

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND VOLUNTEERISM:

Considerations for post-2015 development agenda

The urgent environmental challenges of the 21st century require multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder responses that recognize the diversity of contexts and issues faced by countries around the globe. In a rapidly changing world, volunteerism stands as a constant — a universal, dynamic and creative resource present in every society to support multidimensional responses to the challenge of ensuring environmental sustainability. Volunteerism has been a key driver of the global environmental movement, mobilizing communities all over the world to help address environmental problems. This continues today at local and global levels in a range of interventions and actions, and the potential of volunteerism in this area has not yet been fully recognized or captured. This Issue Brief demonstrates that incorporating volunteerism into the post-2015 development framework as a mechanism for achieving environmental sustainability is absolutely critical. When well facilitated, volunteerism not only supports the achievement of environmentally sustainable outcomes but also promotes long-term processes that help to build the resilience of communities, improve capacity for local self-sufficiency, encourage empowerment at the grassroots level and durably change attitudes and mindsets, which is necessary to sustain environmental gains.



In Namibia, a community group digs a pond for fish farming before the start of the rainy season as an adaptation measure to climate change. © UNV Namibia, 2010

I. Environmental sustainability, volunteerism and the post-2015 agenda

Discussions on the post-2015 development agenda¹ have focused on mainstreaming links between environmental sustainability and poverty eradication as well as merging the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. While the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) captured these three dimensions of sustainable development, they did not sufficiently integrate their interlinkages in that framework. Poverty is

increasingly understood to be multidimensional and involve multiple deprivations, including that of natural resources for survival and livelihoods, particularly of the rural poor.² New interdependent environmental challenges are further driving the need to integrate human development and environmental objectives in the context of the post-2015 development framework.

The interrelated challenges of climate change and disaster risk have emerged as a priority in the post-2015 discussions.³ The incidence of natural disasters, attributed in part to climate

¹ See UNDP and UNEP 2013; UNDG 2013; HLP 2013; UNTT 2012.

² UNDP and UNEP 2013, pp. 7–8.

³ UNTT 2013; HLP 2013.

change, has increased five-fold since the 1970s,⁴ with long-term consequences for human and economic development. Estimates of economic losses (primarily reflecting the monetary value of damage to physical assets) from weather and climate-related disasters have increased, from a few billion US dollars in 1980 to more than 200 billion USD (in 2010 dollars).⁵ These estimates do not reflect those impacts that are difficult to monetize, such as the loss of human life, cultural heritage and ecosystem services. Building the resilience of communities to climate change and disaster risk, particularly that of the poorest, who are also the most vulnerable, is a priority concern.

The UN System Task Team (UNTT)⁶ identified environmental sustainability as a core dimension of sustainable development.⁷ The High-Level Panel⁸ recognized that without environmental sustainability there can be no end to poverty: *the poor are too deeply affected by natural disasters and too dependent on deteriorating oceans, forests and soils.*⁹ The Sustainable Development Solutions Network¹⁰ has equally underlined the importance of environmental sustainability by including goals on its different aspects in its proposed framework of sustainable development.¹¹ In 2013, the United Nations General Assembly's special event to follow up on efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals emphasized the *intrinsic interlinkage* between poverty eradication and the promotion of sustainable development, while underlining the need for *a coherent approach that integrates in a balanced manner the three dimensions of sustainable development* in the post-2015 agenda.¹²

4 United Nations 2011, p. 6.

5 IPCC 2012, p. 7.

6 The UN System Task Team (UNTT) on the post-2015 UN development agenda, which assembles more than 60 UN agencies and international organizations, was established by the UN Secretary-General in 2012 to support the post-2015 UN development agenda by providing analytical thinking and substantial inputs. It published its first report, *Realizing the Future We Want for All*, in June 2012.

7 UNTT 2012, pp. 27–28.

8 The High-Level Panel of eminent persons was launched by the UN Secretary-General in July 2012 to advise on the post-2015 UN development agenda. The Panel assembled representatives from civil society, the private sector, academia, and local and national government, to reflect on new development challenges while drawing on experiences gained in implementing the MDGs. It submitted its Report to the Secretary-General in May 2013.

