Global Synthesis Report

Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda

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FOREWORD

As we write this, the world is in the grip of a pandemic that underscores our common humanity and reinforces the need to draw on our collective strengths to address global challenges.

The good news is that volunteers, perhaps more than ever before, are demonstrating the critical importance of acting together to tackle the challenges of our time. We need to look no further than the daily news headlines to see evidence of people volunteering to meet the needs of their communities with courage, commitment and creativity.

But the news stories are also significant for what they leave out. The full picture of volunteering remains complex and often hidden. Most volunteering happens in conditions that can be difficult to capture: actions beyond the confines of formal organizations; spontaneous, sometimes highly individual actions in response to a need, and in humanitarian contexts that are dangerous and fast-paced. These forms of participation are driving change and shifting the dynamics in ways that we are only just beginning to recognize and measure.

This is why reimagining volunteering is as timely as it is essential. To fully harness the power of volunteering for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our policies, programmes and practices must catch up to where volunteering stands today. We must understand the dynamics of volunteering in a world that is at once more individualized and more interconnected, a world where new innovations can both empower and exclude. The *Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda* demands that we get a better grasp of these and other dynamics and that we retool the global volunteering architecture for maximum impact and inclusiveness.

At the start of the Decade of Action, those who support volunteers have an opportunity to reimagine their ways of working to position volunteers at the heart of local, national and global implementation of the development agenda. Together, we can do this. The SDGs were designed to respond to lessons as they are learned. They compel us to upgrade norms and practices that fail to promote inclusiveness, to share practices that succeed and to help each other to make headway where we are falling short. 2020 should be the year where we build on progress made to truly position the voluntary actions of all people, everywhere, at the heart of efforts to achieve a shared future for people and planet.

We also need to show our gratitude to the one billion people who give their time as volunteers: those who are responding so courageously to the coronavirus pandemic and are making such enormous contributions to the 2030 Agenda. And we wish to thank all the contributors to this report and all the stakeholders who engaged in the Plan of Action, who prove daily that action is the force that drives us forward. Our hope is that the 2020 Global Technical Meeting on Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda – and the Call to Action that follows – can help smooth the way.

Mr. Olivier Adam
Executive Coordinator of UNV

Mr. Jagan Chapagain
Secretary General of IFRC

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1. Reimagining volunteering

> **As we seek to build capacities and to help the new agenda to take root, volunteerism can be another powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation. Volunteerism can help to expand and mobilize constituencies and to engage people in national planning and implementation for sustainable development goals. And volunteer groups can help to localize the new agenda by providing new spaces of interaction between Governments and people for concrete and scalable actions.**
>
> United Nations Secretary-General's synthesis report on the post-2015 agenda[1]

Since 2015, governments, civil society and other stakeholders have worked together to take action, build partnerships and mobilize resources to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Addressing the General Assembly in January 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General rallied the global community to embark on a Decade of Action globally, locally and individually.[2] At the time of his remarks, few could have imagined the unprecedented upheaval that would grip the world just weeks later. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated some of the most persistent development challenges.

As leaders, legislators and policymakers scramble to provide a collective global response, people around the world are already taking action through volunteering. Many are contributing to "leaving no one behind", with marginalized and vulnerable groups mobilizing through volunteering to ensure that their voices, capacities and influence help tackle shared challenges.

However, volunteering could have a far bigger impact if its full potential was supported by structures, systems and partnerships that recognize and flexibly respond to its complex, shifting characteristics and holistic contributions. Volunteering is still often seen as separate from other aspects of development. Similarly, the broad range of volunteering practices around the world are seldom recognized as contributions to achieving sustainable development. Yet despite the many challenges, there are also new trends and innovations that offer significant opportunities to strengthen the impact of volunteering.

The Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda (Plan of Action) established three objectives to deepen the integration of volunteering in sustainable development: strengthening people's ownership of the development agenda; integrating volunteering into national and global implementation strategies; and measuring volunteering to contribute to a holistic understanding of the engagement of people in SDG implementation.[3]

These objectives are the subject of the Global Technical Meeting (GTM) on Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda at the 2020 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).[4] To provide the foundations for conversations at the GTM and help stakeholders "reimagine" volunteering to better support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, this report seeks to synthesize the outputs of the consultations and other evidence gathered through the Plan of Action processes over the past three years.[5] The report is divided into two sections:

The **first section** surveys the big picture of how volunteering is currently integrated today, as we enter the Decade of Action. It gives a snapshot of how volunteering can and should advance the 2030 Agenda based on the three objectives of the Plan of Action: ownership, integration and measurement.

In the **second section**, Plan of Action stakeholders offer their views on realizing and reimagining the potential of volunteerism for the Decade of Action. The contributors represent a wide range of perspectives, from academics to policymakers and front-line volunteers themselves, covering all sectors and regions of the world.

2. Volunteering at the start of the Decade of Action

> **Volunteering is neither a panacea nor a simple proposition. The contributions that volunteering makes need to be situated in the context of complex and interdependent social, political, economic and cultural forces that are going through dramatic changes.**
>
> 2015 IFRC Global Review on Volunteering[6]

Volunteerism is a complex and continually changing practice. It evolves in step with the realities of an increasingly interconnected world, offering new opportunities while facing evolving threats and challenges. Communities and societies hold immense knowledge on volunteering. However, five years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, evidence generation on volunteering for sustainable development remains in its early stages.

Effectively integrating volunteering into the 2030 Agenda requires a common starting point for understanding the range and scope of activities that could be relevant to policymakers and other stakeholders. This section provides a short overview of what we have learned about trends and patterns of volunteer work globally in the first five years of the SDGs.

Scale of volunteering

An estimated one billion people volunteer each year to help their communities or to make a difference to the causes they care about.[7] Measurement efforts, which are still in their early stages, show that volunteering is universal, albeit with regional variations in participation by different subpopulations. There is a gender divide in terms of the volunteering workload, roles and sectors, with women taking on the larger share.[8] Volunteering is increasingly performed by people of all ages, from children and adolescents in education, through to people in full-time employment, all the way to retired persons or "silver volunteers".[9] Most volunteer work is arranged informally between people as a form of mutual support. The remainder is organized through various groups, associations and organizations, which make up a significant proportion of national labour. Taken together, these make up a sizeable contribution of any country's gross domestic product (GDP).[10]

Scope of volunteering activities

To explore links between volunteering and development, four broad types of volunteer work were identified by the United Nations in 1999: mutual aid and self-help; service volunteering and philanthropy; advocacy and campaigning; and participation.[11] In 2020, under the Plan of Action, new research was undertaken to review these types of volunteer work in light of evolving trends in volunteering and emerging evidence from the global South on the diversity of volunteering practices in low- and middle-income countries.[12] The review found that the original four types of volunteering are still relevant in 2020. While the relative mix of the categories of volunteering vary, they are shared by diverse geographies and situations.

Similarly, the 2030 Agenda, with its focus on the agency of all peoples, suggests the need to better capture the intrinsic value of volunteering through the benefits to volunteers themselves. Even when volunteers are engaged in activities outside the original categories, the benefits to their health, well-being and social capital can indirectly contribute to their communities and societies. The paper suggests volunteering as "leisure" as a new category of volunteer work (for example in relation to arts, sports or the environment) that promotes both individual well-being and cohesive communities. However, volunteering as leisure does not cover activities that fail to make a net contribution to sustainable development, such as many forms of "voluntourism". Figure 1 shows the updated categories of volunteering for 2020.

Figure 1. Categories of volunteering in 2020

Range of volunteer practices

Volunteering practices are evolving quickly in the twenty-first century in response to a range of social, economic, political and technological shifts. These practices are likely to be much more dependent on context and issues and are transforming in relation to the needs, priorities and preferences of volunteers themselves. For example, interest continues to grow in short-term, event-based volunteering and volunteers increasingly tend to engage with specific causes and outcomes they identify with personally, instead of investing in long-term relationships with specific organizations. The rise of new technologies and online connectivity has increasingly shaped volunteering opportunities for certain individuals and groups.

Rather than provide a comprehensive list of the main practices in 2020, for the purposes of this report it is perhaps more useful to identify the five key variables shaping volunteering in the twenty-first century: site, structure, intensity, aspiration and category. Volunteers may be characterized by a combination of these components at a given moment or at different points during the life cycle (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The five components shaping volunteering practices in 2020 (from the centre): structure, site, intensity, aspiration, category

Implications for integrating volunteering into the 2030 Agenda

The scale, range, diversity and complexity of global patterns of volunteering in 2020 provide several considerations for reimagining volunteering for the Decade of Action. There is a need to reflect on the types of volunteering practices that can best support greater ownership of the development agenda by the groups that are furthest behind. It is also important to understand the models for integration and partnership that provide the best "fit" for the different aspirations and motivations of volunteers, from formal schemes to looser alliances. Finally, there is a need to determine how twenty-first century volunteering practices inform what we measure, beyond the scale and scope of volunteering.

As we explore progress under the Plan of Action objectives, there are several common issues for the three areas of ownership, integration and measurement:

Reframing the narrative. The dominant understanding of volunteering in policy discourse has been framed by and is rooted in experiences from the global North. To date, there has been a tendency to overlook the wealth of volunteering practices in the global South and local volunteering at the community level or to see them as legitimate contributions to development. These gaps in understanding must be urgently addressed to provide a meaningful basis for policies and programming that integrate volunteering for the SDGs.

Recognizing all types of volunteer work. In public perception and to a large extent in development thinking, volunteering is still most commonly seen as a service to others, or as a form of philanthropy. However, as shown above, service delivery is just one of five broad categories of volunteer work that can contribute to sustainable development. Volunteers engage in a wide range of activities in their free time – from activists engaged with social movements and trade associations, to online communities of people reporting cyberbullying. This has implications for policy approaches, particularly where stakeholders have traditionally been more focused on full-time and formal volunteering. New models are required to shape and partner with the full diversity of voluntary and social action.

Addressing persistent inequalities. Patterns of participation show how volunteering often reflects the fault lines of gender, age, employment status and a range of other socioeconomic factors. Opportunities for ownership of the development agenda must harness the power of whole-of-society approaches to go beyond participation and increase the voice and representation of those who are furthest behind, rather than merely relegating responsibilities to those least able to cope. This includes volunteers who are living in situations of conflict, those who provide the first and final support to their communities and even people who place themselves at risk.

Countering emerging inequalities. Emerging opportunities and evolving practices in volunteering bring new risks. For example, online volunteering may inadvertently reinforce the digital divide and indeed there are early signs that the COVID-19 pandemic may impose further digital disadvantages on certain groups of people. A shift to issue-based volunteering may create competition for volunteers' attention, causing support for less visible or popular causes to fade. Opportunities for people to participate must take these challenges into account, particularly in least developed contexts, if volunteering is to support inclusion.

The above trends reflect the complexities of a world in which institutions are struggling to restructure in an era of rapid and constant change. Volunteerism reflects these schisms, filling spaces on its own terms. In this context, the next section of this report will look at how stakeholders reported on the integration of volunteering into their work around the three objectives of the Plan of Action: strengthening people's ownership of the development agenda; integrating volunteerism into national and global implementation strategies; and measuring and monitoring.

3. Integration into the 2030 Agenda

> **When volunteerism is integrated into national development strategies and United Nations plans, people are increasingly able to contribute to achievements in education, health, governance, sustainable livelihoods, security and peace, environment, gender and social inclusion.**
>
> Integrating Volunteering in the Next Decade: Report of the Secretary-General[13]

The Plan of Action was developed during 2014–2015 in consultation with over 180 organizations,[14] and was endorsed by one hundred United Nations Member States in General Assembly resolution A/RES/70/129 of 2015. It recognizes the potential for volunteering to enable people to take charge of their own futures, aiming to position it as a driving force for people-centred and inclusive development.

The Plan of Action contains three objectives to harness the full potential of volunteering: (i) strengthened people's ownership of the development agenda; (ii) deeper integration of volunteering into national and global implementation strategies; and (iii) a more holistic understanding of volunteering in the 2030 Agenda through research and measurement.[15] This section of the report reviews progress made in the three objectives of ownership, integration and measurement by analysing evidence and data gathered through national, regional and global consultations and preparations for the GTM. The analysis draws on four main sources:[16]

- National Situation Analyses (NSAs) submitted in line with the 2015 report of the United Nations Secretary-General (A/70/118), which called on Member States to generate evidence and data on the scale, scope and impact of volunteerism and submit it to the United Nations Volunteers programme.[17]
- Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports presented by United Nations Member States at the 2016–2019 annual HLPF, detailing country-level progress towards achieving the SDGs as part of follow-up and review mechanisms of the 2030 Agenda.[18]
- On-site and online consultations with different Plan of Action stakeholders. In line with General Assembly resolution A/RES/73/140 of 2018, these included regional consultations under the auspices of the regional commissions of the United Nations in the context of the regional forums on sustainable development, supported by regional synthesis reports.[19]
- Information generated in preparation for the GTM 2020. This includes a call for good practices, bringing together experiences and innovations in supporting or mobilizing volunteers,[20] analysis from research on typologies of volunteering[21] and data from a global survey of public perceptions of volunteering.[22]

Figure 3. The Plan of Action process

Regional Synthesis Reports

Five Regional Synthesis Reports on the role and contributions of volunteering to the 2030 Agenda were produced based on the National Situation Analyses.

Online consultations

The Secretariat conducted online consultations during 2019 and 2020 on the future of volunteering, volunteers as SDG accelerators, reimagining youth volunteering and the role of the private sector.

Global Technical Meeting (GTM2020)

The Global Technical Meeting (GTM2020) on "Reimagining Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda" in July 2020 provides a platform to share knowledge and advance debates on volunteering for the Sustainable Development Goals and to jointly shape the future of volunteering through a Call to Action.

National Situation Analyses

Between 2016 and 2018, 43 United Nations Member States submitted National Situation Analyses on the status of volunteering, generating data on the scale, scope and impact of volunteerism.

Regional consultations

Five multi-stakeholder regional consultations were held jointly with the United Nations regional economic and social commissions for Africa, Asia–Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Asia on the margins of regional sustainable development forums between March and April 2019.

Additional consultations

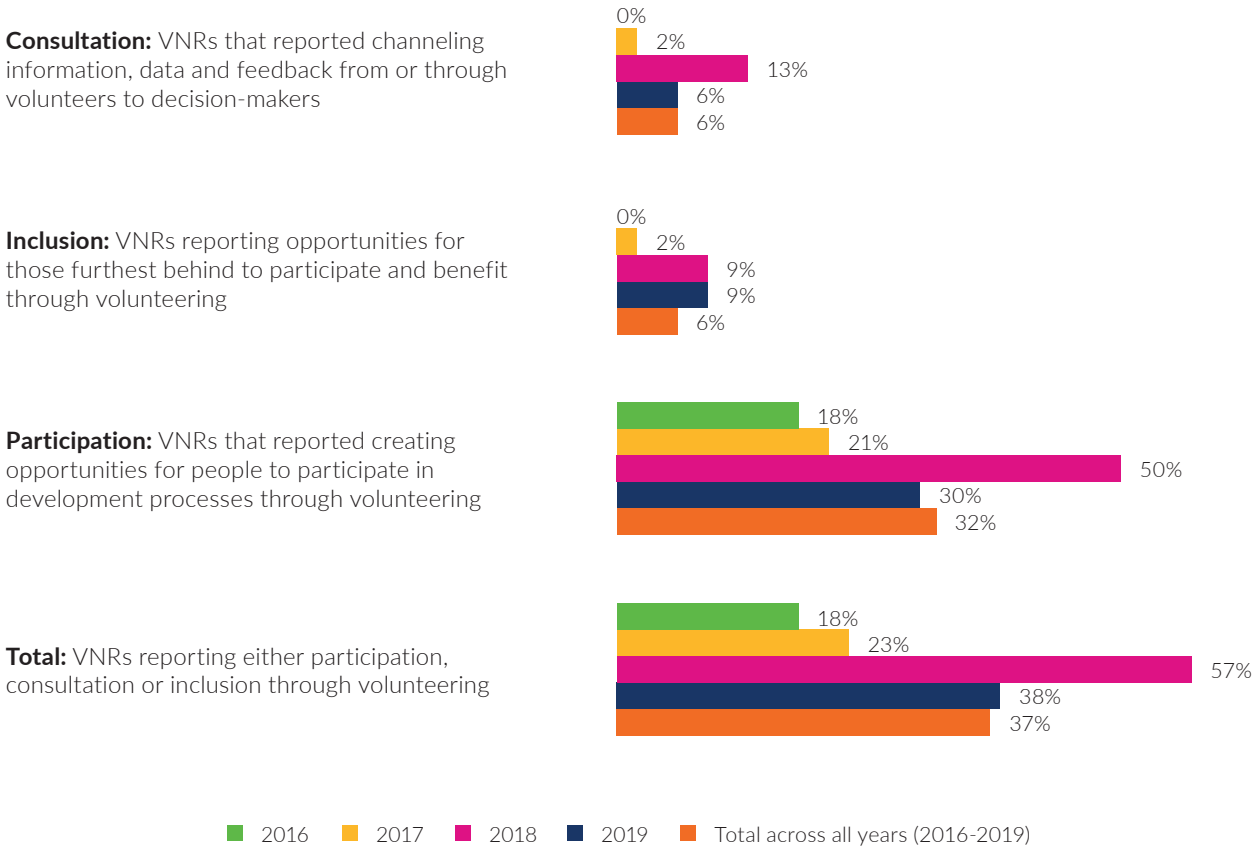
Seven additional consultations were held with specific target groups: an expert round table in cooperation with the African Union Commission and GIZ; an expert seminar on volunteering and inequality with the UNDP Human Development Report Office; a round table with academics and practitioners from Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States; a round table discussion with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in the Arab States; a technical workshop on accelerating the implementation of the SDGs in Asia; an event on reimagining humanitarian volunteering with the Government of Kenya and IFRC; and a session on reimagining volunteering at the International Association for Volunteer Effort regional meeting in Peru.

