BASIC SERVICES AND VOLUNTEERISM:
Considerations for post-2015 development agenda

Discussions to date on the post-2015 UN development agenda have reinforced the commitment to meeting basic human needs as a fundamental priority, with poverty eradication as the ultimate goal. Central to realizing this objective is inclusive social development that ensures that no-one goes without access to basic quality services such as health and education, which are basic human rights and form the foundations for wellbeing. Without improvements in the capacity of government institutions to deliver essential services, the effective implementation of a new development agenda, no matter how ambitious or transformational, will remain limited. Addressing contextual and multidimensional barriers to equitable basic services is equally critical.

Volunteer action, when well facilitated, can be a particularly effective mechanism to foster support and complement the state provision of essential services across a number of sectors. The evidence presented in this Issue Brief demonstrates how volunteer programmes provide concrete opportunities for wider participation in development processes, often including the otherwise marginalized and excluded, which can positively influence the reach and qualitative outcomes of service delivery. Volunteerism also promotes social transformation through its ability to effect political, attitudinal and behavioural change, which can be a strategic means for overcoming the many barriers that stand in the way of access to basic services for all.

In Burkina Faso a local volunteer teacher helps to progress achievement of universal primary education. © Philippe Pernet, 2010

I. Delivery of basic services and inclusive development

Ensuring access to basic public services such as primary education, health care and clean water supply, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable, will be a critical component of achieving the goal of eradication of global poverty and promoting inclusive development in a post-2015 world. Lack of or unequal access to such services reinforces gaps in human capabilities and perpetuates inequalities across generations.[1] While there has been notable progress at the global level in the achievement of several targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, assessments show that trends have been uneven across countries and regions and among social groups.[2] The focus of the MDGs on national and global averages has often concealed gaps in equality that are present at sub-national levels.[3] The UN-led post-2015 processes are rightly emphasizing inclusive development as the basis of the new development framework. The UN System

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1   UNTT 2012a, p. 26.

2   UNGA 2013b; UNTT 2012b.

3   Wild and Foresti 2013; UNTT 2012c.

VolunteerActionCounts

UN Volunteers
inspiration in action

Task Team[4] has identified 'inclusive social development' as a core dimension of sustainable development,[5] while the High-Level Panel[6] recognized leaving 'no-one behind' as one of the five transformative shifts required in its vision of ending extreme poverty in a post-2015 world.[7]

Box 1. Basic services

The provision of basic services such as clean water and sanitation, health care and primary and secondary education is a key ingredient of human development and wellbeing. As the 2013 Report of the Secretary-General to the United Nations General Assembly stated, *no person should go hungry, lack shelter or clean water and sanitation, face social and economic exclusion or live without access to basic health services and education. These are human rights, and form the foundations for a decent life*.[8] The efficient and equitable provision of such essential services is critical for enabling the poor to overcome the deprivations of poverty, including lack of capabilities, allowing one to live the life one values.[9]

Many factors affect how, to whom and to what degree of quality public services are delivered (Box 1). As a 2004 World Bank Report stated, *too often services fail poor people…they are often inaccessible or prohibitively expensive. But even when accessible, they are often dysfunctional, extremely low in technical quality, and unresponsive to the needs of a diverse clientele*.[10] Weak financial and basic infrastructure and poor management policies play a role in this, but the underlying roots of poverty and inequality play an equally critical role. Contextual factors that have their basis in political, cultural and societal structures — that is, *power relations and systemic legacies that combine to shape the motivations and behaviours of different actors* — all affect equitable and efficient service delivery processes and outcomes.[11] Moreover, since the poor

are not a homogenous group,[12] different groups face different, often multiple, barriers that go beyond service quality or lack of financial resources. For example, it is well documented in development discourse that women accessing services experience discrimination due to factors such as early marriage and childbearing, lower wages and lack of property rights.[13]

The responsibility for ensuring access to and quality of basic services for all fundamentally lies with the state.[14] However, the reality is that many factors in developing countries worldwide, including urbanization and rapid population growth, are increasing pressure on service delivery systems, and national and local governments cannot adequately address these challenges on their own. Improving access to and quality of public services involves not only effective national protection systems and strategies for social development but also local action and leadership coordinated within a governance framework.[15] Finding new pathways that open up space for strong collective action by new and emerging actors has become critical for promoting more equitable, effective and sustainable service delivery.[16]