9 HLP 2013, p. 5.

10 The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) was launched in 2012 by the UN Secretary-General to mobilize scientific and technical expertise from academia, civil society and the private sector on the challenges of sustainable development, including the design and implementation of the post-2015 global sustainable development agenda.

11 SDSN 2013, pp. 28–31.

12 UNGA 2013, p. 4.

Box 1. Environmental sustainability

The concept of 'environmental sustainability', while a broad one, rests on a central tenet: *meeting human needs without undermining the capacity of the planet's ability to support life.*¹³ Environmental sustainability forms one of the three integrated dimensions of 'sustainable development', alongside the economic and social dimensions. Far from being only about the preservation of natural resources, environmental sustainability is fundamental to poverty reduction, human development and wellbeing.

The recognition that environmental sustainability is fundamental to human development and wellbeing calls into play the effective integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development (Box 1) into future development policy and practice. To this end, partnerships to channel related commitments and actions from a wide set of actors along with the active engagement of individuals and communities at the grassroots levels must be seen as fundamental to any development action undertaken. During the United Nations-led post-2015 consultation on environmental sustainability, which engaged over 5,000 stakeholders from around the world, there was widespread consensus that local action is essential to securing environmental sustainability and that local community groups can indeed deliver *a wide range of benefits for people and nature if empowered to manage their ecosystems and natural resources.*¹⁴ The emphasis on such an approach is fitting for a new development framework that seeks to be *grounded in the voice of people.*¹⁵ Local participation and civic engagement, if well supported and facilitated, can be a vital aspect of long-term social transformation and empowerment.

Volunteerism is a powerful mechanism that opens up pathways for greater participation of people in the environmental sustainability of their communities (Box 2). Powerful examples exist in different parts of the world of people uniting and mobilizing action through volunteerism to address local environmental challenges, resulting in systemic changes. The Chipko movement that started in India in the 1970s began as a small-scale volunteer action by a group of peasant women in the region of Uttarakhand to fight for the protection of the local forests on which their livelihoods depended. It grew into a national movement that eventually resulted in bans on tree felling in a number of different parts of the country. The Greenbelt movement in Kenya is another example of a volunteer-

13 UNDG 2009, p. iv.

14 UNDP and UNEP 2013, p. 29.

15 HLP 2013, p. 14.

Box 2. What constitutes volunteerism?

The terms *volunteering*, *volunteerism* and *voluntary activities* refer to a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, **undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor** (A/RES/56/38).¹⁶ Within this conceptual framework, at least four different types of volunteer activity can be identified: *mutual aid or self-help*; *service to others*; *participation or civic engagement*; and *advocacy or campaigning*.¹⁷

supported organization that has empowered communities, particularly women in those communities, to conserve the environment and improve livelihoods. Volunteer interventions at local and global levels continue to drive powerful environmental

outcomes in the 21st century, whether they be spontaneous community-based actions or the provision of highly specialized support at the global level (Box 3).

Box 3. Snapshots: Volunteer contributions to environmental sustainability

Volunteer contributions to the promotion of environmental sustainability occur at all levels, from community-based efforts to global contributions, as the following examples illustrate:

