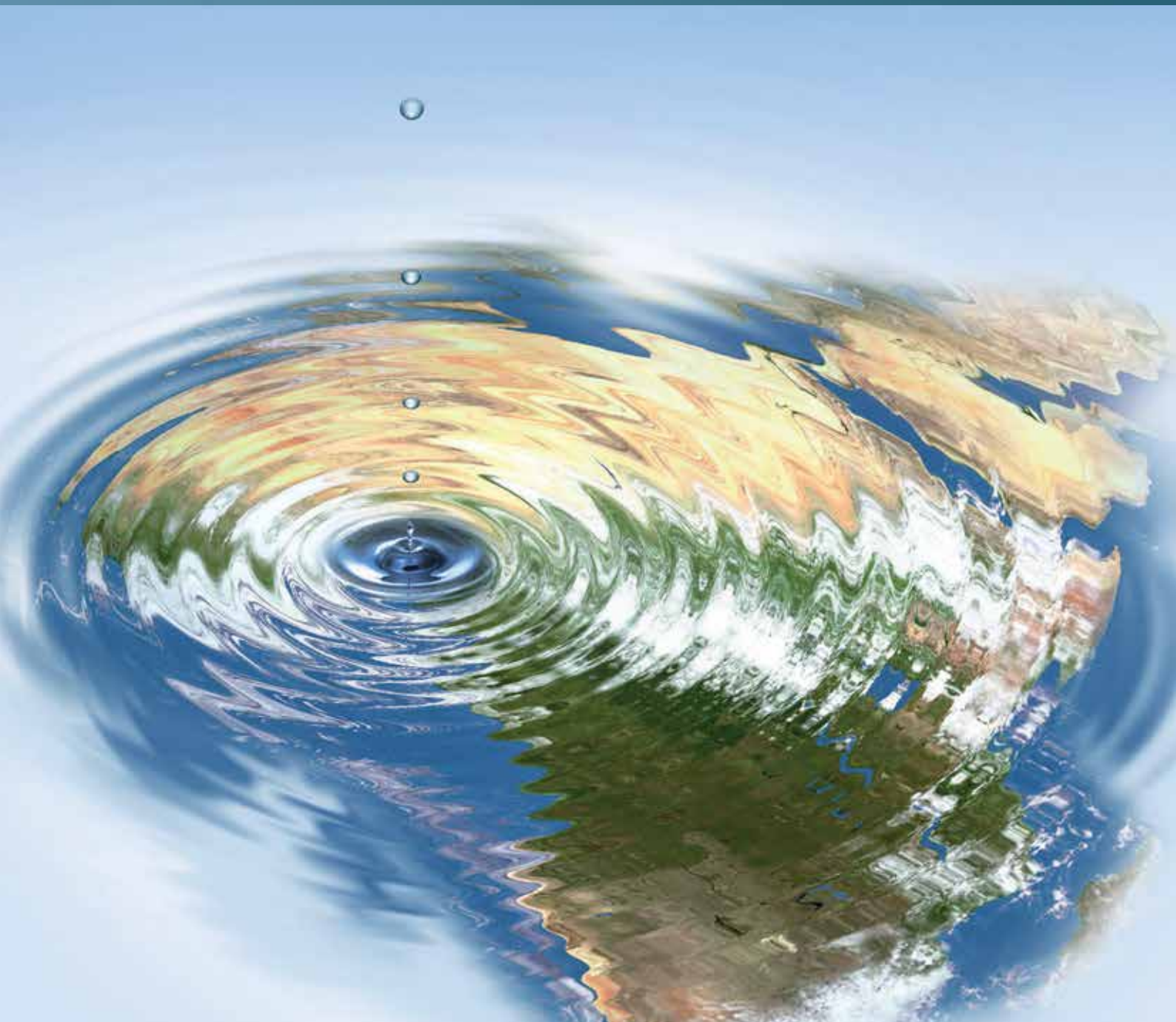


Volunteerism and Social Inclusion

An extract from the 2011
State of the World's Volunteerism Report



UN

Volunteers

inspiration in action

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide.

Volunteerism is a powerful means of engaging people in tackling development challenges, and it can transform the pace and nature of development. Volunteerism benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation.

UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for recognition of volunteers, working with partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing an increasing number and diversity of volunteers, including experienced UN Volunteers, throughout the world. UNV embraces volunteerism as universal and inclusive, and recognizes volunteerism in its diversity as well as the values that sustain it: free will, commitment, engagement and solidarity.

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Volunteerism and Social Inclusion

We have seen the success of popular movements in forcing political change in key Arab States. That now needs to be followed by the difficult and detailed work of building more inclusive societies, economies and governance systems.

