State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2021: Volunteering and the 21st Century Social Contract
Draft concept, March 2021

*Register for the webinar on 23 March **here***
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1. Rationale

Against the backdrop of 21st century challenges, especially the COVID-19 crisis, the UN Secretary-General has called for a ''new social contract for a new era" with updated norms and systems that deliver for all people. With less than a decade to 2030, the pandemic has reversed decades of progress on poverty, health care and education. Fragilities within existing systems – such as health and well-being, employment, trade, sustainable livelihoods – have become more visible and, at times, accentuated (Leach *et al.*, 2021). Overwhelmingly, COVID-19 has accentuated inequalities, disproportionally impacting the most vulnerable – more than 71 million people have been pushed to extreme poverty in 2020 (UN 2020).

But with increased inequalities, intense competition over finite resources and polarized politics, how can this global reset be achieved? Volunteerism, in its various forms, has often been positioned as a universal asset which can help shape, localise and achieve development goals. But more than that, under the 2030 Agenda voluntary participation is embedded as part of the evolving *social contract* towards the fulfilment of the SDGs. From the global conversations to set expectations and a shared vision, via the My World Survey and other channels, to the established principles of the 2030 Agenda this perspective identifies a dynamic and productive relationship between states and people as a key pillar for inclusive and sustainable development. Most recently the 2018 UNGA Resolution on "Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" encouraged governments to galvanise the position of volunteering within national and international frameworks of action for the SDGs and greater ownership of the development agenda by all people through the integration of volunteering in national, sectoral and local plans and processes (Plan of Action, 2020).

This year's State of the World's Volunteerism Report (SWVR) will explore the theme of volunteering and the 21st Century Social Contract. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic the SWVR will explore emerging models of volunteering, particularly those that provide opportunities for collaboration across society, and how these impacts the evolving roles and relationships of governments and people in the face of 21st century needs. While policy frameworks recognise volunteerism's role in development, the report seeks to generate much-needed evidence to further understand how emerging volunteer models could better contribute to the SDGs. Making new models of volunteering visible will provide insights into how social contracts for the 'new era' could fundamentally reorient approaches to people's engagement and how volunteering could be central to achieving the SDGs moving forward.

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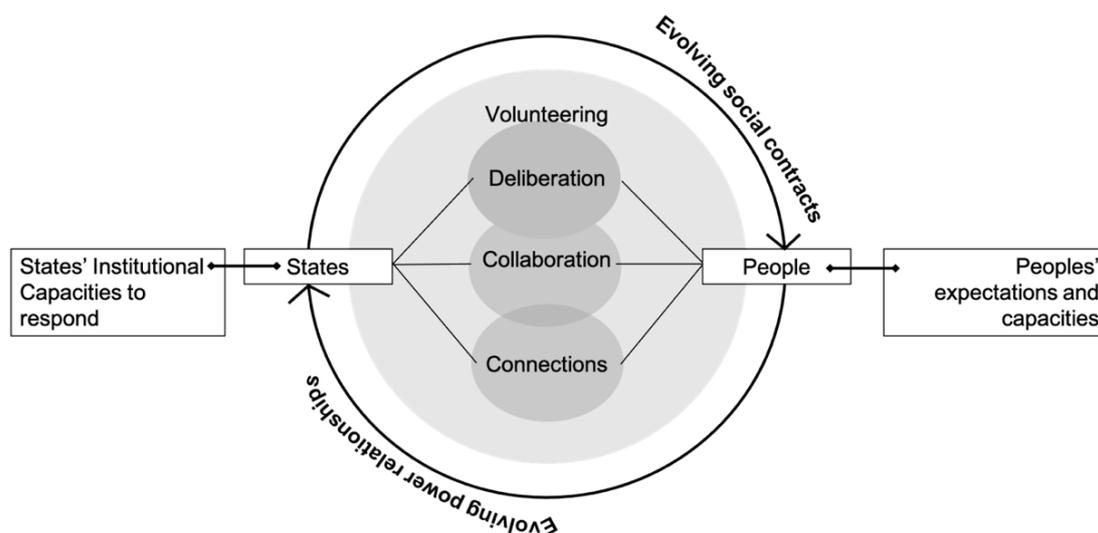[2] Institute for Volunteering Research, UEA, UK
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![UN VOLUNTEERS logo]

