

Volunteerism and the Post-2015 Agenda



The experience of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has taught us that, in order to be sustainable, international development cooperation must look beyond technical and financial assistance to people-centred approaches and solutions that are devised from the ground up. The act of volunteering is a demonstration of this bottom up approach to development in which civic engagement and accountability to citizens can be strengthened. Additionally, volunteers are an important means by which any development goal framework will be implemented and extended to some of the poorest and most marginalised groups.

Volunteers were a vital but often invisible partner in the delivery of the MDGs. With this in mind, VSO is calling for a Post-2015 framework that recognises and effectively supports the role that volunteers can play in facilitating

people-centred, sustainable development and protects against its misuse. Failing to include volunteer groups as a recognised partner in the development process would risk missing out on the full benefits that volunteers can provide – increased accountability, enhanced social capital of citizens and an intrinsic interest in serving communities.

What is volunteering?

Volunteering is formal or informal activity that is done out of an individual's free will; is conducted outside the household for the benefit of the wider community; is driven by motives other than financial gain; and is not a substitute for paid work. In a development context, this increasingly takes the form of South to South, diaspora, corporate, international volunteering and national and skilled international, all of which are powerful 21st century mechanisms for change.

Volunteering in the Post-2015 framework – how it should feature:

Where	What	Why
Overarching narrative	Include volunteers as a named partner in development cooperation, building on UN Resolution 67/290 which identifies volunteer groups as a partner with which the High-Level Political Forum should seek to engage in the delivery and accountability mechanisms of the Post-2015 agenda.	If supported and structured properly, volunteers can and will support the implementation of the Post-2015 framework in a way that ensures it reaches the most marginalised and vulnerable populations in a people-centred and sustainable way.
Governance goal	A participation and governance goal which cements citizens', volunteer groups' and civil society's role in open, transparent governance arrangements.	This ensures that these groups are actively involved in the process of creating more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate public institutions through transparency, access to information, equal participation.
Proposed Indicator 1	Monitoring of and support for the work of volunteers in extending the provision and accessibility of education, health and other public services.	Volunteers play a complementary role in supporting the delivery of inclusive services, meeting the needs of some of the hardest-to-reach groups. These indicators will help governments to measure the contribution of volunteering and offer long-term evidence on how and where volunteers can be better integrated into national policies and strategies.
Proposed Indicator 2	Mechanisms at national and local government level that recognise and support the work of volunteers in contributing to sustainable and inclusive education/health/ other public services.	
Means of implementation	Any discussion on Means of Implementation must take into account the role of all partners, including those, like volunteer groups, that have traditionally been invisible.	This would avoid a pitfall of the MDGs, which focused on the end goal without defining the means by which goals and targets will need to be implemented . It also ensures a bottom-up approach to delivery.

The value of volunteering and its contribution to development.

Within the context of the Post-2015 framework, volunteerism provides two important and related functions:

1. Implementation

Volunteers make up a significant proportion of the informal workforce that supports the delivery of a range of MDG-related public services. They play a very specific role in extending the reach of these services to the poorest and most marginalised people who may not be reached by traditional approaches.

- Community education volunteers, for example, play a crucial role in extending education services to the children most at risk of being out of school, and in strengthening the capacity of schools to provide accessible and inclusive education. Similarly, a 2010 World Health Organization study on MDG delivery found that Community Health Volunteers provide a critical link between communities and health and social care systems. Their work can help to genuinely achieve the objective of 'leave no one behind'.
- Volunteering provides a resource-efficient, not cost-free, development approach. Volunteers are not a substitute for a paid and resourced workforce but rather are best utilised alongside a well-trained workforce.

Volunteering makes significant contribution to the economy

Proportion of volunteers in civil society workforce



About VSO

VSO is the world's leading independent international development organisation that works through volunteers to fight poverty in low income countries. We promote volunteering as a powerful and practical way to tackle poverty and inequality because we believe it is only when individuals step forward – either as local, national or global citizens – that meaningful and sustainable change happens.

2. Accountability

The process of volunteering can help to facilitate shared ownership of national, local and community development processes. Volunteers acts as a catalyst to active citizenship and participation in decision-making.

- The way that volunteers work makes them a unique and important vehicle for participatory development. As a member of a local community, or someone deeply integrated within that community, volunteers can help identify and develop locally appropriate solutions and use their networks within those communities to spread awareness and access. In this way volunteering can create a space for greater ownership of the design and implementation of policies and programmes by the people who benefit from them.
- The process of volunteering can also increase people's agency and social capital by allowing them to take on new roles and responsibilities within a community. It is often the first step towards being an active citizen and becoming aware of their rights and ability to influence change. This is particularly important for people who are often excluded from formal decision-making processes, such as women and young people. These volunteers can then become catalysts, prompting others to take action. They help to organise a collective voice, and identify and seek out spaces for that voice to be channelled, which increases citizens' ability to have a say over services in their community and hold decision-makers to account.

If volunteers were a country it would be the 9th largest