Helen Clark (2011)

Introduction

Volunteerism is a basic expression of human relationships. It is about people's need to participate in their societies and to feel that they matter to others. It is infused with values including solidarity, reciprocity, mutual trust, belonging and empowerment, all of which contribute significantly to the well-being of individuals, their communities and societies. People the world over engage in volunteerism for a great variety of reasons: to help eliminate poverty and improve basic health and education; to provide a safe water supply and adequate sanitation; to tackle environmental issues and climate change; to reduce the risk of disasters; and to combat social exclusion and violent conflict. Volunteerism also forms the backbone of many national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society organizations as well as social and political movements. It is present in the public sector and is increasingly a feature of the private sector.

BOX 1 :

"Putting people at the centre of development is much more than an intellectual exercise. It means making progress equitable and broad-based, enabling people to be active participants in change".

Source: UNDP (2010).

The definition of volunteerism employed in this paper is that adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2001 (resolution 56/38). First, the action should be carried out voluntarily, according to an individual's own free will and not as an obligation stipulated by law, contract or academic requirement. Second, the action should not be undertaken primarily for financial reward. Third, the action should be for the common good, benefitting directly or indirectly people outside the family or household, or a cause, even though the person volunteering normally benefits as well.

Recognition of volunteerism has been growing in recent times, especially since the United Nations proclaimed 2001 the International Year of Volunteers, yet the phenomenon is still largely misconstrued and undervalued even though it is one of the principal channels for people to engage in enhancing their own wellbeing. All too often, the strong links between volunteer activity and peace and human development are overlooked. Yet, as over 20 years of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Reports* continuously note, people are the real wealth of a nation.

VOLUNTEERISM AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

This paper is an extract from the United Nation's first *State of the World's Volunteerism Report*, published by the United Nations Volunteers programme in December 2011. It is one of a series that look at the role and contribution of volunteerism in different thematic areas. This paper focuses on the role of volunteer action in promoting social inclusion. It draws on growing empirical evidence that, contrary to common perceptions, the income poor are as likely to volunteer as those who are not poor. In doing so they utilize their assets, which include knowledge, skills and social networks, for the benefit of themselves, their families and their communities. These assets are extremely relevant in strengthening local capacity to address disasters and, on the broader front, to assist the more vulnerable to secure livelihoods and to enhance their physical, economic, spiritual and social well-being.

WHAT IS SOCIAL INCLUSION?

The concept of social inclusion has grown out of concern over poverty, marginalization and other forms of deprivation. Social inclusion places people at the centre of policy-making. Its ultimate goal is to enable them to improve their own lives through the realization of opportunities. The World Bank definition of social inclusion is a "process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live."¹

Social inclusion is a relative concept whereby exclusion is judged by considering the circumstances of certain individuals, groups or communities relative to others. It is also a normative concept that places emphasis on

the right of individuals to participate in the life of their communities. Social exclusion is a process whereby individuals, groups or communities are pushed to the edge of society, cut off from community networks and activities, and prevented from participating fully on account of their poverty, poor health, lack of education or other disadvantages. This may be the result of discrimination or an unintentional outcome of policies. Access to decision-making bodies is diminished and there is often a feeling of powerlessness to affect daily life.

The 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen affirmed that the most productive policies and investments are those that empower people to maximize their capacities, resources and opportunities. It called for a "society for all where every individual has rights, responsibilities and an active role to play."² Five years after Copenhagen, at the special session of the General Assembly in Geneva, governments recognized volunteerism as: "an additional mechanism in the promotion of social integration"³ and agreed on the need to raise "public awareness about the value and opportunities of volunteerism" and to facilitate "an enabling environment for individuals and other actors of civil society to engage in volunteer activities and for the private sector to support such activities."⁴ The recognition of volunteerism as a path

BOX 2 : Volunteerism is a social behaviour

A notion is beginning to emerge of volunteerism as a form of social behaviour rather than as a category of person: the "volunteer". The reciprocal relationship that underpins this behaviour is understood to include benefits accruing to volunteers as well as the "beneficiaries". This notion will have major implications for policies focused on promoting and strengthening various forms of voluntary action. It is also starting to impact on discussions on social inclusion with volunteerism being one way out of exclusion.

Source: UNDESA and UNV (2007, November).

Volunteerism enables people to play a fuller and more satisfying role in the lives of their communities and societies

to inclusion signified a move away from the perception of a gift relationship, whereby one side gives and the other receives, towards a reciprocal relationship in which both sides benefit.

The summit was a seminal moment in the discourse on volunteerism. The focus of this paper is on the benefits that volunteerism, with its universality and values base, can bring to people who experience some form of exclusion. Among these benefits

is the space provided by volunteerism which enables people to play a fuller and more satisfying role in the lives of their communities and societies. This in no way diminishes the important work of the vast array of organizations and programmes, many involving volunteers, that provide direct services to people who are considered excluded. However, here the spotlight is on aspects of volunteerism that are widely experienced but that receive little exposure.

