

# **Developing a Volunteer Infrastructure**

## **A Guidance Note**



**UN**  
**Volunteers**



**United Nations Volunteers**

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Volunteer Infrastructure**

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UN Volunteers is administered by the  
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Volunteerism as a development asset and volunteer infrastructure as a key requirement for harnessing its power

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will require the ingenuity, solidarity and creativity of many millions of ordinary people through voluntary action. Efforts on the part of governments, supported by the international community, can only complement what ultimately will depend on the full involvement of people all over the world. Six billion people have something to contribute. Recognizing this fact is the first step towards harnessing this vast resource in a global effort to meet the MDG targets.

The International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001 created global awareness of the enormous contribution that individuals make to development through voluntary action.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Voluntary action is at the core of social capital and underpins most social action in civil society. It occurs spontaneously, as is often the case during natural disasters where citizens come forward to voluntarily assist the victims of floods, earthquakes or forest fires. It is also expressed through civil society organizations (CSOs). CSOs encompass a very broad range of types and serve an array of constituencies. However, one common feature is that their roots lie in volunteerism. People join non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to volunteer a wide range of services in every field covered by the MDGs. People also volunteer to serve in the governance structures of the organizations themselves. Volunteerism is also present, in a less visible way, through membership in innumerable grass-roots associations found in every part of the globe. The full alignment of volunteer action by community groups with the MDGs, drawing on long-established traditions of sharing skills, time, ideas and energy, is critical in addressing the challenges posed by these goals.

Whether expressed as volunteer service, mutual aid and self-help, campaigning and activism,<sup>2</sup> or other forms of voluntary participation, the willingness and ability of citizens to give their time, out of a sense of solidarity and without expectation of monetary reward, will have a major influence on the extent to which the MDGs are attained and sustained.

IYV also established the notion of a range of actions that can, and should, be taken to promote and support volunteerism<sup>3</sup> These vary from place to place reflecting the diverse ways that people organize, the motivations that drive them, and the activities they pursue. While there is no common model of volunteering that works in every country, there are common elements that can work together to strengthen volunteerism as a strategic resource for development. These can be grouped into the following four key factors:

- reaching a common understanding of volunteerism and a shared appreciation of its value;
- establishing and nurturing an enabling environment;
- adopting a diversity of approaches to mobilizing and facilitating volunteerism;
- ensuring sustainable funding.

These actions, taken together, form the backbone for the development of an effective volunteer infrastructure and can harness the power of volunteerism to help meet development challenges.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the most successful global campaigns of recent times, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, relied on the active participation of hundreds of thousands of volunteers. Large numbers of citizens have been mobilized around other campaigns in such fields as literacy, debt relief, human rights, sustainable environment and violence against women.

<sup>3</sup> Volunteerism is defined for the purposes of this note as a form of social behaviour undertaken freely which benefits the community and society at large as well as the volunteer, and which is not driven by financial considerations.

## **1.2 Purpose and contents of this Guidance Note**

This note aims to provide the principal stakeholders in the promotion of volunteerism – governments, the private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs) and development cooperation agencies – with the information they need to put in place a volunteer infrastructure. This infrastructure encompasses the systems, mechanisms and instruments needed to ensure an environment where volunteerism can flourish.

The remainder of the note is divided into four sections corresponding to the above-mentioned four key factors. These sections briefly describe sets of actions, explore their importance, and highlight key concepts. The development of a national volunteer infrastructure should evolve through dialogue and collaboration among the main stakeholders. Each section concludes, therefore, with recommendations for the principal stakeholders. While the four factors are discussed sequentially, it is important to note that they may occur simultaneously as awareness of the role and potential of volunteerism increases and interest grows.

## 2. Four key factors in developing a volunteer infrastructure

### 2.1 Reaching a common understanding of volunteerism and a shared appreciation of its value

**A**t the heart of volunteerism are the ideals of service and solidarity and the belief that together we can make the world better.