3.1. Strengthening people's ownership of the development agenda

The development of the post-2015 agenda is one of the largest ever consultative policy processes. Almost 10 million people made their voices heard through the MY World campaign and volunteers played an important role in facilitating the participation of people in the hardest to reach communities.[23] As the 2030 declaration acknowledges, the key to the success of the agenda is that it is "of the people, by the people and for the people".[24]

Volunteering is one of the main ways for people to participate in development processes. Five years into the implementation of the SDGs, governments, civil society and other partners are beginning to recognize the potential for volunteering as a vehicle for participation, consultation and inclusion of the groups who are furthest behind, as shown by all NSAs submitted as part of the Plan of Action process and in 37 per cent of VNRs (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Evidence of volunteering as a means to build ownership of development processes in VNRs 2016–2019



As shown below, much of the focus of volunteer engagement to date has been on building awareness of the SDGs, consulting on development problems and creating structures and platforms to mobilize people (especially youth) for the SDGs. While these channels for participation and consultation are prerequisites for effective development, they currently fall short of providing full ownership. Many examples described giving people opportunities to participate with the intention of creating conditions for future ownership. However, there was less evidence of direct engagement or impact on decision-making.

At the same time, efforts towards inclusion have been most successful in relation to the participation of young people, harnessing new technologies to create interest and momentum across a broad range of contexts. Channels and mechanisms to partner with other groups were less evident and there is some risk of new structures reinforcing biases against those furthest behind, including people living in contexts of high fragility and conflict.

Ultimately, it is not yet possible to establish whether these efforts are allowing people to influence policies and planning on the issues that affect them. The Decade of Action should build on the foundations developed to urgently embed the spirit of people's ownership of the 2030 Agenda as a critical factor for its success.

Participation

Volunteering has been widely shown to enable people to **participate in SDG processes**. Between 2016 and 2019, 32 per cent of VNRs reported creating opportunities for participation through volunteering (Figure 4). Much of the effort has focused on young people, including support for youth volunteering schemes and raising young people's awareness of the SDGs and local development issues.[25] At the local level in particular, volunteers are also reported as key agents for promoting community participation in local development and resilience-building, as described by the Turkish Red Crescent at the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) regional consultation (Case study box 1).[26] Governments are increasingly supporting citizen participation in the 2030 Agenda through volunteering.[27] Similarly, innovations – particularly apps, platforms and social media – were frequently referenced as extending participation opportunities.[28]

Plan of Action consultations indicated a **broad coalition of stakeholders working together** to extend participation and connect local efforts to national priorities. Many networks and federations support volunteers through knowledge-sharing, capacity-building and coordination with governments.[29] Companies are increasingly supporting volunteers alongside government and civil society.[30] More and more measures are being taken to encourage multiple stakeholders to support volunteering, such as certification of individual volunteering experience, as in Cambodia.[31] While funding availability was often cited as a major challenge, there were also new funding mechanisms

Case study box 1. Syrian refugees volunteer for other refugees

Turkey hosts close to 4 million refugees, over 3 million of which have arrived from Syria since the start of the conflict in 2011. Through a joint partnership between the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and 14 national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, thousands of Syrians have volunteered to support fellow refugees. They provide vocational training and language lessons to support integration and employment. Volunteering has increased refugees' resilience and self-reliance, as well as providing opportunities to create new social support networks.

Source: 2019 Plan of Action regional consultation in the ECE region

to broaden participation – such as a microgrant scheme in Slovakia for community volunteering projects or plans to expand funding for various volunteering initiatives in Kazakhstan.[32]

However, in terms of participation, **the range of volunteers being supported is relatively narrow**. Grass-roots and community-level volunteering –particularly informal volunteers, which contribute 70 per cent of total volunteering efforts globally – were largely excluded from reporting, albeit with certain exceptions, such as Togo, where village development committees support community volunteers.[33] The demographics of people who received support for participation also tended to be narrow, with youth participation far more prominent than other demographic groups, such as older people.[34]

Consultation

A common thread running through the reporting was the creation of **channels for volunteers to share information** to connect the local with the national and the global. This included through national SDG reporting processes,[35] by providing feedback on local SDG priorities[36] and creative inputs for policymaking.[37] Networks and coalitions of volunteer-involving organizations (VIOs) were often cited as working to amplify the voices of volunteers and the organizations themselves at the national level.[38] In several countries, volunteers were also giving real-time feedback on progress and challenges to feed into SDG monitoring frameworks,[39] including through volunteer-led data collection and by creating platforms for increased accountability.[40] There were also examples of campaigns that used volunteers to raise awareness, often promoted by networks and energized by online advocacy and technology.[42]

Volunteers were found to be increasingly participating in **consultations around policies that directly affect their work**. Examples were presented from Ireland, where public consultation informed the design of a new national volunteering strategy and from Paraguay, where consultations fed into the drafting of new volunteering legislation.[43] There was also evidence of institutions and networks established to encourage local ownership of support for volunteers, such as in the United Arab Emirates, where local volunteer youth councils work to ensure youth policies empower young people.[44]

However, while feedback and bottom-up reporting was encouraged, **it is currently hard to show the subsequent influence on policies and practice**. Examples were shared of how volunteers generate local data and share local concerns to hold governments accountable but there is little documentation of how this is shaping decisions. Governments and organizations should share examples of grass-roots participation by volunteers facilitating new policy directions and challenging existing priorities, as well as the spaces and processes needed to allow this to happen.

Inclusion

All types of people volunteer, meaning volunteering has the potential to allow groups **often excluded from development processes** to become agents of change. Many interventions, particularly from civil society volunteers, were focused on building more inclusive development processes. These ranged from targeted awareness-raising[45] to transformational opportunities for participation, including for refugees and people with disabilities.[46] Perhaps surprisingly, in the Plan of Action consultations there were relatively few examples of initiatives to support participation by women[47] or promoting norms of gender equality that create the conditions for increased ownership.[48]

There was also increasing **recognition that volunteering is not a level playing field**. Across the regional consultations, many VIOs shared efforts to lower access barriers to enable more people to

engage in formal or organizational volunteering.[49] A growing body of volunteer-focused legislation and policies aims to enable inclusive participation (Table 1).[50] National schemes that can be classed as volunteering policies are also evolving to broaden participation, as seen for example in Côte d'Ivoire.[51]

However, the data largely overlooks the **potential for volunteering to disempower and create new inequalities that reduce ownership**. This factor was missing from many examples, such as where volunteering was used to engage large youth populations facing job scarcity and weak social security nets. No evidence was provided of spaces emerging for marginalized groups to challenge the roles that they are forced to adopt through volunteering in the absence of formal service provision. There are also gaps in understanding the full impact of technology, including its potential to reduce ownership by creating or reinforcing barriers and patterns of inequality.

Table 1. Inclusive volunteering in legislation, strategies and policy

In Ecuador, the Organic Law on Citizen Participation encompasses volunteering and promotes equality of opportunities, recognizing the need for affirmative action to promote the participation of women, indigenous people and other marginalized groups.
In Serbia, an initiative has been developed for the period 2016–2025 in the context of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma to improve the skills and employability of Roma youth through volunteering opportunities across local, provincial and national government.
Gender equality is one of the main values of the Volunteering Law of Spain, which promotes volunteering based on equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

Source: Government of Ecuador 2008, Government of Serbia 2016, Government of Spain 2015.

3.2. Integrating volunteerism into global and national implementation

The United Nations Secretary-General's synthesis report on the post-2015 agenda recognizes volunteers as a "powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation" that can "engage people in national planning and implementation for the Sustainable Development Goals".[52] In the Plan of Action consultations and evidence, there was consensus that each country must consider its national circumstances and the most relevant approaches. It was also widely accepted that realizing the full potential of volunteering requires integration across all levels and all sectors.

Awareness of the contributions of volunteers to the SDGs is certainly growing. Despite being just one measure of recognition, between 2016 and 2019, 46 per cent of VNRs (73 out of the 158 submitted) acknowledged the contributions made by volunteers to the SDGs. This recognition has increased from just 18 per cent in 2016 to a high of 63 per cent in 2018 (Figure 5a). Similarly, across the VNRs there was increasing recognition of the contributions of volunteering across the full SDG spectrum (Figure 5b).

Figure 5a. Percentage of VNRs that acknowledge the positive contributions of volunteers (see Annex B)

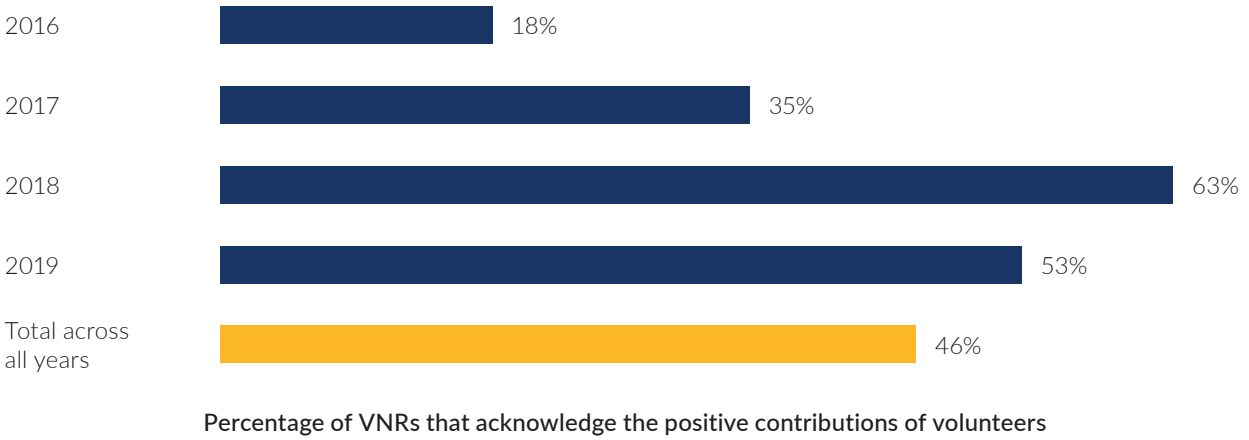


Figure 5b. Evidence of volunteer contributions to specific SDGs in VNRs 2016–2019

Yet this general recognition did not demonstrate comparable levels of policy integration. While nearly half of the VNRs recognized the role of volunteers, in contrast less than a fifth (18 per cent) showcased the integration of volunteering into national policies and plans to address the SDGs from 2016 to 2019 (Figure 6). This was recognized as a challenge across the Plan of Action consultations, for example at the regional Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) consultation, where participants noted the tendency to limit the focus on volunteering support to the needs of young people.[53] While many countries highlighted the contributions of volunteers in the areas of poverty reduction, health and education, few pointed to their integration in cross-sector policy frameworks. This means that the contributions of volunteers to these SDGs were not synergized with other efforts.

Figure 6. Evidence of the integration of volunteering in national policies and plans for the SDGs in VNRs 2016–2019

Percentage of VNRs with at least one mention of integrating volunteering into national policies and plans

Implementation without integration

Laws and policies that specifically focus on promoting volunteering are increasingly common. While there are examples of more decentralized approaches to supporting volunteering,[54] at least 82 countries now have specific national laws on volunteering and 58 have specific national policies, schemes, strategies and plans.[55] Many have been established in the last two decades and provide stand-alone support, defining the scope of volunteering and setting out parameters for partnerships and funding.[56] With a few exceptions, such as new legislation on volunteering in Burundi (Law no. 1/014, of 5 July 2018, Establishing a Corps of Burundian Volunteers), which is rooted in the country's national sustainable development plan for 2025, the lack of integration and alignment with wider policy priorities appears to be widespread.[57]

There is **limited evidence that Member States are mainstreaming volunteering into sector policies and national development strategies**. By far the most common integration is in youth policies and frameworks, increasingly in countries in the global South with large youth populations and high unemployment.[58] Integration of volunteering also tends to be higher in the implementation – if not always the design – of disaster risk reduction policies and plans. Across the evidence base, volunteers are included in contingency planning to support public authorities and coordinated strategies, as well as occasionally being involved in regular dialogues with government actors (Case study box 2).[59]

Case study box 2. Disability inclusion in disaster management

In Indonesia, the principle of leaving no volunteer behind has been integrated into disaster management practices. Disability inclusion services units have been established and people with disabilities now volunteer as part of a 5,000-strong disaster management corps. Thanks in part to this inclusive and participatory approach, the impact of disasters on people in Indonesia has been significantly reduced between 2015 and 2018, as measured by the Indonesia Disaster Risk Index (Indeks Risiko Bencana).

Source: Government of Indonesia 2019.

Beyond this, a **small number of examples of wider integration were shared through the Plan of Action process** in national priority areas, such as social development, social welfare and social cohesion, some of which are summarized in Table 2. Most of these are new, having been developed since 2018. It will be important for stakeholders to share knowledge and evidence as they progress to allow a more in-depth understanding of the opportunities and challenges arising from an integrated approach in the context of the SDGs.

Table 2. Examples of integrating volunteering into policies and strategies

The thirteenth five-year national development plan of China mentions volunteers in relation to health, culture and the provision of social welfare and community services. It sets a target of 13 per cent of community residents to be registered as volunteers.
In Cyprus and Saudi Arabia, volunteering has been integrated into school curricula to promote social responsibility, inclusion and employment skills.
Egypt includes volunteerism in its national sustainable development strategy to promote sustainable agriculture and includes mechanisms to encourage voluntary activities and the involvement of VIOs in environmental protection.
Lebanon has integrated volunteering into its national social development strategy to strengthen communities.
In Malta, the national strategy on ageing for 2014–2020 aims to foster volunteering among older people through national programmes and an online platform.
The Sri Lanka Peacebuilding Priority Plan includes volunteers while also supporting the participation and engagement of women in governance and decision-making processes.

Sources: Government of China 2015, Government of Cyprus 2018, Government of Egypt 2015, Government of Lebanon 2011, Government of Malta 2018a, Government of Saudi Arabia 2018, Government of Sri Lanka 2018.

Coordination and facilitation

In all contexts, regardless of broader integration, **national platforms, coordinating bodies and networks were reported as important for coordinating, supporting and creating channels of communication** across the spectrum of volunteering actors.[60] Over 40 per cent of countries submitting NSAs reported having a national body for coordinating volunteering.[61] The importance of having lines of regular communication across institutions and stakeholders was also strongly recognized, for example in Madagascar, where the national coordinating body has 19 volunteering focal points distributed throughout ministries and public institutions.[62]

Many countries have established volunteering schemes to channel citizen efforts towards the SDGs. Among the NSAs submitted, over 40 per cent of countries reported having at least one national scheme,[63] and around 30 per cent reported international volunteering schemes. Many countries mentioned international volunteering in their VNRs.[64] Youth volunteer schemes, such as the Azerbaijani Service and Assessment Network (ASAN), were commonly reported as embedded in national youth policies and strategies[65] and some governments reported that international volunteering was increasingly integrated.[66]

At the global level, volunteers have had a voice in the United Nations since 2015.[67] However, **volunteer efforts are largely under-recognized in global and regional level implementation strategies and plans**. Volunteerism does not receive enough attention and support in key frameworks or policy documents addressing issues that tend to attract the real-world involvement of volunteers, such as migration, disaster risk, urbanization and, more recently, COVID-19.[68]

At the regional level, strategies that promote volunteering often do so as a way of capacity-building among youth and reinforcing solidarity and regional identity.[69] Many global South countries have recognized volunteering as part of **South–South cooperation**, highlighting how they are going from being recipients of international volunteers to senders.[70]

Gaps in the evidence

On the whole, **there was a lack of evidence of the integration of volunteer schemes into broader SDG efforts**, despite recognition of the critical roles volunteers play in SDG implementation.[71] There were some exceptions, such as Burkina Faso, where the national volunteer scheme is integrated into broader poverty reduction programming.[72] However, most schemes were reported as stand-alone, with reporting often focused on the value to the volunteer (such as skills acquisition) or to nation-building (such as citizenship), rather than on the value of the scheme as embedded in wider SDG efforts.

Most of the specific measures supporting volunteers or the integration of volunteering into strategies and policies **did not clearly show that approaches were being guided by evidence**. There were many reports of new measures to promote volunteering but less evidence of their impact on integrating volunteer contributions into SDG implementation. Such measures need to be incorporated into project design from the start to understand how and whether volunteering is making a difference.