THE LEVELS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

At the level of the individual, volunteer action can help people to overcome feelings of personal isolation and reduced self-worth. Volunteers come into contact with others face-to-face or, increasingly, online in circumstances that can help to enhance feelings of belonging and of contributing.⁶ Volunteerism reduces stresses in life and combats feelings of loneliness. People who are excluded often experience a sense of shame and failure and lose hope of affecting their circumstances. Through volunteering, people can tackle some of the underlying causes of social exclusion such as lack of employment, education and health.

Volunteering can improve employability by enhancing a person's vocational and social skills.⁷ Contacts arise through social networks that people form through volunteering and these can lead to securing useful references and even finding a job. Individuals who have experienced poverty and homelessness may work with others in need as a way of elevating their own status.⁸ Through volunteering in counselling, advising and supporting others, people are able to move from being service recipients to service providers which can be empowering.⁹ Identities are expanded as people see that they have something to give to their community by volunteering.¹⁰ The element of recognition of people's volunteer contributions is an important aspect of belonging.

BOX 3 : Retired and engaged

Rui Oliveira, a retiree with more than 40 years of experience in information and communication technologies (ICT), created a news portal for the Ghana-based NGO Volunteer Partnerships for West Africa (VPWA). The portal provides information for and about NGOs in Africa, has 2,000 subscribers and boasts 15,000 visitors per month.

"Rui created the web portal NGO News Africa in 2009 and has been the webmaster ever since. He recently re-modified the website, integrating so many amazing features! Communication with Rui was joyful and fulfilling and we are grateful for his dedication to serving the NGO community in Africa," says Portia Sey, Volunteer Manager of VPWA.

Through NGO News Africa, VPWA provides a one-stop shop where journalists, donors, researchers, volunteers and other interested people worldwide can find information about the work of NGOs across Africa. Every day, Rui publishes new stories gathered from online volunteers who act as correspondents for different African countries. This includes articles on development issues and news about the NGOs, as well as information on grant opportunities for NGOs.

Rui, who is from Portugal, explains: *"I was in Guinea-Bissau, where my concern with people who have less on Earth, and my wish to help, originated. After retiring from something that I love, my work in ICT, I was completely stressed and lost. That was when a friend from Africa told me about online volunteering."* He continues: *"After I joined, my life changed completely. I feel useful and the stress is almost gone. When I see that I have more free time, I go and look on www.onlinevolunteering.org for another NGO that needs help."*

Source: UNV (2010c).

At the level of communities, where some groups, or the entire population, suffer from exclusion, volunteerism fosters an enhanced sense of belonging and community well-being that helps to build resilience.¹¹ In rural communities, in particular, people are better able to mobilize through volunteerism to manage resources, minimize the impact of climate change and create sustainable practices that lead to a better quality of community life.¹² Many poor urban communities experience urban decay, crime and social fragmentation. Living in challenging environments can carry a stigma that attaches itself to the entire community.¹³ People living in such communities often volunteer through local groups and organizations to provide basic services and to engage in activism and campaigning. Action of this type can challenge prevailing views outside the community that local people are passive or have violent tendencies. Such perceptions hinder moves towards inclusion.

At the country or global level, volunteerism through campaigning and activism can bring about changes in policies that may be hindering inclusion. Examples include the high-profile women's rights movement and the lower-profile, but equally effective, campaigns for recognition of the status of indigenous people and for the provision of facilities for people with disabilities. As a vehicle for fostering, deepening and sustaining participation, volunteerism plays a significant role in determining how all people can be engaged in shaping their destiny beyond their own immediate locality.

The international movement ATD Fourth World works with volunteers at grassroots level to improve the well-being of people living in extreme poverty. In addition, its volunteers are advocates at country and global level for the rights of the most disadvantaged populations in areas such

BOX 4 : Traditional help in Brazil - *mutirão*

In Brazil, *mutirão* is a traditional system of mutual help originating in rural areas, during harvest time. The União Nacional por Moradia Popular (National Union for Popular Housing) has applied the term to the collective building and management of community housing. Through collective work in the *mutirão*, participants working together do not only acquire new technical skills but also get to know one another better. They learn about their rights and more.

According to Christian Leray, a *mutirão* participant, "In the *mutirão* I found my identity and I could obtain what I needed whether transport or health! ... I met a lot of people I hadn't met before. I discovered there were a lot of people who had a keen interest in helping others who struggle daily. Before, my life was very limited. I didn't know what a community was, what was a movement. I had no political awareness. Here, I have begun to understand my rights. This has been a revelation for me."

Sources: União Nacional por Moradia Popular (n.d.); Leray (n.d.).

as child nutrition, gender violence and social inclusion.¹⁴ Global initiatives such as the Campaign to Ban Landmines, the International Women's Movement Campaign and the Global Call to End Poverty have all relied on the desire of people to engage on a volunteer basis in causes to which they are personally committed. In addition to mobilizing public support and helping to bring about change, these volunteer-based initiatives have also provided opportunities for people from every corner of the globe to share their ideas and aspirations and, through participation, be part of a more inclusive world.