**Kofi Annan**  
**UN Secretary-General**

Volunteerism has existed for centuries. Whether described as *mephato* in Botswana, *minga* in Ecuador, *gotongroyong* in Indonesia, *dobrovolchestvo* in the Russian Federation, *kwitango* in Rwanda, *ubuntu* in South Africa, or *shramadana* in South Asia, volunteerism is a universal human phenomenon that occurs across all cultures, economic levels, genders and ages.

A common understanding of volunteerism impacts on the extent to which it is valued. Basic beliefs about the value of volunteering influence policies and procedures for promoting, engaging, managing and recognizing volunteers. Stakeholders who cannot identify and articulate why they support and value volunteerism often remain limited in their vision of its scope and its contribution to development. Attitudes may even be negative in situations where notions of volunteerism were abused at some point in history when unpaid communal action was imposed as a state directive.

People in most societies have some knowledge of volunteerism based on local customs and traditions but their appreciation of the contributions that volunteers make varies. In many instances there is no shared understanding of the role of volunteerism or shared appreciation of its contributions to society in general and to volunteers themselves. In some countries, where volunteerism used to be imposed by state directive, there may be a need to

develop innovative approaches for re-kindling interest in, and appreciation of, volunteer work.

As stakeholders explore opportunities to embrace the potential of volunteerism to address national priorities for social and economic development, attention should be given to developing a common understanding of what volunteerism is and its value as a resource for achieving shared development goals. Three major types of activity could contribute to the development of a common understanding of volunteerism:

- public dialogue and discussion;
- research and documentation;
- dissemination of information.

### ***2.1.1 Public dialogue and discussion***

A shared understanding of volunteerism begins with conversations among stakeholders which take into account:

- indigenous customs and expressions of volunteerism;
- strengths and weaknesses of various models and approaches;
- nuances of language that distinguish between neighbourly help, advocacy, volunteering and civic duty;
- importance of mutual support and human development;
- advantages or limitations of enabling resources;
- potential benefits;
- clarification of stakeholder roles.

Volunteerism is grounded in the principles of choice and free will, which implies that the ways in which it is expressed will vary. Efforts to embrace and support volunteerism should be based on a clear understanding of the role of volunteerism within the context of cultural, social, religious and historical traditions and norms. This frequently calls for engaging in discussion about the nature of paid and unpaid work. If governments or CSOs had abundant

resources to pay workers would they still engage volunteers and, if so, why? When stakeholders have a common understanding of the nature of volunteer work and are able to describe its value in terms of its contributions to social and human development, it is easier to articulate why governments should invest in volunteerism as a strategic initiative and why all stakeholders should promote volunteer action.

### **2.1.2 Research and documentation**

While volunteerism is part of old, deeply rooted traditions in most societies, there is little scientific analysis of its manifestations, or its social impact or of how it is perceived. This limits a proper understanding of the phenomenon and hinders efforts to design policies and programmes which harness volunteerism to development.

Studies on volunteerism need to address the sociological, cultural, gender and economic dimensions. It is increasingly recognized, for example, that volunteering is a key factor for bonding different social groups in most societies. Research can document the magnitude, perceptions, patterns, and social distribution of volunteering as well as motivations, barriers and the scope of the volunteer movement within a country.

Identifying volunteer contributions to the gross domestic product highlights the economic benefits of volunteerism. National assessments based, for example, on a national average wage, cost/benefit ratio or market value estimates can help to assign a monetary value to volunteer work. There is now an expanding literature on the economic value of volunteering. In the context of the IYV 2001, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme and the United States-based organization Independent Sector developed *Measuring Volunteering: A Practical Toolkit* to help to advocate, and help draw up, statistical measures of volunteer activities and contributions. In 2003 the Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society Studies collaborated with the United Nations Statistics Division to develop the *Handbook on Non-profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts*, which also captures the economic aspect of volunteer contributions.

The studies cited, and others, help not only to challenge stereotypes but also, by focusing on voluntary action as a component of national wealth, provide a platform for the introduction of supportive measures.