Additionally, a relatively **narrow band of volunteering practices were reported as being supported and integrated**. Local and community-level volunteering and informal volunteers were largely excluded from all types of support, while in disaster risk reduction strategies, spontaneous volunteering – which often constitutes the first response to a disaster – was largely ignored in integration efforts.[73]

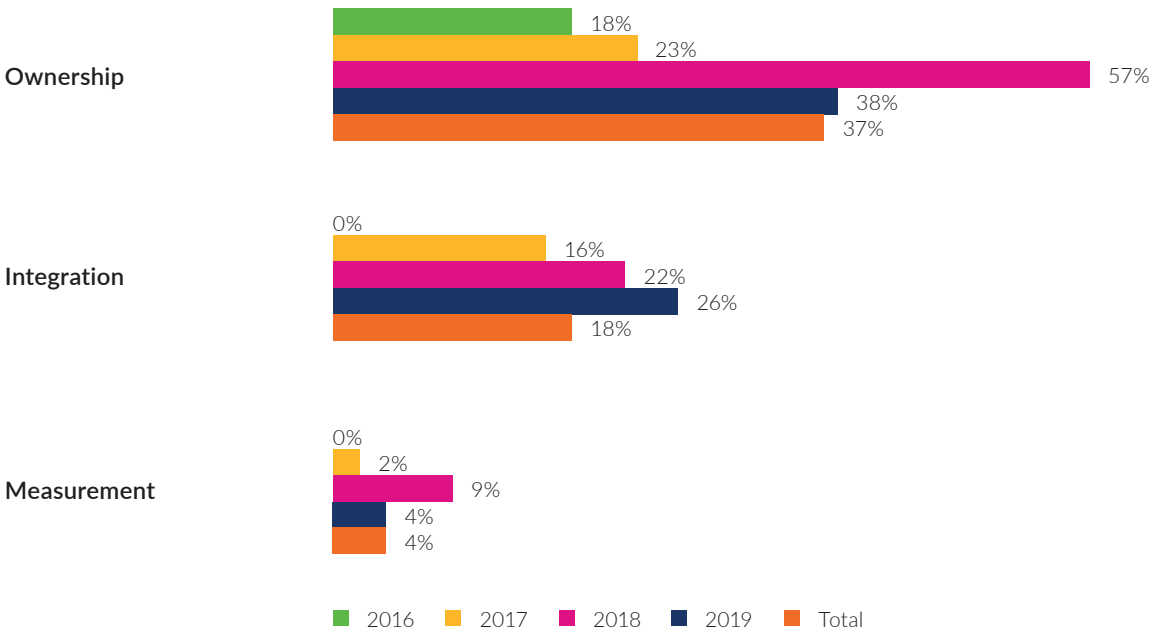
Finally, **schemes and initiatives tended to involve volunteers as foot soldiers** to deliver top-down mechanisms at scale, particularly in relation to basic services. Although this is an important strength of volunteering, other aspects that volunteers can contribute, such as nurturing innovation, collaboration and self-organization, were largely absent from strategies and plans.

3.3. Measurement and research on volunteering

The effective integration of volunteering in the 2030 Agenda requires relevant evidence and improved knowledge to support policies and planning. Furthermore, as recognized in the Plan of Action itself, there is the potential for its stakeholders to use volunteering measurement to contribute to greater understanding of the role of agency, dignity and well-being for the SDGs.

Until recently, volunteer efforts have often been recognized through experience-sharing and context-specific and project-level research, rather than via systematic analyses oriented towards policies and strategies at scale. There is currently a disconnect between the research carried out by volunteering stakeholders and those working to analyse, predict and measure progress on national and global priorities. This is confirmed by the VNRs, which show that information on volunteer measurement is the lowest of the three objectives of the Plan of Action, at just 4 per cent across all reviews from 2016–2019.

Figure 7. Evidence supporting each of the three objectives of the Plan of Action in VNRs 2016–2019



Despite small steps being taken in the past five years, there is an urgent need to accelerate the whole range of measurement, research and evidence work to provide an evidence-based approach to integrating volunteering into the Decade of Action. New partnerships across government, the private sector, academia and civil society are required to ensure the relevance and quality of this work.

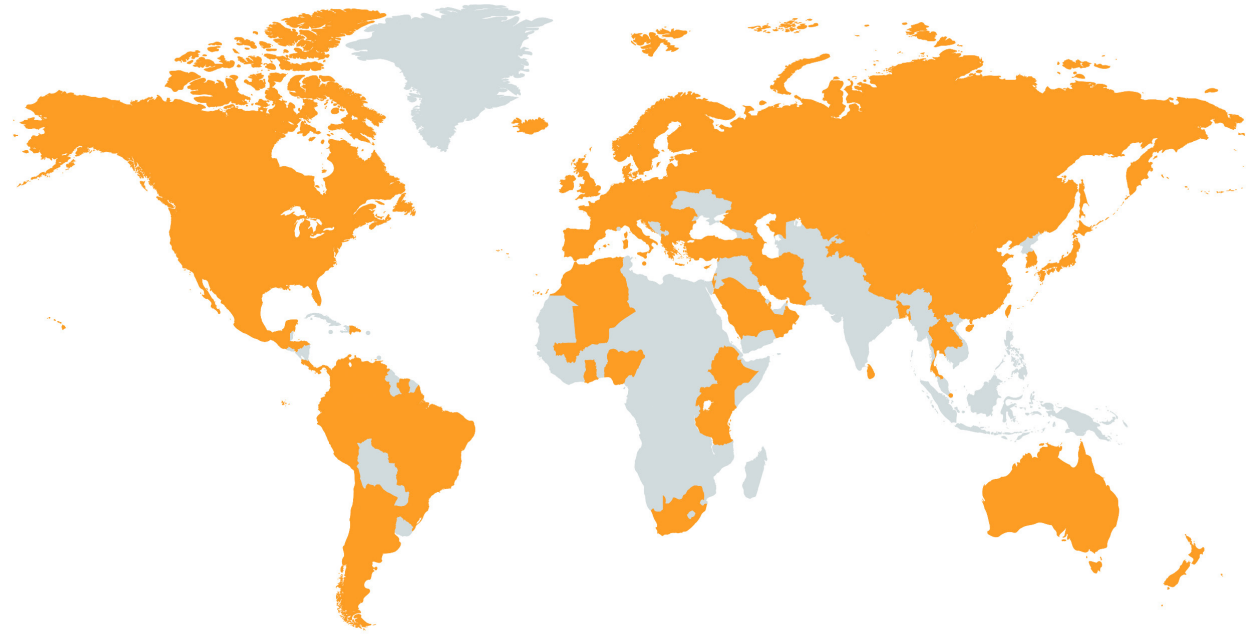
Priorities include qualitative research and measures to help build context-specific understanding on an enabling environment for volunteering and on the value of volunteering for groups left furthest

behind when compared to other development approaches. Statistical measurement is still lacking in the global South and remains important for building a common and comparable foundation across countries. Volunteer-led data has huge potential but requires the means and mechanisms to be appropriately integrated into national systems. Innovation is needed to help understand and realize the models that can bridge the gaps between volunteer actions and strategic policy goals.

Statistical measurement remains patchy

There is a regional imbalance in official measurement efforts.[74] Data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) points to large geographical imbalances in measurement, which is carried out most consistently in the global North (Figure 8).[75] According to ILO estimates, only 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and five countries from the Arab States region measured volunteering in official statistics between 2007 and 2019.[76]

Figure 8. Global official measurement efforts between 2007 and 2019



Member States that conducted at least one measurement of volunteering between 2007 and 2019

No data available

The absence of data is more than just an academic problem; **regional consultations have identified it as an impediment to integration efforts**.[77] Many stakeholders reported challenges related to the availability of data able to help capture the unique contributions made by volunteering. A lack of data on impact and scale make it harder at national levels to make the case for integrating volunteering into broader strategies.[78] Disaggregated data was seen as a vital – but often missing – input for monitoring ownership and ensuring no one is left behind.[79]

Statistical measurement tools should also be improved to better demonstrate volunteer efforts across diverse contexts. This is one area that has seen significant progress since 2018, with the testing and development of new survey tools and guidance in the global South by UNV and ILO.

These tools enable better application of the 2013 international statistical definition of volunteer work, an important requirement for comparable data on citizen action into SDG reporting.[80]

Many countries expressed strong interest in measurement, including going beyond scale and scope, while recognizing the limitations they face.[81] There were various examples of measuring the economic value of volunteering to highlight its in-kind contribution.[82] Countries also expressed interest in measuring the non-monetary value of volunteering beyond GDP, following examples set by countries such as Bhutan, which has developed a national happiness index that incorporates volunteering.[83]

Widening the lens

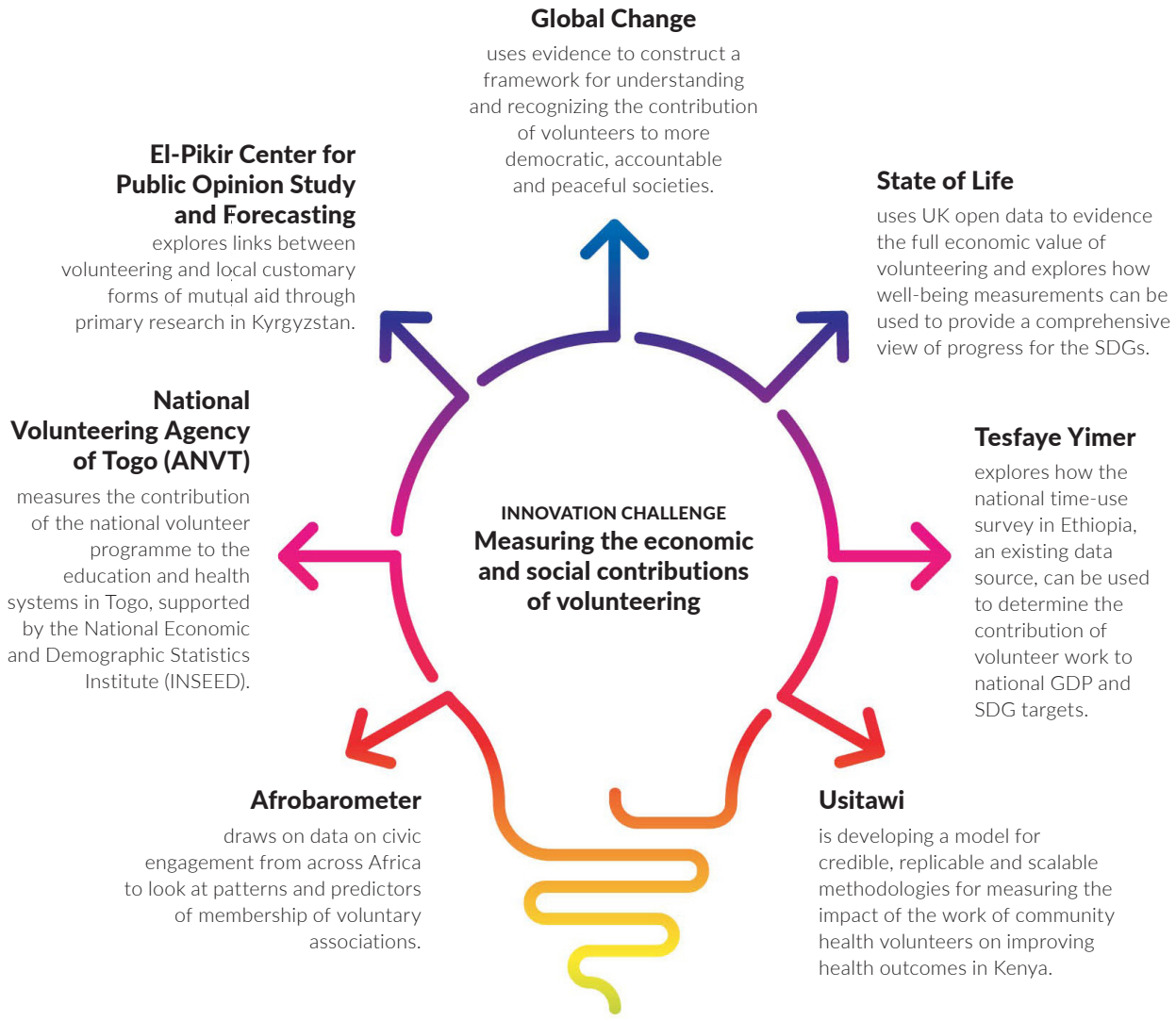
Evolving approaches to research and data offer opportunities to fill gaps and broaden the lens of enquiry. Qualitative research on volunteering is increasingly paying attention to the experiences of local and informal volunteering as well as impacts across the life cycle.[84] Stakeholders are attempting to show the economic and social value of volunteering using new approaches and tools.[85] Cross-country studies and knowledge exchanges are also becoming more common, including within and across the global South.[86] New models and approaches have also been shared that go some way to capturing the 360-degree value and contributions of volunteers.[87] Re-analysing existing data sets also provides important insights that can be used by policymakers. The 2020 Plan of Action Innovation Challenge encouraged further research in these areas, with the establishment of a community on measurement innovation practice and resulting in seven exploratory papers to be published for the GTM (Figure 9).[88]

There were many examples of **crowdsourcing and online platforms to gather volunteering data**.[89] The rapid emergence of these methods points to the need to rethink traditional volunteer measurement and monitoring processes through a "big data" lens, applying technology-enabled citizen-led data collection to capture the full picture of volunteer action from the local to the global level, across sectors and functions.

Despite the potential and demand for more sophisticated data via these new tools, **uptake and use remain low**. There was little evidence that those who collect data and those who make policy are talking to one another. In fact, there seems to be a vicious cycle in which the lack of policy integration stymies the development of structures and initiatives to better measure the real-time impact of volunteering, which could facilitate the integration of volunteering into larger 2030 Agenda efforts.

While the scope of research is expanding and diversifying, it remains narrow. Volunteering in the global South is increasingly being studied by researchers from the global South, but often from the starting point of theoretical lenses influenced by the North. A deeper dive is also urgently needed in areas related to ownership and integration. For example, volunteerism's effectiveness in addressing forms of inequality and the risks that volunteering can create new patterns of inequality remain understudied.

Figure 9. The Plan of Action Innovation Challenge



4. Reimagining pathways to integration

> **The future of volunteering means investing in the long march towards sustainable development, in the common goal of a future where everyone feels at ease.**
>
> Marie Mpacko Ngosso, respondent, Shape the Future of Volunteering: Online Conversations[90]

The actions taken by one billion people through volunteering are a critical resource for working practices in the twenty-first century, providing a major opportunity for economic and social transformation. The question remains, however, whether our global and national strategies, policies and ways of working can keep pace with this force for change. Based on Plan of Action processes from 2015–2020, this final section highlights some potential pathways to ensuring the impacts of volunteer efforts are maximized under the 2030 Agenda.

This report shows that incremental progress has been made across the three objectives of the Plan of Action. However, the potential of volunteering remains unrealized. Ownership-building efforts have remained focused on awareness-raising, consultation and participation. Similarly, in terms of engagement of groups left furthest behind, efforts have primarily targeted young people. The Decade of Action must see the transition to more meaningful ownership by all people to ensure achievement of the SDGs.

Most countries have yet to mainstream volunteering in their national development plans and volunteering schemes, programmes and partnerships overwhelmingly remain isolated. Investments and support are often focused on formal and full-time volunteers, engaging them to scale up delivery and to reach those furthest behind. The next generation of policies and plans should build on this to consider how all types of volunteers – particularly at the local level - can contribute as innovators, entrepreneurs, leaders, local experts and valued partners who are driving their own development.

Measurement is slowly increasing but coverage remains patchy, with models narrow and disconnected from policymaking. There is more work to be done to make the significant contributions of one billion volunteers and the organizations that support them a fully harnessed resource for the Decade of Action.

Many important challenges were raised through the Plan of Action processes and stakeholders will need to work together to overcome these. They include challenges related to resources and capacity, which hold back integration efforts, and challenges related to recognition of volunteering by the public and government, as well as the underlying tensions between state involvement and civic space and freedoms. However, the lack of evidence available to move forward remains a common thread that cuts across all these challenges. The Plan of Action consultations have only scratched the surface. The GTM in July 2020 is not only the end of a process but aims to mark the start of increased knowledge-sharing, experimentation and research between stakeholders.

However, alongside the challenges, there are many opportunities. While only limited progress has been made in integrating volunteering, there was widespread recognition of the holistic and diverse value of volunteers. Although momentum remains slow, the aspiration for integration is widespread. There was also general recognition of and increasing support to promote ownership through volunteering, even if its impact remains underexplored. Finally, considerable appetite was expressed for measurement and a desire to use new innovations and approaches that offer new opportunities for cost-effective data collection.

The way forward

Volunteering and its ecosystem are continuously and rapidly shifting. Reimagining volunteering for the SDGs requires both reflecting on progress to date and anticipating how it needs to adapt to meet new challenges likely to emerge over the coming decade. Across the three objectives of the Plan of Action, there are a number of pathways that can help to maximize the impact of volunteering on the 2030 Agenda.

Firstly, **global framing of volunteering must evolve** to support all forms of volunteering, particularly local, traditional and emerging ones in the global South. This reframing, which is already happening in academic and VIO research, has yet to make a strong impact on the global policy discourse on volunteering, which remains focused on formal volunteering, often service delivery. A more sophisticated understanding of the nuances shaping the context and contours of volunteering, such as age, gender, diversity and socioeconomic inequalities, can open new avenues for action and help prevent new inequalities being inadvertently generated in the attempt to dismantle existing ones. This should be reflected in terms of how countries envision inclusion and ownership models, the nature of integration into national strategies and plans and the measures used to reflect the true value of volunteering, particularly at local levels.

To help understand and position it to maximize its impact in the policy space, **volunteering should be recognized as a transformative strategy**. Top-down schemes and programmes are unlikely to nurture volunteering's greatest attributes and demonstrate its value in whole-of-society approaches. For example, future thinking under the Plan of Action suggests policy investments in volunteerism[91] as a global force for sharing and co-creating solutions; as a local force for countering social, political and economic polarization by bringing together diverse social groups; as a lever for greater intersectional equity; and as a means to counter "digital solutionism", where technology is applied to people's lives without consultation or a comprehensive understanding of the implications on our social structures.

