



PRESS RELEASE

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Volunteers vital to success of new global development agenda, report says

New York – Volunteers are playing a vital role in making governments worldwide more accountable and responsive to their citizens, but their potential is seriously under-valued, a new report from the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme said today.

The **State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2015** is the first global review of evidence around the contribution of volunteers to better governance, a pre-requisite for the success of the new Sustainable Development Goals to be agreed at the United Nations in September.

Drawing on evidence from countries as diverse as Brazil, Kenya, Lebanon and Bangladesh, the UN report shows how ordinary people are volunteering their time, energies and skills to improve the way they are governed and engaged at local, national and global levels. Volunteers are working with governments and civil society to hold those in power to account, to influence policies and laws and to represent the voices of those who are often left out of development decisions such as women, youth and marginalised groups. The end result, the report says, is more inclusive - and ultimately more effective - development.

“By creating environments for people to volunteer their time, it is possible to use their skills and knowledge for the common good in the sphere of governance.” said Richard Dictus, Executive Coordinator of UNV. “Change will occur with greater civic engagement broadening the number of people who have voice, who can participate and who can hold governance actors to account.”

More than 1 billion people volunteer globally, the majority of them working in their own countries. Many are in the forefront of efforts to improve the way they and their fellow citizens are governed and engaged. Examples featured in the report include:

- Brazil's Social Observatories - citizens' groups monitoring city contracts for corruption who have saved millions of dollars in public funds;
- Regional campaigns in the Arab world to challenge laws preventing women married to foreign nationals from passing on their nationality to their children;
- The global movement to secure an agreement to regulate conditions for garment workers following the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh.

The **State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2015** says there is widespread agreement that future development efforts will have to include radically different approaches in order to better engage people in their own, their communities' and their countries' development.

While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed by governments in 2000, successfully galvanised people around clearly articulated targets, they have fallen short of their ambition in some issues and in some countries because countries' development efforts have not sufficiently reflected the needs of all citizens, the report says.

The new post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, to be agreed at the United Nations in September, will only succeed if they include the voices of all people, and look into ways to



engage communities more effectively, including through the power of volunteers and volunteering.

Speaking at the launch of the report in New York, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Helen Clark said: “The potential of volunteers to help create truly people-centred development is enormous, but, as yet, far from fully tapped. Achieving the new Sustainable Development Goals will be helped by the participation of all sections of society. Volunteers have a critical role to play in representing the voices of those who are often excluded from development decisions, including women and other groups who may be marginalised”.

The report finds that countries that provide a supportive “enabling environment” for volunteers tend to reap the rewards of their inclusion in decision-making. It praises some governments such as Peru, Mozambique and Norway who have passed laws and set up frameworks to formalise the contribution of volunteers. But it says too many other governments are failing to acknowledge – and leverage – the immense potential of volunteers to help them chart a more successful development path. It calls on all governments to “go beyond the rhetoric of participation” and take concrete steps to help the world’s volunteers actively contribute to the decisions that affect people’s lives.

Recommended steps include:

- Engaging more volunteers in the process of crafting policies and putting them into action
- Integrating volunteers formally into national development frameworks and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) strategies
- Engaging more volunteer women, youth and marginalised groups in local and national decision making

The aim of the 2015 **State of the World’s Volunteerism Report**, UNV says, is to spark a global conversation about the role of volunteers in the area of governance that is so critical to future development success.

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About the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme

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. UNV is active in around 130 countries every year. UNV, with Field Units in 86 countries, is represented worldwide through the offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and reports to the UNDP Executive Board.

For more information go to: www.volunteeractioncounts.org/SWVR2015 and follow us on Twitter @UNVolunteers and on Facebook