### ***2.1.3 Dissemination of information***

Dissemination of information on volunteerism encompasses a broad range of possible actions such as:

- reporting on various volunteer activities, for example in media flashes;
- publishing results of studies on volunteerism;
- providing basic information or news about volunteer-involving organizations (VIOs);
- organizing policy debates and/or legislation around volunteerism;
- stimulating initiatives or innovations for civic participation;
- highlighting specific contributions to volunteer initiatives.

Dissemination of information on volunteerism, to be effective, needs to go beyond circulating existing information, or even simply storing information on a web site. Information should be packaged and conveyed in ways that attract attention, stimulate increasing interest, generate social interaction, and thus encourage people to want to know more about volunteering.

Networking is one example of an effective channel for dissemination. When it encompasses both national and international constituencies it can pool a wealth of information and provide a rich source of creativity and a channel for effective cross-fertilization of experiences.

## **Recommendations**

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### For **governments**

- Convene meetings involving the main stakeholders to identify opportunities for aligning volunteerism with national development goals and priorities.
- Engage parliamentarians in discussions on the nature of supportive legislation and regulations for volunteerism for development.
- Organize debates within political parties on the importance of volunteerism as an asset for development.
- Promote dialogue among various stakeholders – including with trade unions – on the complementarity of wage employment and volunteering.
- Engage ordinary citizens in discussions about the importance of volunteerism and ways to facilitate it.
- Mobilize public media to report discussions and promote forums and research on volunteering.
- Feature volunteer contributions to national development in the public media.
- Support the development of national measurement standards for volunteer contributions.
- Reflect volunteer contributions to development in the national system of accounts disaggregated by gender.
- Support existing research studies which document perceptions, patterns, volume, motivation, scope of and barriers to volunteer involvement.

### For **civil society**

- Facilitate increasing knowledge and understanding of local traditional expressions of volunteerism.

- Partner governments to connect local volunteer initiatives with national development priorities.
- Provide development education to volunteers and constituencies to improve their understanding of the economic and social dimensions of their work.
- Engage in discussions about the benefits of volunteerism to individual volunteers e.g. offering an opportunity to learn, grow and engage more fully in democratic processes.
- Feature volunteer stories to illustrate the potential of each citizen to contribute, and thus stimulate further volunteering.
- Engage prominent leaders and well-known personalities from civil society to serve as spokespersons to promote volunteerism for development.
- Use web sites of CSOs to display volunteer contributions and publicize events that recognize volunteers.
- Organize research projects – to involve, *inter alia*, CSOs – to measure volunteer effectiveness and to assess organizational capacity to engage, support and retain volunteers.

### For the **private sector**

- Promote internal and external dialogue to explore opportunities and incentives for employees to engage in volunteer activities.
- Encourage employees to discuss the value and benefits of corporate volunteering initiatives.
- Take a public stance on the value of corporate volunteering as an expression of corporate social responsibility.
- Facilitate employee access to information about volunteering opportunities within and outside the corporation.
- Encourage private media to support the promotion of volunteering through, for example, reporting on volunteer success stories, public service announcements, and coverage of high-profile volunteering events.

- Contribute to various forms of recognition of volunteers.
- Promote studies on corporate volunteering.

### For **development cooperation agencies**

- Make local development partners aware of the potential of volunteerism with reference to experience around the world – in both the North and the South.
- Support studies on local/national expressions of volunteerism for development.
- Stimulate and engage in public debates on volunteerism for development.
- Contribute to the promotion of volunteer awards as a way to recognize and value volunteer achievements.

## **2.2 Establishing and nurturing an enabling environment**

Volunteerism is a product of its environment. What volunteers do and who they are are shaped by customs and traditions as well as by public policy and legal considerations. When public policies and legal frameworks facilitate participation and reduce potential barriers, citizens are encouraged and inspired to volunteer for development. A favourable environment for volunteerism respects and nurtures traditional forms of volunteerism while broadening and enhancing opportunities for voluntary action to complement national development efforts.