Volunteer measurement efforts should support effective integration. Over the past decade, there have been attempts to quantify volunteer contributions in several ways, with a strong focus on economic value.[92] However, there is also a need to move towards holistic new models to provide data and evidence of the contributions and impacts of volunteering to help position it where it best adds value. Under the Plan of Action, stakeholders have developed a framework for capturing the economic and social contributions of volunteering in the context of the 2030 agenda.[93] In time, common indicators for volunteering could be used to promote a comprehensive approach to policymaking that enhances or complements GDP measures, helping embed well-being indicators into policy processes.[94]

New volunteering tools and approaches should be developed. As this report shows, the policy toolkit on volunteering has so far largely comprised national laws, volunteer policies and volunteer schemes that engage formal volunteers. As stakeholders enlist volunteerism for peace and development, there is a need to evaluate approaches and update and expand tools. What types of financing can help informal groups access resources? What kinds of spaces can be created to enable people of different social backgrounds to volunteer as equal partners? Which governance structures best amplify the voices of local volunteers in policymaking? Under the Plan of Action, blueprints are being drawn up in collaboration with communities experiencing humanitarian crises, climate change and pervasive social and economic inequalities to come up with new ideas and further develop the range of support options.

Widening perspectives

As our understanding of the current nature and potential of volunteerism continues to improve, its reimagining is already taking place. The evidence presented by stakeholders under the Plan of Action process takes stock of integration so far. Discussions at the GTM will enable a wide range of actors to come together to think about where we go from here.

To kick off this dialogue, each of the contributors in the next section of the report has been asked to address an issue that is critical to unlocking the power of volunteering for the Decade of Action and beyond.[95] Rather than providing definitive answers, these interventions are intended to start conversations among all stakeholders in the Plan of Action to help strengthen volunteering during the Decade of Action. Their inputs cover four main areas:

- Leaving no one behind: How can volunteering help ensure that no one is excluded from development processes? These contributions examine how volunteering can enable the SDGs to go the "last mile" to reach the most vulnerable, empower the marginalized and ensure that all voices are heard in decision-making.
- From local to global: How do the everyday actions of volunteers, particularly those working in their communities, create the building blocks for achieving the 2030 Agenda? These contributions look at how a wide range of volunteering activities can promote social solidarity, strengthen accountability on complex challenges such as climate change and support the needs of people in conflict.
- Policies and partnerships: What support can we provide to maximize the potential of volunteering while protecting freedoms and avoiding exploitation? The voices expressed here look at the measures that can be taken by governments and their development partners to reimagine an enabling environment for volunteering that goes beyond the siloed approaches of the past.
- Volunteer perspectives: How can the diverse perspectives of volunteers themselves shape the reimagining of volunteering under the 2030 Agenda? This final collection of contributions looks at some of the fundamental issues that need to be taken into account to ensure that volunteering in the Decade of Action is informed by the perspectives of volunteers, even as the forms and practices of how people engage are constantly changing.

5. 20 questions for 2020 volunteering

Leaving no one behind

- Can we value and equalize volunteering for all? *Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women*

- How can technology open up access to volunteering instead of creating new barriers? *Gabriela Andrea Perona Zevallos, Executive Director of the Special Project for the Bicentenary of the Independence of Peru*

- Can volunteering bridge gaps between migrant and host communities? *Serge Bagamboula, Researcher, Collectif Formation Société ASBL; Member of the Bureau of Studies for the Undocumented in Belgium*

- What can volunteer coalitions contribute to the struggle for indigenous rights? *José Francisco Calí Tzay, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples*

- How do we transition away from informal volunteering as a safety net for those furthest behind? *Dr. Lungile Patience Mabundza, Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Eswatini*

- How can "silver volunteering" support the contributions of older people to the SDGs? *Association of Volunteer Centers (Russian Federation)*

From local to global

- How can social-activism volunteering unite communities? *Lysa John, Secretary-General of CIVICUS*

- How can volunteers go beyond ringing alarm bells to drive climate action? *Aotearoa Climate Emergency (New Zealand)*

- Can volunteers help localize the SDGs through data collection? *Dr. Poornima Dore, Head of Data Driven Governance at Tata Trusts (India)*

- Can local volunteering be safely sustained in contexts of conflict? *Bessy Valle Paz, Head of Volunteering at the Honduran Red Cross and Stefan Agerhem, Senior Advisor on Volunteering in Conflicts and Emergencies at the Swedish Red Cross*

- When will research and policy better account for the complexities of volunteering beyond service delivery? *Tania Haddad, Assistant Professor of Public Administration and Nonprofit Management at the American University of Beirut (Lebanon)*

Policies and partnerships

- How can we ensure that volunteering is not a policy afterthought? *H.E. Ms. Victoire Tomegah-Dogbé, Minister of Grass-roots Development, Handicrafts, Youth and Youth Employment (Togo)*

- Can volunteering help us navigate the future of work? *Claudia Costin, Director of the Center for Excellence and Innovation in Education Policies (Brazil) and member of ILO Commission on the Future of Work*

- What new partnerships are required to supercharge volunteering in the global South? *Litia Mawi, Fiji Ambassador (Retired) to the Pacific and Special Envoy to the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (Fiji)*

- Does international volunteering have a place in the post-2020 development landscape? *Helge Espe, Senior Adviser for the Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (Norec)*

- How can youth volunteering strengthen global cooperation in the Decade of Action? *Zhang Zhaohui, Vice-President and General Secretary of the Chinese Young Volunteers Association*

Volunteer perspectives

- How can we ensure that a broad and diverse evidence base informs our approaches to volunteering? *Dr. Jacob Mati, Senior Lecturer at Sol Plaatje University (South Africa), and Helene Perold, Director of Helene Perold & Associates (South Africa)*

- How does millennial activism interface with other forms of volunteering? *Annisa Hasanah, Social entrepreneur and millennial volunteer (Indonesia)*

- What would "volunteering reimagined" look like at the United Nations? *Volunteer Groups Alliance*

- What are the foundations for a twenty-first century of volunteering action? *Anton Bilokon, Volunteer, Ukrainian Red Cross Society and Saja Awad, National UN Volunteer, State of Palestine*

5.1. Leaving no one behind

Can we value and equalize volunteering for all?

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women

Across the world, volunteers are crucial to the survival and development of communities. Volunteering enables all people, including women and the most marginalized, to drive their own development by building critical skills, strengthening shared bonds and creating new connections. Given the proper support, volunteering can also advance gender equality by altering perceptions of women's roles in society, helping them to gain social capital and building their leadership capacity.

For example, the HerStory network, a youth-led initiative supported by the UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States, brings together 300 youth volunteers from across the region to monitor mass media and social media, to gather gender-related stories of the impact of COVID-19 and to track and correct misinformation and harmful gender stereotyping on Arabic entries on Wikipedia.[96]

However, the roles and activities of volunteers in the community can also reflect, and even perpetuate, gender inequalities. The State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2018 showed that the majority of volunteer work is done by women, especially if only informal volunteering is taken into account.[97] Globally, women already do on average three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men.[98] If performed for non-family or non-household members – for instance, in the form of making food, driving to medical appointments and babysitting without pay – it is classified as volunteer work. This means volunteerism can reinforce gender roles and the social, political and economic inequalities already faced by women and girls.

> **"The roles and activities of volunteers in the community can also reflect – and even perpetuate – gender inequalities.**

To "reimagine volunteering" and realize gender equality for the Decade of Action, we need to think about how to redress these imbalances. This starts with increasing the value and recognition of volunteer roles traditionally performed by women. In responding to the COVID-19 crisis, for example, volunteers have delivered meals to neighbours, sewn facemasks and staffed helplines on

domestic violence. These contributions provide vital social lifelines and keep our economies running. In fact, the contribution of women to all types of care has been valued at US$ 11 trillion, equivalent to 9 per cent of global GDP.[99]

Another important part of reimagining volunteering is addressing the social and gender norms that discourage men from taking on volunteer work and that limit the opportunities available to women. This means enabling the participation of women in non-traditional roles and giving them a voice in decision-making spaces, so that outcomes are more inclusive and provide role models for women's leadership. It also means encouraging men to volunteer for roles traditionally performed by women, such as providing emotional support for communities experiencing crisis or conflict. At the local level, we need more programmes like the "School for Husbands" in Niger,[100] which works to balance gender roles by increasing the responsibility and participation of men in health, hygiene and other issues in the community. As with UN Women's #HeForSheAtHome campaign – which has been encouraging men and boys to do an equal share of housework during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond – we also need men to do their fair share of volunteer work, recognizing these inequalities at the community level.

At UN Women, we have also seen how access to formal volunteering opportunities has enriched our own staff. We currently have 234 United Nations Volunteers working with us, equivalent to 8 per cent of our workforce. Moreover, 64 per cent are national volunteers, bringing local expertise and helping to build national capacity. But we still need to do more to ensure that all types of volunteering, including local volunteering, can contribute to gender equality. As we work together to rebuild stronger and more equal societies, including through UN Women's Generation Equality campaign,[101] let us recognize and value volunteer work as crucial to driving the global action we need, ensuring it is a shared endeavour and a sign of solidarity between all genders.

How can technology open up access to volunteering instead of creating new barriers?

Gabriela Andrea Perona Zevallos, Executive Director of the Special Project for the Bicentenary of the Independence of Peru

In 2021, Peru will celebrate two hundred years of independence. To mark the occasion, we have renewed our efforts to achieve the SDGs by fostering national dialogue around sustainable development and promoting an unprecedented citizen mobilization by establishing our Bicentennial National Volunteer Programme. This new programme aims to create a body of committed citizens and give them the tools they need to become agents of social change through voluntary action.

Understanding how technologies can improve the programme is critical to enabling it to benefit the most vulnerable. Over the last few months, this has been highlighted by the new challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Mandatory confinement meant that thousands of vulnerable Peruvians were unable to access food or social protection or were locked indoors, where they faced additional risks of domestic violence. To tackle these challenges, The Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion created a new online network to extend and integrate the work of the Bicentennial National Volunteers Programme into the government's response to the pandemic. This is the first time that online volunteering has been implemented in Peru on such a large scale.

> **"In Peru we want technologies to lower barriers to volunteering to enable all people to contribute, rather than creating new obstacles to participation.**

Through this online initiative, volunteers immediately began to help thousands of vulnerable people by providing psychological support and raising awareness of relevant subsidies and services – including for people living with disabilities and the elderly. In this way, the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated that technology can extend volunteering to reach the most vulnerable. It also illustrates the flexibility of the use of technology. Throughout the pandemic the programme has had to manage and recruit volunteers remotely and develop new online training materials and support processes for volunteers.

However, it also demonstrates that to be truly effective, we need to ensure that digitization is inclusive, not only to reach those furthest behind with services, but to ensure the full participation of all types of people through volunteering. In Peru we want technologies to lower barriers to volunteering to enable all people to contribute, rather than raising new obstacles to participation. Coordinating measures with private telephone and internet companies at the national level has helped our COVID-19 volunteering response. Through partnerships with these companies, volunteers could use free data on their mobile phones to access the volunteering platform and make calls, regardless of their financial situation.

Material support for activities is not the only form of support needed to enable all types of people to engage. During the pandemic response, we quickly realized the importance of ensuring that our digital network can provide psychological and other types of support to volunteers. Through a "cascade" methodology, developed with assistance from UNV and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), groups of volunteers were trained to provide emotional support and mental health counselling to other volunteers.

Challenges still remain to ensure technology supports inclusive volunteering. For example, we need to develop protocols to better protect personal data and efforts to overcome digital access barriers must continue to ensure that everyone can benefit from volunteering, regardless of their personal circumstances.

Peru pursues national and global sustainable development hand-in-hand with its citizens and technology. When used in an accessible way that supports broad community participation, new technologies can be powerful instruments to foster opportunities for volunteering, enabling volunteers in Peru and throughout the world to become an army that promotes – whether in person or remotely – solidarity, care, empathy and the transformative force of collective action.

Can volunteering bridge gaps between migrant and host communities?

Serge Bagamboula, Researcher, Collectif Formation Société ASBL; Member of the Bureau of Studies for the Undocumented in Belgium

Wars, natural disasters, starvation, poverty and other consequences of major global changes have always driven international and internal migration. Mass displacements of people seeking safety, security or a better life continue to pose challenges to host country governments and humanitarian organizations.

The Geneva Convention and other international instruments oblige states to receive displaced persons to safeguard the fundamental human right to life and personal security.[102] States cannot abdicate from their role in providing support to refugees and displaced persons. However, where they are slow to respond, volunteers from host communities often step forward to help improve the living conditions of new arrivals. From distributing food, water and items for personal hygiene through to helping to arrange access to decent shelter, health care, education and employment,

> **"This volunteering is not a form of charity, but an act of solidarity.**

volunteering connects actors both with each other and in each other's service. This support helps strengthen social bonds and create more hospitable, humane and balanced societies.

Volunteering by host communities is not a form of charity, but rather an act of solidarity. The associations in which these volunteers work guarantee safety and dignity for the people they welcome. They provide information, guidance, training (language and education), support and material assistance that is essential to building the capacities of migrants.

However, people often forget that migrants and refugees themselves often also contribute their own skills and capacities. Given the opportunity, migrants can break cycles of dependence with meaningful contributions in all spheres of life, including through volunteering. Volunteering can give migrants a sense of purpose and contribute to restoring their autonomy and overall well-being. Their intellectual and physical participation through volunteering should be encouraged by public authorities, who can establish schemes for migrants and locals to volunteer together.

Public opinion is not always in favour of receiving migrants. However, through their work, volunteers from host communities and migrant populations can help dismantle prejudices about migration. Volunteering is about give and take: it benefits both volunteers and those supported by them. As such it is also a useful lens through which to analyse the relationship between migration and development. While public authorities must undoubtedly support migrants, volunteers and volunteering should also be supported and encouraged to continue reducing inequalities and building meaningful bonds between migrants and host communities.

What can volunteer coalitions contribute to the struggle for indigenous rights?

José Francisco Calí Tzay, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples

While there are an estimated 370 million indigenous people around the world, most remain largely excluded from mainstream decision-making processes. As a result, despite making up 5 per cent of the world's population, 15 per cent of indigenous people suffer from extreme poverty.[103] Structural racism, discrimination and marginalization continue to deny indigenous peoples the right to genuine self-determined and sustainable development, as opposed to the "development" imposed by others. This not only goes against their human rights, creating conditions for potential conflicts, but also prevents development efforts from sustainably building on their valuable skills, knowledge and creativity.

To counter this marginalization, which cuts across geographical locations and cultural traditions, volunteering is a vital channel for indigenous peoples to self-organize and empower themselves around their own priorities. Volunteering nurtures collective and context-specific strategies to address problems.[104] This is especially important for marginalized peoples and groups that lack access to political power and resources.

Volunteer-led networks and popular assemblies formed by indigenous communities in Tehuantepec in Mexico share information and coordinate actions to revitalize traditional forms of self-governance in the face of attacks on indigenous defenders of human rights.[105] Similarly, in Guatemala, volunteer-led campaigns in indigenous communities have fought for the right to consultation in the face of development projects involving natural resources.[106] Finally, indigenous volunteers across the world have led the response to protect indigenous communities from the severe risk they face from the COVID-19 pandemic.[107]

> **"Voluntary self-organization is a major – and often the only – way in which indigenous concerns are voiced.**

However, indigenous volunteers and volunteer coalitions are subject to the same drawbacks as other volunteering contexts. Volunteering is by no means a silver bullet. Volunteer coalitions can be co-opted by outsiders, with the risk of diluting or subsuming indigenous peoples' causes to broader more widely supported concerns or greater numbers. There is also the universal hazard that if it is not well-supported volunteering can exclude, exploit or disempower the most vulnerable groups. Power dynamics within and among communities may mean that those who are already marginalized do not benefit from volunteering or might be even further exploited. When jobs are scarce, volunteering does not "put food on the table" and it is important to acknowledge the limitations of voluntary action when adequate livelihoods are compromised.

When indigenous peoples join forces to go beyond individual or group action, they can broaden coalitions among marginalized peoples to influence decision-making processes. These coalitions, supported through volunteerism, have advanced the causes of indigenous peoples, improved information sharing and pooled resources more effectively. They will continue to push indigenous movements forward in this Decade of Action, until the rights of indigenous peoples to make their own decisions for their communities and to participate in all decisions that affect them are fully respected.

Voluntary self-organization is a major – and often the only – way in which indigenous concerns are voiced. Reimagining volunteering for the Decade of Action requires considering how best to support indigenous volunteers in spaces from which they have been excluded for too long, while avoiding their volunteering efforts being co-opted or exploited. That support must then be integrated into broader policies, strategies and partnerships to ensure that indigenous voices are heard and acted upon before it is too late.

How do we transition away from informal volunteering as a safety net for those furthest behind?