There is already a clear call for the new post-2015 development agenda to move away from a top-to-bottom or state-to-state approach towards one that involves ordinary citizens in shaping and implementing developmental processes. The 2013 United Nations Development Group report, which captured the conclusions of 88 national consultations, 11 thematic consultations and the MY World global survey on the post-2015 agenda, highlighted that *the consultations have revealed a huge appetite and demand for involvement not only in the design of the development agenda, but also in its future implementation…people, businesses and civil society organizations want to be engaged in creating development solutions while holding governments and the international community accountable for implementation… not just of the 'what', but also 'how' we do development*.[17] In specific references to basic service delivery, the consultations emphasized that *there is a keen sense that without improvements in the capacity and transparency of government institutions, particularly their capacity to deliver public services…the benefit of developing a new, ambitious development agenda may be limited.*[18]

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

5   UNTT 2012a, pp. 26–27.

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

7   HLP 2013, pp. 7–8.

8   UNGA 2013b, p. 3.

9   UNESCAP et al 2007, p. 1.

10   World Bank 2004, p. 19.

11   Wild and Foresti, p. 2.

12   UNESCAP et al 2007, p. 33.

13   UNESCAP et al 2007, pp. 12–13.

14   World Bank 2004, p. 3.

15   Fraser-Moleketi 2013; UNTT 2012a.

16   UNDP 2013.

17   UNDG 2013, p. 6.

18   UNDG 2013, p. 29.

II. Volunteerism as a powerful mechanism for enhancing the delivery of basic services

Box 2. What constitutes volunteerism?

The terms *volunteering, volunteerism and voluntary activities refer to a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation,* undertaken of free will, *for the general* public good *and where* monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor (A/RES/56/38).[19] Within this conceptual framework, at least four different types of volunteer activity can be identified: *mutual aid or self-help; service to others; participation or civic engagement; and advocacy or campaigning*.[20]

Volunteer-based community action, if well facilitated and organized, can effectively complement state delivery of basic services for the poor (Box 2). While volunteerism often 'flies under the radar'[21] of policy-makers, its value as an important component of poverty reduction and sustainable development strategies has been recognized by the United Nations (Box 3). In 2001, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) explicitly recognized the *valuable contribution of volunteering…to economic and social development, benefiting society at large*, as well as *a means of enhancing resources, addressing global issues and improving the quality of life for everyone*.[22] Everyday people all over the world, of their own free will, engage in volunteer activity to improve conditions for others and themselves, achieving outcomes that substantively impact long-term human wellbeing and development (Box 4). The worldwide volunteer efforts to eradicate polio, for example, are a clear demonstration of such actions.

In 1988, the World Health Assembly called for the eradication of polio by 2000, and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI),[23] a public-private partnership led by national governments, was launched to help achieve this goal. In its two decades of operation, GPEI has mobilized 20 million volunteers all over the world to support the efforts of

Box 3. Volunteerism for poverty reduction

In 2001, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that recognized volunteerism as *an important component of any strategy aimed at, inter alia, such areas as* **poverty reduction***, sustainable development, health, disaster prevention and management and social integration and, in particular, overcoming social exclusion and discrimination* (A/RES/56/38).[24]

governments, global agencies and health workers.[25] Their activities range from administering the oral polio vaccine on national immunization days to educating communities through innovative campaign strategies.[26] By 2006, annual numbers of polio cases had decreased by over 99 percent, and polio is now considered endemic in only three countries.[27] More than 2.5 billion children have been immunized since 1988, and the contributions of volunteers have been critical in achieving this degree of success. Volunteer efforts towards polio eradication in hard-to-access areas or during cases of emergencies have been particularly noteworthy. In Afghanistan, for example, the efforts of the Afghanistan Red Crescent helped the country to dramatically reduce the number of polio cases through its health clinics and national immunization days. In 2011, when a polio outbreak struck Kenya, which is polio free but has low immunization levels, *more than 1,000 Red Cross volunteers fanned out in teams of 20, going from house to house, visiting churches, mosques and community centres, getting the message out and pre-registering children*.[28]

Volunteerism, which is rooted in mutual aid and reciprocity, can increase the pool of skills and resources available in a community to achieve developmental goals, including enhancing the efficiency and outreach of basic service delivery programmes. In a 2007 study on civic service in five countries in the South African Development Community (SADC) — Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe — the common elements that emerged in defining 'service' included the idea that civic service should provide tangible and intangible benefits to individuals, the community and the wider society. The concept was strongly associated *with a philosophy of reciprocity between the server and the beneficiaries, the achievement of self-reliance, the empowerment of individuals and communities, and the fostering of civic responsibility*.[29]

