

Chapter 4

Volunteer–state partnerships and deliberative governance



Key highlights

- Volunteer–state partnerships promote volunteers' voices and agency, leverage volunteers' expertise and experiences, and engender inclusion.
- By engaging volunteers in deliberative processes, state authorities facilitate their inclusion and enable them to contribute to finding viable solutions to complex challenges.
- Volunteers engage in deliberations to claim their space and make their voices heard, particularly when there are different agendas and priorities.
- Engaging volunteers from marginalized communities (rural women, peasant farmers, indigenous groups) in decision-making contributes to long-term and sustainable solutions and ensures ownership in development.

4.1. Introduction

Across countries and regions, volunteers from marginalized groups—women, people with disabilities, slum-dwellers and the urban poor—are devoting their time, expertise and knowledge, and collaborating with state authorities in various deliberative processes, with the goal of shaping development outcomes. Drawing on case study research from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ecuador, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and Tunisia, this chapter focuses on models of volunteer–state partnerships in deliberative governance in the Global South.

The case studies, which provide insights on how diverse interests are brought together and the aspirations of volunteers and state authorities are met, also shed light on new ways of working between volunteers and state authorities, and how deliberative governance mechanisms can foster inclusion of marginalized groups and build more equal societies.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four parts. Section 4.2 introduces and defines the concept of deliberative

governance, and describes the key processes involved. The case studies in this report are briefly introduced in section 4.3. Section 4.4 then outlines the key components of the deliberative models emerging from the case studies. Finally, the strengths and challenges of these models are discussed in section 4.5.

4.2. More than discussion: what is deliberative governance?

Deliberative governance processes broadly encompass forums or spaces where volunteers can participate in dialogue or in setting strategic priorities, and are often used by public entities to engage citizens more directly in solving some of the most pressing policy challenges.⁹⁵ Deliberative governance processes do not involve a predetermined agenda or choice and are more likely to give voice and agency to a wider range of citizens. This chapter explores how volunteer–state partnerships can give voice and agency to volunteers from diverse groups and communities, and with different aspirations and interests.

Three key characteristics of deliberative systems



Deliberative systems have three key characteristics: authenticity, inclusivity and consequentiality.⁹⁶ To be authentic, deliberation must be voluntary and reflective. To be inclusive, deliberative systems must provide opportunities and develop capacities for all people to participate. To be consequential, deliberative systems must aim to achieve an outcome such as an agreement or course of action. It should be noted that while consensus is often viewed as the ideal, deliberation need not lead to it. Rather, it is critical that people are provided with an opportunity to express their self-interests and preferences to stakeholders (government officials, volunteer-involving organizations and even their fellow citizens) while making conflict visible.⁹⁷

In assessing volunteer–state partnerships in deliberative governance processes, the chapter examines how volunteers engage with governments in decision-making processes. As volunteers devote their

time to participate in these processes, it is important that they participate freely (linked to authenticity). How volunteers participate and how the processes accommodate their needs is important. For deliberative processes to be inclusive and increase their legitimacy, volunteers should have an active role on how these spaces are created and shaped. Deliberative processes can then become a vehicle through which marginalized groups such as women can claim their space in public decision-making processes.⁹⁸

Who creates spaces for participation and who engages in these spaces remain critical questions.^{99,100} Although deliberative spaces can be created by the state or by non-state entities, including civil society groups or volunteers, this can result in unequal processes that favour privileged groups.¹⁰¹

¹⁰² In such spaces, marginalized groups such as women, ethnic minorities and poorer populations may be further sidelined in these processes and their voices not heard.¹⁰³

4.3. Introducing the case studies

Volunteer–state partnerships in deliberative governance focus on volunteerism within the context of communities in countries and regions in the Global South. Volunteers from marginalized groups, including indigenous communities (Nepal), rural women (Kyrgyzstan), farmers (DRC and Tunisia) and activists (Ecuador) collaborate with their governments to tackle a variety of issues, from climate change (Ecuador and Nepal), agriculture (DRC) and a water crisis (Tunisia) to women’s rights (Kyrgyzstan) and heritage conservation (Nepal). Recognizing that volunteer–state partnerships are characterized by unequal power relations, the case studies help illustrate how new ways of working that enable volunteers to play a greater role in decision-making alongside the state can make spaces more inclusive and contribute to outcomes that better respond to the needs of marginalized communities, while providing the basis for a shift in power relations.

While the case studies from Nepal and Ecuador were developed through primary research (interviews and focus groups), the other three are based primarily on secondary sources.¹⁰⁴

Two forms of volunteerism are evident in the case studies. In Nepal and Kyrgyzstan, volunteer efforts were aimed at helping communities respond to emerging issues through discussions and collective decision-making—often called mutual aid¹⁰⁵—while in Ecuador, Tunisia and DRC, volunteers engaged in meetings and public dialogues.



A volunteer maintains paths to promote ecotourism in Peru. *Source:* UNV.