Dr. Lungile Patience Mabundza, Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Eswatini

The International Labour Organization estimates that only around 10 per cent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa is covered by state-based social security.[108] Knowing how the remaining 90 per cent protects itself is key to understanding the significance of informal volunteerism, particularly in lower-income contexts. Eswatini is a lower middle-income country where nearly 60 per cent of the population live below the national poverty line.[109] Moreover, state social security only covers and protects people in paid employment, leaving the poorest behind. This makes informal volunteerism an important mechanism for coping and resilience.[110]

> **"The efforts of informal volunteers are often undocumented, unsupported and underappreciated.**

Local engagement is critical to the sustainability of development. Informal volunteerism promotes people-centred and solution-focused models of development based on responsibility, solidarity and reciprocity.[111] Services offered by informal volunteers are central to meeting basic community needs, while informal volunteering can also contribute to building entrepreneurial capacity, social capital and participation in community governance. The adaptive capacity of communities, driven by informal volunteers, can provide local solutions to local problems, allowing people to better prepare for future shocks and stresses.[112]

All this makes informal volunteering extremely important for achieving the SDGs because it helps protect communities from risks. However, the efforts of informal volunteers are often undocumented,

unsupported and underappreciated by governments and their development partners. Greater effort must therefore be made to realize the value of informal volunteering as an asset for achieving the SDGs while ensuring that informal volunteers are not exploited or used as a substitute for other forms of necessary support as other safety nets are developed.

Alongside these steps to support informal volunteers, new strategies are also required to transition to more formal safety nets for all. When times are hard, informal volunteering is not enough. Universal and sustained support to those furthest behind is also needed, beyond that which can be provided by communities themselves.

This means new evidence is needed of how forms of volunteer work can support the transition to safety nets for those not in formal employment in low-resource contexts. For example, volunteer schemes that develop the skills of volunteers and make their time and effort available to authorities could create room in budgets to broaden coverage of social protection. However, these types of opportunities can only work as a safety net if they are inclusive for all, regardless of age, gender or disability.

That does not mean abandoning the distinctive strengths that informal volunteering brings to our communities, such as our shared humanity towards others, or *ubuntu*.[113] It goes without saying that we should protect these aspects of volunteering, which are valued by communities. As long as states continue to face resource and capacity constraints, informal volunteerism will continue to provide vital support for the most vulnerable.

Development actors must recognize that truly transformative and participatory development should build on and complement the existing capacities of communities. Similarly, if we are to achieve the SDGs, there is a need for innovative thinking about how volunteer efforts can also help ensure the right blend of informal and formal systems to protect the most vulnerable. This should be a joint endeavour between citizens and states for the Decade of Action.

How can "silver volunteering" support the contributions of older people to the SDGs?

Association of Volunteer Centers (Russian Federation)

Volunteering is a transformative experience throughout the life cycle, benefiting from the involvement of all age groups. While all types of volunteers often work to address the issues facing older populations, it is also important to go beyond treating older adults as a helpless group and recognize their agency and contributions to sustainable development.[114]

Evidence suggests that volunteering by older adults can help improve quality of life by creating a sense of belonging, ownership and satisfaction from being able to give something back to society.[115] In Russia, recognition of these benefits has informed the principle of lifelong volunteerism, which has guided the national strategy for supporting volunteers. This approach provides individuals across all age groups with opportunities to actively engage through volunteering, including older demographics, known as "silver volunteers".

The Association of Volunteer Centers (AVC) is the largest volunteer-involving organization in Russia and has been monitoring silver volunteering across the country to improve support for initiatives in this area. Recent data shows that since 2013 the number of people over 55 years of age involved in volunteering has increased from 3 per cent to 9 per cent of the total Russian population.[116] Three factors help explain this increase.

"Volunteering by older adults can help improve quality of life by creating a sense of belonging, ownership and satisfaction.

Firstly, the development of silver volunteering in Russia has been prioritized at the presidential level and promoted by the government in coordination with national and local volunteer-involving organizations. The National Strategy of Actions for the Benefit of Senior Citizens in the Russian Federation up to 2025, adopted in 2016, has integrated volunteering into the government's policy of "active longevity". As part of its own strategy, AVC has partnered with the government to implement the nationwide "Young in Soul" programme.[117] Nearly 30,000 volunteers aged 55 and over are currently engaged in the programme through more than 300 organizations.

Secondly, capacity-building has been identified as an important area for encouraging silver volunteering. The "Young in Soul" programme has developed tailored training for both volunteers and managers. This includes guidance and good practices on organizing volunteering activities for older people and information on healthy ageing for bodies and minds. Since 2019, AVC has also been running www.dobro.ru, the largest online platform for volunteering-related resources in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States. The site takes its name from the Russian word for kindness (*dobro*) and includes two online platforms: one that connects volunteers with opportunities and another for learning, with specific materials on "silver volunteerism".

Finally, recognition is key to valuing and encouraging the individual contributions of silver volunteers and fostering innovative practices. A forum for silver volunteers takes place every October in Russia to celebrate the International Day of Older Persons and annual national contests like "Volunteer of Russia" recognize existing initiatives and provide support to encourage new projects involving older volunteers across the country.

Populations across the world are ageing and older adults are critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Even if ageing affects different countries at a different pace, the practice of silver volunteering should be more widely recognized and supported, not just as a key contributor to healthy ageing but also as a strategic force driving sustainable development and strengthening community cohesion.

5.2. From local to global

How can social-activism volunteering unite communities?

Lysa John, Secretary-General of CIVICUS

Participation is a human right, deeply rooted in our need to form and voice opinions and influence the structures shaping our lives. While communities are increasingly connected through technology, threats to unity are increasing. Growing polarization, climate change, wars, economic inequality and disease do not recognize national borders. Now, more than ever, people need to work together on shared problems. The global level has therefore become a legitimate sphere of action for people and organizations to claim rights and advance change in this Decade of Action for the SDGs.

Social activism is a powerful form of volunteering and can promote social inclusion through citizen engagement in participatory development processes.[118] The most successful struggles of recent times – against colonialism and authoritarianism, and for women's and LGBTQI rights – involve a mix of local-level, spontaneous and voluntary acts by citizens coupled with organizational planning and commitment. Through volunteering, individuals can

> **"Avenues for individuals and communities to contribute to the SDGs through volunteering can help create a powerful new narrative about our shared future.**

make a difference. Such activism can begin with a like on social media although new technologies also offer tools to mobilize citizens in new and creative ways.

Only three per cent of the world's population currently lives in countries where fundamental rights of expression, assembly and association are, in general, protected and respected.[119] More recently, we have seen the threats to public health posed by the COVID-19 pandemic being used to restrict democratic freedoms and suppress democratic demands. The SDGs must therefore provide an opportunity to model new international and national democratic processes for civic engagement. It is important to raise awareness that the SDGs will not be achieved without clear mechanisms for civic engagement, such as volunteering and social activism.

We need a new mobilization of social-activism volunteering to unite communities. We need to stimulate and cultivate participation, confidence and competence. Similarly, development and volunteer-involving organizations must walk with volunteers through activism journeys. This will enable connections with citizens already actively volunteering at the grass roots level, building from local to global. One example of this is Innovation for Change (I4C), a community-led global network collaborating to protect civic space and inspired by global experiences to overcome restrictions to basic freedoms of assembly, association and speech.[120] Another is the Diversity and Inclusion Group for Networking and Action (DIGNA), a collaborative platform that enables individuals and organizations to co-create strategies for inclusion across diverse contexts.[121]

The Decade of Action must be the starting point for a series of new and inclusive national and local debates about what unity means and how democratic values can be defined to encompass everyone, including groups that have been historically excluded and those not previously recognized as citizens. In doing so, we must promote the inclusion of excluded groups in existing democratic systems and institutions and create new spaces that allow volunteers to develop the skills and confidence needed for participation. Evidence from participatory budgeting and community-controlled grant-making shows that the best decisions are made when people are asked to collaborate to define economic and social priorities.

Fostering avenues for individuals and communities to contribute to the SDGs through volunteering can help create a powerful new narrative about our shared future – one that addresses contemporary grievances and offers a positive vision that unites communities. The Decade of Action is an opportunity to reaffirm the direct links between development and democracy and recognize the key roles of volunteers as change-makers in these processes.

How can volunteers go beyond ringing alarm bells to drive climate action?

Aotearoa Climate Emergency (New Zealand)

From civil and political rights to equality and environmental protection, we have all seen the important role of volunteers in raising public awareness and achieving a consensus that results in real change. Yet there is still no social and political consensus on climate action, despite decades of discussion since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Compare this with the rapid response to the COVID-19 emergency, which took just a few weeks! To try and move beyond ringing alarm bells and raising awareness of the climate crisis facing our planet, volunteers from the Aotearoa Climate Emergency (ACE) network have promoted citizens' assemblies as a way in which government can consult and engage effectively on climate issues with the people it serves.

ACE was formed by volunteers in February 2019. Its strategy is informed by previous volunteer-led campaigns in New Zealand on apartheid, electoral reform and drug law reform. In its work to promote citizens' assemblies, it follows the Maori tradition of *hui*, a term for formal public discussions. Such forums can provide a foundation for building consensus on the most intractable global problems

we face. In 2019, we held the first conference in New Zealand on citizens' climate assemblies[122] and since then ACE volunteers have held webinars and shared information on how citizens can engage with and help transform climate policy. To connect and strengthen our *hui*, ACE volunteers engage with diverse groups, including political parties, trade unions, journalists and Maori and Pasifika organizations, building from the grass roots up.

From our experience, we know that volunteer-led climate action should model the characteristics of citizens' assemblies. Firstly, it needs strong and positive communication. In our work, online connections have allowed a network of volunteers to form quickly and stay connected. The challenge now is to sustain the initial enthusiasm over a long period. Secondly, a sense of purpose creates a spirit of unity. Careful preparation is needed to establish clear objectives and manage effective meetings to ensure a good process is followed and all voices are heard. Finally, it is important to create a non-partisan and inclusive organizational culture that welcomes people with a wide variety of backgrounds and affiliations. Considering all viewpoints with respect and trust allows consensus to develop.

Our recent experience of the COVID-19 emergency has proved not only the significance of the state response to complex challenges, but also the importance of people acting through volunteering and the need for productive collaborations between government and volunteers. The same applies to the climate emergency. Government and people must act together for a common purpose. Ways of thinking about climate change can and must change quickly. Through citizens' assemblies, volunteers can help strengthen the relationship between the state and the people and build the consensus on climate action that is urgently needed for a successful Decade of Action.

> **"Through citizens' assemblies, volunteers can help strengthen the relationship between the State and the people.**

Can volunteers help localize the SDGs through data collection?

Dr. Poornima Dore, Head of Data Driven Governance at Tata Trusts (India)

The SDGs describe a standard of development to which we aspire as a global community. However, sustainable development must ultimately be judged by how well it covers the communities that are furthest behind. Volunteers can play a valuable role in generating data to identify local gaps and priorities, to strengthen local responses and to share needs with wider stakeholders.

In India, we already have a national indicator framework for contextualizing the SDGs and this is being localized through state-level and even village-level frameworks (at the *Gram Panchayat* level). However, local districts often struggle to maintain and triangulate robust SDG indicator data sets. Within our Data Driven Governance portfolio, at Tata Trusts we have worked extensively with local governments, communities and volunteers in over 90 districts across 27 states to build granular databases covering development indicators at the community and local institution levels for integration into formal planning channels. We have mapped these onto relevant SDG indicators to incrementally measure progress towards larger development goals.

This approach would not be possible without the essential voluntary contributions of motivated community members. Through Tata Trust's DELTA programme, volunteers are trained to collect data at the individual, household and institutional levels to support community planning. These volunteers – part of mixed field teams known as "DELTA Champions" – also receive training to help build community awareness of data collection.

Local data is helping to revitalize community-level institutions. Volunteers present data back to communities for discussion at *Gram Sabhas* (village-level assemblies). The results show that this has fostered more active *Gram Sabhas*, together with *Mahila Sabhas* (women's assemblies), involving more and more citizens in village-level development processes.[123] The data also provides planning information for district authorities to help meet local targets. Innovative social audit methods are used to gather community feedback – such as wall paintings on the side of community buildings – to feed back to authorities.

> **"These volunteers strengthen "last mile" links between local authorities and rural communities as a basis for advancing local development under the 2030 Agenda.**

Our DELTA Champion volunteers have become valuable resources that help localize the SDGs and allow communities themselves to collect, share and respond to data on the issues that affect them. They also enable data to be collected at scale. Between 2017–2018 over 3,200 volunteers collected information about the needs and priorities of over 1.7 million people.[124] As part of the motivated group of DELTA Champions, these volunteers strengthen "last mile" links between local authorities and rural communities as a basis for advancing local development under the 2030 Agenda.

Can local volunteering be safely sustained in contexts of conflict?

Bessy Valle Paz, Head of Volunteering at the Honduran Red Cross, and Stefan Agerhem, Senior Adviser on Volunteering in Conflicts and Emergencies at the Swedish Red Cross

Local volunteers are critical to humanitarian and crisis responses, particularly when international donors withdraw due to security risks or when state institutions and infrastructures are too weak to cope. International attention to the dangers faced by local humanitarian volunteers has grown in recent years. Nonetheless, although they deliver most humanitarian aid and face significant personal risks, these volunteers receive limited attention from policymakers and researchers. Experience shows that aid donors hesitate to fund investments in safety infrastructure and systems for volunteers and are even more reluctant to support organizational change processes.

Prioritizing the safety and well-being of their volunteers is high on the agenda of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. However, many Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have faced significant challenges in implementing this vision at the national and local levels. Current statistics reflect this reality: from 2016 to 2019 the Movement reported the deaths of 93 staff and volunteers. However, the much larger number of those who are injured, mentally traumatized or stigmatized are not reflected in the global data, in addition to unreported cases of staff and volunteers killed in the line of duty.

There is a gap in the knowledge of the dynamics of local humanitarian volunteering, compared to knowledge on international volunteers or the staff of national or international humanitarian organizations.[125] Recent research by the Movement reveals a mismatch between approaches to volunteers as benevolent donors and situations where volunteers come from vulnerable and affected communities, meaning they may place themselves at further risk by volunteering.[126]

Despite the challenges, many national societies have embraced the concept of duty of care. With the Movement's support, national societies have created sustainable models, organizational systems and tools that allow volunteers to participate in a safe, fulfilling way, even with limited financial means. Psychosocial support to volunteers has evolved to become a critical intervention area, following evidence gathered during responses to pandemics such as Ebola, with displaced communities, and

in other crisis situations.[127] National societies, such as the Sudanese Red Crescent, have successfully combined learning opportunities with referral mechanisms and internal follow-ups to standardize and institutionalize psychosocial support for volunteers.[128]

Giving volunteers access to accident insurance is another area where national societies have made significant progress. For more than 10 years, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have provided a global volunteer accident insurance scheme to support national societies that cannot access local insurance. However, these schemes have their limitations, especially in the global South and in lower-income countries. The Honduran Red Cross has explored this issue through an innovation lab to find local solutions.[129]

> **"While many humanitarian actors can withdraw from crisis settings when risks become too high, most local volunteers do not have the choice of a safe exit.**

However, a bigger challenge is how to reduce risks for volunteers. While many humanitarian actors can withdraw from crisis settings when risks become too high, most local volunteers do not have the choice of a safe exit. They must remain in their community and face the same dangers as their neighbours. Sometimes they even face increased risks for being a volunteer with a humanitarian organization. Better prepared, trained and skilled volunteers are more resilient and able to mitigate some of these risks. Several volunteers in the Ebola response in West Africa described how their resilience gave them the confidence to volunteer in their communities, even though it meant dealing with increased risks and uncertainty. Belonging to a resilient volunteer group reinforced their willingness and motivation to volunteer. To strengthen this resilience, the "Be Careful" learning resource by the Swedish Red Cross provides volunteers with training on the self-assessment of whether they are ready to step into a dangerous situation and on how to reduce and mitigate risks.[130]

Keeping volunteers safe and well is one of the most challenging ethical and moral tasks of volunteer-involving organizations. Implementing all possible measures to provide support, systems and tools allows volunteers to thrive and develop their resilience. Only a combination of resilient volunteers and organizations that support them systematically implementing their duty of care will allow people to feel safe and motivated to provide the life-saving services that humanitarian volunteers contribute.

When will research and policy better account for the complexities of volunteering beyond service delivery?

Tania Haddad, Assistant Professor of Public Administration and Nonprofit Management at the American University of Beirut (Lebanon)

Volunteering is a human practice and, as such, inherently complex and multifaceted. In the Arab States region, volunteers play a major role in communities through their direct involvement not only in delivering services but also in identifying needs and context-specific ways of addressing them. In common with other regions, literature on Arab volunteerism acknowledges a historic absence of policies and the prioritization of civic engagement and volunteering in the national agendas of Arab states.[131] This has arguably been changing in response both to evolving socioeconomic and political trends and to the active efforts of civil society. However, while volunteering has been developing and growing, it still tends to be viewed through the narrow lens of delivering services to others in need. More needs to be done by policymakers and researchers to better understand, support and integrate the roles of volunteering beyond service provision.

Reimagining volunteering requires a broader, more nuanced view of the various types of volunteering.[132] It requires a more expansive view of the roles played by volunteers, including as leaders, evaluators, advocates and shapers of outcomes. It also acknowledges that some of these roles are played by individuals who do not – or choose not to – call themselves volunteers. Support to volunteers should also reflect this broader conceptualization. For example, government policies should create an enabling environment that encourages and integrates the contributions volunteering can make to strengthening social cohesion or building more resilient communities. The private sector should move beyond philanthropic volunteering by corporate employees to supporting existing formal and informal community volunteering.