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19 UNGA 2001, p. 3.
20 UNV 1999, p. 4.
21 UNV 2011, p. 3.
22 UNGA 2001, p. 2.
23 GPEI was spearheaded by World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).
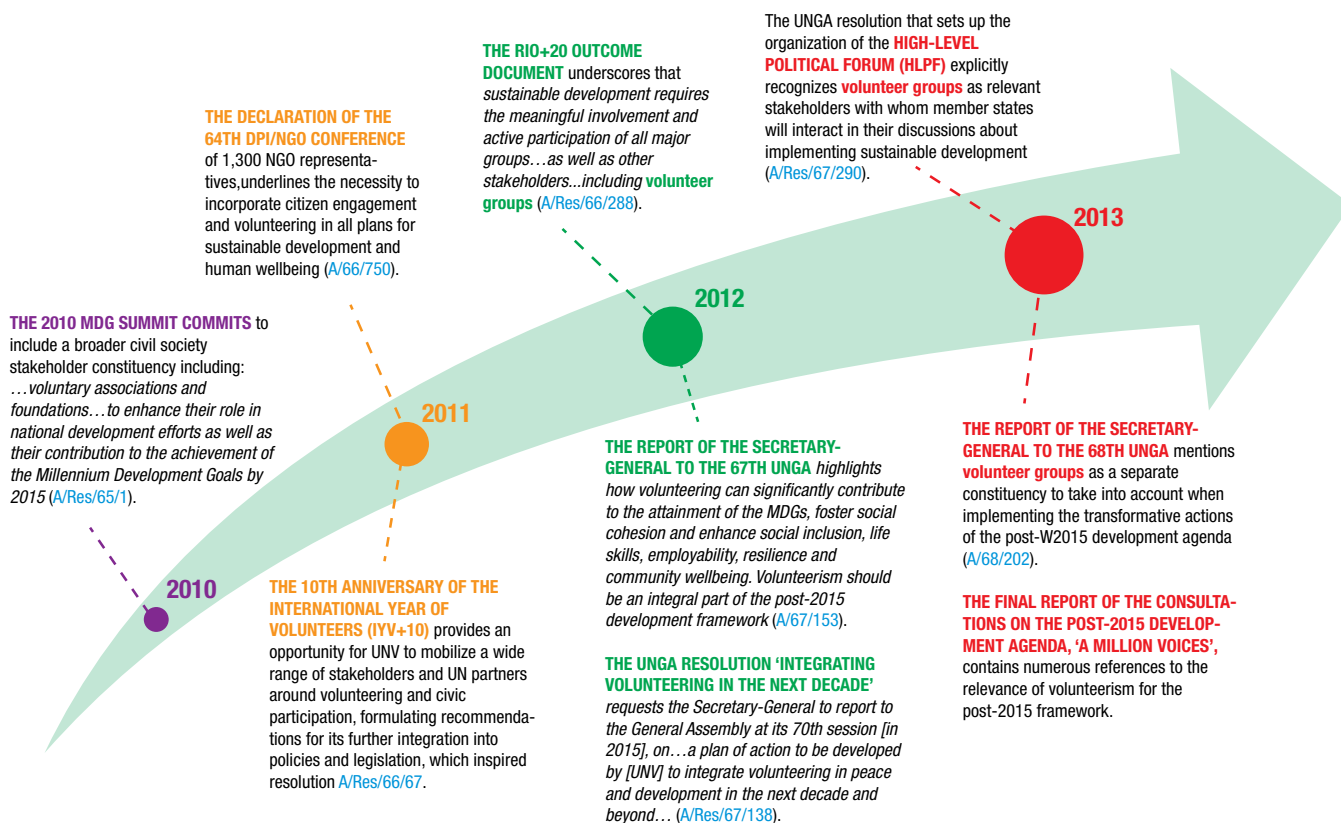
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24 UNGA 2001, p. 2.
25 GPEI 2013.
26 Majiyagbe 2004.
27 IFRC 2013.
28 IFRC 2013, pp. 6–7.
29 Patel 2007.

THE DECLARATION OF THE 64TH DPI/NGO CONFERENCE of 1,300 NGO representatives, underlines the necessity to incorporate citizen engagement and volunteering in all plans for sustainable development and human wellbeing (A/66/750).

