



## VSO's EU Aid Volunteers in Action

Building disaster-resilience  
for a fairer world



Made possible through funding from

## **EU AID Volunteers**



Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection

*WE CARE, WE ACT*

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## Introduction letter

For the last two years VSO has provided piloting opportunities for the EU Aid Volunteers Initiative. Since February 2012 we have worked with local partners and communities in Bangladesh, South Sudan, India, Pakistan and the Philippines to design appropriate EU Aid Volunteer placements. The aim has been to build the capacity of local partner organisations and support their important work around disaster preparedness, management and risk reduction as well as in post-conflict areas. Over the course of the pilots, VSO has selected, trained and deployed a total of 48 EU Aid Volunteers to fill these placements.

This pilot phase has been a welcome opportunity to evaluate whether VSO's longstanding experience of working through volunteers in the field of development would be a good match for this new humanitarian initiative from DG ECHO. Based on two pilot projects the suitability of this match is clear.

This booklet contains some inspiring snapshots of the ways in which these first VSO EU Aid Volunteers take a 'step forward'. Working with local partners and communities they are helping build latrines and set up water filtration systems in India. In the Philippines they are leveraging their skills to help map climate vulnerable areas to mitigate the risks of future typhoons. Their input, role and impact is both tangible and measurable.

We are proud to support this important initiative and share DG ECHO's vision that harnessing the experience, skills and power of 4000 EU Aid Volunteers during the coming seven years will greatly strengthen the EU's humanitarian efforts.

**Jim Emerson**  
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# VSO's EU Aid Volunteers in action

## Building disaster-resilience for a fairer world

As the number of natural and human-made disasters in the world has significantly increased in recent years, so too has the need for capacity building in the areas of disaster preparedness and risk reduction. Since 2012, VSO has been working with the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (DG-ECHO) on a pioneering new pilot programme – the EU Aid Volunteer Initiative – to support the EU's humanitarian work through the deployment of volunteers to deliver humanitarian assistance. The EU Aid Volunteers Initiative seeks to deliver disaster relief, rehabilitation and sustainable development by harnessing the energy and expertise of Europeans who wish to offer practical help where it is needed most.

VSO is well placed to support the EU's humanitarian work worldwide. As the world's leading independent international development organisation that works with and through volunteers to deliver high-impact sustainable development projects, VSO has placed more than 40,000 volunteers from 94 nationalities to fight poverty in 90 countries since it was established more than fifty years ago. Since 1958, VSO volunteers have been changing lives for the better by bringing people together to share skills, knowledge and promote greater understanding in the communities in which our volunteers work. VSO's vision is of a world without poverty and we believe people are the best agents of change in achieving this goal.

Working in partnership at the global and local level is at the heart of VSO's mission to combat poverty and disadvantage in developing countries. By working with DG-ECHO on the EU Aid Volunteer Initiative (EUAV) VSO, through our volunteers, is making a lasting difference on the ground in contributing to the EU's humanitarian efforts. This booklet aims to share some of the inspiring stories from VSO's EU Aid Volunteers who have taken part in the pilot initiative Building in Resilience. It focuses on two projects involving volunteers from five European countries who have worked to deliver humanitarian assistance alongside local partner organisations in the Philippines and India.



**“We cannot stop disasters from happening but we can prevent them from killing more people”**

Kristalina Georgieva, former-European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response (ECHO)



## Overall action in the Philippines: Supporting disaster preparedness and prevention

In November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan devastated entire communities and caused catastrophic destruction to infrastructure on an unprecedented scale in the Philippines. Although the country is prone to flooding, typhoons and earthquakes, it was one of the deadliest tropical storms experienced ever recorded in history claiming over 6000 lives and leaving millions of people homeless. One year on, more than 14m people are still rebuilding their livelihoods ravaged by the typhoon.

In an effort to strengthen measures to support disaster preparedness and prevention at the national and local level, VSO-EU Aid Volunteers have been sharing their skills, expertise and knowledge to support the implementation of the National Operational Assessment of Hazards (NOAH) programme. Through sophisticated 3D digital mapping, NOAH enables flood warning agencies to provide

a six hour warning system for vulnerable communities. In the field, volunteers have been visiting flood-prone areas to assess, review and advise on how to overcome barriers to the effectiveness of the Filipino Government's national disaster management policy that is designed to protect lives, livelihoods and land.

A major component of this national effort is the Disaster Risk and Exposure Assessment for Mitigation - or DREAM Project – that maps the country's major river basins to predict flood-hazard areas and provide lifesaving information on critical infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and roads. Through the practical application of science and technology, VSO-EU Aid volunteer action is making a difference on the ground so that national agencies and disaster-prone communities are better prepared and more resilient to the threat of future natural disasters.



## VSO EU Aid Volunteering in action: Saving lives through digital mapping

Community leader, Anita Ayuban, has lived her entire life facing the devastating effect of typhoons, flooding, and earthquakes. Following Typhoon Haiyan, she remains haunted by the destruction that a natural disaster can bring when a community is unprepared. Driven by a desire to prepare for future disasters, Anita is one of forty community leaders who attended an OpenStreetMap workshop organised by VSO-EU Aid Volunteer, Arnoud Keizer.

Using his professional experience in disaster preparedness and prevention, the Dutch volunteer teaches community leaders to use GPS devices to digitally map their villages. In turn, they mobilise local volunteers in using the technology to create 3D hazard maps that identify which areas are most likely to be affected by flooding – crucially enabling community volunteers to actively participate in disaster preparation measures.