- In **Nicaragua**, the Farmer-to-Farmer Program (*Programa de Campesino a Campesino*, or PCaC) operates through a network of socially driven, environmental-minded farmers in the municipality of Siuna. The program was founded in 1992 to control the rapidly expanding agricultural frontier within the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve, while enhancing food security, increasing household incomes and strengthening regional governance. PCaC's farmer-to-farmer network promotes sustainable soil use practices and raises awareness of sustainable farming and ranching practices through information-sharing. Three hundred volunteer extension officers work in over 80 communities and serve more than 3,000 subsistence farming families. Over the past two decades, these dedicated volunteer 'promoters' have contributed to the development of an effective resource management framework for the region as well as promoting social integration and reconciliation among the war-torn rural population.¹⁸
- In **Kenya**, the Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO), a volunteer community-based organization that has worked on forest conservation and reforestation in the Kikuyu Escarpment Forests since 1996, is now providing environmental education in schools and has initiated a number of income-generating activities around the forest, including beekeeping and community tree nurseries.¹⁹ In **Papua New Guinea**, community volunteers support the Department of Environment and Conservation to systematically monitor crocodile population numbers in the Sepik River. They conduct regular night counts of crocodiles, and population monitoring by aerial surveys has revealed that the crocodile population steadily increased between 1998 and 2010.²⁰
- According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), national meteorological and hydrological services around the world rely on thousands of volunteers to gather data on climate and weather.²¹ In some countries, especially in the event of natural disasters, volunteers are often called upon to take measurements and communicate near-real-time data on precipitation, temperature and river levels for use in early warnings to the populations under threat. The national meteorological and hydrological services of WMO's 185 members have also contributed voluntarily to WMO's work by sharing observations, encouraging standardization and exchanging data.²²
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the leading international body for the assessment of climate change, assesses and reviews the scientific, technical and socioeconomic information on climate change that is produced worldwide. Thousands of scientists and other experts from all over the world contribute voluntarily to the IPCC's work, providing expertise, research support and services in drafting, reviewing and finalizing the IPCC's reports on various aspects of climate change.²³ These highly qualified volunteer experts cover a broad range of disciplines, including climatology, hydrology, agriculture, forestry, sustainable development and equity.

16 UNGA 2001, p. 3.

17 UNV 1999, p. 4.

18 UNDP 2012b.

19 KENVO 2013.

20 UNDP 2012a, p. 125.

21 WMO 2001.

22 WMO 2001, p. 19.

23 IPCC 2013; WMO 2001, p. 16.

II. Volunteerism promotes environmental sustainability

Volunteerism has long been considered an important strategy for overall sustainable development.²⁴ In 2011, the Declaration of the 64th UN Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organizations Conference, agreed to by over 1,300 NGO representatives, emphasized the critical contribution of the voluntary actions of millions of people towards sustainable development. It underlined the intrinsic interconnectedness of volunteerism and environmental sustainability, and it called for governments to ensure that volunteerism and civic engagement are incorporated in all global, national and local plans for the implementation of sustainable development. It explicitly recognized the impact of volunteering on adaptation to and mitigation of climate change and on the development of sustainable livelihoods.²⁵ The 2011 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution, on the 10th anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers, also recognized volunteerism as an important component of the range of strategies aimed at climate change and disaster management (Box 4).²⁶

Box 4. Volunteerism for climate change and disaster management

The United Nations General Assembly's resolution in 2011, on the 10th anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers, recognized volunteerism as an important component of any strategy aimed at, inter alia, such areas as poverty reduction, sustainable development health, youth empowerment, climate change, disaster prevention and management... (A/RES/66/67).²⁷

Volunteerism is particularly suited to promoting environmental sustainability because of its key inherent attributes and the processes it engenders, as the following points demonstrate:

- Communities are often the first responders in the face of environmental challenges. They are able to leverage rapid collective action,²⁸ reacting with resilience for themselves and others. Local volunteer actions can provide a 'unique lens' on the conditions and drivers that communities are experiencing, whether they be environmental threats or institutional and service gaps. Local community actions represent a key source of information on the needs and challenges of communities, and can help to elucidate demand trends for [further] development support.²⁹

²⁴ UNGA 2001; UNGA 2002.

²⁵ UNGA 2011a, p. 5.

²⁶ UNGA 2011b.

²⁷ UNGA 2011b, p. 1.

²⁸ Wilson 2011; Nakagawa and Shaw 2004; Milligan 2001.

²⁹ UNDP 2012a, p. 6.