THE RIO+20 OUTCOME DOCUMENT underscores that *sustainable development requires the meaningful involvement and active participation of all major groups…as well as other stakeholders…including volunteer groups* (A/Res/66/288).

The UNGA resolution that sets up the organization of the **HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM (HLPF)** explicitly recognizes **volunteer groups** as relevant stakeholders with whom member states will interact in their discussions about implementing sustainable development (A/Res/67/290).

THE 2010 MDG SUMMIT COMMITS to include a broader civil society stakeholder constituency including: *…voluntary associations and foundations…to enhance their role in national development efforts as well as their contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015* (A/Res/65/1).

2013

2012

2011

THE REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL TO THE 67TH UNGA *highlights how volunteering can significantly contribute to the attainment of the MDGs, foster social cohesion and enhance social inclusion, life skills, employability, resilience and community wellbeing. Volunteerism should be an integral part of the post-2015 development framework* (A/67/153).

THE REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL TO THE 68TH UNGA mentions **volunteer groups** as a separate constituency to take into account when implementing the transformative actions of the post-W2015 development agenda (A/68/202).

2010

THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF VOLUNTEERS (IYV+10) provides an opportunity for UNV to mobilize a wide range of stakeholders and UN partners around volunteering and civic participation, formulating recommendations for its further integration into policies and legislation, which inspired resolution A/Res/66/67.

THE UNGA RESOLUTION 'INTEGRATING VOLUNTEERING IN THE NEXT DECADE' *requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its 70th session [in 2015], on…a plan of action to be developed by [UNV] to integrate volunteering in peace and development in the next decade and beyond…* (A/Res/67/138).

THE FINAL REPORT OF THE CONSULTATIONS ON THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA, 'A MILLION VOICES', contains numerous references to the relevance of volunteerism for the post-2015 framework.

GRAPHIC 1: VOLUNTEERISM MILESTONES

Box 4. Youth volunteerism as a source of community strength

Young people possess the energy, creativity and determination to drive developmental progress. The following examples demonstrate what can be achieved when youth take the initiative to contribute to change in society.

- *Un Techo para Chile*: In 1997, a group of Chilean youth concerned with extreme poverty in their country set out to build 350 basic houses for families living in slums. While the initiative was intended to be short term, its success as well as the ongoing need for housing in poor areas of Chile motivated the group to continue. By 2000, the volunteers had constructed 5,701 mediaguas (basic houses), working jointly with residents in camps, neighbourhoods and apartment blocks.[30] The group, known as Techo ('roof'), now has regional offices throughout Chile and in eight other Latin American countries. To date, Techo has mobilized 500,000 volunteers in Latin America, and 85,000 families have worked together with its volunteers to construct their homes.[31]

- *Jege Otho* in Bangladesh: In 2007, a group of college and university students in Jessore district in south-western Bangladesh founded the non-governmental organization *Jege Otho* ('awaken your mind'). *Jege Otho*, which works with over 70 youth volunteers, was borne out of their motivation to educate marginalized young people in their communities who had been left out of formal service delivery systems. It established a youth centre where volunteers provide weekly English and maths tutoring to children from economically disadvantaged families. It also set up a pre-school[32] to provide children between the ages of three and six a head start in pre-formal education. The pre-school is free of cost for its students, whose parents are mainly rickshaw pullers and daily labourers.[33]

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30 CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV 2007, p. 5.

31 Techo 2013.

32 The school is open for four hours every day and is run completely by volunteers, who receive three months training on early childhood development. Many of the volunteers are studying to become teachers.

33 UNV 2013a.

It is, however, critical that volunteerism should be seen as complementing not substituting public services. A UNGA resolution of 2001 stated that while support for voluntary activities did not *imply support for government downsizing or for replacing paid employment*, governments could play an important role in creating a favourable environment

for influencing citizens' opportunities and willingness to volunteer.[34] Indeed, *in welcoming and expanding its network of partners, a government does not curtail its legitimate role and responsibility*.[35] When synergies between governments and the public are properly established, they can complement each other to increase *the efficiency and outreach of government programmes while strengthening people's and the community's trust in themselves and in their government*.[36]

