

Reflecting Volunteer Contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals in Voluntary National Reviews

Note for the United Nations System

Volunteering is an SDG accelerator in the Decade of Action

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of volunteers in delivering services, disseminating information and awareness and developing localized solutions has proved as important as ever. UNV estimates that globally there are around one billion volunteers that carry out a range of roles in their communities and societies. Therefore, volunteering is an enormous resource for social, economic and environmental problem-solving throughout the world, with volunteers accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Decade of Action by contributing to eliminate poverty, improve basic health and education, tackling environmental issues, and addressing social exclusion. However, volunteering is not only a means of delivering development activities; it can make its own unique and distinctive contributions that extend beyond the results of specific volunteering activities, for example by strengthening social inclusion, empowerment, participation, inclusion, innovation and accountability.

The importance of volunteering for achieving the SDGs is also reflected in the 2020 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System (A/C.2/75/L.61), which recognizes that “volunteerism can be a powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [...] and encourages the United Nations development system [to] promote the conducive environment for volunteerism and volunteers to enhance the sustainability of development results; [...]” In order to do so, the UN development system needs to strengthen policy integration of volunteerism into the 2030 Agenda. One important way to do this is to integrate volunteerism into key instruments under the 2030 Agenda and UN Reform, such as the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), United Nations Strategic Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), Regional Collaborative Platforms (RCPs) and issue-based coalitions. Within the structures of UN Reform, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme engages with and supports member states and UN entities in promoting policy integration of volunteerism and a conducive environment for volunteers to unleash their full potential for the Decade of Action. This note focuses on recognizing volunteer contributions to the SDGs in VNRs.

Integrating volunteering into the VNRs

The increasing importance of VNRs is reflected in the fact that all Regional Fora on Sustainable Development held by the UN Regional Commissions include VNR-specific sessions or reflections. Incorporating facts, evidence and data on volunteer efforts in VNRs is not only anchored in high-level political documents such as the 2018 General Assembly resolution A/Res/73/140 but can also enable countries to report in line with the principles of the VNRs, including to:

- Integrate a multi-stakeholder perspective and focus on engagement at the local level
- Draw on existing national official statistics and other evidence sources
- Analyze the means of implementation, highlighting gaps and opportunities for achieving the SDGs



Integrating Volunteering into the VNRs

The role of UN entities in promoting volunteering in VNRs

Between 2016 and 2020, the proportion of VNRs documenting positive contributions of volunteering to the SDGs increased, as reports better reflected whole of society approaches. This wider recognition of volunteer efforts is also reflected in how volunteering contributions were documented across all 17 SDGs by 2018. There are many ways in which governments have incorporated information on volunteer contributions over the years, ranging from anecdotal mentions of volunteer activities to documenting how volunteering is integrated into national development policies. For example, many countries recognize the role of volunteers in addressing development priorities at scale (including responses to the COVID-19 pandemic), reaching the furthest behind, raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda, strengthening innovation and social cohesion, and giving women and marginalized groups greater voice and ownership in development processes.

UN entities can encourage countries and provide the needed input for them to recognize volunteer contributions to the SDGs in their respective VNRs. Many projects and operations across the UN system involve national and international UN Volunteers, and their role can be highlighted when providing VNR input to governments. Furthermore, UNV can provide input, including data and evidence, on volunteering and how it contributes to the SDGs in reporting countries. Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach, UN Country Teams (UNCTs), Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) and other UN entities can take the following steps to promote the recognition of volunteer efforts in the VNRs:

- 1. Review whether volunteers were involved in programmes, projects and operations** in the country and highlight their role when providing input to the government.
- 2. Encourage governments to include volunteers** and volunteer-involving organizations in stakeholder engagement efforts.
- 3. Include UNV's Field Units and Regional Office in VNR-related discussions** among UN entities, especially via the UNCT and RCO, and keep them up to date about VNR timelines, processes and government needs.
- 4. Share UNV's input with the government's VNR focal points** or drafting team, where needed.
- 5. If joint UN inputs are provided to the government, ensure that UNV's input on volunteering is included** in the final document and shared with the government's VNR focal point or drafting team.

You can also reach out to your UNV focal point or [Regional Office](#) to identify opportunities for collaboration and how UNV can support VNR preparations.