Governments, civil society and the private sector all have important roles to play in ensuring that the environment supports volunteerism as a strategy for building civic participation and addressing social development goals. Three key factors should be taken into account:

- a favourable policy and regulatory framework;
- recognition and promotion of volunteerism for development;

- committed national leadership.

### **2.2.1 A favourable policy and regulatory framework**

In many cultures, networks of mutual support are deeply rooted and can provide the basis for volunteerism. Religious beliefs may inspire actions that benefit individuals beyond local networks of family and friends. Such actions are often based on a need for self-help, on shared interests, and on the inherent desire to pass on norms and traditions. Activities are generally organized informally at the local level.

As perceptions about the power of volunteerism and its contribution to development come into greater focus, the need for governments to take a proactive approach to adopting a supportive policy becomes more urgent. Ensuring regulatory frameworks which are favourable to volunteerism implies consideration not only of appropriate new legislation but also of existing legal policies and measures which may impact on people's willingness and ability to volunteer time. A joint publication of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNV entitled *Volunteerism and Legislation: A Guidance Note*, highlights several areas of law that can impact on volunteer profiles in a country. These include, for example, legislation on the length of the working week and the age of retirement. Labour standards that address compensation, safety or age requirements for work may also have an impact on the ability of VIOs to engage particular segments of society. Regulations on associations, memberships, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and philanthropic activities may affect the role of citizen participation in VIOs.

Any discussion of official support for volunteerism should never lose sight of the fine balance between allowing freedom of choice and providing direction. Governments and civil society need to work together to encourage spontaneity in a citizen's decision to volunteer time while directing the energy released by that decision towards national development aspirations.

## ***2.2.2 Recognition and promotion of volunteerism for development***

Public recognition of volunteerism for development can be a powerful means of motivating citizens to volunteer. The growing number of countries offering periodic awards for volunteer initiatives is a positive sign. This expression of recognition needs to take place at different levels to encourage volunteerism for development across the board.

It is important to highlight the difference between recognition for volunteerism and incentives for individual volunteers. VIOs may be very effective at motivating, monitoring, managing and evaluating individual volunteers, and such actions may well represent sufficient incentive. Indeed, research indicates that volunteers generally attribute much of their commitment to the support they receive. While volunteers might be given additional incentives based on personal achievements, this might be known to only a limited number of people and therefore might not be greatly valued by the general public, and especially by decision makers. In this light incentives might achieve little in terms of expanding the scope and impact of volunteerism.

The promotion of volunteerism for national development could include special events such as International Volunteer Day on 5 December, thematic workshops convening specifically targeted groups (e.g. women, youth) and debates, both highly visible such as parliamentary hearings and less so, at the more local, practitioner level. Each event relating to volunteerism can be an opportunity to recognize contributions and stimulate further volunteer initiatives.

Special awards and events around volunteerism for development can have an impact on citizens' aspirations to volunteer and on the public's perception of volunteerism. They can provide, therefore, a good foundation for scaling up and diversifying volunteer contributions to national development.

### ***2.2.3 Committed national leadership***

There are two major components of national leadership to be borne in mind when discussing ways to strengthen the enabling environment for volunteerism. These are:

- recognized leaders within government, civil society, and the private sector;
- public opinion makers.

The former can be easily identified as including heads of state, of government, of parliament, of the judiciary, and other key officials in charge of developing and implementing policy. The latter group may be less identifiable since their leadership is not based on any official status but rather on the respect accorded them and their influence on people's opinions. Such individuals might include distinguished religious or community leaders, prominent scientists, media personalities, etc.

A public statement or other action by these leaders in favour of volunteerism can make a valuable contribution to legitimizing and furthering an environment favourable to promoting and supporting volunteerism. It may exert pressure for, and even lead to a development policy that acknowledges volunteerism as a major asset involving, for example, the formulation of special programmes involving volunteers and the allocation of appropriate resources for volunteer-related initiatives.