The concept of national volunteering as a development tool has been promoted by a number of countries, some of which have developed their own national volunteering or civic service programmes. In Vietnam, the government established a first-of-its-kind Volunteer Information Resource Centre in 2010 to coordinate volunteering opportunities among the government, volunteer-involving organizations and individual citizens who wanted to directly contribute to their country's developmental progress. It has registered 210 organizations and 1,000 volunteers so far, and has opened two regional offices. In Togo, the government established the Promotion of National Volunteering Programme in Togo (PROVONAT) in 2011, and since then almost 3,000 national volunteers have been deployed in the field. In 2013, 750 new community volunteers, more than 40 percent of whom were women, took their oath under PROVONAT to fulfil their volunteer missions with dedication, humility and professionalism.[37]

In 2013, during the special event of the UNGA to follow up on efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, there was agreement on placing *a strong emphasis on all approaches that have a cross-cutting and multiplier effect* on the acceleration of MDG progress.[38] The added value of volunteerism in the cross-cutting processes it engenders, which go beyond 'hard' outcomes, makes it a particularly fitting development mechanism in this context. If properly harnessed, volunteerism has the potential to result in diverse multiplier effects that promote social change and empowerment, helping to overcome sociocultural barriers to the equitable delivery of essential services for the poor.

- The role volunteerism plays in **capacity development** holds central relevance in the area of service delivery. Volunteerism is often referred to as a 'capacity development multiplier' because of its inherent attributes that reinforce capacity development processes (Box 5). When volunteer-involving programmes harness the potential of these attributes, the capacities developed can spread further into the community, not just to a small

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Box 5. Volunteerism reinforces capacity development

The key characteristics associated with volunteerism reinforce capacity development. The following list, while not exhaustive, highlights some of these attributes:[39]

Values
- commitment and solidarity
- belief in collective action for the public good
- commitment to human rights and gender equity

Community ownership
- a significant number of volunteers belong to the communities they serve
- direct contact with communities through living and working at the grassroots level
- reciprocity of exchanging skills and experiences

Sustainability
- mobilizes local rather than external resources
- facilitates capacity development for many rather than a few

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number of people. Forms of volunteerism based on skill-sharing and mutual learning, such as international volunteerism and corporate volunteerism, can play an important role in strengthening the technical capacities of local service providers, especially when such initiatives are forged out of partnerships and reciprocity. There have been many notably successful basic services initiatives that have been realized with the voluntary participation of community members in partnership with government ministries and multilateral organizations (Box 6).

- **Volunteerism is predicated on the premise that everyone has something to contribute,** and it provides the space for all people to play fuller roles in the lives of their communities by making use of their skills and capacities. It opens up powerful participatory paths that promote inclusion, often of those who have traditionally been discriminated against or lack political voice in development processes. This inclusiveness plays a critical role in the area of service delivery, particularly for recipients, since it presents opportunities to advocate for change so that service provision can reach 'all', according to *their needs, priorities and conditions*.[40] In its 2004 report, the World Bank highlighted that in cases where services have 'worked' for the poor, they

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34   UNGA 2001, p. 3.

35   UNV 2000, pp. 9–10

36   UNV 2000a, p. 10

37   UNV 2013b, pp. 10–15.

38   UNGA 2013a, p. 3.

39   UNV 2000b, pp. 8–9.

40   UNESCAP et al 2007, p. 33.

Box 6. Community participation in educational progress: EDUCO in El Salvador

The example of El Salvador's 'Education with Community Participation Programme' (EDUCO), which has its roots in voluntary community action, demonstrates how partnerships between the government, multilateral organizations, parents and community groups can play a critical role in extending the reach of public educational services. In the aftermath of its 12year civil war from 1980 to 1992, El Salvador faced a severe crisis in basic education services, including very low enrolment rates, high dropout rates and poor school management.[41] Research conducted by the Ministry of Education in 1990 found that during the conflict many rural communities had voluntarily taken the initiative to provide basic education to children by organizing their own schools and administering and financially supporting them through household associations. *While these early attempts were constrained by the low rural income base, they demonstrated a strong inherent demand for education as well as a desire [by the communities] to participate in the governance of schools*.[42]