- The role of volunteerism in fostering resilience is critical in the context of the changing nature and frequency of natural disasters, attributed in part to the effects of climate change. Spontaneous volunteer responses to disasters are among the clearest and most recognizable expressions of local collective action. The example of Japan, which experienced a surge in volunteerism in the aftermath of the Kobe earthquake in 1995 and the Tohoku earthquake in 2011, is a strong case in point. Close to 1.4 million volunteers mobilized during the months following the Kobe earthquake, making 1995 a watershed in the history of volunteerism. Lessons learned during and after the 1995 earthquake prompted the Japanese government to lead the United Nations initiative to make 2001 the 'International Year of Volunteers', which was adopted in a resolution at the 52nd UNGA in 1997.³⁰ When well organized, the contribution of volunteerism can effectively cover the spectrum of disaster management, from preparedness and prevention to response and recovery. The 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction, at which the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015*³¹ was adopted, gave considerable attention to the role of 'vital stakeholders', including volunteers and community-based organizations, in disaster management.³² The Hyogo Framework for Action called for the promotion of community-based training initiatives, particularly for volunteers, to enhance local capacity and to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.³³
- Evidence in the areas of environment and development suggests that community-based initiatives are successful because they prioritize social processes that enable collective action, such as participation, inclusion and empowerment.³⁴ Volunteerism, which is predicated on the premise that everyone has something to contribute, provides a space for all people to play fuller roles in their communities, opening up powerful pathways to participation and engagement. This includes not only participation in formal consultations but also the meaningful participation of groups that are often excluded. Participation is not unique to voluntary action, but the symbiosis between voluntary action and

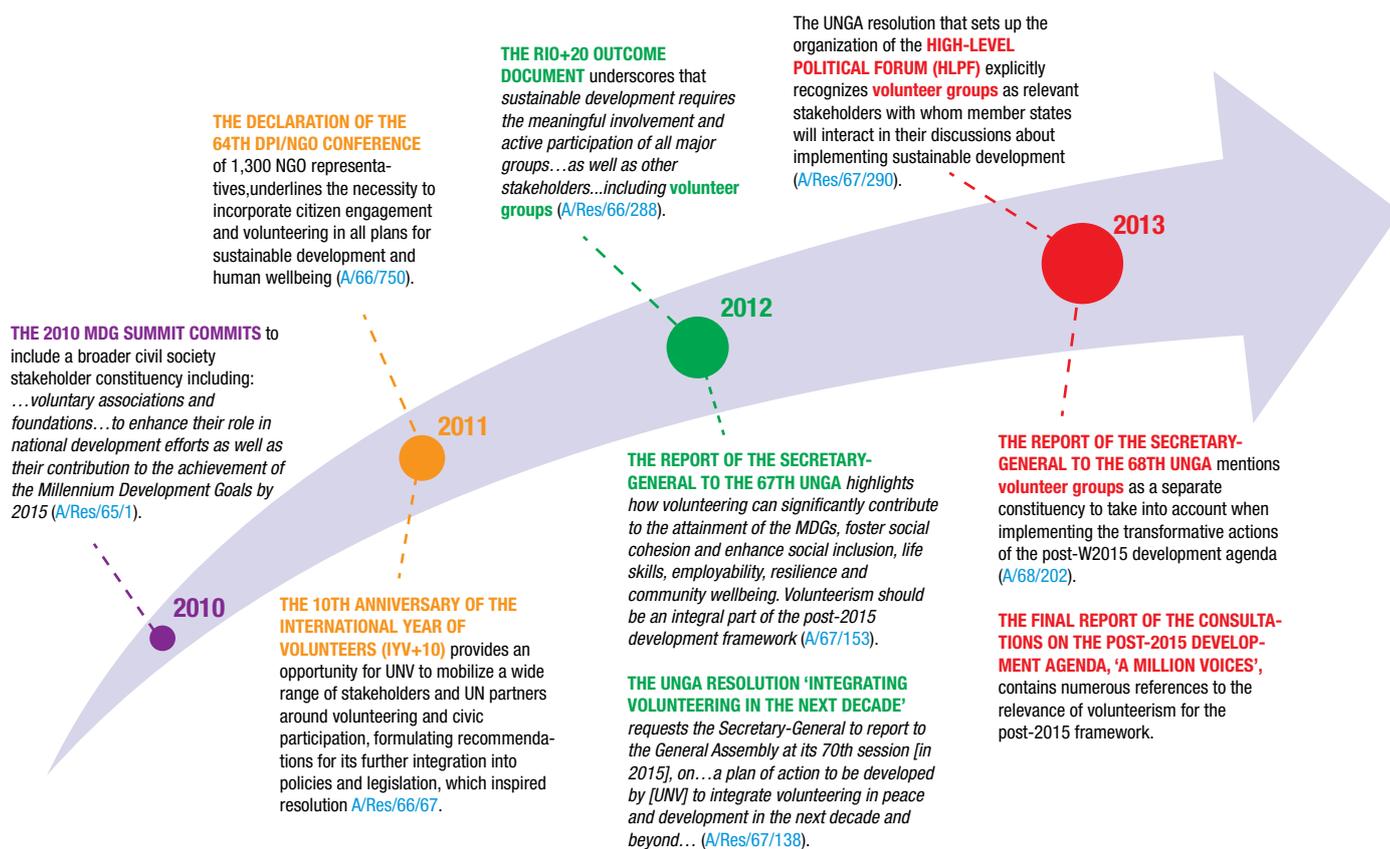
³⁰ Milligan 2001.