While the commitment of individual key leaders is critical for volunteerism to flourish, their partnership and collaboration are equally important in sending a strong signal of a shared vision. By facilitating the free flow of information among the various parties, this interaction can also lead to a better understanding of roles and contributions of stakeholders in promoting volunteerism for development.

## **Recommendations**

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### For **governments**

- Develop enabling legislation for volunteerism.
- Officially link volunteer actions to national development goals and priorities.
- Create formal opportunities for volunteer contributions to public programmes, e.g. through national service schemes.
- Establish national targets for volunteer participation.
- Promote special recognition schemes, such as awards, for volunteers and VIOs that significantly contribute to national development priorities.
- Establish a focal point in government institutions for the promotion and support of volunteer actions.
- Nominate a government member as the Government Champion of Volunteerism for Development.
- Reflect volunteer involvement in the programmes of each ministry.

### For **civil society**

- Help to ensure the development of policies and structures that respect and promote volunteerism from existing customs and traditions.
- Promote dialogue with government to identify and address factors that facilitate and support volunteer actions, e.g. transportation, technology and public communications.
- Research and document various expressions of volunteerism and provide background data regarding the potential impact of public policy initiatives on them disaggregated by gender.

- Promote civic engagement of young people through appropriate schemes that link community actions with national development goals and educational curricula.
- Design meaningful, attractive activities for volunteers.
- Develop recognition schemes that acknowledge the contributions of volunteers.
- Promote the development of national volunteer centres and their possible ramifications at the decentralized level.
- Call on respected leaders (e.g. religious, cultural and political) to speak out and advocate policies supportive of volunteering.

#### For the **private sector**

- Dialogue with employee associations, trade unions and government on ways of promoting legislation and development policy that support volunteerism.
- Lobby for tax regulations that support volunteerism.
- Catalyse and support complementary activities of employees and local volunteering in business-community relationships.
- Organize and publicize special forms of recognition for employees who volunteer.
- Set up an inter-corporation platform for sharing experiences to support expansion and continuous improvement of volunteering schemes for employees.

#### For **development cooperation agencies**

- Provide expertise to enable governments to assess the impact of existing legislation/regulations on volunteering.
- Make parliament aware of the need for legislation supportive of volunteering and develop local capacity accordingly.

- Advise local and national authorities on ways to properly factor volunteer contributions into development cooperation programmes.
- Set up a special thematic task force on Volunteerism for the MDGs.
- Lobby public opinion makers to support high-profile events on volunteerism for development, e.g. International Volunteer Day.

### **2.3 Adopting a diversity of approaches to mobilizing and facilitating volunteerism**

Volunteerism is something that anyone can do. Individuals with diverse backgrounds, skills and abilities can come together to work cooperatively on issues of common interest. Communities and individuals benefit when citizens work together without regard for ethnic, gender, racial, religious, social or age differences.

A volunteer infrastructure should include strategies for involving all segments of society. Targeted programmes can be designed to open up, or increase opportunities for specific social groups such as youth, women, older persons, persons with disabilities, minorities and other groups which may be socially excluded. Such targeted efforts promote pluralism, strengthen social capital and increase the capacity of citizens to make a lasting impact on development. As mobilization strategies are developed, specialized training in the facilitation of volunteerism can help VIOs increase their effectiveness in delivering services, expand volunteer involvement and enhance volunteer satisfaction and retention.

Focus on formal mobilization structures should not lose sight of the need to respect and encourage spontaneous volunteerism undertaken in informal, unstructured settings. Infrastructure should also consider ways to harness and channel such expressions of volunteerism towards meeting national development goals.

Expanded and diversified opportunities for volunteer involvement tend to arise where there is pluralistic and effective facilitation of

volunteerism as well as systematic and specialized training in managing volunteer resources.

### ***2.3.1 Diversity of approaches***

Different structures can be encouraged to cater for the varying needs of different groups of people wishing to engage in volunteerism. Voluntary action can take place online as well as on-site, assignments can be short- as well as long-term, and volunteer work can be hands-on at community level, support functions or be administrative in nature. The greater the range of opportunities, the more volunteerism will appeal to larger numbers of people.