“ It requires a more expansive view of the roles played by volunteers, including as leaders, evaluators, advocates and shapers of outcomes.

These efforts should also be underpinned by new evidence. Gaps must be bridged between knowledge production and communities and research should focus on the diversity of local volunteering cultures and practices that goes beyond purely quantitative analysis of results. We need to explore not only factors that motivate or increase volunteering numbers, but also how volunteering experiences are intrinsically subjective and connected to local understandings of development, resilience and sustainability. Ethnographic research in volunteering is needed to account for these nuances.

The act of volunteering and the meaning behind it is complex and constantly reinvented. For the Decade of Action, we need to better recognize this complexity in the support that is provided to volunteers to harness the full potential of volunteering beyond service delivery. We should step back to consider the types of volunteering practices promoted by existing support and those that are left unsupported. And we should consider how volunteering patterns will change in the future, alongside the new opportunities and threats these changes will bring.

5.3. Policies and partnerships

How can we ensure that volunteering is not a policy afterthought?

H.E. Ms. Victoire Tomegah-Dogbé, Minister of Grass-roots Development, Handicrafts, Youth and Youth Employment (Togo)

National volunteering programmes, policies and legislation are increasingly common in the African context and around the world as ways for governments to facilitate the voluntary engagement of individuals. To ensure that volunteering is not a policy afterthought, this support must be clearly integrated into national development priorities, according to the needs and challenges of each country.

In the case of Togo, the country’s volunteering policy was initially linked to youth, facilitating access to employment and participation in national development.[133] Togo has had a national youth policy since 2007, which reflects the aspirations and concerns of young people, including greater empowerment, personal development and full participation. By engaging young people in volunteering, the government aims to ensure they can strengthen their personal and professional skills to benefit their communities.

The government has since implemented several initiatives on volunteering to address youth unemployment and promote social inclusion. The National Programme for Promoting Volunteerism in Togo (PROVONAT) was launched with the support of UNDP, UNV and France Volontaires in 2010 and

is regulated by a specific law enacted in 2011. Similarly, the National Agency for Volunteering in Togo (ANVT) was created in 2014 with the mission of "making volunteering an innovative and inclusive tool for sustainable development". This shows how the integration of volunteering into national policies in Togo has evolved from an initial priority given to youth to one linked to national development priorities.

The national agency has carried out several reforms to align its work with the SDGs. It has diversified its targets for creating volunteering opportunities for people who do not complete school and older people and has made changes to allow volunteers to increase the socioeconomic and environmental value of volunteer contributions to the country. The agency has also increased its measurement and evaluation of volunteer contributions to the SDGs, including through a new online platform, to support decision-making in the Decade of Action. All these new initiatives have been accompanied by government financial support.

Volunteering has also recently been incorporated into the country's national development plan for 2018–2022 as a key means of creating the right conditions to empower young people and women and to cultivate a sense of responsibility among Togolese youth, grounded in values of peace, solidarity and a commitment to the country's sustainable development.

"Governments need to think about the future, listen more to volunteers in the field and consider how the power of voluntary action can best be integrated into sectoral strategies and national development priorities.

Based on these developments over the past decade, over 30,000 volunteers have been mobilized through government promoted schemes, helping to develop new capacities and lending their skills and creativity to pave the way for sustainable development. Notable contributions of volunteers have been recorded against SDG 4 (access to quality education), SDG 8 (access to decent work), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 13 and SDG 15 (climate action and life on land), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

Governments need to think about the future, listen more to volunteers in the field and consider how the power of voluntary action can best be integrated into sectoral strategies and national development priorities. When volunteering is correctly integrated, the potential of volunteers can be truly realized and the impact of their actions on sustainable development can be felt at all levels.

Can volunteering help us navigate the future of work?

Claudia Costin, Director of the Center for Excellence and Innovation in Education Policies (Brazil) and member of ILO Commission on the Future of Work

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause disruption to jobs, health, the economy and education, exposing and exacerbating underlying development challenges like poverty and inequality. Before the pandemic, societies were already grappling with the implications of the fourth industrial revolution. When it recedes, we will still have to contend with the pressing challenges and major disruptions posed by the so-called "future of work", with artificial intelligence and accelerated automation heralding massive shifts in patterns of living and working.

The events of recent months have shown the potential of online platforms and artificial intelligence to improve access to education and health care. Similarly, in light of the mass unemployment caused by the pandemic and the furloughing of employees, it has also highlighted the importance of public policy interventions to provide solid safety nets for those most vulnerable to social and economic uncertainty. However, perhaps most clearly, it has shown that volunteering can be an important way

> **Volunteering can be an important way for people to find meaning and a sense of purpose in the work that they do.**

in which people find meaning and a sense of purpose in the work they do.

Here in Brazil, voluntary activity has been essential to fill in the gaps in support for the most vulnerable. Many people have volunteered their time to help educate children or deliver food to those who cannot leave their homes. Volunteers are also helping to ensure no one is left behind. For example, teachers have volunteered to prepare education videos to be displayed on community television to ensure children who cannot access online platforms can still receive an education.

The question arises of what this means in the broader, complex and rapidly shifting context of the future of work. Volunteering is usually associated with supporting causes that emerge from an individual's community or personal experience. It taps deeply into essential human capabilities that cannot be supplanted by automation, such as empathy, intuitive problem solving and adaptability. The challenges looming on the global horizon – from job insecurity and the effects of climate change to the grim prospect of future pandemics – will require all of us to have a strong sense of collective action to find shared solutions, something that is at the heart of many people's motivation for volunteering.

As machines replace many human jobs, changing our outlook on work and leisure, and as life expectancy increases, individuals are likely to find value and meaning in a lifelong practice of volunteering. After the crisis and beyond 2030, when we find ourselves struggling to ensure equality has kept pace with rapid technological advances and sweeping changes in the way that we work, I hope we can look back and build on the experiences of this pandemic. The coexistence of technology, paid work and volunteering has not always been seamless and the boundaries will continue to shift. Our recent experiences show us that volunteering remains important for volunteers themselves, as a component that provides a sense of purpose and increased well-being in the broader world of work.

What new partnerships are required to supercharge volunteering in the global South?

Litia Mawi, Fiji Ambassador (Retired) to the Pacific and Special Envoy to the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (Fiji)

The 2030 Agenda calls for innovative, mutually beneficial partnerships that reflect a greater emphasis on equality and local ownership, while enabling national and international policy agendas to coalesce around shared, global challenges. To help maximize the potential of volunteering for the SDGs, new partnerships and collaboration across sectors and national borders and at all levels of society should be formed to reflect these principles.

To address power dynamics and promote equalities, new partnerships are required to support local volunteering. These must go beyond hierarchical approaches that see national or international organizations "subcontract" project implementation to local communities in the South. At the national level, multi-sectoral initiatives and whole-of-government approaches can foster collaboration to create the best environment for addressing complex challenges. Scaling up multi-stakeholder efforts in developing countries is also critical: when local or national governments, non-profits and private sector companies work together, they can create new spaces for diverse groups to come together through volunteering.

Beyond formal projects and financial resources, new volunteering partnerships must also be built on a foundation of knowledge and evidence, in line with SDG 17. Knowledge-based partnerships will allow volunteering actors in the global South to collectively define challenges and co-create solutions. Knowledge-based cooperation will also help partnerships avoid dependencies and issues

caused by the asymmetric power relations that exist between all countries.

Volunteering through South–South and regional cooperation offers a way to share knowledge and competencies, while strengthening trust and building regional resilience. A good example of this in my region is the "Wake Up!" project by the Pacific Community Public Health Division, which engages young volunteers to raise regional awareness of noncommunicable diseases, one of the main causes of death in the Pacific region.[134] However, implementing effective international cooperation needs reliable financing. This is a problem facing many countries in the global South. In my country, for example, the Fiji Volunteer Service Scheme[135] is currently stalled pending new financial resources. Challenges like this are an opportunity for triangular partnerships with donors, with potential partners asking not "what can we do to help you?" but instead "how can we add value to what you are already doing?".

> **"New partnerships are required that go beyond hierarchical approaches that see national or international organizations "subcontract" project implementation to local communities.**

As countries in the global South reflect on new paradigms for partnership, they must prioritize collective self-reliance as an engine of growth in the pursuit of the 2030 Agenda. New partnerships for volunteering require stakeholders to reach consensus on the long-term goals of the partnership itself, to retain agency at the national and local levels and to have a firm foundation of cocreated knowledge and principles of equality and mutual benefit. New partnerships should be seen not only as a vital instrument of cooperation, but as an opportunity to reimagine volunteering and the support it receives.

Does international volunteering have a place in the post-2020 development landscape?

Helge Espe, Senior Adviser for the Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (Norec)

The 2030 Agenda is universal. The SDGs are as valid under the sun at the equator as they are under the polar lights of northern Norway. Even if conditions vary from one country to the next, we are all in this together. As part of this common agenda, our Voluntary National Reviews report back to the High-level Political Forum on our challenges and successes.

This situation is quite different from what we have traditionally seen in aid and development spaces. In the past, there have been major North–South flows of resources, both financial and in-kind, with a clear distinction between "donor" and "recipient" roles. However, these flows are increasingly intertwined in the new development landscape. We see new emerging and middle-income economies in the South and huge growth in South–South cooperation.

The international volunteering narrative used to be dominated by eager, well-wishing middle-class youth from traditional donor countries in the global North, travelling to "do good" in Southern countries. Fortunately, however, this stereotype is increasingly challenged by an increase in the recruitment of international volunteers from the global South as a consequence of the changing development landscape. Youth in all countries share feelings, aspirations and a concern for the future of the world we live in.

The United Nations Conference on South–South and Triangular Cooperation (BAPA+40) in 2019 acknowledged the roles of both South–South volunteering and the exchange of personnel for achieving the SDGs. If old prejudices can be shaken off, this can provide a pathway to ensure the continued relevance and impact of volunteering in the 2020s. South–South exchange now constitutes almost two thirds of the portfolio of the Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (Norec).

However, we must ask why South–North volunteering is often been missing from the equation. After all, if "we" visit "them", why should "they" not visit "us"? Mental barriers to true reciprocity have

been as high as any border or immigration barrier. There should be no reason to deny youth in the South the same opportunities to go abroad and share, learn and bring back inspiration from any country, regardless of whether in the global South or North, just as young people from the North have been encouraged to do for so long. If we agree that we all have something to contribute and something to learn from each other, why should this learning not take place in the North as well as in the South?

That is why, in addition to South–South volunteering, for the last 20 years, Norec has had roughly the same numbers of personnel and volunteers coming into Norway every year as those placed abroad. We do not fund personnel exchange or volunteering between partners without a reasonable balance of people going both ways or in a triangular fashion. Moreover, there is a special clause in the Norwegian immigration law for this purpose.

There remain clear obstacles to South–North volunteering, such as visa issues, immigration hurdles and mobility, but the biggest challenge of all is arguably our mindsets. A feeling of superiority – of "what can we learn from them?" – and the idea that the North does not need contributions from the South has prevailed. More than anything else, learning is a state of mind, not a package to be delivered from country A to B. If United Nations Member States have now accepted the fundamental universality of the 2030 Agenda, we should all actively follow up by facilitating flows of volunteers and personnel in both directions.

Our experience confirms it is no less inspirational for youth from the global South to spend a volunteering year abroad than their Northern counterparts. It is often a life-changing experience, whether they have been to another Southern country, or, for example, to the North Cape of Norway. Moreover, we know from documented evidence that the time spent and contributions made after returning home are no less important than the volunteer's contribution during their placement.

If we keep these benefits in mind, we will reap long-term rewards from international volunteering in countries in the global South and the global North. The full realization of the 2030 Agenda relies on equality and reciprocity – and these should be the first steps to reimagining international volunteering.

> **"Obstacles to South–North volunteering include visa issues, immigration hurdles and mobility, but the biggest challenge of all is arguably our mindsets.**

How can youth volunteering strengthen global cooperation in the Decade of Action?

Zhang Zhaohui, Vice-President and General Secretary of the Chinese Young Volunteers Association

Over the past six months, countries around the world have been fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only do global crises like COVID-19 pose a real threat to achieving the SDGs, they also highlight the need for unity and sharing among all human beings. During this crisis and in many others, global networks of volunteers have connected countries and global spaces, overcoming boundaries between and within governments, academia and society.

These strengths should be fully recognized over the next 10 years as we work collectively to achieve the SDGs. However, while all types of volunteering make important contributions to the SDGs, international youth volunteering provides important opportunities for young people to participate and provide leadership in ways they may not always be able to in other spheres, such as at work and in the family.

Learning from its domestic experience of deploying youth volunteers to less developed areas of rural China, the Chinese Young Volunteers Association overseas volunteering programme sends young volunteers to developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America every year. These young people work alongside locals to contribute different perspectives and experiences to support local

agricultural development, health care, education and other fields. For example, in Ethiopia, Chinese youth volunteers have worked alongside local experts to help increase local agricultural output.

Working with and through global and regional organizations is also important. With the recent pandemic, joint actions between countries have shown the significance of cooperation at the human level, in which volunteering plays an irreplaceable role. Over the past few years, the Chinese Young Volunteers Association has been jointly implementing the programme for Chinese youth volunteering overseas with UNV. The programme sends young volunteers from China to United Nations agencies as volunteers in various fields. It aims to promote economic and social development, foster inclusiveness and reduce inequality in developing countries.

In this way, international youth volunteering enables the sharing of skills and knowledge between countries, particularly across the global South, drawing on the energy and creativity of youth. However, perhaps most importantly, it also creates a shared understanding between young people. When Chinese volunteers return to their homes, communities, friends and families, they return with a greater understanding of communities, cultures and challenges in other countries, as well as new solutions to old problems. Moreover, as they are young, this learning and shared understanding stays with them for a long time, helping to create global citizens with global friends and global perspectives.

> **“ To fully harness the power of youth volunteering for the Decade of Action, countries and other stakeholders need to work together.**

To fully harness the power of youth volunteering for the Decade of Action, countries and other stakeholders need to work together. An important first step is to strengthen the macrocoordination of youth volunteering and promote the sharing of information at the global and regional levels. More initiatives, such as joint projects with the United Nations and focused on the SDGs, should be created. Secondly, it is important to jointly improve existing practices and standards for international volunteering to break through barriers to cooperation between different actors and sectors. Thirdly, it is important to better show the unique added value of youth volunteering by measuring impact, using new methodologies to capture the full range of volunteering benefits and sharing comparable data between countries and organizations.

Through these steps, I firmly believe that international youth volunteering will help promote the smooth realization of the 2030 Agenda in the Decade of Action.

5.4. Volunteer perspectives

How can we ensure that a broad and diverse evidence base informs our approaches to volunteering?

Dr. Jacob Mati, Senior Lecturer at Sol Plaatje University (South Africa), and Helene Perold, Director of Helene Perold & Associates (South Africa)

The discussion of volunteering research is framed by the fact that most research has been done by Northern researchers writing about Northern volunteer programmes. The paucity of volunteer research in Southern countries has resulted in substantial knowledge gaps and imbalances in the field. These threaten the very assumption that volunteering can provide significant support to achieving the SDGs.

Three main issues shape the global volunteering research landscape and require serious urgent attention if we are to foster a more global, diverse and balanced approach to evidence gathering: the context of knowledge production; the infrastructure to support volunteer research development;

and outreach opportunities to inform policymaking. Overcoming challenges in these areas is key to filling existing knowledge gaps and fully understanding how volunteering can support the achievement of the SDGs in different contexts.

First, despite vibrant and diverse volunteering constituencies in the global South, the agenda, process and outcomes of "global" knowledge production in volunteering research are dominated by individuals and powerful research and practice networks from Northern geographies. Alternative research and theorizations in Southern contexts show preferences for evidence of the experience and effects of international and local volunteering (for example, the relationship between poverty, inequality and volunteering), South–South and South–North volunteer exchange (particularly among young people),[136] and the political economy of civic service and volunteering.[137] Addressing traditional global power imbalances and inequalities in knowledge production will require the development of relational partnerships that value inclusivity and reciprocity in setting research agendas, research practice and theory building. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided opportunities where technology has been leveraged for equitable collaboration. This should be expanded to allow greater access to international research opportunities and equitable research collaboration between individuals and institutions across countries and regions to build a truly global theory of volunteering.

> **"The global volunteer research landscape is informed by power and resource differentials between North and South.**

Second, developing the infrastructure for systematic volunteering research requires investment. Research infrastructure remains grossly under-resourced in Southern countries. For example, there is not a single centre devoted to the study of volunteerism in Africa. The closest we get are two centres for the study of philanthropy: the John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy, Civic Engagement and Responsible Business at the American University in Cairo (Egypt) and the Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg (South Africa). More such institutions are needed across the global South, because they bring intellectual weight to volunteering research, while amplifying the voices and experiences of Southern volunteers and organisations in subject knowledge. Moreover, their position in the academic ecosystem also provides them with access to international networks, journals and other platforms for knowledge generation, dissemination and influence. However, perhaps most importantly, they train the next generation of researchers to drive indigenous knowledge production.

Finally, the dominance of Northern knowledge networks and resources means that Southern volunteer research has limited influence on domestic and international discourse and policymaking. The experience of Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa, a non-profit research agency dedicated to volunteering research in Southern Africa from 2003 to 2013 shows how small independent research groups in the South struggle to be heard, especially in academic publications that are influential in policy arenas. This is because the dominant academic community and the gatekeepers of journals and publishing houses reinforce inequality in our subject. Additionally, high purchase costs limit access by scholarly and practitioner communities in the South. Those interested in ensuring a balance between "international" comparative quality and "local" relevance need to invest in equitable collaborative research initiatives, publishing and policy advocacy.