4.3.1. Guthis and Barghars, Nepal

Nepal's volunteer-based Guthi¹⁰⁶ and Barghar institutions within the Newar and Tharu communities, respectively, are rooted in traditional and cultural processes.

Among the Newars, Guthi is still predominantly practised as a social institution that determines the rights and obligations of Newars towards their community. Volunteerism under Guthi and Barghar takes the form of social and cultural activities where individual choice is considered less important than broader social and cultural goals (such as the preservation of cultural heritage).

As such, they are characterized as mutual aid and self-help groups where individuals and communities work together for the common good, addressing shared problems.

With Nepal's shift to a federal form of government, local governments maintained and strengthened their relationship with Guthis and Barghars to promote deliberative processes. This enabled them to participate in decision-making and set their priorities in community development. Local governance also provided opportunities for volunteers to engage in planning and implementation of projects. While Guthis and Bargharsⁱⁱ traditionally engaged in cultural and religious activities, the new state system, which recognized traditional models of governance, led to increased participation of Guthis and Barghars in planning and implementation of projects. In this context, partnerships with local governments enabled them to engage in deliberative governance processes and paved the way for their growing influence. This model strengthened the deliberative capacities of local informal institutions like Guthi and Barghar and increased their capacity to influence the state's micro system for planning and implementation of development activities such as natural resource management. This is the focus of the case study.

ⁱⁱ In Nepal, the term "Guthi" also refers to a land tenure system that oversees the management of land donated for religious purposes. Elsewhere in the country, the Guthi system is mostly practised as this type of land tenure system, but among the Newars (who are the focus of this case study), Guthi is still predominantly practised as a social institution that determines the rights and obligations of Newars towards their community.



4.3.2. **Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano, Ecuador**

The Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano [Latin American Future Foundation – FFLA] promotes a culture of collaborative dialogue between multiple stakeholders, among them volunteers who engage in various sectors across Latin America to find alternative solutions to sustainable development challenges.

The foundation seeks to generate new capacities, strengthen the development of public policy and address conflict in collaborative situations. The case study explores how FFLA's dialogue for sustainable development programme provides spaces for volunteers to engage in discussions on issues surrounding climate change and sustainability.



4.3.3. **Agricultural and Rural Management Council, Democratic Republic of the Congo**

The Agricultural and Rural Management Council (CARG) is a mechanism comprising civil society, traditional leaders and farmers, among them volunteers who partner with government institutions to address challenges that farmers face.

Historically, consultation frameworks for peasant organizations were often grouped into a federation and defended the interests of farmers.¹⁰⁷ With time, these federations evolved and transformed into more formal structures to allow farmers to participate in decision-making. As CARG has evolved into an intermediary mechanism between peasant farmers and the state, some farmers have volunteered their time and talents to CARG and helped to shape and advance the interests of their fellow farmers.¹⁰⁸ This case study examines the mechanisms involved when peasant farmers volunteer their time to CARG and how they shape agricultural policies and financing at the local level.



4.3.4. Nebhana Water Forum, Tunisia

The Nebhana Water Forum is a multi-stakeholder platform created to address water scarcity in the Kairouan region in Tunisia.¹⁰⁹

The purpose of the platform is to develop a sustainable and integrated water management approach. Tunisia has very limited water resources, 82 percent of which are used by the agriculture sector.¹¹⁰ While the platform involves multiple stakeholders, the case study explores the partnership between two groups with divergent views on water management in the region—farmers (some of them volunteers) and the government—and their efforts to address water management issues in a collaborative way.



4.3.5. Alga, Kyrgyzstan

Founded in 1995 by active rural women living in a collective farm, Alga is a voluntary women's group that operates in villages across six districts in the eastern part of the Chui region in Kyrgyzstan.¹¹¹

Its name, which comes from the name of the collective farm where the founding group of women lived, means “moving forward” or “going ahead” in Kyrgyz. The case study explores how the volunteer organization represents the voice of Kyrgyz women in local government deliberative processes.



A volunteer receives tika and blessings from elders after finishing Guthi rituals in Nepal.
Source: UNV.

4.4. Key features of volunteer–state partnerships in deliberative governance

The four key features of deliberative governance in volunteer–state partnerships are discussed in the following subsections.

Box 4.1. Summary of mechanisms involved in volunteerism for deliberative governance

Who volunteers or participates?

Community-based volunteers coming from socially marginalized groups (peasant farmers, indigenous groups, rural women, young people etc.) are those who volunteer in community forums, discussions and meetings, as they are directly affected by the issue or topic being deliberated and shared. Not everyone wants to participate or are convinced by the need for people–state discussion.

The “seat” at the decision-making table is created in two ways: (1) state-sponsored public forums invite people from these groups to volunteer their time and knowledge and (2) local governments call on pre-existing institutions and organizations that facilitate volunteering to extend discussions to marginalized groups.