Some segments of society may not volunteer because they lack access to information about opportunities, or they have not been asked to participate. Formal inclusion schemes can be designed to mobilize socially marginalized or excluded population groups. Such schemes address volunteering barriers and special needs and create organizational conditions to attract and retain the identified groups. Inclusion initiatives help marginalized groups acquire skills and knowledge, build social networks and contribute to overcoming exclusion.

Mobilization schemes can be designed to engage specific segments of society in volunteer activities. They might, for example:

- promote youth initiatives to encourage mutual support, citizenship, skill-building and leadership development;
- promote campaigns addressing domestic violence against women;
- promote the physical and mental benefits of volunteering among older adults;
- create opportunities for older adults to engage with the young to share life experiences and develop leadership skills in young people;
- sponsor volunteering programmes to help older adults to remain independent, active members of society;

- encourage corporate volunteer schemes that help promote social solidarity by working with VIOs at community level.

In some contexts it may be appropriate to promote stand-alone schemes for specific population groups, especially where this can help ensure that the value-added of the group concerned is not lost. It is generally desirable, however, to work towards bringing together different interests and profiles wherever possible to help ensure harmonious evolution of the volunteer movement at country level and establish a favourable environment for stimulating synergies between various volunteer forms and constituencies.

### ***2.3.2 Effective facilitation of volunteerism***

Mobilizing large numbers of volunteers does not guarantee successful volunteer actions. Effective facilitation practices will strengthen volunteer engagement and increase the potential for high-impact volunteer activities. Investing in good practices to manage volunteers increases the capacity of VIOs to deliver services, to support volunteer involvement and to increase volunteer retention. Volunteer management is about mobilizing and selecting volunteers, training and facilitation, evaluating and providing recognition, as well as the day-to-day practices of organizing and relating with volunteers.

Effective volunteer actions require high-quality management capacity. This is a key component of volunteer infrastructure in any country and VIOs need to acquire and enhance this capacity continuously. Different yet complementary ways to develop and strengthen this capacity include:

- formal start-up training of volunteer managers;
- periodic refresher courses and workshops;
- networks of practitioners for sharing experiences;
- learning from documentation;
- analysis of past and ongoing activities.

Dedicated managers can become leaders in defining best practices and in sharing information and resources to enhance the work of volunteers. They can provide peer training or peer mentoring programmes for new managers supplemented by, for example, local meetings of managers of volunteers, national and international forums, related chat rooms and online discussions, and conferences on volunteer management and volunteer efforts. In that respect, the Association for Volunteer Administration facilitates an online discussion and the UNV World Volunteer Web provides valuable resources and links.

In the haste to mobilize volunteers in great numbers for special programmes, there might be a tendency to go directly to implementation strategies. However, focusing first on schemes for engaging volunteers may cause the preparation required for their long-term success to be overlooked. Recruiting volunteers can be facilitated when recruitment schemes are part of an integrated overall approach to volunteer management.

Different management skills are required for different mobilization schemes. Promoting and supporting a corporate employee programme, for example, calls for a different set of skills and techniques than, say, a programme aimed at older persons or youth. While there are some core considerations, management requirements will vary with each approach and need to be specific for each targeted group.

## ***Recommendations***

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### **For governments**

- Create special incentives to engage marginalized groups in volunteering for development, e.g. former drug addicts and people infected with HIV.
- Promote volunteerism as a skill-building and networking option for the unemployed.
- Organize special national service periods in response to strategically defined issues, e.g. fighting a disease or rehabilitation after severe natural disasters.

- Support VIOs in connecting officially sponsored programmes with special groups, e.g. women, youth and older persons.
- Encourage respective government departments to promote the engagement of their constituencies in volunteer actions.
- Organize and/or facilitate volunteer schemes targeting contributions by or integration of special groups such as women, older persons, people with disabilities, and youth.
- Establish or support national and regional volunteer centres for, *inter alia*, mass mobilization schemes or facilitation of linking potential volunteers with various types of VIOs.
- Create educational programmes targeted at the effective management of volunteer actions.

