

Position paper submitted by volunteer groups on the theme of “Strengthening integration, implementation and review - the HLPF after 2015.”

Purpose

Created in response to an invitation from the UN Secretariat on 13 April 2015 to submit a paper related to the theme of this year's HLPF "Strengthening integration, implementation and review - the HLPF after 2015", to be issued as official document of the 2015 session of the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF).¹ Key recommendations for the HLPF are listed on page 15.

Introduction

Volunteerism has a significant role to play in the implementation of the SDGs. Nearly one billion people throughout the world volunteer their time through public, nonprofit, or for-profit organizations. “Volunteeria,” if it were a country, would have the second largest adult population in the world, behind only China.² Over 17 million volunteers worldwide - most of them in the Global South - support the work and mission of the International Red Cross and Red

¹ List of contributors: this paper was drafted by staff from the following listed organizations and bodies, working under the umbrella of the Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group and representing that group’s position: Cuso International; International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum); France Volontaires; Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies; Voluntary Service Overseas; Volunteer Service Abroad; International Forum for Volunteering in Development Research Working Group.

² Lester M. Salamon, S. Wojciech Sokolowski and Megan A. Haddock, “Measuring The Economic Value of Volunteer Work Globally: Concepts, Estimates, and a Roadmap to the Future,” *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, 82:3 (September 2011) 217-252. Available at: <http://ccss.jhu.edu/publications-findings/?did=321>.

Crescent Movement alone, and a study from the Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society showed volunteers make up 44% of the nonprofit workforce.³

The year 2011 marked the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV+10) with a series of national, regional and global activities, conferences, and consultations that led UN member states to: *“acknowledge that the tenth anniversary has provided the opportunity and impetus for an increased and unprecedented level of collaboration among Governments, the United Nations system, civil society, private sector partners and people from a broad cross-section of societies all over the world, and reaffirms the need for further efforts to achieve the goals of the International Year [of volunteers] in the areas of the recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion of volunteerism worldwide.”*⁴

Building on the energy and commitment mobilized around the celebration of IYV+10, volunteer groups convened in New York in early 2012 to self-organize to engage in the preparatory process of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). Volunteer groups actively engaged in the Rio+20 Conference and their commitment was recognized by Member States through being fully acknowledged as a relevant “stakeholder” in paragraph 43 of the UN Resolution 66/288 “The future we want.” Such explicit governmental recognition further mobilized volunteer groups to define their commitments to sustainable development at the Ottawa Declaration.⁵ In this declaration, development-oriented volunteer-involving

³ Salamon, Lester M., S Wojciech Sokolowski and Associates, (2004), Global Civil Society: Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector, Volume Two, Kumarian Press. An overview of this book is available online: <http://ccss.jhu.edu/publications-findings/?did=95>

⁴ Para.2 UN GA 66/67 of 5 December 2011

⁵ The Annual Conference of International Volunteering and Cooperation Organizations (IVCO) in Ottawa took place in October 2012. The resulting “Ottawa Declaration” was agreed with the aim to make a strong case for the value

organizations identified a set of joint priorities and actions to ensure that volunteerism was explicitly recognized and supported in the Post-2015 development agenda.

The year 2012 ended with another important governmental recognition milestone for volunteer groups; the UN GA Resolution 67/138 was approved on the 10th of December. This critical resolution, “Integrating volunteering in the next decade”, calls *“Member States and other stakeholders to favor the integrating of volunteering in all relevant issues of the United Nations, in particular to contribute to accelerated achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as giving appropriate consideration to the issue in the discussions on the Post-2015 United Nations development agenda.”*⁶

With such a strong mandate and governmental recognition, volunteer groups initiated 2013 fully committed to proactively engaging in the discussions of the Open Working Group on the SDGs. In July 2013, Member States again explicitly recognized volunteer groups as a relevant stakeholder in Resolution 67/290 on the format and organizational aspects of the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development. In October 2013, over 50 international volunteering and cooperative organizations, and volunteer involving organizations working worldwide, signed “The Paris Accord on Volunteering for Sustainable Development” and again in October 2014, volunteer groups gathered to share their experience and commitment to sustainable development and agreed to re-state their widespread commitment to an inclusive

of volunteering in development and for its full recognition in the Post-2015 development agenda: <http://forum-ids.org/conferences/ivco/ivco-2012/ottawa-declaration/>

⁶ Para.9 UN GA Res 67/138 of 10 December 2012.

