

KEY MESSAGES ON THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERISM IN SHAPING AND IMPLEMENTING AN INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

Volunteerism advances sustainable development

- The Declaration that emerged from the 2011 UN DPI/NGO Conference recognises the limitations of market-based measures of progress and encourages replacing GDP measures with other economic and social indicators, including “civic participation and improved well-being”.¹
- The Declaration affirms that volunteerism promotes sustainable development, social inclusion, community mobilisation, local capacity, social cohesion and other measures of progress. GA resolutions and recent reports have continued to emphasise these vital contributions and their centrality to sustainable development.
- Laying the groundwork for the post-2015 framework, the Rio+20 Outcome Document in June 2012, *The Future We Want*, underscored the role that volunteers play in development, recognising that sustainable development requires the meaningful involvement and active participation of, among others, volunteer groups.² Furthermore, volunteerism was recognised as an important means of reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the 2010 UN General Assembly, which called on “civil society, including non-governmental organizations, voluntary associations and foundations, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders ... to enhance their ... efforts as well as their contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015”, and committed member states to the inclusion of these stakeholders.³

Volunteering is both a means and an end to the creation of healthy, vibrant societies and the achievement of future sustainable development goals⁴

The International Forum for Volunteering in Development includes NGOs and state organisations who represent over 12,000 volunteers working in more than 100 developing countries. Forum believes that:

- Volunteerism has been key to delivering all the MDGs and should be recognised as a cornerstone of people-centred development and the delivery of the post-2015 universal development agenda.
- The very act of volunteering promotes partnerships, fostering a vibrant civil society and peace through social inclusion. Volunteerism builds a shared vision, mutual accountability and a reciprocal learning relationship between people and between organisations, and between the public and private sectors and civil society. It is therefore central to building a stronger, more inclusive new global partnership goal.

1. *Forum Discussion Paper 2013: Measuring and Conveying the Added Value of International Volunteering*, p1: <http://forum-ids.org/2013/12/forum-discussion-paper-2013-measuring-and-conveying-added-value/>

2. *The Future We Want – Outcome Document*: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1298>

3. *UNV post-2015 briefing document: Volunteerism is key to social, economic and environmental transformation*: http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/828Brief_information_about_post_2015.pdf

4. *The Paris Accord on Volunteering for Sustainable Development*, International Forum for Volunteering in Development, 2013: <http://forum-ids.org/news/sign-up-to-the-paris-accord/>

- Research has shown countries with high levels of volunteerism are more economically and socially vibrant and better placed to meet global challenges.
- Volunteerism acts as an effective catalyst for sustainable, people-centred development, contributing to the elimination of inequality between and within countries, and inequality between men and women.
- Volunteerism is a critical mechanism by which social inclusion can be promoted in the post-2015 development framework. Predicated on the principle that everyone has something to contribute, it provides the opportunity for all to participate and play fuller roles in their communities by making use of their skills and capacities.⁵

The value of volunteerism is clear – and universal

- Over recent years, progress has been measured primarily by GDP. This measure excludes from national accounts, for example, the contribution of women in the home, which some argue therefore “counts for nothing” in the national and global economy. Today, however, there is a growing trend to measure such contributions in other ways. As with the contribution of women, the diverse impact of volunteering can be demonstrated clearly in many ways across communities, countries and generations. It can also be estimated in economic terms:
 - Red Cross Red Crescent international volunteers contribute expertise and time worth US\$5.9 billion annually,⁶ and extend the IFRC paid workforce by a global average of 20 volunteers to each paid staff member.
 - The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project⁷ found that in 36 countries studied, 44% of the workforce of civil society organisations was made up of volunteers, and would be worth US\$400 billion annually.⁸ If volunteers were a country, JHCNS estimated “Volunteer Land” would be the ninth-largest in the world. In developed nations, volunteer work represents 2.7% of GDP; in developing nations, it is 0.7%.⁹
- Volunteerism contributes positively to the many dimensions of poverty – education, health, livelihoods. It is a resource that should be harnessed and supported as part of a global partnership for people-centred development that leaves no one behind.

The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals Focus paper and The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda canvass a number of possible goals

- While volunteerism is arguably relevant to all areas of sustainable, people-centred development, the impact of volunteers and their partners is particularly critical in strengthening active citizenship and good governance, improving health and education, reducing poverty and inequality through capacity building and skills transfer, and contributing to inclusive growth.

5. UNV Issue Brief: *Social Inclusion and Volunteerism*: <http://www.unv.org/en/news-resources/resources/fact-sheets/doc/unv-issue-brief-social.html>

6. *The Value of Volunteers*, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2011: <http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/volunteers/IFRC-Value%20of%20Volunteers%20Report-EN-LR.pdf>

7. Center for Civil Society Studies, John Hopkins University: <http://ccss.jhu.edu/>

8. *The State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, United Nations Volunteers, 2011: http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/docdb/pdf/2011/SWVR/English/SWVR2011_full_%5B05%5D_chapter2.pdf

9. *The State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, United Nations Volunteers, 2011: http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/docdb/pdf/2011/SWVR/English/SWVR2011_full_%5B05%5D_chapter2.pdf

- Likewise, their shared work in ensuring food security, access to water and sustainable livelihoods is also key to ensuring that no one is left behind.
- Volunteers are not only key to many major local and national environmental initiatives but, at a time of climate change, conflict and people displacement, they also provide humanitarian aid and disaster relief, helping communities to become more disaster-resilient. Volunteers advocate for the rule of law, human rights and gender equality. They support the building of community self-reliance. As a civic engagement mechanism, volunteerism harnesses the ingenuity of people in addressing the challenges of sustainable development and is a key driver for positive change, building on the foundation of solidarity, cooperation and mutual accountability.

The International Forum for Volunteering in Development calls for volunteerism to be recognised and supported as a mechanism for the successful delivery of all post-2015 goals

- For volunteers to be able to contribute most effectively to the Sustainable Development Goals and to results that count, their specific contribution to sustainable development must be recognised by local bodies, national governments and international policy makers, and their roles supported by enabling environments such as national policy frameworks which provide guidance and support for the implementation of volunteering activities. As such, we would like to see volunteers named and featured as a group within reference to civil society, within the narrative that guides the framework, and in the wording within goals, targets and indicators.
- Volunteers and volunteer groups also need to be acknowledged as more than implementers. They, and those they support, will seek space and opportunity to engage with governments and decision makers, to be involved in the decisions that shape their lives, just as millions of people have done by responding to the United Nation's unprecedented consultation on the post-2015 framework.¹⁰
- Volunteerism is resource efficient, not cost free. Investing in supportive public policies and legal frameworks will assist governments to tap into the enormous resource that volunteerism represents.

We hope that these opportunities will continue at local, national, regional and global levels as the discussions over the post-2015 agenda continue.

Additional references to support general positioning can be found at:

<http://www.volunteeractioncounts.org/en/>

10. *Volunteering Task Force Joint Statement*, Task Force, 2013.