#### For **civil society**

- Expand and enhance volunteer schemes in various thematic areas of CSO involvement.
- Organize volunteering opportunities to attract the widest range of people, e.g. combining short-, medium- and long-term activities and volunteer assignments.
- Promote social inclusion through, for example, developing schemes and actions for special target groups such as women, students, the unemployed, minority groups and people with disabilities.
- Organize online volunteering to facilitate engagement of segments of the population that have limited access to on-site voluntary action.
- Promote collective, professional training for managers of volunteers.
- Set up and facilitate local networks of managers of volunteers to share best practices and encourage mentoring for new managers.

## For the **private sector**

- Stimulate volunteering programmes for employees across the diversity of private corporations.
- Continuously improve capacity to engage employee volunteers, e.g. through drawing on the experience and expertise of VIOs in civil society.
- Set up special units to focus on expanding and diversifying corporate volunteering opportunities.
- Appoint and train staff to enhance and improve effective management of employee volunteering.
- Invite other VIOs to make presentations and provide material on expanded opportunities for employee volunteering.
- Assist other VIOs, especially from civil society, to improve their organizational and managerial capacity by drawing on the expertise of the private sector in these domains.

## For **development cooperation agencies**

- Allocate resources for a training programme on volunteer management.
- Facilitate the training of trainers in volunteer management.
- Support schemes that enable disadvantaged or marginalized groups to volunteer, e.g. the disabled, street children abused women, and young offenders.
- Facilitate replication in the South of online volunteering schemes.

## **2.4 Ensuring sustainable funding**

Promoting volunteerism raises public awareness and support. Legislative and regulatory frameworks create a supportive environment. Mobilization schemes engage citizens to get involved

as volunteers. Proper management systems help to ensure their effectiveness. Financial resources make it all possible.

Media campaigns, recruitment schemes and management training are activities that need to occur over an extended period to continually attract new volunteers, promote evolving opportunities for volunteering, and train new leaders and managers.

Obtaining the financial resources to organize, support and sustain volunteer efforts is challenging because political leadership and economic priorities change while the need for funding remains constant. Furthermore, new volunteer initiatives develop slowly. In countries where formalized volunteerism is relatively new, long-term promotion and advocacy may be needed to allow the concept to develop and grow over time. Moreover, potential donors are sometimes hesitant to fund start-up initiatives, looking instead for proven results and long-term sustainability.

Two approaches are suggested:

- base funding requests on volunteer impact and efficient resource management;
- ensure long-term funding – as opposed to short-term support of successive activities – and lever existing resources.

### ***2.4.1 Volunteer effectiveness and efficient resource management as a basis for securing funding***

The social and economic benefits of volunteer mobilization schemes, and their effectiveness in facilitating volunteer contributions, need to be well documented. Ideally, this should not only highlight the mutual benefits of volunteerism for the community and for volunteers themselves, but also place volunteer contributions in the context of national development. This calls for at least a basic grounding of managers of VIOs in development considerations through formal information channels and through more informal networking and contacts. VIO personnel should be encouraged to engage in ongoing national dialogue about development challenges and draw on this exposure to help shape their resource mobilization strategies.

VIOs that invest resources in their institutional infrastructure to support the effective engagement and management of volunteers are more likely to have programme and resource mobilization successes. Funders look to support VIOs that have sound, transparent management structures and are good stewards of their human and financial resources. Transparent and regular reporting is an important contributor to attracting the interest of potential funders. Supporters – both actual and potential – are likely to look favourably at situations where it can be shown that volunteerism is enhancing citizens' participation and increasing social solidarity around issues related to national social and economic development.

#### ***2.4.2 Long-term funding and leveraging existing resources***

Where resource requirements for volunteerism are aligned with long-term development priorities, volunteerism is more likely to become an integral component of a deliberate strategy for long-term national development. Funding short-term volunteer initiatives – often prompted by humanitarian concerns – needs to be part of a coherent national strategy aimed at a volunteer infrastructure that matches the social and cultural characteristics of a nation.