In 1991 the government followed up on these initiatives, institutionalizing them as a prototype through EDUCO to expand education in rural areas. EDUCO gave control of the administration of schools to an elected community association, *Asociación Comunal para la Educación* (ACE), drawn from the students' parents. The responsibilities of the ACEs included contracting and dismissing teachers as well as equipping and maintaining the schools. In addition, the parent associations visited the schools regularly as a way of monitoring them. Given that the programme had its genesis in grassroots practices, community commitment to it was strong. The weekly visits of ACE members to schools proved to be an effective monitoring mechanism, and each ACE visit reduced student absenteeism (due to teacher absenteeism) by 3 percent.[43] Subsequent analytical evidence indicated that the programme had also accelerated the expansion of schools, especially in the poorest rural areas, increased attendance by rural children without compromising academic achievement, and increased teacher retention.[44] EDUCO students had missed less school days due to teacher absences than those at traditional schools. When the programme was initiated, 263 ACEs were involved, and by 2003 the programme had expanded to over 2,000 ACEs and rural schools, 7,000 teachers and 362,000 students.[45]

have been at the centre of service provision and have been able to *monitor and discipline service providers by amplifying their voice in policy making, and by strengthening the incentives for providers to serve the poor.*[46] The relationship between volunteerism and social activism is particularly meaningful here as both are important strategies for fostering people's inclusive participation in the process of advocating for broader social change (Box 7).

- Given its symbiotic relationship with social activism, volunteerism can be **an important tool to strengthen accountability processes** in the provision of basic services. Increasing civic participation is a viable modality to monitor how public services are delivered (for example, see '*Volunteerism supports civic participation and accountability in service delivery processes — India, p. 8*). While social activism defines the areas of engagement and the leadership for social action, social mobilization, which is required to effect the desired change, is supported by volunteers.[47]

- **The ability of volunteerism to contribute to personal transformation,** *whereby individuals change their beliefs, perspectives and day-to-day behaviours once they have developed new awareness or understanding about a particular situation,*[48] is another of key added value that can facilitate change through the establishment of sociocultural constructs that positively influence equity and inclusiveness in service provision. The case of how volunteerism contributed to change in community attitudes and practices when it was adopted as a means of combating the cultural practice of female genital mutilation in Sudan — an issue that impacts maternal health (MDG 5), gender equality (MDG 3) and human rights — is explored later in this Issue Brief.

Volunteerism enhances the delivery of basic services: case studies

The following examples demonstrate how volunteer actions enhance the provision of and access to essential services in multidimensional ways, such as inclusive implementation, opening up concrete opportunities for wider participatory processes and promoting social transformation by effecting attitudinal and behavioural changes.

Volunteerism expands the reach of service delivery — Vietnam
When volunteerism is well integrated into development programmes and schemes, it has the potential to involve a broad range of actors and stakeholders. The wide-ranging

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41 Basaninyenzi 2011, p. 1.

42 Jiminez and Sawada 1998, p. 1.

43 World Bank 2004, p. 9.

44 Mesa et al 2004, p. 2.

45 Meza et al 2004, p. 1.

46 World Bank 2004, p. 1.

47 CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV 2007, p. 10.

48 CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV 2007, p. 1.

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Box 7 . Volunteerism and social activism: commonalities

In 2006, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme jointly commissioned a study[49] to examine the relationship between volunteering and social activism in promoting development. The study engaged over 100 volunteering-involving organizations and individuals from 53 countries. The results highlighted three areas of commonality between volunteering and social activism:

- Volunteering and social activism both foster the participation of people from varied backgrounds and provide them with a wide range of opportunities to get involved in actions that can contribute to positive social change.

- Both volunteering and social activism can be purposeful and change oriented. Volunteerism promotes social change by influencing political processes such as agenda setting, policy making and decision making. Social activism, on the other hand, plays an important role in providing leadership, defining areas of engagement and mobilizing individuals. Social activism depends on the contributions of volunteers to effect the changes sought.

- Both can be a tool for development, particularly for helping to meet global, national and local development goals. Research shows that inclusive participation in the identification, design, implementation and monitoring of development projects is crucial for their success and sustainability.

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impacts of a UNV and UNAIDS-supported project[50] in Vietnam entitled 'Promoting Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV' (2006–2011) demonstrate how inclusive volunteer programmes can encourage local capacity development and self-sufficiency as well as empowerment at the grassroots level. This project was implemented in four provinces that had a large number of people living with HIV/AIDS and self-help groups for people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS (PLHA). In order to increase the voluntary participation of PLHA in the planning and implementation of HIV interventions, the capacity development of the self-help groups through training and information sharing was a central component of the project.

Subsequent evaluations of the project indicated that it had effectively contributed to developing multiple capacities among the self-help group volunteers in skill areas such as promoting the rights of PLHA, providing care and treatment, and communicating with the media, donors and the government. Many reported that their skills had progressed from rudimentary to more advanced levels. However, the volunteers stated that the empowerment of PLHA in the provinces was one of the greatest achievements of the project. In the course of the project's activities, many PLHA were transformed from being seen as beneficiaries to becoming recognized as implementers of capacity development activities through volunteering.[51] PLHA who were involved as national UN Volunteers provided particularly effective leadership by demonstrating that it was possible to acquire skills and expertise as volunteers while advocating among local government and non-governmental organizations to improve the provision of services to PLHA.