Volunteers can participate (especially in the second strategy) either directly or through representatives from the volunteer-involving organization. This has implications for inclusion and voice, namely who gets to have a seat at the table and how they are heard in these spaces.

What is the extent of participation?

The case studies demonstrate several ways in which discussions can become more participatory, from going from house to house to invite household representatives, to gathering information and insights from group members. While representation targets are at times put in place, these are not always evident in forum discussions, and more “powerful” participants may dominate the conversation. Facilitation skills and careful design of the deliberation method helped to address these issues.

For what outcome?

People’s participation in deliberative governance has led to more responsive and sustainable outcomes that help address the needs of the most marginalized. Volunteerism has proved to be a pathway to strengthen collaboration between people and states. But such relationships are constantly changing due to differing agendas, priorities and needs, both of volunteers and state institutions.



A volunteer and member of the Guthi institution takes part in a religious procession. Nepal’s volunteer-based Guthi institution supports and partners with the Government to preserve cultural heritage. *Source:* UNV.

4.4.1. Promote agency and voice

The case study in Nepal is an example of how deliberative governance mechanisms can engender volunteers' agency.

Under the evolving federal system, both Guthi and Barghar are mutual aid groups that have utilized deliberation and partnered with state authorities in governance systems, as well as becoming increasingly involved in community projects. At the local level, both the Barghar and Guthi have partnered with the local government around issues of cultural preservation. Under the evolving mechanism, Guthi and Barghar have been integrated into decision-making processes which has enabled them to influence decisions. As part of its partnership with local authorities, Guthis' involvement in the planning process has given them agency and amplified their voice, allowing them to advocate for the preservation of cultural heritage rights. Nepal's shift to a federalized government structure in 2015 enabled these local institutions to participate in decision-making and set their priorities on community development. Local governance has also provided opportunities for volunteers to engage in planning and implementation of projects. Local governments maintained and strengthened their relationship with Guthis and Barghars to promote deliberative processes, and local government officials increasingly engaged with Guthis and Barghars to expand decision-making in public resource management, infrastructure and disaster response (see Box 4.2).

4.4.2. Leverage volunteers' expertise and experiences

Across the case studies, volunteer–state partnerships illustrate that deliberations allow for diverse points of view to be heard,

with volunteers providing knowledge and expertise that frequently resulted in sustainable solutions. Often, volunteers' knowledge and ideas merge with often called “expert” knowledge from bureaucrats and other government officials. For example, farmers who volunteered with the CARG (DRC) offered first-hand insights to local government officials on how agricultural prices and tax responsibilities were impacting their livelihoods and suggested how to prevent these price surges.¹¹²

In Ecuador, FFLA volunteers from local communities who were experiencing the impacts of climate change engaged in dialogues, including through networks such as the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN), in which they supported policymakers from developing countries to implement development policies aligned with climate issues.

In Nepal, Guthiyars brought to discussions principles of resource management that are rooted in their culture and traditions. For instance, a Guthiyar explained that the annual festival they co-organize called Sithi Naha is “not only based on religion, it also is a basis of our resource management, environment conservation and governance. Before the notion of world environment was known in the Newar community, our ancestors were aware of the need to clean the water resources...It is referred to as a type of cleaning campaign based on our tradition.” These culture-specific beliefs and practices provided useful insights for local environmental planning.



4.4.3. Facilitate inclusion

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In the case studies, deliberative processes were created to facilitate and foster inclusion.
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In Nepal, Barghar volunteers partnered with the local government to build a dam (see Box 4.2). This volunteer–state partnership enabled the inclusion of Barghars in decision-making on a public project, which resulted in the construction of a stronger structure that aligned with both the volunteers' needs and the local government's aspirations. Meanwhile, Guthi who partnered with local authorities in restoring and maintaining temples, waterspouts and other monuments established a co-funding mechanism that culminated in the preservation of some historical monuments.

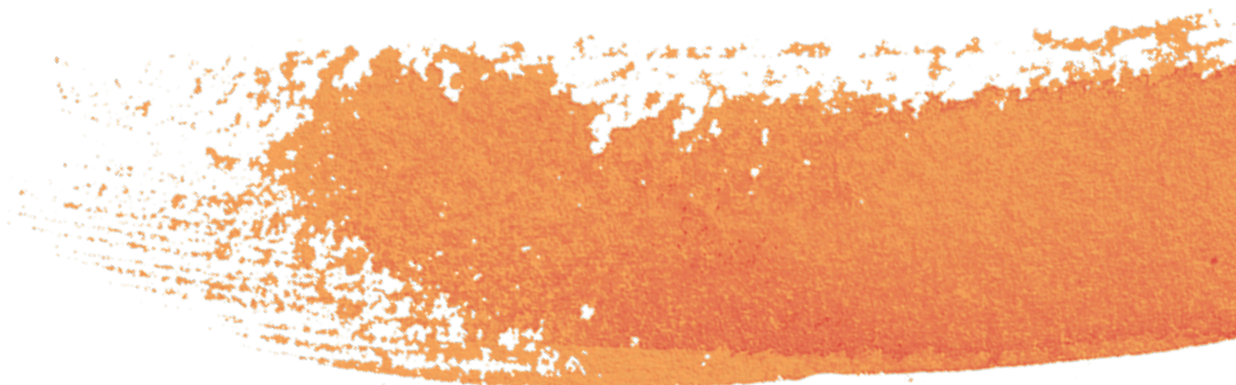
In Ecuador, the FFLA ensures that minority groups, particularly women, are not only included but centralized in the spaces that they create and the issues that they influence or advocate for within certain government policies. This is in spite of the lack of mechanisms and specific spaces for these groups in the foundation's governance bodies.