SOCIAL INCLUSION OF GROUPS THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM

The economic, political and social dimensions of exclusion impact on disadvantaged groups in different ways. The following section focuses on some of the exclusionary challenges that specific groups face, in particular women and youth, and how, through volunteerism, people can find a way towards inclusion.

BOX 5 : Political participation of indigenous people

Volunteering in the form of social activism can help influence decision-making, national policies and representation. Over the last 20 years, great progress has been made in Mexico in increasing the representation of indigenous peoples who represent 15.7 million or 13 per cent of the total national population. While indigenous peoples represent 40 per cent or more of the inhabitants in over 30 per cent of Mexican municipalities, they hold only eight of the 500 seats in the lower house of parliament.

According to the recent UNDP *Human Development Report on Indigenous Peoples in Mexico*, multiculturalism can lead to greater human development if it brings wider political participation from local to national level.

"In our communities, we do not elect someone just for the sake of the election; in order to reach a position, one needs to start from the bottom where the community can get to know you," says Marcelino Nicolás, a member of the civil association Servicios al Pueblo Mixe. Civil society groups play an important role in articulating new ideas and bringing them to the attention of the general public that can ultimately influence decision-making. It is partly thanks to such initiatives that during the first half of the 1990s Mexico began a number of reforms of laws and institutions recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples.

For the last four years, UNDP has provided support to Mexican electoral bodies to further promote the political and electoral participation of indigenous peoples.

Sources: CDI (2010); CIVICUS, the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) & United Nations Volunteers (UNV) (2008); Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (UNDP) & Organización de los Estados Americanos (OAS) (2010).

WOMEN

Across the world, women are more likely than men to live in poverty.¹⁵ In many places, women's lack of education and health care is an enduring issue.¹⁶ In some regions, women still struggle for the right to vote and to own property. In this context, it is surprising that the impact of volunteerism on women's lives is rarely researched, especially considering the widely studied impact of the women's rights movement. Yet, the women's rights movement achieved so much thanks to the commitment of so many women, and men, to engage in volunteer action to achieve their goals. While volunteer action may actually reinforce existing gender roles, there are signs that through volunteerism women are challenging their traditional place in society and experiencing greater empowerment. In India, volunteering in social movements has helped to address social and political issues that affect women's lives.¹⁷ Through

volunteering to build institutional shelters for abandoned and abused girls, women have bonded and addressed issues of gender-based violence. They have created social networks and generated resources that protect mistreated and forgotten members of society. This work has raised the profile of women, lifting some into leadership roles, and is influencing policies that affect women. When volunteer activists spread information about such initiatives there is greater public understanding of the importance of the issues.¹⁸ Women in Latin America have been able to influence policy on gender through their work as volunteers in a gender budgeting programme. In Arab states, volunteerism has often been perceived as a concept adopted from the West with a focus on "service volunteer" models involving the provision of assistance through formal organizations.¹⁹ The reality is very different as recent developments in the region have shown. In fact, "volunteerism" and

“civil society” are just new names for age-old traditions in the region. Social activism has long been embedded in associations such as Muslim consultative councils and parallel secular organizations aimed at combating poverty and underdevelopment.²⁰

Women played a major part in the Tunisian demonstrations that sparked the Arab Spring at the beginning of 2011, often marching up Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis with their husbands and children behind them. In Yemen, columns of veiled women poured into Sana'a and Taiz to affirm their right to participate, along with men, in peaceful demonstrations for regime change.²¹ To advocate for social and political change, they used all the means of expression at their disposal: word of mouth, newspapers, Internet and social media. The power of women's activism not only played a major role in bringing about change but also succeeded in breaking down stereotypes about the passivity of Arab women.

Women volunteer in many informal ways within their communities. In rural areas, particularly where poverty levels are high, women volunteer as a way to combat poverty and contribute to the economy.²² They are more likely to achieve inclusion when they organize into functional groups that address social and political issues within their societies and extend mutual support to initiatives towards economic emancipation. This is challenging in situations of minimal education and literacy. Nevertheless, local volunteer-based organizations established and run by women are found throughout the developing world.²³

YOUNG PEOPLE

The World Bank *World Development Report 2007*²⁴ states that the number of 12-24 year olds is set to rise to 1.5 billion by 2035. Young people represent a huge potential for development. There is a pressing need to build on this potential, to open doors to

BOX 6 : Maasai Pastoral Women's Council

The Pastoral Women's Council (PWC) is a women-led, community-based organization founded in 1997 in Tanzania to develop solutions to address the poverty and marginalization of Maasai women and children. Through its large volunteering network, the council has made significant inroads into key problem fields for Maasai women: education and gender equality, financial independence and property ownership rights, and their participation in the political process.