The project succeeded in mobilizing an increasing number of community volunteers to provide counselling and home-based care support to PLHA. In Ho Chi Minh City, for example, the number of community volunteers increased from one at the commencement of the project to 50 by its conclusion.[52] The reach and impacts of the project were expanded over time, and its success visibly demonstrated to local government stakeholders the positive impacts generated by volunteer activity.[53]

Volunteerism promotes transformational change in maternal health, gender equality and human rights — Sudan
The values inherent in volunteerism endow it with far-reaching potential to enhance local public service delivery in several MDG areas and to drive transformational developmental change. A comparative advantage of volunteerism is that it begins with the individual but is firmly rooted in local communities, so it is in a prime position to facilitate change in people's mindsets, attitudes and behaviours. This powerful but rarely documented aspect of volunteerism is well captured by the findings of a series of evaluations of a UNV-supported project aimed at eliminating female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) in Sudan (2006–2009). FGM/C, which originates from the ancient traditions and religious beliefs of northern Sudanese society, today has multiple causal factors, including patriarchal gender relations, poverty, and lack of information and understanding not only about basic human rights but also about the reproductive health impacts of FGM/C on girls and women.

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49   CIVICUS, IAVE and UNV 2007.

50   The project was implemented by the Vietnam Women's Union in partnership with UNV and UNAIDS. It began with the participation of a number of PLHA self-help groups in four locations.

51   Burke 2011, p. 12.

52   Burke 2011, p. 18.

53   Burke 2011, p. 16.

The FGM/C project was implemented in two communities in Khartoum State that had had no prior exposure to FGM/C advocacy and where prevalence of FGM/C was very high (over 90 percent). Its ultimate objective was to bring about change in community attitudes through volunteer-based local action. Forty male and female community volunteers were recruited and trained to take on the role of advocates against FGM/C, and a grassroots campaign on sexual education was launched, involving advocacy, communications activities and community dialogue platforms that brought together diverse groups of participants.

The project's strong volunteering basis engendered ownership and trust among the communities and was catalytic in generating numerous positive impacts, including attitudinal and behavioural changes. The extensive advocacy groundwork done by community volunteers built momentum against FGM/C and encouraged many others to join as volunteers. Their awareness-raising activities increased broad-based support for ending FGM/C, including that of prominent community members. Twelve sheikhs from six mosques demonstrated their commitment to the cause by training to become volunteer advocates themselves.54 During the course of the project, the participation of men, young people and religious leaders who were highly respected in the communities — groups that had not been associated with previous efforts to stop FGM/C — was actively encouraged.

The fact that the volunteers were from the communities themselves was strategically very effective *since it led to greater openness during the discussions, particularly on highly sensitive topics, and gave weight to the message to abandon the traditional practice*.55 Furthermore, including male volunteers as key advocates impacted positively upon outreach activities, as men in the communities tended *to listen to [other] men and to take advice more from their peers*.56 Volunteers organized the community conversations around this, grouping males from similar age categories, professions and interests during group discussions.

Support for volunteerism in the communities grew, as demonstrated by the establishment of a local volunteer organization, MENATH, which became a focal point in the push to combat FGM/C in the area and which is now an independent organization.57 Community members also clearly became more aware of the negative impacts of FGM/C on girl children and women and understood more about the issue of human rights abuse. A survey published in 2008 reported that 69.4 percent of households had stopped practising FGM/C.58

Volunteerism supports civic participation and accountability in service delivery processes — India

Access to information is a prerequisite for holding service providers accountable for the quality of their work. Lack of information about one's rights as citizen as well as about the design and implementation of public service programmes hampers the ability of the poor to ensure that they have access to the best quality services possible in their context. The lack of access to information *about one's condition, one's rights and one's responsibilities is at the core of poverty because it makes it difficult, if not impossible, to seek access, remedy and justice, even if [essential] services are available. The poor and other politically marginalized groups may internalize this sense of powerlessness to the extent they are convinced that they have no right to participate in decision making or that participation will not make any difference to the outcome of the process*.59 The complementary relationship between volunteerism and social activism can support advocacy efforts around issues that are central to accountability in service provision, such as access to information.