In Tunisia, one part of the Nebhana Water Forum's three-part method for dialogue is an exploratory session.¹¹³ For example, a small group of farmers (without state

representatives) were able to engage in an open dialogue about water use, their aspirations and the significance of water in their farming, without any pressure to stick to predefined talking points (see Box 4.3).

The case studies show that it is not only state authorities that take the initiative to engage the public in a deliberative process. Volunteer and mutual aid groups also took on leadership roles in these spaces, giving them the authority to highlight a problem or issue to be discussed. For example, a Barghar stated that "...we have also called a meeting to discuss a community issue and we invited the ward chair and the mayor to join us." Farmers in CARG (DRC) and women leaders in Alga (Kyrgyzstan) were, at times, the ones being invited by state authorities to participate in council meetings and stakeholder dialogues.

These features point to how deliberative spaces can be inclusive, representative and rooted in community values and practices. This is not entirely true for the Guthis in Nepal where despite some changes, processes remain exclusive to certain castes and genders. Aside from these exclusions, volunteers and mutual aid group members were not only "invited" to deliberative spaces but also created their own to discuss issues that were high on their agenda. Deliberation was not always formal; there were also informal, unstructured activities in which people's stories and lived experiences were highly valued.





A volunteer and Guthi member helps to reconstruct a temple which was destroyed by the 2015 earthquake in Patan, Nepal. Source: UNV.

4.5. Strengths and challenges of deliberative systems

These case studies highlight some of the strengths and challenges of deliberative systems when utilized as an approach to facilitate volunteer–state relationships.

4.5.1. Volunteers can help with difficult decisions and contribute to more responsive outcomes.

As the case studies illustrate, volunteers enhanced decision-making, with their expertise and experiences helping to achieve outcomes that were more responsive to their communities' needs.

In Kyrgyzstan, Alga partnered with several local and regional government bodies, including the Supervisory Council of the Chui region.¹¹⁴ In 2015, Alga launched the Follow Your Voice campaign which sought to increase women's participation in electoral processes and represented their interests in state bodies.¹¹⁵ While Alga represents Kyrgyz women members, it also drew on opinions gathered through their educational campaigns. They were then able to share the insights gained from these campaigns with local councils. These insights proved useful when local governments had to make difficult decisions on complex issues surrounding women's political and civic participation, domestic violence, and women's rights.



A volunteer works on a construction project in Nepal.
Source: UNV.

Box 4.2. What it took to build a dam

Barghars collaboratively engage in different communal work to build infrastructure such as roads, temples and canals. The region of Rajapur was experiencing severe floods during the monsoon season, which damaged farmlands and consequently, people's livelihoods. To address this shared community problem, the Barghar leader went from house to house asking representatives from each household to attend a meeting on the issue and then later to volunteer to construct the dam itself. The Barghar leader explained, "As per their availability, men, women, young and old participate as volunteers. They set out to the dam early in the morning with their lunch and snack. They fill the ditch with stones to irrigate water in the canal. It takes three to four days to build a dam." Traditionally, the community used stone, mud and their manual labour to build these dams, though they often did not last as long as intended.

It turned out that building the dam was also a priority for the local municipality, having seen the destruction brought by flooding to agricultural activity in the area. This led the Barghar and the local municipality to deliberate on collaborative action. The ward chair explained that the planning process started with collecting views from the community members. Local government officials were also invited to join the Barghar's community meetings. The Deputy Mayor of the Municipality stated that "traditionally, Barghars only use their solutions but nowadays, they have become more participatory and welcome new ideas and solutions during these public gatherings. Decisions were not individual but communal and aligned with the local government's aspirations." Subsequently, the volunteers started using tools such as Gabion wire to wrap the stones so that the structure could withstand heavier flooding. They used their traditional skills and knowledge combined with more modern approaches to engineering to build a stronger dam, funded by the municipality.

Source: UNV primary research.

In Nepal, the partnership between the Barghar and local government in the Municipality of Rajapur demonstrates how the know-how of the Barghar combined with the local government's funding and engineers' technical expertise led to the construction of a more viable and sustainable dam that could protect farmers' land from flooding (see Box 4.2). While Barghars had previously relied on their indigenous/traditional knowledge and had worked independently to address flooding, the partnership with the state made this easier (for example, in terms of co-funding) and led to more sustainable outcomes.