One example is the Olosirwa Women's Action Group, set up in 2002, with 25 members and a loan of one million Tanzanian shillings from PWC. Half of the members of the group had the lowest income in the village. They began by buying cattle in Tanzania and selling them at the nearest market in Posimoro, Kenya. They used the profit to build improved houses for the four poorest and most disadvantaged women of the group and completed 16 houses for other members. The group farms maize and beans; sells sugar, tea and beadwork; and supports members to buy dairy cows. It is also involved in raising awareness of HIV/AIDS using Maasai songs and runs an adult education programme and nursery schools. There are currently 49 members in the Olosirwa Women's Action group who collectively own 45 goats, 4 cattle and 51 farms.

Sources: Ngoitiko (2008); T. Oleyaile, [Assistant Coordinator: Pastoral Women Council of Tanzania], Personal Communication (2011, July 14).

all forms of youth participation including volunteering. Young people should not be seen as passive recipients of resources or as the cause of society's problems. Rather, they should be recognized as important contributors to development in their countries. However, as the global economy and political and social institutions undergo major changes, young people face huge constraints due to their lack of capacity and limited opportunities to participate. Indeed, young people are among the groups most susceptible to social exclusion characterized by unemployment, poverty, crime and drug use.²⁵ Youth crime in developing countries is on the rise, with a 30 per cent increase from 1995 to 2005.²⁶ Also rising is the participation of young people in armed conflict, especially through recruitment into gangs and rebel

Volunteerism is one route by which young people can improve their employment prospects

organizations. Although historically young people have faced social exclusion, the recent economic downturn has created a crisis which particularly affects the younger generation.

Employment is a critical area in any discussion of paths to inclusion for young people. In this respect, volunteerism is one route by which young people can improve their employment prospects by enhancing job-related skills. There is much anecdotal information to show that volunteering plays a valuable role in the transition from schooling to paid employment in both developed and developing countries. One survey in the United Kingdom found that 88 per cent of unemployed respondents believed that volunteering would help them get a job.²⁷ Research on the extent to which volunteering enhances employability skills needs to be greatly expanded so that policy can be informed by robust empirical evidence. A China Youth Daily survey of 1,044 employers showed that more than

60 per cent of them prefer a candidate with experience of volunteering in the remote western region of China. Employers said that the values they sought in their employees were the dedication, integrity and good communication skills displayed in volunteering service. The vast majority of those employers who employed former volunteers said that they were satisfied with their performance.²⁸

However, it is also essential not to see volunteering solely as preparation for employment. Young people themselves usually refer to important aspects of giving their time to help others, to make changes that matter to them, gain new experiences, meet new people and have fun. Moreover, there are wider benefits to individuals and society in terms of health, well-being and community engagement. Empirical studies support the view that young people who participate in volunteerism tend to develop positive social behaviours that mitigate delinquency.²⁹ Volunteerism constitutes

BOX 7 : Increasing youth employability in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Students in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, increase their future employability through a social volunteering programme. Around 300 secondary school students and ten university students engage every year in a programme run by Omladinski Komunikativni Centar (OKC) (Youth Communication Centre). The volunteers break down stereotypes and prejudices among students by organizing leisure activities for children and young people with learning difficulties, orphans and young people without parental care, and older persons and young people with physical disabilities.

Tanja Grujic, who volunteered in the Center Zaštiti Me (Protect Me) for children with special needs, says: *"I have been always thinking: How I can help others? When I started with my education studies, I had in mind primarily helping children. I contacted the OKC and found out that they are planning to start engaging volunteers in the Center Zaštiti Me. As fashion design and tailoring are my hobbies, I decided to start a tailoring workshop with children from this centre."* Tanja adds proudly: *"I feel hours spent with these kids are so useful for me. This experience fulfils me as a person, allows me to taste life and expands my knowledge and experience."*

Conducting creative workshops, organizing excursions and playing games has an additional impact on the students: they develop personal and social skills that complement the theoretical knowledge gained during their studies. Through these practical skills, the students become more competent and competitive on the labour market.

Source: J. Jevdjic, [Executive Director, OKC], Personal Communication (2011, July 13-27).

an important part of the transition to responsible adulthood.³⁰ It is a valuable vehicle by which young people are exposed to active citizenship.

