UN VOLUNTEERS

REFLECTING VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

GUIDANCE NOTE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

VOLUNTEERING IS A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL ACCELERATOR IN THE DECADE OF ACTION AND BEYOND

Volunteer groups are helping implement plans suited to their local communities and reflective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[1] Demonstrably all community-level development and humanitarian and peace-building interventions draw on some aspects of informal volunteerism that emerge naturally in response to a specific event, such as an earthquake. Volunteers are a critical element of community capacities and resources, demonstrating local solutions and engaging those often left furthest behind.[2] The COVID-19 pandemic showed just how critical volunteers are in delivering services, disseminating information, raising awareness and developing localized solutions.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme estimates that globally, there are around one billion volunteers who carry out a range of roles in their communities and societies. Volunteering represents an enormous resource for social, economic and environmental problem-solving throughout the world. Volunteers can accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Decade of Action by helping to eliminate poverty, improve basic health and education services, tackle environmental issues and address social exclusion. Conservative estimates that tend to capture the most visible types of volunteers have shown that volunteering adds significant value to economies and societies, which one estimate put at 2.4 per cent of global GDP (Human Development Report, 2015). However, volunteering is not only a means of delivering development activities, it also provides unique contributions that extend beyond the results of specific volunteering activities by, for example, strengthening social inclusion, empowerment, participation, inclusion, innovation and accountability.

---

1   https://swvr2022.unv.org/
2   https://unv-swvr2018.org/files/51692_UNV_SWVR_2018_WEB.pdf

WHY UNITED NATIONS ENTITIES SHOULD INCLUDE VOLUNTEERISM'S CONTRIBUTIONS IN VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

The importance of volunteering for achieving the SDGs is 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 states: "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 United Nations 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 United Nations Reform, such as the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and United Nations Strategic Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs). Within the structures of United Nations Reform, UNV engages with and supports member states and United Nations entities in promoting policy integration of volunteerism and a conducive environment for volunteers to unleash their full potential for the Decade of Action.

United Nations General Assembly resolution 73/140 of 17 December 2018 encourages governments, in partnership with United Nations entities, volunteer-involving organizations and other stakeholders, to take several steps:

- integrate volunteerism into national development strategies, plans and policies

- include information on the scale, contribution and impact of volunteerism in VNRs

- engage volunteers to monitor progress towards achieving the SDGs at the national and subnational levels and as part of a wider citizen engagement effort

Incorporating information about volunteerism in national plans and policies into the VNRs is vital. Doing so ensures that the difference volunteers make to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is understood and capitalized upon. Governments can then determine the best means for implementing national development plans, including through engagement at the local level, and highlight gaps and opportunities for achieving the SDGs.

VOLUNTEERISM IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND POLICIES

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that traditional means of implementation must be supplemented by participatory mechanisms that helps the transition to more meaningful ownership by all people. Volunteers complement government efforts, enhance service delivery, promote community ownership and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes. By integrating volunteerism into the national development plans and policies, governments can create an environment that allows volunteerism to flourish. Data collected by volunteers can help to strengthen planning and resource allocation processes, particularly in relation to the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups. Integration of volunteerism into sector strategies and policies can also provide a basis for dialogue and collaboration with volunteer groups at the national and subnational levels to address opportunities and bottlenecks.

Integrating volunteerism into national development plans and policies helps national governments in many ways:

- builds broad legitimacy and gathers voices of marginalized people, enhancing trust and ownership of the development plans and policies being developed

- widens skill sets, fills data gaps and applies innovative solutions based on community needs to the implementation of development plans and policies

- extends delivery of government services, implements programmes in underserved areas and addresses emerging needs, allowing more effective implementation of development plans and policies

HOW VOLUNTEERISM IS BEING INTEGRATED INTO VNRs

For three years beginning in 2016, the proportion of VNRs reporting the positive contributions of volunteerism to the SDGs steadily increased, as reporting better reflected whole-of-society approaches to the 2030 Agenda. Specifically, the figure rose from 18 per cent of VNRs in 2016 to a peak of 65 per cent in 2018. Since then – and despite the increasing recognition of the roles and contributions of volunteers during the COVID 19 pandemic – the proportion of VNRs reflecting the positive contribution of volunteers has been decreasing. It dropped from 60 per cent in 2019 to 55 per cent in 2022.

Reflecting volunteering integration in national plans and policies into the VNRs: The integration of volunteering into national development plans and policies continues to evolve. In VNR, some Member States have targeted volunteer integration into national strategies regarding youth, health, and disaster management / emergency response. Additionally, some Member States have noted their intent to upgrade the capacity of volunteers, providing incentives to volunteers and creating an enabling environment for volunteerism.

Reflecting contribution of volunteers to achieved SDGs: Member States have recognized volunteers as critical partners for addressing development priorities at scale and supporting project implementation. Some VNRs also recognize that voluntary actions strengthen the ability to reach marginalized people and communities. Member States have also highlighted the role of volunteers in combating gender-based violence and increasing the empowerment of women.