Similarly, as part of Guthis' partnership with state authorities to restore and preserve cultural buildings, including many temples and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage sites in Lalitpur in Kathmandu City that were destroyed in the 2015 Nepal earthquake, they engaged in planning alongside the local government. This allowed the Guthis, who have a long history and tradition of preserving their cultural heritage, to engage effectively with the local government and ensure that their priorities were aligned. Participating in the planning process offered the Guthis opportunities

to listen to traditional institutions in the governance mechanism, and the deliberative process enhanced decision-making on the preservation of the sites.

These examples show how people volunteered their time and knowledge to develop more responsive government projects, aligning often differing priorities and agendas. Volunteers were willing to step in and “think with” local officials, contributing context-specific knowledge and supporting government projects. Within these deliberative spaces, the experiences of the public played an important part in increasing understanding between those participating in the deliberations.

It should be noted, however, that the “outcomes” of deliberation are not always clear. For example, in Ecuador, FFLA’s engagement in discussions did not result in policy change. Since FFLA served to liaise between state authorities and civil society, and aimed to create spaces for dialogue between them, FFLA’s goal was to influence government policy by advocating for marginalized groups. While FFLA’s partnership with state authorities may have helped amplify the voices of these groups, it

did not influence outcomes in favour of them or the communities it represented.

4.5.2. Volunteering can foster inclusion in deliberative spaces but may have limitations.

These case studies demonstrate that deliberative processes provide avenues for volunteers from marginalized groups to take on a central role in making decisions about public services and programmes that affect them, thus bridging the gap between communities and the state authorities. While the impetus for volunteers’ collaboration with state authorities to address challenges varied—from dissatisfaction with government services for specific groups (Alga in Kyrgyzstan) to the desire for more sustainable flood management (the Barghar in Nepal)—in all cases, volunteers were keen to influence decisions on issues that mattered to their communities and for the greater good. Through deliberative governance mechanisms, Kyrgyz women (Kyrgyzstan), peasant farmers (DRC and Tunisia), and indigenous groups (Nepal and Ecuador) were able to participate in public policymaking at the local and national level.

Volunteers invest:



to develop more responsive government projects, aligning often differing priorities and agendas

Box 4.3. Peasant farmers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo volunteer their time to ensure equitable financial processes

Through deliberation, peasant farmers who volunteered with CARG influenced agricultural prices between producers and buyers and discussed taxes with the state. The CARG coordinator noted that “when there are surcharges of the sales price or harassment by civil servants which negatively influence the price of agricultural products, the members of the state present in the council are called upon to give explanations.” As many stakeholders were involved, there were often conflicts and disagreements. The dialogues nevertheless provided peasant farmers with the opportunity to present their counterarguments and propose new terms. The CARG coordinator added that “this is how the tax nomenclature is decided and is accessible to the peasant farmers. Once the peasant farmers arrive at the market with their agricultural products, they know what they have to pay or not.”

A similar process is in place for preparing and validating the provincial budget. Before CARG, the budget was prepared at the provincial level without the farmers and therefore did not consider their standard of living. Now, the draft budget is submitted to CARG, which convenes a meeting of all the members for review. According to another CARG member, “if we find that a particular section is wrong, we prepare a report highlighting our changes and we send it to the provincial level.” He continued, “We try to look at the classification system at the provincial level and at the national level. If it does not coincide with the standard of living of the population, we make slight modifications at the level

of the different entities.” Through these deliberative processes, the financial components of the public agricultural procedures are able to reflect the realities of the poorest farmers in the area.

Sources: Interviews with CARG Provincial Officer and Permanent Secretary, 12 and 14 July 2021.

In the case of CARG, peasant farmers attended deliberations discussions with state authorities to raise concerns that may not have been addressed otherwise. As is illustrated in Box 4.3, issues around the costs of agricultural products and local budgeting had a direct impact on these farmers' lives and livelihoods. Having a venue to present their views and share their concerns on how decisions were made fostered inclusion while ensuring that their needs were considered.

As some of the case studies illustrate, challenges remain in ensuring that deliberative spaces are inclusive. In Nepal, deliberative processes reflected existing differences among marginalized groups. For example, the Guthi volunteers engaged in deliberative processes were mostly male members of the Newar community (an ethnic group with different caste groups) in key positions, although over time, some of their activities were opened up to women. Similarly, for the Nebhana Water Foundation (Tunisia), it was difficult to ensure that deliberative processes fostered inclusion among the vast and diverse groups of farmers affected by the water crisis (including in terms of their geographical spread).¹¹⁶

Given the diversity of marginalized groups, their issues are too disparate and dependent on contextual realities to propose how challenges related to deliberative processes can be adequately addressed. However, as the CARG and Guthi cases suggest, bringing in groups with similar experiences and

backgrounds to discuss an issue first can enhance prospects for further deliberations, including with state authorities.