Increasingly, developing countries are introducing volunteerism to young people through the educational system. Service learning has grown rapidly over the past few decades in South America. In some countries, such as Venezuela, service has been introduced into secondary grades.³¹ This is not volunteering in the sense of having free choice. However, exposure to civic service at an early age can lead to involvement in volunteerism in later years. For many young people, volunteerism is their first experience in a work setting. It helps them to form attitudes and opinions about work and to gain exposure to benefits that they can pass on to others through volunteerism.³² There are also benefits to be gained from building peer relationships with other volunteers, forming adult networks and developing relationships with those who are served by their efforts.³³ These social connections all facilitate greater inclusion. In Latin America, youth unemployment stands at around 22 per cent, and as high as 40 per cent in some countries.³⁴ In the region, volunteerism in the form of youth civic service is seen as serving the dual purpose of contributing to development and preparing young people for employment.³⁵

Where young people are concerned, two sets of considerations are necessary. Firstly, there is the sort of society that they are going to inhabit as they move into adulthood with all the responsibilities that this entails. Secondly, there are the barriers that they may confront on account of factors such as religion, ethnicity or general stereotyping. This is where volunteerism, with core values such as mutuality and respect, can play a significant role. Volunteerism stresses active involvement in society. New ways of volunteering are opening up that widen the

opportunities for participation. Education can play an important role in inculcating civic attitudes. At the wider level, the media, governments and volunteer-involving organizations all have an important influence on the lives of young people. Encouragement is needed to promote news about the contributions of youth including reports by young people themselves. Governments need to promote a climate in which needs and interests of young people are fully respected and to ensure that infrastructure is provided. Volunteer-involving organizations should be proactive in engaging young people. Healthy societies need young people who are involved with their communities. Volunteer action can be a highly effective route towards such involvement.

OLDER PERSONS

Older persons have traditionally been active contributors to their societies. Indigenous people in particular have long recognized the valuable contributions that elders make in perpetuating and enriching society. Aging trends in many parts of the world are contributing to awareness of the social dimensions of aging. The first United Nations World Assembly on Aging, held in 1982 in Vienna, and follow-up conferences have led to the adoption of global, regional and country plans of action that recognize the role of volunteerism in active aging. The 20-year review of the Vienna conference, which took place in Madrid in 2002, in its first recommendation stressed that a society for all should provide older persons with the opportunity to continue contributing. Such contributions extend beyond economic activities to include voluntary activities in the community. These need to be recognized as contributing to the growth and maintenance of personal well-being.

The contribution made by older persons to society through volunteer action is vast. Volunteering itself can be a valuable

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asset in keeping older people active and engaged. This is an important observation since research, mostly in developed countries, indicates that older people are particularly vulnerable to exclusion. This is especially true of those who have left the labour market and those with weak family ties.³⁶

Data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) confirm that older people at risk of social exclusion are less likely to be involved in voluntary activities. However, when they do volunteer, the impact on them can be significant.³⁷ Studies have found that volunteering in later years of life can contribute to reducing the risk of social exclusion. Aside from age-related ailments, older persons often suffer from mobility restrictions or isolation. Volunteering can lead not only to higher activity levels but also to better integration and inclusion in society.³⁸ These findings are backed up by the statement in the *Guide to the National Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* that emphasizes the importance of older persons' "participation in the countries' broader social and cultural

life, challenging negative stereotyping and exclusionary practices".³⁹ Volunteerism is a universal channel for such participation.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

For societies to achieve social inclusion, all members must feel that they are able to contribute in a meaningful way.⁴⁰ People with disabilities often face social exclusion based on misunderstandings and prejudices that depict them simply in terms of their disability and not in terms of the contributions that they can make. Like other excluded groups, they are often perceived as passive recipients of the actions of volunteers rather than as active volunteers themselves. The charitable or "giving" perception of volunteerism prevalent in the developed world reinforces this attitude. Volunteerism also has an image problem for many people who feel that, because of their disability, volunteer action is not for them.⁴¹

The result is that people with disabilities are less likely to volunteer. In the United Kingdom, for example, in 2008 just 32 per

BOX 8 : Have wheels – will volunteer

Volunteerism can transform volunteers, leading to increased confidence, a strong sense of personal accomplishment and new professional aspirations. Motivated by these gains, volunteers with disabilities help to dispel stereotypes and change perceptions about what people with disabilities can and cannot do.

Shannon Coe served as a US Peace Corps volunteer in Paraguay. There, local people with physical disabilities are not often seen outside their homes. Shannon herself was in a wheelchair. *"When I pushed myself around my community,"* says Shannon, *"people stared at me curiously. Many had probably never seen an independent woman in a wheelchair before. Every time I heard "qué guapa" (hey you are great!) when going to work on my own, I knew that I had changed another person's perspective."*

Like Shannon, people with disabilities make valuable contributions as international volunteers, yet historically they have been underrepresented in volunteer programmes abroad. Those programmes often focus on serving the disability community rather than engaging volunteers with disabilities as leaders and contributors. People with disabilities have the same desire to contribute and gain skills as their non-disabled peers. With simple accommodations, creativity and a positive attitude, any international volunteer programme can be made accessible to volunteers with all types of disabilities.