1.2. Analytical framework: Evolving social contract and volunteering as people's engagement

The concept of a 'social contract' has been understood as an evolving agreement between people and states on their mutual roles and responsibilities towards shaping and achieving certain goals. For UNDP (2016, p. 3), social contract is "a dynamic and tacit agreement between states, people and communities on their mutual roles and responsibilities, with participation, public goods, public policies and taxation chief among them". Through volunteering, people could participate (to varying extents) in the planning, co-designing, implementing and evaluating of a range of state activities, provisions, and policymaking. Several development interventions aim at 'extending' social contracts, for instance around basic services and social protection, between the state and so-called marginalised groups (Hickey, 2010). Governments and state institutions are encouraged to work with local volunteer organisations and through national volunteering programmes to leverage their impact.

Actions and practices involved in forging and maintaining social contracts are influenced by power relationships. Evolving social contracts exist within what Cornwall and Coelho (2007, p. 1) describe as a 'participatory sphere' or "spaces of contestation as well as collaboration" where different people bring diverse understandings and agendas. Drawing from UNDP (2016, p. 3), there are "multiple formal and informal structures that mediate and shape the relationships between people and the state". The SWVR recognises the existence of multiple social contracts (as opposed to a singular characterisation) within a state operating at multiple levels. The figure below proposes a framework for understanding the various configurations of state-people relationships within the context of evolving social contracts.

Relationships	Description	Examples where volunteering could play a role
Deliberation	People talk and listen to each other to shape plans and various levels of state authority. As well as consensus, conflict may arise and need to be deliberated	Deliberative governance mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, townhall meetings, co-designing local policies, policy forums such as hackathons, community campaigning, people-led journalism
Collaboration	Collective action between people and their local/national government towards solving social issues. These partnerships could exist in a spectrum between state-led and people-led.	Co-creating and co-implementing social protection programmes and services such as through planning and delivery initiatives, community response teams and mutual aid groups
Connections	Forging effective and enduring relationships between people and states. These connections and relationships are embedded within existing governance (and non-government, particularly in fragile states) systems and frameworks	Community health volunteers as part of a devolved national health system, national volunteering programmes, neighbourhood governance, local councils, climate boards, social entrepreneurship

Figure 1. Various forms of state-people relationships within evolving social contracts (adapted from Lee and Levine, 2016 and UNDP 2016)

Drawing from the work of Lee and Levine (2016) on forms of 'citizen' engagement, the model above proposes three ways in which people-state relationships may exist – deliberation, collaboration and connections – and examples to show how volunteer practices could play a role. These forms of people engagement do not exist in isolation nor should be considered as 'end goals' of participation. While they may be relevant across contexts, these three elements are likely to be culturally specific. People's engagement could best lead to impactful outcomes when these three forms support and build on each other. For instance, deliberation could lead to shared social action (collaboration) and then to longer-term partnerships. As well as being descriptors, these three forms of engagement could also be seen as steps in a process towards an ideal outcome.

At the heart of a robust, evolving social contract is "a strong match between people's expectations of what the State (and other actors) will deliver and the institutional capacity available within the State (and other actors) to meet those expectations" (UNDP, 2016, p. 18). In this framework, populations are understood as diverse. Certain groups – e.g. women, young people, people with disabilities and indigenous peoples – might face barriers in forming partnerships with the state through volunteering. Different groups also have different expectations and aspirations that help shape social contract. States have varying institutional capacities which influence how they can respond to the expectations of communities. This could be in terms of effectiveness of state institutions, resource mobilisation or capacity to learn. Social contracts may also have different dynamics in fragile state, particularly in contexts of protracted crisis, war and violence (McCandless, 2018, 2020).

Using an evolving (rather than static) social contract as a starting point, the SWVR will go beyond framing volunteering simply through the lens of formal service delivery. Instead, the lens of participation is proposed, suggesting that under certain circumstances, volunteering provides a pathway for individuals and groups to engage with and shape state activity.

2. Research and Evidence

To investigate the relationship between volunteering and the 21st century social contract, the 2021 SWVR will use original research to understand new and emerging volunteering models in contexts in Asia, Africa, Arab States, Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and Latin America. A key question that frames the research is: what new models of volunteering have the potential to help volunteering more effectively shape a sustainable and inclusive social contract? Guided by the framework above, the chapters will each feature the three models of people-state relationships: deliberation, collaboration and connections. Findings from the original research will inform the 'deep dive chapters' which will explore the following models.