Post-2015 process in the “Lima Declaration.”⁷ While, following the IAVE 23rd World Volunteer Conference in September 2015, over 600 leaders from the breadth of the global volunteer community, from global corporations and international NGOs to grassroots leaders and social entrepreneurs, joined IAVE’s call to have volunteering recognized as a strategic asset in the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

The global effort to include and value volunteerism in the Sustainable Development Goals was explicitly recognized by the UN Secretary-General’s Synthesis Report on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in paragraph 131: *“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.”*

Most recently, in March 2015, the Sendai Outcome document recognized volunteers as relevant stakeholders in paragraph 7 and 36 and encouraged *“Civil society, volunteers, organized voluntary work organizations and community-based organizations to: participate, in collaboration with public institutions, to, inter alia, provide specific knowledge and pragmatic guidance in the context of the development and implementation of normative frameworks, standards and plans for disaster risk reduction; engage in the implementation of local, national,*

⁷ The Lima Declaration is a statement of agreed priorities and messages as international volunteering cooperation organizations for the Post-2015 Development Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): <http://forum-ids.org/conferences/ivco/ivco-2014/lima-declaration/>

regional and global plans and strategies; contribute to and support public awareness, a culture of prevention and education on disaster risk; and advocate for resilient communities and an inclusive and all-of-society disaster risk management which strengthen the synergies across groups, as appropriate.”

Today, the collective effort to recognize volunteerism in the future development agenda is led by an international coalition of volunteer groups, working in 146 countries, organized around the “Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group.”⁸ The Working Group is open to all organizations that work with and through volunteers - locally, nationally and internationally. The members of the Working Group represent the diversity of volunteerism and reflect the universality of the Post-2015 agenda. Members include international volunteer and cooperation agencies, volunteer-involving NGOs and academic institutions, as well as those working through corporate volunteering, diaspora volunteering, reciprocal volunteering and through volunteers in their own countries. As members are based all over the world, the group holds monthly meetings by phone, with a coordinator based in New York.

Volunteer groups have worked diligently to channel the voice of volunteerism into the Post-2015 process through a number of avenues, including representation and engagement at the High-Level Political Forum under the auspices of the ECOSOC, the Open Working Group and the intergovernmental negotiations. Volunteer groups have brought volunteers to share their personal experiences and perspectives at these processes. The opportunities that have been

⁸ About the Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group: www.volunteeractioncounts.org/en/post-mdg/stakeholder-engagement.html

provided for volunteer groups in these processes have enabled the contributions of volunteers to be shared, and made more visible, and have undoubtedly enriched the dialogue and outcomes.

This position paper was developed under the leadership of the Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group, in consultation with the International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum),⁹ the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE)¹⁰, the signatories of the Lima Declaration and a wide range of other regional and national networks, organizations and individuals whose work would not be possible without volunteers.

Integration

The Post-2015 development agenda will incorporate two principles that are intrinsically linked: universality and inclusion. The mandate of the High-Level Political Forum will be strong and successful only if governments worldwide commit to a development agenda that is inclusive, sustainable and universal. It is also important that Member States commit to clearly focus on the implementation of all goals and targets and shared responsibility for them, and not only “pick and choose” those that are more easily implementable or convenient.