Source: Scheib & Gray (2010).

cent of adults with disabilities volunteered with organizations compared with 41 per cent of the general adult population. This was due to factors such as lack of special equipment, inappropriate premises, the extra cost of travel and the need for support workers.⁴² In one study, an informant suggested, with respect to the image problem, that researchers consider applying the term “activists” to volunteers with disabilities as “people seek to move away from the traditional, passive image of people with disabilities as the subject of volunteering to a far more proactive image associated with activism.”⁴³

One example of just such an activist role occurred during the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in March 2011. People with disabilities often avoided going to designated evacuation centres because they knew that they would not receive support to meet their special needs. Among the volunteers who went from house to house to identify and assess needs were people with disabilities from the YUME-KAZE Foundation. The Foundation was established after the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake in 1996 to assist people with disabilities affected by natural disasters. These volunteers not only enabled people with disabilities in the affected areas to express their immediate needs but also communicated their wishes, and abilities, to live in their own communities rather than in residential care.⁴⁴

MIGRANTS

Migrants face unique challenges in overcoming exclusion. Often they must surmount language barriers and learn local customs. Volunteerism can offer opportunities to practice language skills and to build social networks that can lead to greater inclusion. While racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to participate in formal volunteer activities,⁴⁵ rural immigrant communities in particular experience high

BOX 9 : Immigrant volunteering: New Zealand

The Change Makers Refugee Forum in Wellington is an NGO that helps refugee communities to participate fully in New Zealand life. In one initiative of the NGO, around 50 volunteers produced a DVD and resource kit to support families of Afghan, Assyrian, Burmese, Colombian, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Iraqi, Oromo, Sierra Leonean, Somali, Sudanese, Rwandan, Ugandan and Zimbabwean descent.

The Strong Families, Strong Children Resource Kit took six months to complete. Phase one, during the resettlement of Assyrian, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali and Sudanese immigrants, included workshops on family and identity. Phase two focused on family values and possible sources of conflict. In Phase three, a cast of volunteers and professional actors acted scenes for the DVD depicting refugee communities confronting everyday situations. For the participants, this was a chance to explore how to deal with the generation gap, cultural differences and pressures on families and how to raise children in a new country without the family support to which they were accustomed.

According to one of the volunteers: *“Our objective is to highlight that coming to a new country is a huge cultural shift. When refugees arrive in New Zealand, they only have six weeks of orientation... but adaptation to the new culture takes a long time and continues for their whole life.”*

Sources: Change Makers Refugee Forum (n.d.); Johnstone, Personal Communication (2011, July 16-22).

levels of informal types of volunteerism. These include volunteering in schools, in secondary language programmes and in organizations that help immigrants to integrate into society.⁴⁶

The potential of migrants volunteering for their own communities crosses borders. The concept of “co-development” is relatively new. It applies to development initiatives undertaken by migrants who live in developed countries to assist their communities of origin. Co-development is a means for migrants to share the benefits they enjoy in their host countries and to continue to engage in the civic life of their communities of origin. One example is

the Asociación Sociocultural y de Cooperación al Desarrollo por Colombia e Iberoamérica (ACULCO). This is a volunteer-based NGO created in 1992 by immigrants from Colombia living in Spain. It works for the integration of Colombians into the Spanish society and supports community-based development initiatives in Colombia.⁴⁷

PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

While deaths from HIV/AIDS have fallen in recent years, the estimated number of people infected globally is still over 33 million according to the Joint United

Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).⁴⁸ Misunderstandings about the disease abound, creating a stigma for those infected. Volunteerism among HIV/AIDS patients and volunteerism by HIV-positive people themselves helps create an understanding both about the disease and the people affected by it. Nearly 75 per cent of HIV/AIDS affected people live in sub-Saharan Africa. Much of the support to patients and families comes through home health services provided by volunteers.⁴⁹ Volunteerism is one way for HIV-positive people to fight the stigma of HIV/AIDS, build their self-esteem and enhance their well-being.⁵⁰

BOX 10 : Talking Positive about HIV: China

"I always tell people with a smile: HIV is a virus, not a sin! We are living with HIV and we can still make our own contribution to society," declares Xiaofeng, who contracted HIV through a blood transfusion. When this became known, he faced humiliation and discrimination but, eventually, Xiaofeng decided to speak out.

Despite regulations that prohibit institutional discrimination against people living with HIV, barriers remain in China. Fear of stigma often prevents people from accessing services and disclosing their HIV status to families and friends. The Positive Talks Project was initiated in 2007 by Marie Stopes International China, a not-for-profit family planning and sexual and reproductive health-care organization with support from UNDP and UNAIDS, and in consultation with the National Centre for AIDS/STD Control and Prevention and the Chinese Association of STD/AIDS Prevention and Control. More than 40 people living with HIV from across China were trained as educational speakers and trainers. Subsequently, the Positive Talk speakers held training sessions for government departments, private sector enterprises, universities, media, NGOs and people in rural areas. In June 2008, five Positive Talk speakers trained 7,500 Beijing Olympic volunteers on HIV awareness. Through their engagement, the Positive Talk speakers have been bringing about positive behaviour change and reducing discrimination against people living with HIV.