³¹ The Hyogo Framework for Action (2005–2015) for building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters explains the work that is required from all different sectors and actors to reduce disaster losses. It was developed and agreed upon by the many partners — governments, international agencies, disaster experts and many others — and attempted to bring them into a common system of coordination. The Framework outlines five priorities for action and offers guiding principles and practical means for achieving disaster resilience.

³² UNISDR 2005, p. 13.

³³ UNISDR 2005, p. 10.

³⁴ UNDP's 2012 publication on *The Power of Local Action: Lessons from 10 Years of the Equator Prize* presents a body of diverse and detailed community-based initiatives in environment and development from all over the world (UNDP 2012a).



GRAPHIC 1: VOLUNTEERISM MILESTONES

community participation is particularly potent. Research on voluntary biological monitoring³⁵ (VBM) in Europe and North America has shown that volunteerism generates civic participation that is dynamic and multidimensional in nature. The VBM case studies assessed indicated that while voluntary contributions improve objective outcomes (such as enhanced biodiversity data collection), the process and experience of volunteering simultaneously affects the volunteers themselves in terms of their values, behaviour, further experience and decision-making.³⁶ The volunteering process is a dynamic one in which structure, collective agency and individual agency all interact.³⁷ Some of the case studies even demonstrated that the volunteers also played a strong advocacy role. The efforts of the Citizens' Environmental Watch, a voluntary network in Canada, resulted in the prosecution of the City of Hamilton in Ontario in relation to a leaking landfill site, and the British Trust for Ornithology, for which thousands of volunteers collate data on birds and their habitats, has provided substantive inputs to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.³⁸

35 Voluntary biological monitoring involves activities by volunteers, from specialist amateurs to members of the public, to collect data about species and habitat distributions, abundance and rates of change.

36 Lawrence 2006, p. 293.

37 Lawrence 2006, p. 295.

38 Lawrence 2006, pp. 287–289.

Box 5. Volunteerism reinforces capacity development

The key characteristics associated with volunteerism reinforce capacity development. The following list, while not exhaustive, highlights some of these attributes:³⁸

- Values
 - commitment and solidarity
 - belief in collective action for the public good
 - commitment to human rights and gender equity
- Community ownership
 - a significant number of volunteers belong to the communities they serve
 - direct contact with communities through living and working at the grassroots level
 - reciprocity of exchanging skills and experiences
- Sustainability
 - mobilizes local rather than external resources
 - facilitates capacity development for many rather than a few

39 UNV 2000, pp. 8–9.

- **Volunteerism is often referred to as a ‘capacity development multiplier’** because of its inherent attributes that reinforce capacity development processes (Box 5). When programmes involving volunteers are able to harness the potential of these attributes, the capacities developed can spread further into the community, not just to a small number of people. Well-organized volunteer-involving programmes can effectively deliver context-specific technical and social learning, which is often necessary to meet specific environmental challenges. Volunteerism for development plays an important role in this, not only by enabling the transfer of skills and knowledge but also by making the space for mutual learning between volunteers and community members.
- **When volunteerism is formally integrated into community-based programmes, it generates new community networks and extends existing webs of social interaction.**⁴⁰ Such networks, which are conduits for information exchange and adaptive learning, play an important role in sustaining community-based enterprises. They provide the opportunities for innovation, encouragement, engagement and learning, without which community-based projects are often not sustainable.⁴¹ Volunteerism provides supportive conditions for the development and maintenance of such networks.⁴² Civic engagement and the involvement of beneficiaries also ensure the long-term viability of sustainability projects and increase credibility and local ownership. Volunteers often provide a vital link between target communities and more organized institutions, such as government agencies and development agencies, as they are seen as credible intermediaries.⁴³

The following examples of community-based initiatives in natural resource management, climate change adaptation and disaster management highlight the attributes of volunteerism that are particularly relevant for promoting sustainable environmental progress and demonstrate the wide range of impacts that volunteer actions can help to generate.