Evidence of the far-reaching benefits of volunteerism: Member States have evidence showing that the benefits of volunteering extend beyond any single, specific programme. As an example, volunteering highlights and strengthens international cooperation, including South-South cooperation. Evidence also revealed the vital roles volunteers played during the COVID-19 pandemic recovery and response.

HOW UNITED NATIONS ENTITIES CAN PROMOTE INTEGRATION OF VOLUNTEERING IN VNRs

United Nations entities can encourage Member States and provide the needed input for them to recognize volunteer contributions to the SDGs in their respective VNRs. Many projects and operations across the

United Nations system involve national and international UN Volunteers, and their roles can be highlighted in the VNR input provided to governments. Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach, United Nations Country Teams, Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) and other United Nations 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. Encourage governments to assess national plans and policies under specific SDGs that integrate volunteerism and include the evidence into the VNR reporting.

4. Include UNV field units and regional office in VNR-related discussions among United Nations entities, especially via the UNCT and RCO, and keep them updated about VNR timelines, processes and government needs. UNV focal points can be found here.

5. Share input from UNV with the government's VNR focal points or drafting teams where needed.

6. If joint United Nations inputs are provided to a government, ensure that input from UNV on volunteering is included in the final document and shared with that government's VNR focal point or drafting team.

HOW UNV CAN SUPPORT THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN VNR PREPARATIONS

Through the UNRC Office, UNV can provide input – including data and evidence – on volunteering and how it contributes to the SDGs in reporting countries in several ways:

•   **Provide data and evidence on volunteering in the national context** at our Knowledge Portal, especially the Volunteering Database, which provides information on volunteering laws, policies and schemes, measurement work, and VNR reporting; the Evidence Library, which provides information on volunteerism and the SDGs; and knowledge products like the Global Synthesis Report.

•   **Collect and analyse data and evidence on volunteering's contribution to SDGs in the national context.** For example, in Sri Lanka upon the request of the Government Sustainable Development Council, UNV provided youth-focused inputs for VNR through surveys and data analysis. The collated information helped inform the parts of Sri Lanka's 2022 VNR report that relate to volunteering.

•   **Provide additional information on national statistical data of volunteer work** at ILOSTAT: statistics on volunteer work and indicator description: volunteer work.

•   **Convene volunteering stakeholders at a national level to collate and validate data and inputs for specific themes or SDGs.** In Cameroon, for example, UNV partnered with the Ministry of Youth, and Platform of Actor Working in Volunteering Cameroon to prepare a situation analysis on volunteering's contribution to achieving SDGs 4, 5, 14, 16 and 17. The collated information helped inform the parts of Cameroon's 2022 VNR that relate to volunteering. In Pakistan UNV deployed a consultant in partnership with UNDP to prepare the National Situation Analysis and evidence used for inputs to the Draft VNR Report. The NSA was submitted to Pakistan Planning Commission.

- **Collate good practices on volunteering for the SDGs** from governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, UN entities and volunteers at our Knowledge Portal. For example, UNV deployed online volunteers to collect the data and analysis that was included in the parts of Jamaica's 2022 VNR that related to volunteering.

- **Facilitate volunteer-led data collection processes with target groups** (e.g., youth or rural communities) to fill data gaps for the VNR processes. In Tuvalu, for example, UNV drafted two case studies from partner organizations that involve volunteers and verified them with the Tuvalu Red Cross and Tuvalu Women for Change; then, they submitted those case studies to the VNR Report writing team.

Key resources for integrating volunteerism into VNRs

UNV Knowledge Portal on Volunteerism

Volunteering Database: country data on volunteering laws & policies, measurement work, VNR reporting

Evidence Library: Volunteerism and the SDGs

Knowledge Products: Global Synthesis Report, Regional Synthesis Reports

Volunteering Practices in the 21st Century

Good practices on volunteering from around the world

ILOSTATS: statistics on volunteer work and indicator description for volunteer work

Measurement resources: Measuring Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda toolbox and ILO Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work

Surveys: Kenya 2020 and Ecuador 2020

State of the World's Volunteerism Report (SWVR)

UNV's approach on Volunteerism and SDGs

FOR QUERIES, CONTACT:

Narendra Mishra

narendra.mishra@unv.org

Team Lead on Integration, Volunteer Advisory Services Section (VASS)

Emiliya Asadova

emiliya.asadova@unv.org

Regional Integration Specialist, VASS, covering the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific countries

Juan Pablo Gordillo

juan.gordillo@unv.org

Regional Integration Specialist, VASS, covering the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic Commission for Europe and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Jean de Dieu Sibomana

jean.sibomana@unv.org

Regional Integration Specialist, VASS, covering the Economic Commission for Africa