Sources: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) (2010, March 6); Luo Nan, [Project Manager, Positive Talks Project], Personal Communication (15 July 2011).

The idea of drawing on personal experiences of people living with HIV to help to shape the response to the AIDS epidemic was formally adopted as a principle at the 1994 Paris AIDS Summit. Some 42 countries declared that the Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV and AIDS (GIPA) was an ethical and effective national response. Volunteer community support groups involving HIV-positive people are increasingly part of HIV programmes in many countries. Much of the care for People Living with HIV and AIDS takes place in the home by individuals from among the immediate family, friends and from the community. The latter includes support groups and NGOs.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

There are many ways by which people can find their way out of exclusion through volunteerism. For individuals, volunteer action can lead to improvements in feelings of self-worth. It can help to develop vocational skills and other competencies and assist in building networks. All of these contribute to feelings of well-being. At community level, volunteerism can lead to greater cohesion through the building of trust and the reduction of conflict. More generally within society, greater inclusion through volunteerism brings economic gains and helps to develop strong and cohesive nations.

Volunteerism will become more integrated into social inclusion discourse when there is greater recognition of the broad parameters of volunteerism. The literature on

volunteering and inclusion focuses largely on volunteer action in formally constituted organizations. This should be encouraged. However, volunteering by excluded groups generally takes place in a non-formal context. The more inclusive definition adopted by the international community, reflecting all forms of volunteer action, should help to make the role of volunteerism more prominent.

There is much that can be done. For example, governments can include volunteering in policies dealing with inclusion, encompassing both formal, organized and non-formal types of volunteering. The micro-policies of volunteering and the macro-policies for tackling social exclusion need to work in unison. For example, Access to Work legislation could be extended to include volunteering as could anti-discriminatory legislation. At the core of inclusion is recognition of the capabilities, not the disabilities, of individuals. It requires an open and flexible approach. Governments, civil society organizations and the private sector are all capable of proactive targeting of excluded groups, together with other segments of society, in order to involve them in volunteerism. If this happens, more inclusive societies can emerge and it would represent a major step forward in ensuring that entire populations enjoy the multiple benefits of volunteerism.

Greater inclusion through volunteerism brings economic gains and helps to develop strong and cohesive nations

Notes

- 1 World Bank, 2007a, p. 4
- 2 UNDESA, 1995, para. 1
- 3 UNGA, 2000, p. 24, commitment 4, point 54
- 4 UNGA, 2000, p. 24, commitment 4, point 55
- 5 UNDESA & UNV, 2007, p. 13
- 6 Smith, Ellis, Howlett & O'Brien, 2004
- 7 Gay, 1998; Lee, 2010; Mitchell, 2003
- 8 Cloke, Johnsen & May, 2007
- 9 Haski-Leventhal, Ronel, York & Ben-David, 2008
- 10 Uhereczky, 2007
- 11 Haski-Leventahl, Ben-Arieh & Melton, 2008; Omoto & Malsch, 2005
- 12 Danielsen et al., 2009
- 13 Hyatt, 2001
- 14 CIVICUS, IAVE & UNV, 2008
- 15 UN IANWGE, 2011
- 16 Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2005
- 17 Fruzzetti, 1998
- 18 Bortee, 2011
- 19 Kandil, 2004
- 20 El-Guindi, 2001
- 21 Cole & Cole, 2011
- 22 Petrzalka & Mannon, 2006
- 23 Kandil, 2004; Mensah & Antoh, 2005
- 24 World Bank, 2007b
- 25 Johnston, MacDonald, Mason, Ridley & Webster, 2000; Weil, Wildemeersch & Jansen, 2005
- 26 UNDESA, 2005
- 27 Hirst, 2001
- 28 China Daily, 2010
- 29 Uggem & Janikula, 1999
- 30 UNDESA, 2007
- 31 Tapia, 2004
- 32 Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer & Snyder, 1998
- 33 Larson, Hansen & Moneta, 2006; Yates & Youniss, 1996; Youniss & Reinders, 2010
- 34 CEPAL, 2006
- 35 McBride, Johnson, Olate & O'Hara, 2011
- 36 Jehoel-Gijsbers & Vrooman, 2008
- 37 Haski-Leventhal, 2009
- 38 Naegele & Schnabel, 2010, p. 35
- 39 UNDESA, 2008, p. 85
- 40 UNDESA, 2009
- 41 Scope, n.d.
- 42 Michael Rubenstein Publishing, 2009
- 43 Rochester, Paine & Howlett, 2010, p. 181
- 44 Yahata, 2011
- 45 Foster-Bey, 2008
- 46 Chavez, 2005
- 47 Fernandez, Giménez & Puerto, 2008
- 48 UNAIDS, 2010
- 49 Patel & Wilson, 2004
- 50 Ramirez-Valles, Fergus, Reisen, Poppen & Zea, 2005

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