“Knowing in advance where important buildings at least risk of flooding are located; which places are most suitable for evacuation centres and how likely a place can be reached after an earthquake is lifesaving information”, explains Arnoud, who is one of four VSO-EU Aid volunteers who have supported the project so far.

Following her OpenStreetMap training, Anita is now confident of the benefits that digital mapping can have in disaster preparedness. She concludes, “mapping critical infrastructure helps you know where it is safe to go so you can have a proper plan in place - which I believe will save lives.” The project’s goal is to produce flood maps for all the country’s major river basins, with the aim of producing accurate flood maps for disaster-prone communities.

















## **Overall action in India: Linking emergency disaster relief to long-term development**

Rural communities in Indian states such as Assam and Jharkhand are highly susceptible to natural disasters like flooding caused by increasingly unpredictable monsoon weather patterns and tropical cyclones. VSO-EU Aid Volunteers have been sharing their skills and knowledge in the community alongside other international development agencies and local partner organisations on nine-month placements. They are improving access to safe drinking water and better sanitation in flood prone areas to mitigate the loss of livelihoods in the community.

Rather than focussing solely on disaster relief measures, VSO-EU Aid volunteers have been using their skills and knowledge to link humanitarian assistance to longer-term development by supporting communities to prepare for and cope with future disasters by implementing stronger risk adaptation

strategies. Working alongside local NGOs, VSO-EU Aid volunteers have been developing a range of initiatives such as educational health campaigns aimed at schoolchildren to devising innovative water harvesting and filtration systems that provide clean drinkable water all year round. As a result, the implementation of sustainable grassroots solutions to address local challenges is already having a significant impact on the lives of men, women and children in the community and their livelihood security for years to come.



## VSO EU Aid Volunteering in action: Preparing for when the floods arrive

During the monsoon, the Brahmaputra river floods large swathes of the remote Jorhat district in Assam, India. With no access to proper sanitation, health and hygiene issues threaten the livelihoods of communities that have settled for generations along the low-lying flood plains. In order to provide a sustainable solution to the challenges that the community face in accessing clean water, VSO-EU Aid Volunteer, Sarah Matthews, has carried out field demonstrations for chlorination and raised hand pumps in remote villages.

In the firm belief that long-term development comes from supporting local agencies by helping train their staff with 'good practice' approaches, Sarah is working with OXFAM's local partner, North East Affected Area Development Society (NEADS), to train and enhance their skills in water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion (WASH) activities.

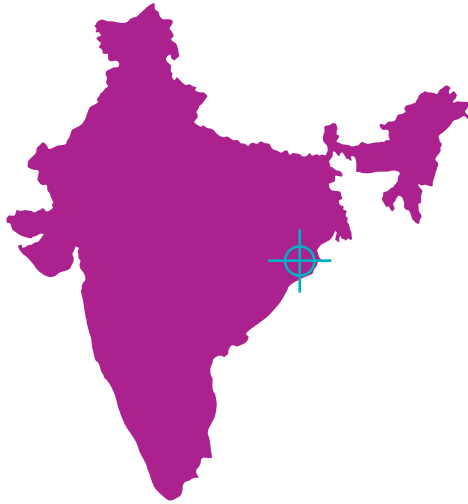
Using her skills and experience in WASH initiatives, Sarah has offered advice on the design of the raised water point and has supported the community in Kumargaon village on its construction. Working in one of India's remote regions, she has also contributed to the disaster risk reduction efforts of NEADS by finding sustainable solutions to local challenges with the adaptation of a floating latrine model that is widely used in Bangladesh. Sarah undertook the volunteer position to work with communities where sustainable development is essential and says she has benefited from the experience. She adds, "working with a community to find the best possible solutions to their problems, and seeing the community benefit from the initiatives has been satisfying".











## VSO EU Aid Volunteering in action: Innovating access to safe drinking water

Residents of Haraspada village in the Puri district of Odisha, India, live on the low-lying flood plains on the northern edge of Lake Chilika. In the aftermath of the monsoon season and subsequent flooding, they have no access to clean drinking water. VSO-EU Aid Volunteer, Robin Ward, talked to local villagers about the challenges they face and came up with an innovative solution. Realising that while there was enough water around, yet unsafe to drink, he developed a filtration tank to purify pond water by raising the tank above anticipated maximum flood levels.

With the support of local partner, the Society for Leprosy Amelioration and Rehabilitation (SOLAR), he designed and implemented the idea through discussions with the community to build the filtration tank 15 feet above ground level. From planning through to completion, Robin involved residents

in the construction of the tank to share skills and make it possible for the entire village to access safe drinking water throughout the year. Antarjami Biswali, a small landowner in the village, said, “This is the season when there used to be a lot of illnesses in the village. This year, we have all started using the water from the filtration tanks for drinking and cooking. Already we are seeing the number of people falling sick reduce”.

Since this EU Aid Volunteer-led pilot project in the area aimed at improving access to clean drinking water for one community, residents from nearby villages have now been inspired by the ‘Pond Filter’ with a view to creating a similar system for themselves.









## **Acknowledgements**

Philippines photographs by Peter Caton

India photographs by Anubhav Das

**VSO International website**  
[www.vsointernational.org/what-we-do/eu-aid/](http://www.vsointernational.org/what-we-do/eu-aid/)

**ECHO Website**  
[www.ec.europa.eu/echo/en](http://www.ec.europa.eu/echo/en)

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