Volunteer groups welcome the UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/67/138, which *“recognizes that volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at such areas*

⁹ The International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) is the most significant global network of International Volunteer Co-operation Organizations (IVCO), with 24 members, including other umbrella organizations for volunteerism: <http://forum-ids.org/members/>.

¹⁰ IAVE has grown into a global network of volunteers, volunteer organizations, national representatives and volunteer centres, and global corporations with members in over 70 countries, and in all world regions. The majority of IAVE members are in developing countries: <http://iave.org/content/about-iave>.

as poverty reduction, sustainable development, health, education, youth empowerment, climate change, disaster risk reduction, social integration, social welfare, humanitarian action, peacebuilding and, in particular, overcoming social exclusion and discrimination.” Volunteerism is a means of implementation that cuts across all of the 17 SDG goals.

The Resolution also calls *“upon Member States and other stakeholders to favor the integrating of volunteering in all relevant issues of the United Nations, in particular to contribute to accelerated achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as giving appropriate consideration to the issue in the discussions on the Post-2015 United Nations development agenda.”* In this regard, volunteer groups, as a named stakeholder in the RES/67/290 on the format and organizational aspects of the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development, look forward to bringing their expertise in community engagement and participation to the discussions of the HLPF, after being proactively consulted by Member States.

Volunteer groups also look forward to being involved in dialogue and decision making with Member States at the HLPF, as well as providing guidance and recommendations for sustainable development on how to expand and mobilize constituencies, and on how to engage people in national development planning and implementation of the SDGs, pertinent to paragraph 2¹¹ of RES/67/290 on the format and organizational aspects of the HLPF.

¹¹ *The General Assembly Decides* that the high-level political forum, consistent with its universal intergovernmental character, shall provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development, follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments, enhance the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner at all levels and have a

The HLPF intends to build on the strengths and experiences of existing national, regional and international processes that promote inclusive participation (such as the My World survey which has engaged more than 7 million people globally) in the design of the development agenda. These consultations will be most effective as part of an ongoing conversation and concrete opportunities for engagement, as we need people not only to articulate the problems, but also to be part of the solutions.

Implementation

The participation of civil society and all relevant stakeholders, including volunteer groups, in the functions of the HLPF, will be a key element in successfully implementing the SDGs, as they have been in the Millennium Development Goals.

Volunteer groups ask Member States to reaffirm their full support for the implementation of A/RES/67/290, which affirms the participation of non-governmental actors, including *'the major groups identified in Agenda 21 and other stakeholders, such as private philanthropic organizations, educational and academic entities, persons with disabilities, volunteer groups and other stakeholders active in areas related to sustainable development'*, and assigns these groups the responsibility *'to autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms for participation in the High-Level Political Forum and for actions derived from that participation at the global, regional and national levels, in a way that ensures effective, broad*

focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges.

and balanced participation by region and by type of organization'. The UN has a key role as a facilitator enabling this broader input and representation, and ensuring a high quality inclusive and representative process and outcome.

Volunteer groups agree with the modalities for civil society participation set out in the modalities resolution (A/RES/67/290 Para 16). It is recognized that the HLPF has the lead role in galvanising coherent global policy-making and sustainable development, including evaluation of the 'global partnership for sustainable development'. During the annual review of the global partnership for sustainable development, volunteer groups look forward to actively participating, alongside other global stakeholders. While Member States are the primary duty-bearers in this partnership, volunteer groups will continue to be accountable to our stakeholders, and will continue to promote the voices of communities and their contributions to the SDGs.

Volunteer groups note that partnerships are founded on the equal inclusion of all partners and mutual accountability between them, supporting the need for an effective global system of monitoring and review. People, communities and other key stakeholders, including volunteer groups, need to be acknowledged as key partners and welcomed as participants at every level. This necessitates the provision of a broader enabling environment for the participation of all people and organizations. The HLPF has a critical role in ensuring that accountability mechanisms and multi-stakeholder or cross-sector partnerships are in place at every level.