As is the case with international volunteering itself, the global volunteer research landscape is informed by power and resource differentials between North and South. The structural factors we mention result in "research gaps" that threaten the evidence base for understanding the contribution of volunteering to the SDGs. COVID-19 has laid bare the significance of local and community-based volunteering around the globe. We need to understand the impact, influence and issues rooted in

the volunteering experiences of the South. The Decade of Action could well present an opportunity to craft collaborative research practices that are globally representative of the valuable role of volunteering in humanitarianism, peacebuilding and sustainable development.

How does millennial activism interface with other forms of volunteering?

Annisa Hasanah (Indonesia), Social entrepreneur and millennial volunteer

> **Millennials are blending volunteering into many aspects of their personal and professional lives.**

Millennials are active volunteers for the causes they care about. At the same time, the forms and nature of volunteer work are rapidly adjusting to lifestyle changes and advances in technology. Traditional, regular forms of volunteering continue, for instance at local community centres, religious places and educational institutes. However, these are being complemented by newer episodic and short-term opportunities, which millennials have embraced, rather than remaining loyal to specific organizations or groups for longer periods of time. Young people are challenging the status quo and opening up new spaces for volunteering, especially through the use of technology and social media.

As a millennial volunteer myself, I know that people my age often integrate volunteering into their lifestyle choices. While older generations might complain that we do not donate enough to charity or spend time in traditional volunteering activities, we can counter that older generations do not always make consistent ethical choices across their lives. The rise of social entrepreneurship, as well as more questionable concepts such as "voluntourism" (volunteering + tourism) and "bleisure" (business + leisure), have blurred the lines between work, study and leisure and enabled millennials to blend volunteering into many aspects of their personal and professional lives.

In 2016, I ran a social enterprise that aimed to raise environmental awareness in my country, Indonesia. We created a boardgame called Ecofunopoly[138] to raise awareness about climate change concepts, such as carbon emissions, waste management and forest fires. Before becoming a social enterprise, we were a voluntary movement. We engaged young volunteers in a fluid, open structure, providing them with a platform to lead the design, implementation and advocacy of the project. Millennials could relate to the episodic and convenient nature of tasks and with the help of volunteers we were able to deliver engaging learning experiences and create a community. This is an example of how volunteering can pave the way for young people to engage in entrepreneurship, fostering a spirit of "social change" that permeates their work ethic and business values.

Rapid change is normal for my generation, and this is reflected in the new approaches that we bring to volunteering. For example, in Indonesia the old concept of fundraising required volunteers to go door to door or directly approach people for donations. This is increasingly being replaced by online donation platforms created by millennial volunteers who see an opportunity to modernize fundraising practices. The platforms promote different causes and campaigns across various fields, allowing people to select campaigns that interest them. While they principally stem from and cater to the millennial desire for variety, online platforms have inspired other organizations in Indonesia to follow the new concept and they are even starting to change the donation habits of older generations.

Incorporating change – both in volunteering and in engagement with volunteering organizations – is therefore important to millennials. We do not just volunteer out of habit or tradition; we volunteer to make a difference. In thinking about the future of volunteerism, there is a need to make the overall volunteer experience adaptable, relevant and interesting for young people. Volunteering organizations should not fear the dynamism that youth require and bring to volunteering. Indeed, the SDGs are themselves a call to update and improve how we live, work and even volunteer. Millennials may not

have all the answers but their spirit of change and adaptability can serve volunteerism well as it retools for the Decade of Action.

What would "volunteering reimagined" look like at the United Nations?

Volunteer Groups Alliance

The Volunteer Groups Alliance (VGA) is the stakeholder group representing volunteers at the United Nations. As a global coalition of organizations and networks working in over 150 countries, VGA members know that volunteers and support for their efforts are essential for peace and development. However, since 2015 we have seen a shift, whereby recognition of volunteering has extended well beyond our volunteering community. Indeed, the synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda confirms that the ambitions of the SDGs will not be realized without the contributions of correctly supported volunteers and volunteer-driven organizations in both developing and developed countries.[139] Right from its design, the 2030 Agenda has been "of the people, by the people and for the people".[140] Volunteering allows Member States to ensure that this people-centred approach continues in implementation.

But the journey to reimagine volunteering as a critical resource for the SDGs is not complete. As Member States and international institutions prepare for the Decade of Action, VGA is imagining a world in which the phenomenal resources, social capital and insights of volunteers mean they are truly in the driving seat of development. We know that these goals can be achieved in the following ways.

Firstly, reimagining through knowledge, by integrating evidence on volunteering at all stages in the 2030 Agenda processes at the national level and together in the United Nations. Evidence is critical for the recognition of volunteer contributions on sustainable development. In 2019, countries around the world as diverse as Cambodia, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Iceland, Mongolia, Pakistan and Sierra Leone all recognized volunteering in their Voluntary National Reviews. Member States should cooperate with volunteer-involving and civil society organizations to include information on the scale, contribution, and impact of volunteering, including informal volunteering.

Secondly, reimagining through dialogue, by creating new spaces to hear the voices of people taking action for the SDGs. Millions of volunteers from all walks of life are playing a critical role not only in delivering the SDGs but also in supporting their accountability. Governments should engage volunteers in monitoring sustainable development at all levels as part of a wider commitment to civic engagement, accepting citizen-generated data and other evidence to complement official processes. Member States should also consult communities on sustainable development policies at all levels, take advantage of new forms of technology, and work with volunteers to listen to and amplify the voices of those who are frequently excluded or left behind.

Finally, reimagining how we work together to partner with the world's one billion volunteers, boosting the role of Member States as "connectors" and enabling partnerships to ensure robust cross-sector volunteering practice. Strengthening partnerships across sectors is essential to advance the state of volunteering globally. It is imperative to bring together governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and the international community in a collective conversation featuring multiple perspectives.

> **"Volunteers play a critical role, not only in the delivery of the SDGs but also in supporting their accountability.**

Perceptions of volunteering have shifted considerably since the Millennium Development Goals. Power dynamics have moved away from old paradigms of North–South volunteering towards a greater focus not only on the importance of volunteering as a powerful tool in the delivery of the SDGs but also on the infrastructure required to successfully engage volunteers. Member States are increasingly

recognizing the power of volunteers but more can still be done. With better evidence, participatory consultation and stronger partnerships, Member States can help reimagine their engagement and support volunteers to drive forward the Decade of Action and reach those furthest behind.

What are the foundations for a twenty-first century of volunteering action?

Anton Bilokon, Volunteer, Ukrainian Red Cross Society and Saja Awad, UN Volunteer, State of Palestine

The start of the Decade of Action is an ideal opportunity to bring clarity and structure to our shared vision for volunteering. It is a sweeping challenge, one that inspires us to redouble our efforts to make the 2030 Agenda a real success. As volunteers for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and UNV, we are keen to act on our potential to bring about change. We welcome opportunities to stretch our capacities and contribute our time and energy towards achieving the SDGs. We would like to see government policies and programmes better reflect and support the drive of volunteers to make a difference.

We know that when it comes to volunteers, the issue is not about growing numbers. A billion people are already taking action through volunteering! The challenge is more about maximizing their impact for the SDGs. For example, in some contexts there may be high rates of volunteering but poor-quality support means the efforts of volunteers are less effective than they could be. To be sure, volunteering happens everywhere, regardless of whether governments support it. However, only with a range of policies, investments and partnerships can governments and others create an enabling environment for scalable action, tapping into the underused potential of volunteers that need only opportunity and investment in order to thrive.

For example, we feel that greater focus is needed on a series of questions: What happens after a volunteer activity has been completed? What structures or strategies could help sustain impact? How can we connect with marginalized groups to support their objectives? What mechanisms can help volunteers to scale up their activities? These issues lie at the root of the relevance and sustainability of volunteerism. It is important that our voices form part of the process as new ideas are developed.

However, while a strong support system for volunteerism is more important than ever, too much external support can have unintended negative effects. There needs to be a balance between support and autonomy, between empowering volunteer action and directing it. Volunteers need to be able to come up with their own solutions and be involved in the decisions that affect them. Governments and others can provide tools, platforms and spaces to allow us to do this.

> **“There needs to be a balance between support and autonomy, between empowering volunteer action and directing it.**

Systems to communicate and connect shrink the distance between us, joining the local with the global and reaching across people from different backgrounds. One of our ideas is to establish a global platform connecting volunteers and sharing ideas related to volunteering. Alongside sharing and connecting, the platform could foster greater ownership, for example, by encouraging the election of representatives to speak on behalf of volunteers at the regional or global levels.

The Decade of Action calls on all sectors of society to take action at the local, national and global levels, to generate an unstoppable movement. Collective action – that is, action by all people and all stakeholders – is required to face the challenges now on the horizon. Laying a solid foundation for volunteering means including everyone and not limiting volunteering to specific groups or nations. This is the ethos of equitable and sustainable development. In reinforcing the idea that “volunteering is for all” we can ensure that we all play our part to achieve the SDGs through 2030 and beyond!

Annexes

Annex A. Terms and concepts

For the purposes of the report, **volunteerism** is understood to be "a wide range of activities undertaken of free will, for the general public good, for which monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor" (UNGA 2002).

Formal volunteering usually involves volunteers making a regular commitment and contributing their time to a civil society organization, governmental organization or private sector company (UNV 2015).

Informal volunteering happens outside of organizational structures and takes different forms, including community-based activities and larger-scale mobilization of citizens, for example to respond to humanitarian disasters (UNV 2015).

Annex B. Countries mentioning positive contributions of volunteering to the SDGs in Voluntary National Review reports 2016–2019

2016 (4 of 22)			
Estonia	France	Republic of Korea	Switzerland
2017 (15 of 43)			
Belgium	Belize	Costa Rica	Cyprus
Denmark	Ethiopia	Guatemala	Indonesia
Italy	Jordan	Malaysia	Nigeria
Portugal	Slovenia	Thailand	
2018 (29 of 46)			
Andorra	Australia	Bahrain	Bhutan
Cabo Verde	Canada	Ecuador	Greece
Guinea	Hungary	Ireland	Jamaica
Kiribati	Lao People's Democratic Republic	Lebanon	Lithuania
Mali	Malta	Mexico	Niger
Poland	Saudi Arabia	Singapore	Slovakia
Spain	Sri Lanka	Togo	United Arab Emirates
Viet Nam			
2019 (25 of 47)			
Azerbaijan	Burkina Faso	Cambodia	Cameroon
Central African Republic	Chile	Côte d'Ivoire	Croatia
Ghana	Guyana	Iceland	Indonesia
Iraq	Israel	Kazakhstan	Lesotho
Liechtenstein	Mongolia	New Zealand	Pakistan
Philippines	Sierra Leone	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Timor-Leste
Turkey			

Annex C. Countries reporting on Plan of Action objectives through their Voluntary National Reviews 2016–2019

Objectives	Number and names of countries reporting			
	2016	2017	2018	2019
1. Demonstrate volunteering as a way to secure people's ownership of the 2030 Agenda	4 countries *Estonia, France, Republic of Korea, Switzerland*	10 countries *Belgium, Belize, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Denmark, Jordan, Nigeria, Portugal, Slovenia, Thailand*	26 countries *Albania, Australia, Andorra, Bahrain, Bhutan, Canada, Ecuador, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Malta, Mexico, Niger, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Togo, Vietnam, UAE*	18 countries *Cameroon, Central African Republic, Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Chile, Croatia, Ghana, Iceland, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Lesotho, New Zealand, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Turkey, UK*
2. Volunteering integrated into national policies and plans	0 countries	7 countries *Cyprus, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Italy, Jordan, Thailand*	10 countries *Guinea, Kiribati, Lebanon, Lithuania, Niger, Poland, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Togo*	12 countries *Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guyana, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Philippines, Turkey, UK*
3. Volunteering measurement as part of understanding well-being and development	0 countries	1 country *Jordan*	4 countries *Australia, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Togo*	2 countries *Mongolia, UK*

Annex D. Countries submitting National Situation Analyses to the Plan of Action

Region	Countries	
West and Central Africa	Benin Burkina Faso Cameroon	Niger Togo
East and Southern Africa	Burundi Ethiopia Madagascar Malawi	Mozambique Uganda Zambia Zimbabwe
Arab States	Iraq Somalia	State of Palestine Sudan
Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States	Austria Azerbaijan Croatia Cyprus Czech Republic France Germany Kazakhstan	Malta Montenegro Netherlands Russian Federation United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Asia and the Pacific	Afghanistan Cambodia China	India Sri Lanka Thailand
Latin America and the Caribbean	Brazil Chile Ecuador Mexico	Paraguay Peru Uruguay

Annex E. List of countries that have conducted at least one measurement of volunteering between 2007 and 2019

Country	Year
Albania	2011
Algeria	2012
Andorra	2017
Argentina	2013
Armenia	2008
Australia	2010, 2014, 2016
Austria	2011, 2015
Azerbaijan	2008, 2009
Bangladesh	2010, 2016 2017
Belarus	2015, 2016
Belgium	2013, 2014, 2015
Brazil	2012, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
Brunei Darussalam	2016, 2017
Bulgaria	2010, 2015
Cabo Verde	2012
Canada	2010, 2013, 2018
Chile	2015
China	2008
Colombia	2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
Costa Rica	2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
Croatia	2015
Cyprus	2015
Czech Republic	2013, 2015
Denmark	2009, 2015
Dominica	2011, 2013
Ecuador	2012
Estonia	2010, 2015
Ethiopia	2013

Country	Year
Finland	2009, 2015, 2017
France	2010, 2013, 2015, 2016
Germany	2012, 2015
Ghana	2009
Greece	2014, 2015, 2017
Guatemala	2011
Honduras	2009
Hungary	2010, 2011, 2014, 2015, 2017
Iceland	2015
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	2009
Ireland	2013, 2015
Israel	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
Italy	2008, 2009, 2013, 2015
Japan	2013, 2016
Kazakhstan	2012, 2017, 2018, 2019
Kenya	2009, 2016
Kyrgyzstan	2015
Lao People's Democratic Republic	2013
Latvia	2015
Lithuania	2015
Luxembourg	2014, 2015
Mali	2017
Malta	2015
Oman	2008
Mexico	2018
Mongolia	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
Morocco	2012
Nepal	2015, 2018
Netherlands	2012, 2015, 2016, 2017
New Zealand	2008, 2010, 2012, 2016, 2018
Nigeria	2015
North Macedonia	2009, 2015
Norway	2011, 2015

Country	Year
Panama	2011
Peru	2017
Poland	2010, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016
Portugal	2012, 2015, 2018
Qatar	2012
Republic of Korea	2011, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2019
Republic of Moldova	2012, 2015
Romania	2012, 2015
Russian Federation	2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
Saudi Arabia	2018
Serbia	2010, 2015
Seychelles	2016, 2017
Singapore	2012, 2014, 2016
Slovakia	2015
Slovenia	2015
South Africa	2010, 2014, 2018
Spain	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
Sri Lanka	2017
Suriname	2012
Sweden	2011, 2012, 2015
Switzerland	2010, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016
Tajikistan	2016
Thailand	2009, 2013
Turkey	2015
Uganda	2017
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	2015, 2017
United Republic of Tanzania	2014
United States of America	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of	2013

NOTES

1 UNGA 2015a.
2 The Decade of Action calls for "accelerating sustainable solutions to all the world's biggest challenges – ranging from poverty and gender to climate change, inequality and closing the finance gap". For the Decade of Action, the United Nations Secretary-General calls on "all sectors of society to mobilize on three levels: global action to secure greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals; local action embedding the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities; and people action, including by youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders, to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations." (UNGA 2020).
3 UNGA 2015c.
4 The Global Technical Meeting will be co-chaired by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) as requested by United Nations General Assembly Resolutions A/RES/70/129 and A/RES/73/140.
5 The Plan of Action was jointly developed by governments, civil society, the private sector and volunteers to consider how best to acknowledge and maximize the impact of volunteering over the next decade and beyond. Resolution A/RES/70/129 "Integrating volunteering in peace and development: The Plan of Action for the next decade and beyond", adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2015, provides a global framework through which stakeholders can support and leverage the potential of volunteerism to deepen civic engagement and sustainable development outcomes. This was followed by UNGA resolution A/RES/73/140 in 2018, which encouraged Member States to increasingly cooperate with other volunteering stakeholders to further integrate volunteerism into national development strategies; to include information on the impact of volunteerism in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the SDGs; and called for national-level analysis on volunteering as inputs for regional consultations on volunteering in 2019, to be held in the context of the annual Regional Forums on Sustainable Development.
6 IFRC 2015.
7 UNV 2018a.
8 Work by women comprises 57 per cent of global volunteering, rising to 59 per cent if only informal volunteering is considered. UNV 2018a.
9 UNV 2018b.
10 UNDP 2015.
11 UNV 1999.
12 Plan of Action 2020a.
13 UNGA 2015c.
14 Following General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/138, UNV created a zero draft Plan of Action. Between August and November 2014, consultations on the zero draft took place in Australia, Bahrain, Cambodia, Peru and South Africa, involving over 180 organizations and 500 participants. Between August 2014 and May 2015, these were supplemented by an online survey that gathered the views of over 250 respondents from governments and international, national and local organizations, as well as two informal consultations with Member States held in New York.
15 UNGA 2015c.
16 These sources have some limitations. For example, some contain the subjective analyses of contributors, which are self-reported and sometimes unverified. Despite these limitations, we believe the combination of the different types of sources and data, gathered on a global level with diverse stakeholders and addressing different themes using different methods, is a solid starting point for further discussion and setting the agenda at the GTM and beyond.
17 A total of 43 NSAs were submitted to the Plan of Action Secretariat between 2017 and 2019. They were mainly produced by governments, but also by civil society organizations, in consultation with other stakeholders including the United Nations, the private sector and VIOs.
18 United Nations 2019a.