4.5.3. Deliberative spaces can address power inequalities between people and states but not eliminate them.

Findings from these case studies showed that deliberative spaces are not neutral. Wider social hierarchies often influence deliberative space, especially when marginalized groups are involved. In the case of the Nebhana Water Forum (Tunisia) and Alga (Kyrgyzstan), both volunteers and state authorities had reservations about whether deliberation was the best approach. For the Nebhana Water Forum, an ongoing divide between people, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the state following the Arab Spring in Tunisia contributed to their reservations.¹¹⁷ As a result, in this case, gaining buy-in from volunteers to ensure that dialogue would enable reconciliation and better agricultural planning was essential.

For Alga, there was clear tension between local village heads and villagers, who were reluctant to work together for fear that it might be disadvantageous and difficult. Alga members were present in local council meetings, conferences and invited council members to participate in their organization's meeting.¹¹⁸ This demonstrated their commitment to partnership, which earned the community's trust. In the case of FFLA (Ecuador), while unequal power relations with state authorities dominated deliberative processes, their impact on outcomes was unclear. A facilitator of the FFLA dialogues stated:

Sometimes governments try to monopolize the debate. Our role is to mediate and guarantee everybody (beneficiaries, NGOs [non-governmental organizations], social organizations, academics, minorities and non-privileged groups etc.) has a space and, for that, we start all processes with transparency. This generates trust. We have already started processes with many criticisms from governments, or sometimes the political agents try to use the processes as a space for self-promotion and to include their own political interests. Other times, governments don't want to join us to avoid becoming a target of criticism. Our role is to find ways to avoid these conflicts.

However, strategies to reduce power differences and ensure marginalized groups' participation in deliberative processes were effective. For FFLA, “[w]hen we create a project, we think about quotas for women, indigenous people etc., that will allow them to participate. This includes paying for their transport, for a place where they can leave their children.”

Findings show that addressing inequalities prior to initiating partnerships can create a strong foundation for an effective volunteer–state partnership (see Box 4.4). Nevertheless, it does not guarantee that the partnership will be effective. As the Nebhana Water Forum model of deliberation shows, not everyone who engages in these venues is ready to deliberate.

In Nepal, Guthi and Barghar buy-in to the deliberative processes may have been significantly better in large part due to the homogeneity of these groups, which may have allowed the volunteers to engage freely. This was not the case for the Nebhana Water Forum: for the farmers, the divide was made worse by a water policy that favoured the middle class, with little control over illegal drilling.¹¹⁹ This unequal power relationship was not only recognized but also addressed through the deliberative processes. Expectations and aims were made clear and farmers were given enough information to enable them to participate effectively in the forum.

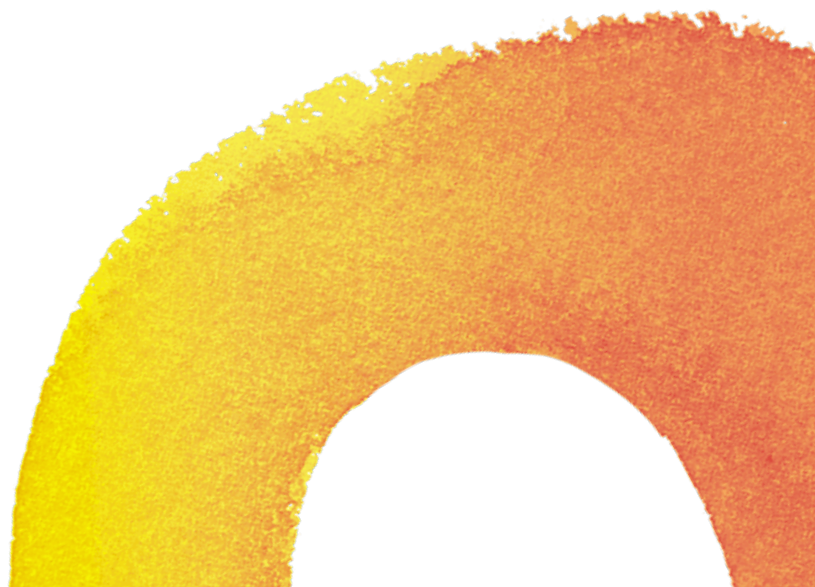
These power dynamics continue to change.

Similar to the Nebhana Water Forum (Tunisia) situation, in Nepal, while the relationship between the local government and the Guthi has often been productive, in recent years, tensions between the Guthi and the federal government have mounted following unilateral efforts by the government to pass the Guthi Bill in 2019, which aimed to nationalize all Guthis, both public and private, and regulate all religious and cultural activities.¹²⁰ The Guthiyars interviewed for this research stated that “the bill could remove the right of Guthis to preserve their cultural heritage and practices.” Through a series of peaceful protests by the Guthis themselves, the bill was withdrawn. Here, a conflict with the state resulted in state policies being influenced.