Deliberative governance mechanisms. People's diverse interests and aspirations are brought into decision-making processes of the state in solving social issues. This can be done through a range of mechanisms. *Social Good Brasil,* for example, connected data scientists with government bodies to encourage evidence-based policy making. Citizen Juries in Korea have explored topics including the future of technology and its impact on national wellbeing. In New Zealand, the *Aotorea* Climate Emergency promotes the adoption of citizens' assemblies by local Councils and the national Government, with a specific emphasis on the topic of the climate crisis.

Co-creation of social protection and services. Volunteers are involved in co-planning and co-designing social services particularly for marginalised sections of the population. Diverse groups of volunteers 'fill the gaps' in services but these have been evolving in response to varied and changing capacities of the state. In China, state-led coproduction of services was essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, extending citizen involvement to areas previously reserved primarily for the government (Miao et al, 2021). In India, *Kudumbashree* (which means 'prosperity of the family') which is chiefly a network of women self-help groups struck a partnership alongside the Kerala government to provide PPE, address social isolation and

ensure food security especially in the poorest communities (Shamsuddin, 2021). Local planning and decision-making approaches include the *Conseil Agricole Rural de Gestion* which provides a public-private platform for dialogue, prioritization and service delivery between citizens, community organizations, private companies and authorities in 135 territories of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Ngala Ntumba, 2018).

Social innovation models. People volunteer to offer and co-implement novel solutions towards addressing social problems and enhancing community capabilities (de Wit *et al.*, 2019). This could include the use of technology-based and entrepreneurial strategies. Volunteer organisations may involve volunteers in the generation, implementation and diffusion of new ideas and practices. A recent global study by the Forum of International Volunteer Coordinating Organisation (IVCO) noted how many international and national volunteer-involving organisations shifted their programme focus, demonstrating innovative solutions during the pandemic (Perold, et al, 2021).

With a special focus on the experience of volunteering in the Global South, the SWVR will also review three strands of existing evidence to contextualise this primary research:

Changing civil society. Recent studies and reports have attempted to describe how governments have worked with civil society organisations in the context of the pandemic. CIVICUS, a global network of civil society organisations found that while civil society has been impacted negatively as a sector, their responses have "met needs, defended rights and forced new paths for civic action" (CIVICUS 2020, p. 4). This included working with state authorities to develop joined-up pandemic responses. In other contexts, volunteer organisations sought to influence policymaking.

Volunteering and COVID-19. In the midst of a global pandemic, volunteers everywhere step in to deliver services to marginalised groups, participate in global campaigns that make authorities accountable and maintain informal safety nets towards community resilience. In turn, volunteer organisations are also forced to reorient their activities in response to the COVID situation. More needs to be understood about how indigenous/traditional forms of volunteering such as the *guthi* in Nepal (Messerschmidt, 1987, Nepali 1965, Scott 2019), are changing in response to the pandemic.

Lessons from past and other crises. While the COVID-19 pandemic has caught the attention of policymakers, many other crises persist. In the first six months of lockdowns, the International Federation of the Red Cross has responded to more than 100 extreme weather and climate related disasters affecting more then 50 million people (IFRC 2020). What lessons can we learn from these experiences? Drawing from their work during the Ebola outbreak, for instance, Anoko and colleagues (2020) suggested that family leaders and grassroots leaders must be involved and mobilised in planning and implementation of response measures including case detection, contact tracing and quarantine support.

3. Added Value for Policymakers

This report builds on the findings of the 2015 SWVR on Transforming Governance and the 2018 SWVR on Community Resilience. In 2015, the SWVR highlighted that volunteerism plays a key role in making the government more accountable, while in 2018, it argued that localism, local participation and local ownership are key to creating resiliency.

The 2021 SWVR moves this debate further by looking at what this participation looks like – what new models are emerging and how they can be scaled up. It will look in detail at emerging models of people-state relationships – including their strengths and weaknesses – and develop specific recommendations to better utilise volunteering towards the achievement of the SDGs. The results of the SWVR could inform ways of developing legislation, frameworks of action and collaborations with volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations and their wider communities towards accelerating efforts in the decade of action. The focus of SWVR 2021on the processes and stages involved in evolving social contracts will be useful

for policymakers in assessing their own practices and to identify specific strengths and areas of improvement. By drawing on new and emerging models of people-state relationships, much can be learned about how governments, organisations and communities are reconsidering volunteering engagement, community organising and leadership approaches.

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