- **Natural resource management**

Involving volunteers in environmental projects is a way of not only developing capacity at the grassroots level but also building trust and cooperation within communities, which can be catalytic for long-term change. A project in the region of Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia provides a number of crucial insights into this approach.⁴⁴ Tonle

Sap, the largest freshwater lake in South-East Asia, is also one of the world’s most productive freshwater ecosystems. Over one million people directly depend on the lake for food and fresh water, and the management of its biodiversity is a critical issue. From 2007 to 2009, national UN Volunteers supported the development of biodiversity-friendly income-generating activities among the communities who were the direct users of the natural resources. They facilitated the formation of self-help groups (SHGs) that set up revolving loan funds and provided training to group members on project and financial management as well as hands-on technical support to those who were implementing new business ventures as alternate livelihood activities.

The UN Volunteers, located in the proximity of the targeted communities, ‘embedded’ themselves in the communities by providing day-to-day assistance and encouraging greater participation of community members, particularly women. The project resulted in the formation of 15 SHGs, involving a total of 407 household members (of whom almost 85 percent were women).⁴⁵ Evaluation reports show that the project reinforced reciprocity among community members to work and save together, with a majority of them becoming long-term (more than 12 months) group members. A range of diversified means of livelihoods other than fishing emerged during the course of the project activities, and over 50 percent of the SHG members were engaged in alternative activities such as livestock raising and aquaculture. In addition, these alternative activities increased the income of members for addressing their basic needs. About 44 percent of the SHG stakeholders interviewed during the evaluation disclosed that their assets had increased, with additional earnings of US\$40–75 per month.⁴⁶ Community members also reported that they had developed better saving habits, and 100 percent reported having increased their savings after joining the group.

Volunteers particularly contributed to the development of the communication skills of community members. The confidence of the SHG members grew as a result of the communications training they underwent, as did their skills in networking and community organizing. Some now actively lobby for community needs with local authorities, and data from the field shows that about 50 per cent of them participate in community development meetings. Volunteerism has also been internalized within the groups, demonstrated by the fact that 97 percent of the SHG leaders were committed to providing services to their groups without any compensation.⁴⁷

40 UNV 2000, p. 6.

41 UNDP *et al* 2008, p. 15.

42 UNDP *et al* 2008, pp. 13–15.

43 UNV 2011b; UNV 2011a.

44 This project was supported by UNV in partnership with UNDP, the Global Environment Facility and the Government of Cambodia.

45 NIRAS 2009, p. 30 and p. 17.

46 NIRAS 2009, pp. 11–13.

47 NIRAS 2009, p. v.

- **Climate change adaptation**

In a post-2015 world, where the focus on building climate-resilient societies will remain central to development practice, volunteerism can make critical contributions towards enhancing the sustainability and impact of climate change community-based adaptation (CBA) programmes. If volunteerism is well integrated into national CBA frameworks and programming, its impacts can extend deeply at the grassroots level, well beyond the reach of national initiatives. The outcomes of a climate change CBA programme⁴⁸ supported by UNDP, UNV and the Global Environmental Facility, which was implemented from 2008 to 2012 in 10 countries, present important insights into the impacts of volunteerism.⁴⁹

A total of 64 projects involving 240,000 community members were implemented under the programme, almost all in remote rural areas. The projects resulted in solid adaptation outcomes, including the restoration of close to 10,000 hectares of land, the protection of over 72 species of flora and fauna across the 10 countries, and contributions to the formulation of 33 local policies and over 66 national-level policy discussions on climate change adaptation.⁵⁰ In seven of the 10 countries where community volunteers were integral to the project design, the volunteers became the main drivers of the local-level initiatives. Volunteers were the community mobilization agents, and the first people communities go to either to report their challenges or share important indigenous knowledge that has proven indispensable to implementing the projects.⁵¹