Box 4.4. Preparing for deliberation in Tunisia

The Nebhana Water Forum model¹²¹ in Tunisia began with an exploratory stage where the farmers were given the space to voice their ideas, opinions and assessment of the issues. These took place in small groups with very little structure. Facilitators created a non-judgemental atmosphere with no push for a particular position. The aim of this open dialogue was to persuade the farmers that engaging in deliberation with state authorities was an effective option to solve disagreements about water management. After this, there was a transversal dialogue within the stakeholder group in which the farmers discussed among themselves, separate from the local administrators. This was to enable farmers to learn from each other and engage with one another's issues. Only when these processes were complete were the farmers and government officials brought together in a collaborative dialogue.

Sources: Kühn (2017) and Diehl (2020).



4.6. Conclusion

Volunteerism plays an important role in deliberative governance. Volunteer–state partnerships, particularly those that engage volunteers from marginalized groups, play an important role in fostering inclusion in processes that may not otherwise accommodate these groups.

As the case studies have illustrated, for the farmers, women and indigenous groups who volunteer in deliberative governance mechanisms, these processes not only enable them to have their voices heard and be taken seriously in public governance, but also empower them to influence outcomes.

Issues of inclusion and voice—who gets to participate and how—are vital, especially in decisions that are value-based (e.g. preserving cultural heritage in Nepal) and those that require long-term solutions (e.g. agricultural policies in DRC). While the inclusion of marginalized groups helps amplify the voices of those who are least heard, challenges remain for volunteers who engage in these processes, as in some instances, deliberative spaces often reinforce

existing power imbalances. This was the case in Ecuador, where more “powerful” interests dominated the deliberations.

As the case studies show, volunteers’ engagement with state authorities fostered solidarity and relationship-building and resulted in outcomes that were more relevant to local needs. In the case of the Guthi and Barghar in Nepal, local government authorities drew on institutions set up to facilitate volunteering (such as Guthi and Barghar), thereby creating more space for deliberation. Moreover, deliberative processes conferred legitimacy and enhanced trust while increasing ownership and ensuring more responsive outcomes.

However, as the case studies have shown, these benefits can only be achieved if inclusive approaches are embraced, although their features may be influenced by local contexts.

Clearly, volunteer–state partnerships that engage people from marginalized groups in deliberative processes have a role to play in building more equal and inclusive societies. While they may not necessarily eliminate existing inequalities, they help amplify unheard voices, resulting in outcomes that are more responsive to communities’ needs.

Volunteer voice: Sumak Bastidas from Ecuador on the importance of promoting indigenous voices in deliberative governance

New spaces of community deliberation, when organized in traditional ways, may undermine efforts of inclusion rather than supporting them. Chapter 4 has shown that who gets to participate in these spaces is an important consideration in creating inclusive social contracts. Sumak Bastidas, a member of an indigenous community in Ecuador, shares how volunteerism could pave the way for indigenous groups' voices to be heard in public decision-making.

I'm Sumak Bastidas, a member of Ecuador's Kichwa indigenous community. I have extensive experience as a volunteer and have served in various capacities, including as a former National Coordinator of the UNV initiative for a global project that ensured access to, and fair and equitable distribution of, benefits on the use of traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources.

Volunteers have a role to play in creating a fairer society in rural and indigenous communities in the aftermath of the pandemic. Volunteers can support the design of policies, programmes and projects that contribute to improving the quality of life of the most vulnerable populations in social, economic, environmental, cultural and environmental issues.

Volunteering can ensure that the voices of women and the perspectives of indigenous communities are included in people–state relationships by strengthening the capacities of indigenous peoples and local communities in national and international frameworks related to the protection of traditional knowledge and the sustainable use of animal and plant life.

The most exciting aspect of volunteering has been the opportunity to contribute to the strengthening of capacities of indigenous communities, bringing government policy closer to remote territories and raising the visibility of indigenous women in the protection of biodiversity and traditional knowledge.

Special contribution: MD Tazul Islam MP, Honourable Minister of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Bangladesh

In 1973, for one of the first times in the modern history of Bangladesh, our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took the courageous initiative of involving state volunteers in the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) for war-ravaged Bangladesh.

This laid a firm base for institutionalizing the engagement of volunteers in development processes. Bangladesh has always been a pioneer country in fighting disasters. Once again, this is visible in this global COVID-19 pandemic, during which volunteers have done a tremendous job of stepping up and raising awareness of handwashing and personal hygiene to protect the most vulnerable.

