learn from each other, but matching communities could help share grounded experiences along the lines of the twinning initiatives for peace in Europe after the 2nd World War.

Realizing rights: The use of human rights frameworks to ensure accountabilities on climate action from public and private stakeholders has been slowly gaining pace. However, as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights notes, a number of rulings over the past 12 months "provide a clear path forward for concerned individuals…..to undertake climate litigation in order to protect human rights." **Expert legal volunteers and community advocates have long helped advance legal change through strategic litigation on wide range of rights issues. In the context of climate action, volunteer coalitions could explore the role of legal approaches,** including working with governments to draft model legislation for example around future generations , or to hold carbon polluters to account.

Knowledge and data: To accelerate climate action, **volunteers can provide new knowledge and insights to support policy-makers.** For example, a number of climate hackathons have been held by public and private bodies in recent years, to address specific issues such as how to support journalists to report on climate stories, to enabling local people to address their own context-specific climate challenges across multiple cities around the world. In the digital space volunteers can also help address the spread of disinformation on climate issues online and particularly on social media.