In Morocco, the programme mobilized 1,000 individual volunteers, including over 200 women and over 200 young people, to implement and monitor project activities. Volunteers contributed their time, leadership (in fostering collaboration) and in-kind support with whatever they had available, including labour, knowledge and practical assistance such as cooking and childcare.⁵²

In Namibia, over 3,500 community volunteers were involved in every aspect of project formulation and implementation. Volunteers willingly contributed their time and labour to activities such as clearing sites, digging fish ponds and setting up fences for project sites,

often using their own personal tools and resources.⁵³ Those who underwent training in climate change risk management and planning voluntarily replicated similar sessions in neighbouring villages. In a majority of the communities, new learning resulted in changed practices such as the diversification of livelihoods, with communities shifting from a dependency on rain-fed crop production to other practices — for example, fish farming, maize production and vegetable growing.⁵⁴

- **Disaster management**

There are certain values inherent in volunteerism that render it particularly relevant to fostering community capacity for resilience and recovery in the face of disasters. Empirical research indicates that communities with strong social capital — expressed through civic engagement and robust social networks, which volunteerism is known to engender — have a better chance of recovering after a disaster than fragmented, isolated ones.⁵⁵ While government policies and the interventions of development agencies are critical, social networks and collective civic action can aid the progress of disaster recovery processes, with social ties serving as mechanisms upon which the victims of a disaster can draw for financial, physical and logistical support.⁵⁶ When volunteerism is integrated into disaster risk reduction programmes, it can make significant contributions across the spectrum of disaster management, from preparedness and prevention to response to recovery.

In Bangladesh, one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, disaster preparedness and risk reduction have long been national priorities. The Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) established by Bangladesh Red Crescent Society and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, supported by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, relies on a well-organized volunteer network to provide early warning to community members. CPP volunteers, who undergo extensive training, use a system of radios, megaphones and hand sirens to warn people of impending weather events and help relocate them to evacuation sites. Before Cyclone Sidr hit the southern coast of Bangladesh in November 2007, around 5,000 CPP volunteers worked through the night using megaphones and hand sirens to warn communities of the approaching cyclone and encourage people to evacuate and move to shelters. Although more than 3,000 lives were lost, the disaster was a fraction of

48 Community participation in the CBA projects, which differed among the 10 countries, included providing local knowledge and expertise, informally training neighbours, building shelters for community meetings, tree planting and creating local seed banks.

49 UNDP *et al* 2011; Onestini 2013.

50 UNDP *et al* 2011, pp. 14–15.

51 UNDP *et al* 2011, p. 19.

52 UNV 2012, pp. 5–6.

53 UNDP and GEF 2012, p. 7.

54 UNDP and GEF 2012, p. 9.

55 Aldrich 2008; Nakagawa and Shaw 2004.

56 Aldrich 2008, pp. 5–7.

the magnitude it would have been had no warning been sounded using the local volunteer network.⁵⁷ Managing disasters efficiently and effectively begins and ends with local communities.

Another area to which volunteerism particularly contributes is the capacity development of local community members. Volunteers, both international and national, often provide a balance between self-help and external assistance in disaster management. In Sri Lanka, over 100 UN Volunteers supported the processes of strengthening community-level capacities in the aftermath of the widespread destruction wreaked by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The tsunami killed over 35,000 people and rendered almost one million homeless. UN Volunteers coordinated a range of civic service activities during the early recovery phase, when state capacity was insufficient.⁵⁸ They also formed a vital link between the communities and national Disaster Risk Management Centres during the development of longer term community-level disaster plans and task forces. This approach ensured that vulnerable groups were able to access the services they needed as early as possible and that the role of local communities was recognized in the formulation of disaster management plans.