The right-to-information movement in India was spearheaded by the people's organization *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS), and this case study demonstrates how social activism and volunteerism were able to combine to provide information to poor rural communities about their rights in relation to essential public services. MKSS started as a grassroots campaign by social activists to seek due payment of poor rural labourers who were denied the minimum wages owed to them. MKSS came up with the idea of *jan sunwais* (public hearings) to conduct social audits of expenditure intended for public services.60 Its first *jan sunwai*, held in 1994, at which people gave individual and collective testimony about the work done by their local government officials, highlighted to MKSS members that there were no legal provisions to allow the public to obtain information that was crucial during such public hearings, such as financial records on expenditure. At the time, MKSS was only able to access evidence with the help of sympathetic officials. In 1995, MKSS launched a state-wide campaign demanding a law on right to information for all citizens — something that was recognized as critical to a participatory democracy. The process that followed was difficult and often contested,61 but the campaign achieved its objective in 2000 when the state government of Rajasthan passed a right-to-information law.62

MKSS's central committee has 20 community members, of which only eight work full time. Various aspects of MKSS's

54   UNV 2008.

55   Elrayah 2010, p. 26.

56   Elrayah 2010, p. 28.

57   Elrayah 2013, p. 35.

58   UNV 2008.

59   UNESCAP et al 2007, pp. 36–38.

60   Sharma 2004, p. 18.

61   MKSS's jan sunwai processes and its work on right to information are well documented; see Sharma 2004.

62   Shah and Agarwal 2005; MKSS 2013; Bhatnagar et al (n.d.).

work are supported by volunteers, including the facilitation of social audit and verification processes. Volunteers go from house to house in the villages before public hearings are held, encouraging residents to scrutinize project information and attend forthcoming public hearings. Volunteers are also active in educating residents about their rights, particularly those of traditionally disempowered groups such as women, whose participation in hearings on expenditure related to public projects is strongly encouraged.63 MKSS's campaign for transparency and accountability gained mass momentum and gave rise to a national campaign for people's right to information, and in 2005 a national right-to-information act was passed by the Indian Parliament.

III.   Recommended actions

The evidence presented in this Issue Brief demonstrates how volunteerism as a means of civic engagement responds directly to the call for *broad-based ownership and sustainability ¬ of both vision and implementation*[64] that was reflected in the post-2015 global consultations on the 'world we want'. In order to realize the potential of volunteerism for advancing national development goals, it must be recognized and supported as a crucial renewable 'resource' across all sectors.

The post-2015 agenda: UNV position

1. Volunteerism is universal and strengthens civic engagement, social inclusion, solidarity and ownership.

2. Volunteerism should be part of a new measuring framework that goes beyond GDP and demonstrates progress in human wellbeing and sustainable human development.

- Volunteerism is resource efficient, not cost free. Investing in supportive public policies and legal frameworks will directly assist governments to tap into the enormous resource that volunteerism represents. Governments can proactively nurture an enabling environment for volunteerism through the creation of public programmes and schemes, the designation of local focal points and the development of enabling policies and legislation for volunteerism, including incentives to engage disadvantaged or marginalized groups.

- Governments should ensure that the regulations and budgets of respective ministries and public departments reflect their commitment to support volunteerism for development. Establishing a government-backed volunteer seed fund to supplement and encourage contributions from other donors to partner with local volunteer-involving organizations would offer key support to volunteer-related policies.

- Governments, civil society and development agencies should support research studies that measure and document various dimensions of volunteer involvement in developmental processes. Rigorously documenting impacts and good practice will be crucial in taking forward discussions on the contribution of volunteerism at the global level. Governments must also play a role in collecting data on volunteerism *disaggregated by gender, age and disability*, in partnership with civil society.[65]

- Civil society, including academia and volunteer groups, should take the lead in supporting global, national and local volunteering networks in order to widen engagement and participation. They should particularly encourage efforts to increase knowledge and understanding of local expressions of volunteerism as well as the sharing of best practices through volunteering networks.

- The new post-2015 development framework should include explicit statements about volunteerism as a cross-cutting element that leverages the delivery of basic social services. In this respect, volunteerism should therefore be integrated as an indicator in goals related to health and education.

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63 Ramkumar 2004, pp. 4–5.
64 UNDG 2013, p. 7.

65 UNGA 2012, p. 2.

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

About United Nations Volunteers

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

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

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

www.unv.org

Volunteer Action Counts

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

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

www.volunteeractioncounts.org