VIOs themselves should ensure they have the capacity to operate within a longer term framework even if the activities they support are of a short-term but recurring nature. Multi-year projects of VIOs presented within a longer term development framework are more likely to be successful where there is a common understanding of volunteerism for development and a shared appreciation of its value.

It is rare for all resources required for even one VIO to come from a single source. It is usually necessary to call on different partners. Multiple partnerships enhance prospects for successful mobilization of contributions from different donors with different areas of interest. In addition, donors tend to consider joint ventures as less risky and, where there are positive results, success attracts others. In this way, multiple partnerships can be an effective

means not only of securing complementary funding in the long run but also of leveraging existing resources.

Beyond enabling a combination of short-, medium- and long-term resources, multiple partnerships also allow consideration of cash and in-kind contributions. Donors are often willing to support direct operational activities but not the related management and administrative expenses. This is likely to limit the effectiveness of a VIO and possibly jeopardize its planned operations. Developing multiple partnerships can be a key to overcoming such a risk. Long-term investments could be provided for through government support while more operational activities could be of interest to potential donors familiar with seeking short-term concrete results.

The expertise of professional resource mobilizers can be drawn on as their business is to know where to find potential resources and how to mobilize them. They can not only adapt proven techniques to specific situations but they can also help design innovative solutions.

## ***Recommendations***

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### For **governments**

- Reflect regular financial commitments in national budgets to support volunteerism for development.
- Formalize budgetary allocations to volunteerism for development in the budgets of respective ministries or public departments.
- Establish criteria and realistic expectations to help VIOs to develop gender-sensitive programmes that address national priorities and make them eligible for potential funding.
- Set up a national investment fund for volunteerism for development to cater to the common needs of organizations concerned, e.g. training in the management of volunteers, sharing of volunteer experiences and information, and infrastructure for online volunteering.

- Establish a government seed fund for volunteerism to supplement and encourage contributions by other donors to local VIOs.

### For **civil society**

- Develop multi-year volunteer-supported projects that are aligned with national development goals, with provisions for tracking annual progress to facilitate/accommodate adjustments and increase effectiveness.
- Develop capacity to dialogue with potential funding sources in order to jointly identify mutually agreed, expected outcomes for programmes involving volunteers.
- Train managers of volunteers to ensure proper documentation of funding that benefits volunteerism for development – from submitting requests to monitoring, reporting on and evaluating implementation.
- Promote multi-CSO collaboration and coordination to enable a collective dialogue with potential common funders so as to maximize synergies and economies of scale.
- Organize professional training in resource mobilization among CSO managers of volunteers.

### For the **private sector**

- Enable host communities to plan for long-term development with expected, reliable support from employee volunteering.
- Establish an intra-/inter-corporation trust fund to promote volunteering activities.
- Set up a private-sector consortium that would enable the complementary allocation of resources (e.g. cash, management training, recycled equipment, new technologies) to VIOs.


- Facilitate volunteer and VIO access to recycled equipment of private companies, e.g. computers, vehicles and office furniture.
- Promote coordination of resource allocations to volunteering activities with other interested donors, e.g. public sector (national and international) and private foundations.
- Train VIO managers in techniques of effective resource mobilization, including viable income-generating initiatives, endowment options, and multiple and complementary sources of support.

#### For **development cooperation agencies**

- Consider and enable VIOs to be a permanent, effective mechanism for the implementation of development cooperation programmes.
- Develop dialogue and agreement among development agencies on appropriate resource allocation to VIOs in cooperation programmes.
- Organize and facilitate a special round table to mobilize resources for volunteer involvement in national development programmes.
- Stimulate government financial support to the long-term contribution of volunteerism to development by offering conditional complementary resources.

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Cover and layout: Robert Warnke, Bonn  
Printed by: Bonner Universitäts-Buchdruckerei, Bonn



# **Developing a Volunteer Infrastructure**

## **A Guidance Note**



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