Volunteers in post-disaster situations can 'humanize' recovery activities, as they bring a personal touch to affected families and provide a trustworthy connection to formal established agencies. Evaluation reports indicate that the UN Volunteers in Sri Lanka created a strong bond of trust among urban and rural communities, while adding to the sense of transparency and equity in the distribution of relief efforts. Their contribution to the humanitarian recovery in Sri Lanka was ultimately endorsed by the Government as well as UN and non-governmental agencies, and a number of the volunteers continued to work with national organizations and the Government in post-tsunami programmes after the completion of UNV's intervention in 2007.⁵⁹

III. Recommended actions

The post-2015 development agenda needs to recognize the critical role of volunteerism as a unifying force without which future goals in relation to poverty reduction and sustainable development cannot be realized. As the evidence in this Issue Brief demonstrates, incorporating volunteerism into

environment and development programming is crucial for sustainably building the resilience of communities, improving capacity for local self-sufficiency and encouraging changes in attitudes and mindsets that can durably influence policies and local action at the grassroots level. The involvement of diverse actors at national and global levels is, however, crucial.

Formally integrating volunteerism into the design and implementation of community-based environmental programmes opens up pathways for drawing upon local community sources and ensuring that strategies are specific and appropriate to the context. Such an approach enhances information gathering on local environmental threats, community needs, and service and institutional gaps, and it avoids the hazards of applying blanket solutions or analyses in environmental programming.

Governments should recognize the value of civic participation and proactively nurture an enabling environment with the appropriate resources and support for volunteering infrastructure. Considered and conscientious planning is required on the part of governments and development agencies to ensure that local initiatives that involve volunteers in environmental activities are recognized, encouraged and sustained.

The post-2015 agenda: UNV position

- Volunteerism is universal and strengthens civic engagement, social inclusion, solidarity and ownership.
- Volunteerism should be part of a new measuring framework that goes beyond GDP and demonstrates progress in human wellbeing and sustainable human development.

Capturing specific data on volunteerism must be a priority in the documentation of community-based environmental programmes. Volunteer engagement, implicit in many environmental initiatives around the world, all too often goes undocumented. Specific, measurable indicators for volunteer action that are realistic and relevant should be incorporated into project designs so that they are a principal focus, not subsidiary to outcome-oriented factors. The provision of support to development agencies and civil society in conducting research studies on volunteer involvement and measurement standards for volunteer contributions is essential.

⁵⁷ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2009, p. 39.

⁵⁸ Goodyear 2008, pp. 25–28.

⁵⁹ Goodyear 2008, p. 39.

In the area of climate change, community-based adaptation (CBA) activities should draw upon volunteers to respond to local needs and strengthen resilience in the face of climate-related vulnerabilities. The incorporation of gender considerations should be integrated at the design stage of CBA projects. Just as men and women have different roles and responsibilities in the household and the community, climate change also affects men and women differently. The inclusion of women's participation in CBA approaches is essential to capture their unique contributions and address their particular vulnerabilities.

In the area of disaster management, research that specifically investigates the role and contribution of volunteer action in disaster management will deepen understanding of the factors that assist disaster mitigation and recovery. The nurturing and rebuilding of social capital through the work of community volunteers must be recognized for its transformative role.

Any sustainable development goal addressing aspects of environmental sustainability should contain an indicator measuring the degree to which community volunteers are engaged in the design and implementation of related policies and programmes.

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Farmers El Houssain El Kerdaoui (centre) and El Mahfoud Ihrche (right) discuss climate change and its effect on their oasis at Iguiwaz, Morocco, with Ali Ait Baha (left), a respected elder. El Houssain and El Mahfoud volunteer with the UNV-supported Community-based Adaptation project, contributing towards water-sharing systems and tree-planting initiatives, and sharing their knowledge with local youth (Baptiste de Ville d'Avray, 2009).

About United Nations Volunteers

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 is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

www.unv.org

Volunteer Action Counts

In 2012 UNV launched the Volunteer Action Counts campaign to tell the world about the impact of volunteering by documenting the actions of volunteers across the globe. Over 64 million actions were counted by the time the Rio+20 summit took place — a remarkable testament to bottom-up, grassroots commitment [...] yet one more demonstration of how Rio+20 is mobilizing a global movement for change, as UN Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, said to the United Nations General Assembly in 2012.

UNV continues the Volunteer Action Counts campaign, building on the achievements of Rio+20, to further raise awareness about the contribution of volunteerism to peace and development and to promote the integration of volunteerism into the post-2015 development agenda. The Volunteer Action Counts website and social media profiles continue to gather stories about concrete volunteer action and provide information about upcoming events, opportunities and best practices.

www.volunteeractioncounts.org