19 The regional commissions included the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The consultations provided an opportunity for Member States and partners to discuss evidence and approaches, identify opportunities for addressing gaps in knowledge and ensure national and regional inputs into the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development take account of volunteer contributions to the 2030 Agenda.
20 Plan of Action 2020c.
21 Plan of Action 2020a.
22 The global survey was translated into more than 20 languages and received over 20,000 responses, over 80 per cent from the global South. Plan of Action 2020d.
23 MY World is a global survey for citizens to bring people's voices into official debates on the SDGs. Almost 10 million people from 194 countries contributed to the first MY World survey to help define the global goals launched in 2015. The 2015 data can be explored at http://data.myworld2015.org/.
24 UNGA 2015a.
25 Volunteering was recognized as very important for the participation of young people across regional Plan of Action consultations and additional consultations such as in Kigali, Rwanda, jointly held with the African Union. Many VNRs and NSAs also contain examples, such as in the UK, where financially disadvantaged people volunteered to gain qualifications while supporting their communities. NCVO 2018, Plan of Action 2019k.
26 Examples include Guinea, where volunteers work on environmental protection; Jamaica, where volunteers are trained in disaster risk management; Canada, where immigrants volunteered to deliver community services; and Germany, where volunteer-led initiatives have met the immediate needs of refugees and asylum seekers. Government of Canada 2018, Government of Jamaica 2018, Government of Guinea 2018, UNHCR 2017.
27 For example, in Spain, where the Government publishes guidance on how citizens can contribute to the 2030 Agenda through volunteering. Government of Spain 2018.
28 For example, online platforms in Israel and Russia connect volunteers with civil society organizations. Government of Israel 2019, Government of Russia 2018. It was notable how many of the examples of digital platforms shared involved cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning. This highlights both the potential of technological solutions to overcome resource constraints and the close link between the online innovations of the past decade and volunteer-led crowdsourcing. For example, the online skills-sharing platform in Lebanon, shared through the online call for good practices, is powered by machine learning. Plan of Action 2020c.
29 Examples include China, which has provincial volunteer federations; Chile, where the National Council of Youth Volunteers provides a space for sharing good practices (http://www.injuv.gob.cl/); and Uruguay, where the National Network of Dialogue on Volunteering and Social Commitment supports different Volunteer Involving Organizations (http://www.mesadevoluntariado.org.uy/). Government of China 2018.
30 These are increasingly supported by national networks such as CentraRSE in Guatemala (https://centrarse.org/) and global coalitions such as the Global Corporate Volunteer Council (GCVC) of the International Association for Volunteer Effort (https://www.iave.org/corporations/gcvc/) and IMPACT2030 (https://www.impact2030.com/home).
31 Government of Cambodia 2018. Other examples include certification in Croatia and volunteer passports in Austria. Government of Austria 2018 Government of Croatia 2018.
32 Government of Kazakhstan 2019, Government of Slovakia 2018.
33 Government of Togo 2018.
34 Exceptions include the reporting of older people volunteering to help youth in Azerbaijan. Government of Azerbaijan 2018.
35 Volunteers and VIOs supported consultation processes for national SDG reporting through VNRs in Sri Lanka. Government of Sri Lanka 2018.
36 Some countries also noted that participation of volunteer groups in the review and monitoring of SDG implementation needed to be further studied, such as in the NSA of Russia. Government of Russia 2018.
37 In New Zealand, volunteers organized a storytelling competition to help identify public SDG priorities and extend the conversation around sustainable development beyond government policy advisers. Government of New Zealand 2019.
38 For example, the Civil Society Organization Integrated Platform for SDGs in Sierra Leone (CIPS), which has amplified the voice of volunteers as partners in national development. Government of Sierra Leone 2019.

39 In Niger and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, volunteers gather data on SDG implementation to inform local and national policies within broader SDG monitoring frameworks. Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic 2018, Government of Niger 2018.
40 Throughout the world, environmental protection was a common area in which volunteers were involved in generating local feedback. One example is the role of volunteers in conservation in Singapore. Government of Singapore 2018.
41 In Tanzania, volunteers established an online citizen accountability platform that provides a direct link between citizens and their members of parliament. Plan of Action 2020c.
42 For example, refugees and young people in Armenia are working together to raise awareness of climate change. Plan of Action 2020c.
43 In 2019, Ireland launched a public consultation to inform the development of its national volunteering strategy for 2020–2025. The consultation received over 90 submissions from civil society, volunteers, networks and other stakeholders. The volunteering legislation in Paraguay was also developed through a consultative process involving volunteering organizations, legal and academic experts and the government. Government of Ireland 2019, Government of Paraguay 2018.
44 Government of the United Arab Emirates 2017.
45 This ranged from raising awareness of key challenges and solutions among and by marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as volunteer radio broadcasters in the Lao People's Democratic Republic to increase awareness of issues related to livelihoods, education and health. Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic 2018.
46 For example, in the Plan of Action regional consultation for Africa, a VIO stressed the importance of volunteering for empowering people with disabilities and unlocking their potential to contribute to and drive their own development. Plan of Action 2019g.
47 Examples include an initiative in Singapore, in which female volunteers expand their social and professional networks and obtain support and guidance from female leaders; and Liberia, where female volunteers led peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts, including through reintegrating demobilized fighters, building community centers and convening dialogues. Government of Singapore 2018, Plan of Action 2019a.
48 Examples include the corporate Sabancı Volunteers Programme in Turkey, which works to change norms that discourage women from entering business; and the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana scheme in India, which engages volunteers (primarily women) to raise awareness of the importance of education for girls. Plan of Action 2020c. Government of India 2018.
49 For example, as shared by France at the regional ECE consultation. Plan of Action 2019i.
50 A UNV paper published in 2018 found that roughly half of 91 countries surveyed had national legislation or policies stipulating the inclusion of specific under-represented categories of volunteers (for example, women, elderly, youth, minorities, indigenous populations, or people with disabilities). UNV 2018b.
51 Côte d'Ivoire expanded its national scheme to encourage broader geographical participation. Government of Côte d'Ivoire 2019.
52 UNGA 2015c.
53 Plan of Action 2019e.
54 For example, in the Netherlands, the task of supporting and promoting volunteerism has been transferred to municipalities. European Commission 2010.
55 According to an ongoing crowdsourcing of data on volunteering infrastructure based on a dataset gathered for the State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2018. The data will be accessible on the forthcoming volunteering knowledge portal that will be launched at the GTM. UNV 2020.
56 For example, legislation enacted by the Emirate of Dubai in 2018 or the 2017 update to legislation on volunteering in Brazil. Government of Brazil 2018, Plan of Action 2019e.
57 In Burundi, new volunteering legislation was enacted in July 2018 to contribute directly to achieving the eight pillars of the national sustainable development strategy for 2025, specifically the goal of increasing employment and household incomes and alleviating poverty. Government of Burundi 2018.
58 For example, the new youth policy in Kiribati includes volunteering as a way to inclusively engage youth in national development. In the Arab States, where 17 per cent of the population is 15–24 years of age, countries like Bahrain and Morocco have introduced national policies that emphasize the value and contribution of volunteerism to youth employability. According to ongoing analysis by UNV, at least 35 United Nations Member States have integrated volunteering in their national youth laws, policies, plans, strategies and schemes. Government of Kiribati 2018, UNV 2015b, Government of Bahrain 2018, UNV 2020.

59 For example, in Ecuador, where the National Secretariat for Risk Reduction and Emergencies has implemented an initiative to integrate volunteering into local plans for disaster risk reduction to improve capacity and share experiences, and Myanmar, where volunteers are an integral part of the country's disaster risk reduction action plan. Government of Ecuador 2018, Government of Myanmar 2017.

60 For example, at the joint Plan of Action and African Union consultation in Kigali, Rwanda, coordinating bodies and platforms were recognized as important for increasing ownership. Plan of Action 2019j.

61 For example, in Poland, where a national body brings together all streams of volunteering to facilitate coordination with the government, and in Mexico, where the national volunteering platform was established in 2015 in collaboration with the National Institute of Social Development. Government of Poland 2018, Government of Mexico 2018.

62 Government of Madagascar 2018.

63 In Africa, many countries, including Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mauritania, Mauritius, Seychelles and Swaziland, have established national volunteer schemes. In Asia, India alone reports 15 different national schemes. Government of India 2018, Plan of Action 2019a.

64 For example, Australia and Hungary. Government of Australia 2018, Government of Hungary 2018.

65 Government of Azerbaijan 2018.

66 For example, international programmes from the Republic of Korea were presented at the Plan of Action Asia and Pacific regional consultation in the context of international development cooperation. China also includes international volunteering programmes in its overseas development policy and regional Belt and Road strategy. Government of China 2018, Plan of Action 2019b.

67 Including through the Volunteer Groups Alliance, which represents volunteers and VIOs from over 150 countries as a stakeholder group at the United Nations Economic and Social Council. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/volunteers.

68 For example, volunteering alongside more civil society, multi-stakeholder and "all of society" approaches. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction mentions volunteers six times, the Global Compact on Migration mentions volunteering once and the New Urban Agenda has no mentions of volunteers. A new United Nations report on responding to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 mentions volunteers just once. United Nations 2020.

69 For example, a 2018 European Union strategy for young people who are not in employment, education or training promotes volunteerism as a means of connecting youth, building solidarity and enhancing employability. Regional intergovernmental bodies such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) also encourage volunteerism among members to strengthen integration and a common identity. Similarly, the African Union Policy Framework for Institutionalizing Youth Volunteerism in Africa aims to develop "a youth volunteer Infrastructure at the national and regional levels within policy provisions". European Commission 2018, ASEAN 2016, African Union 2012.

70 For example, the Volunteering Reciprocity International initiative in Togo facilitates volunteer exchanges between Togo and other countries, Cambodia and Malaysia exchange volunteers working on education and health and in Latin America the Pacific Alliance youth volunteering programme facilitates exchanges between Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. Government of Cambodia 2018, Government of Chile 2018, Plan of Action 2019f.

71 For example, a national scheme in Brazil aims to encourage the active participation of society in the 2030 Agenda. Other examples include volunteer schemes in Qatar and Saudi Arabia that invite people to volunteer to be part of achieving national development objectives. Government of Brazil 2018, Plan of Action 2019e, Qatar Charity 2020.

72 Government of Burkina Faso 2019.

73 The lack of attention paid to supporting and integrating informal volunteers was raised by all the Plan of Action regional synthesis reports. The absence of informal volunteers in disaster responses was widely noted at the Plan of Action side event on humanitarian volunteering, jointly held by the Plan of Action secretariat, IFRC and the Government of Kenya, at the 33rd International IFRC Conference held in Geneva in 2019. IFRC 2019a.

74 In VNRs for 2016-2019, only 4 per cent of countries reported plans to measure volunteering. Around 60 per cent of NSAs mentioned current or future plans for measurement and according to analysis by UNV, 95 Member States measured volunteering between 2007 and 2019. UNV 2020.

75 From the ECE region, six out of the 10 countries submitting NSAs outlined their measurement methods. This included a survey on social participation and social giving in Canada, dedicated surveys in Germany and dedicated modules attached to labour force surveys in Moldova. Plan of Action 2019c.
76 Arab States: Algeria, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia. Africa: Cabo Verde, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Seychelles, South Africa, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania. UNV, 2020.
77 For example, a key message from the Plan of Action Africa regional consultation was that without sufficient data, it is difficult to advocate for volunteering as a form of development and further its integration into efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the 2063 Agenda for Africa. Participants at the meeting expressed that the data on the contribution of volunteers is not systematically collected and that governments and other partners must work together to collect and improve the quality of data on volunteering. Plan of Action 2019g.
78 Plan of Action 2019f.
79 For example, as reported by countries at the Plan of Action consultation in Moscow and the ESCWA regional consultation.
80 ILO 2018a.
81 Afghanistan, Jordan, Kuwait and the State of Palestine have all expressed their interest in developing statistical tools. ILO 2018a, Government of Jordan 2018, Plan of Action 2019e.
82 Some countries are already doing this, for example in Madagascar a baseline study measured the economic value of volunteering, while Norway regularly publishes statistics showing the contribution volunteers make to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Government of Madagascar 2018, UNGA 2018b.
83 Government of Bhutan 2018.
84 For example, Butcher and Einolf's anthology on volunteering in the global South, Patel and others' five-country study in Southern Africa, the Volunteering in Conflicts and Emergencies Initiative (ViCE) on the experiences of local volunteers and research by the Center for Social Development at Washington University on productive ageing and senior volunteering. Butcher and Einolf 2017, CSD 2011, Patel and others 2007, Swedish Red Cross 2020.
85 For example, the Singapore International Foundation includes the economic value of volunteers in project and annual reporting (https://www.sif.org.sg/) and IMPACT2030 has launched a toolbox to measure contributions to the SDGs. Projects such as research by Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO) and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) ViCE listening study are helping to inform broader measurement efforts. IMPACT2030 2020, Swedish Red Cross 2020.
86 See, for example, Patel and others 2007.
87 For example, new "How's Life?" by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) includes a focus on volunteering. OECD 2020.
88 The Plan of Action Innovation Challenge asks innovators to come up with ideas for using existing data on volunteer work to help understand analytical approaches and alternative data sources, indicators and models of development. The seven papers will be published as part of an anthology for the GTM and will also inform a toolkit being developed by UNV for the measurement of volunteer work.
89 This includes VIOs and VIO platforms on which volunteer time and contributions are logged, natural language processing techniques are applied on analytics and large datasets are organized to gain big-data insights on volunteer profiles and action. One example is a digital platform in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, where volunteers log their hours and skills. Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 2019.
90 Plan of Action 2019j.
91 Plan of Action 2020e.
92 Saudi Arabia has calculated its 55,832 national volunteers contributed $12 million to the economy in 2017, while Mongolia has estimated that its 27,312 volunteers have contributed approximately $2 million in economic benefits. Government of Mongolia 2019, Government of Saudi Arabia 2018.
93 Plan of Action 2020b.
94 Chancel and Demailly 2015.
95 The 20 contributors and the 20 questions were selected through a shortlisting process that included the views of the Plan of Action Technical Working Group, the four workstreams that fed into the GTM2020 planning process and the Plan of Action Expert Advisory Group. The final selection was conducted by the Plan of Action Secretariat based on a set of criteria that considered regional, gender and sectoral balance. Each author was invited to write voluntarily, without financial compensation. Where authors were unavailable, alternative authors were selected.

96 UN Women 2020.
97 UNV 2018a.
98 UN Women 2019.
99 ILO 2018b.
100 UNFPA 2011.
101 See https://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/beijing-plus-25/about.
102 UNHCR 2020.
103 United Nations 2019b.
104 UNV 2018a.
105 PBI 2016.
106 Constanza 2015.
107 For example, indigenous volunteers have supported Pueblo and Navajo communities in the United States. Hartigan Shea 2020.
108 ILO 2020.
109 UNECE 2018.
110 Kaseke 2013.
111 For example, informal volunteers help widows and orphans by assisting with ploughing, weeding and harvesting. Kaseke 2013.
112 UNV 2018a.
113 Butcher and Einolf 2017.
114 UNDP 2018.
115 See for example Russell and others 2019.
116 Public Opinion Foundation 2019.
117 Association of Volunteer Centers 2019.
118 CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV 2008.
119 CIVICUS 2020a.
120 CIVICUS 2020b.
121 CIVICUS 2020c.
122 Duignan 2019.
123 Tata 2020.
124 Tata 2018.
125 Laurie and Baillie Smith 2017.
126 Thomas and others 2018.
127 Griffiths and others 2018.
128 The national societies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone provide their volunteers with similar support. IFRC 2019b.
129 Similarly, the Yemeni Red Crescent Society developed a volunteer solidarity fund that inspired the Red Cross Society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to launch their own fund. Swedish Red Cross 2017.
130 Swedish Red Cross 2018.
131 Haddad 2015.
132 Plan of Action 2020a.
133 Government of Togo 2013.
134 For more information, see https://www.spc.int/updates/news/2019/05/launch-of-the-wake-up-project-to-engage-pacific-youth-in-prevention-and.
135 The scheme deployed more than 600 retired teachers and nurses to the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Tuvalu and Vanuatu between 2012 and 2019.
136 Mati and Perold 2012, Mati 2016.
137 Butcher and Einolf 2017.
138 https://ecofun.id/.
139 UNGA 2015a.
140 UNGA 2015b.

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PLAN OF ACTION TO INTEGRATE VOLUNTEERING INTO THE 2030 AGENDA

The Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda is a framework under the auspices of the United Nations through which Governments, United Nations entities, volunteer-involving organizations, private sector, civil society including academia and other stakeholders come together to integrate volunteerism into the planning and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by:
a) strengthening people's ownership of the development agenda;
b) integrating volunteerism into national and global implementation strategies; and
c) measuring volunteerism.

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