Traditionally, volunteerism is deeply rooted in Bangladesh. Over the years, volunteers have played an important role in the socio-economic and political context of the country. Volunteerism is increasingly seen as an essential ingredient in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Fostering volunteerism is very important in Bangladesh for increasing civic engagement and citizen participation, and for ensuring the attainment of SDGs and government long-term development goals including Vision 2041 and the Delta Plan 2100. Volunteers are very important partners for our Ministry, especially at the local levels. We view them very much as an extension of the municipalities as they ensure trust, accountability and respect from the communities. As such, the Ministry engaged 171 UN Community Volunteers in 20 city corporations/municipalities across the country through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). They are an active part of the Livelihoods Improvement of Urban Poor Communities (LIUPC) Project, which is being implemented under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives. As the urban centres and populations to benefit from employment opportunities grow, this project aims to improve overall economic growth, income equality, employment and poverty.

In 2020, despite the challenging COVID-19 pandemic, project milestones included the establishment and strengthening of existing local service delivery mechanisms, enhancement of linkages to the communities, and the capacity development of concerned local officials working at the local level. Volunteers have made a significant part of these results possible, since the project has put special emphasis on community empowerment and better urban local service deliveries. Volunteers were drivers of community-based actions, mobilizing communities to actively engage in participatory poverty mapping or community development committees while also being committed to and raising the capacities of the urban poor on these matters. In this way, they are ensuring that the voices of the poor are louder and that the process is more inclusive.

During the pandemic, UN Community Volunteers are directly coordinating safety and awareness-raising activities on the front line. Through regular counselling, they motivate their communities to get vaccinated. They are also actively raising awareness on safety measures and hygiene practices, and providing support to slum-dwellers and other urban poor people to protect themselves from COVID-19. This has been invaluable: the volunteers belong to these communities and they are able to understand the local realities, create a bond and form new relationships.

To give you a better picture of what our UN Community Volunteers are busy with, here are just a few examples. They mobilize community-based organizations and work alongside the community development committees to prepare, for example, the Community Action Plans by prioritizing improvements to community infrastructure, keeping in mind climate-resilience factors and the need to address socio-economic challenges in line with the local requirements. Volunteers also organize and facilitate assessment, monitoring and evaluation with the urban poor at the city level. All this demonstrates their robust nature and capacity to mobilize resources and staff at the local level. This in turn has helped achieve well coordinated and effective response activities, in coordination with the local government and development agencies.

My Ministry is advanced in terms of partnering with volunteers. In 2020, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, WaterAid and UN Volunteers (UNV) Bangladesh jointly launched the countrywide Bangladesh Volunteer Award initiative, which recognized the country's most dedicated and hardworking volunteers. The launch was widely covered by national media. Following this unique initiative, I am now seeing that other government bodies are being encouraged to initiate several volunteer recognition programmes.

The ongoing crisis stemming from the pandemic also forced us to rethink our engagement of volunteers using traditional governance models. Therefore, giving volunteers the appropriate skills to be an auxiliary workforce that can engage in development activities is of the utmost importance for us. For a number of months now, together with volunteers and volunteer-involving organizations as well as whole-of-government ministries, we are collectively co-creating a first-of-its-kind National Volunteer Policy, since we all realize the need for the well organized and effective coordination, management and maintenance of volunteerism in Bangladesh. The policy will help embed volunteerism within our national development policies, significantly strengthening local government institutions. It also mainly centres on core themes of promoting and mainstreaming volunteerism in national development, narrowing the rural-urban divide, attaining SDG targets, and undertaking human resource development with a broad-based inclusiveness strategy. In my view, the formulation of the National Volunteer Policy will help bring the voluntary activities of individuals and groups, as well as the private sector and development partners, into the mainstream and give government recognition to volunteerism. We have organized consultations at the national and subnational levels in order to provide a space for volunteers and other stakeholders to express their views, listen and be heard as we design the policy.

I strongly believe that locally based planning solutions and the participation of direct beneficiaries of local government initiatives can be significantly strengthened by the creativity, innovation and local wisdom of volunteers.

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Endnotes

- 95** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2020).
- 96** Dryzek (2002).
- 97** Curato and others (2017).
- 98** Rao and Sanyal (2010).
- 99** Cornwall and Coelho (2007).
- 100** Cornwall (2002).
- 101** Sanders (1997).
- 102** Hendriks (2009).
- 103** Sanders (1997, p. 349).
- 104** For a full methodological note, please refer to Appendix A.
- 105** Chapter 1 explains the report's expanded definition of volunteering.
- 106** Note that this report refers to Guthi institutions in the Newar community and not to the Guthi Land Tenure system in Nepal. The Guthi Land Tenure System is a legal means of management of land donated for religious purposes.
- 107** Ntumba (2018).
- 108** Ntumba (2018).
- 109** Kühn (2017).
- 110** Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO; n.d.).
- 111** Burke and others (2007).
- 112** Interview with CARG Provincial Coordinator, 12 July.
- 113** Kühn (2017).
- 114** Kyrgyzstan, Ministry of Justice (2017).
- 115** National Information Campaign Follow Your Voice (2015).
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- 117** Kühn (2017).
- 118** Burke and others (2007).
- 119** Kühn (2017).
- 120** Shreshta (2019).
- 121** Kühn (2017).