An accountability, transparency and review framework would be greatly strengthened by involving the public in the follow-up and accountability mechanisms at all levels, complementing the vital role of governments. These inclusive mechanisms at the local and national level would allow people, particularly those experiencing poverty, inequality and marginalization, to participate effectively and without discrimination in the accountability process. Equally important is that the structure and process ensures that progress on gender equality and women's human rights is measured from the perspective of women themselves, and that a conducive environment is created for the engagement of all groups, including children and young people.

Review mechanism

A key lesson learnt from the MDGs is that development needs people's participation and ownership if it is to make a real difference in their lives. As stated in the UN Secretary-General latest Synthesis Report "*volunteerism can help to localize the SDGs by providing new spaces of interaction between governments and people for concrete and scalable action*". Localization will only be possible if a diverse range of actors - women and men, rich and poor, mainstream and marginalized - are systematically engaged in SDG planning, implementation and monitoring.

For the Post-2015 development agenda to be truly accountable and sustainable, it must be understood by the people it is designed to help. Volunteer groups, including the Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group, are already playing a substantive role in ensuring that people are aware of the process and are endeavoring to meaningfully contribute to the development

agenda. Volunteers are key actors who have the capacity to engage people at the local level in planning, monitoring and implementing the new framework in a universal and holistic manner. Volunteering helps move people from being passive recipients to being actively engaged in the development processes that affect their lives, and the lives of their families and communities.

Volunteer groups can play a critical role in mobilizing community participation and engagement, and in monitoring and evaluating the successes and addressing the SDGs at a global, national and local level. To this end, volunteer groups have submitted our recommended indicators to the UN Statistical Commission as a means of measuring the contribution of volunteerism to achieving targets under Goals 8, 16 and 17.

At its core, volunteerism is a form of civic engagement, a way to strengthen state-citizen accountability mechanisms, and a means to support the work of national governments. Volunteering also contributes to developing a sense of belonging to the community and in strengthening social cohesion. This is important for the SDGs. Given that the agenda is universal, it needs the commitment and energy of people from all over the world to complement government action.

The SDGs would benefit greatly from being monitored through participatory processes, thus providing access to the most marginalized as experts in their livelihoods. The collection and analysis of data also needs to involve participation of the most marginalized, as well as those in civil society, including volunteers, who work closest to them. Measuring change requires a baseline understanding of the extent and character of volunteering at the national and local

levels, so that the activities and characteristics of volunteers can be known and supported.¹² To truly assess progress, objective, reliable, and comparative data complemented by qualitative measures of the transformative impacts volunteers make in the communities are essential.

The final report of the OWG and the Secretary General's synthesis report underline that the new agenda shall be universal, transformative and rights-based, combating inequalities within and between countries and leaving no one behind.

These objectives require a universal commitment to monitor progress made at all levels, and a concerted effort to ensure that data is collected and made openly available, to ensure transparency and accountability. Capacity building needs to be strengthened to empower all relevant stakeholders to request, understand and utilize quality and open data. All development actors should commit to publishing timely, comprehensive and forward-looking information on their activities in a common, open format, based on existing open data standards. In line with international human rights standards of access to information, all data on public matters, including those produced by the private sector, should be made public. This will allow citizens to link resources to results, and consequently engage productively with governments. Governments themselves, at all levels, have a key role in providing information in a timely, accurate, comprehensive and accessible manner.

¹² New standards for baseline measures of volunteering at the national level, which can be disaggregated at the local levels by demographic characteristics, such as sex, ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, and employment status, among others, are provided in the 2011 *International Labour Organization Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*. http://www.ilo.org/stat/Publications/WCMS_162119/lang--en/index.htm

Data should report on progress at the national and sub-national levels and for different groups of people, in particular the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, and should include official objective baseline estimates of the scale and characteristics of volunteers, and qualitative and multi-dimensional factors that look at non-monetary forms of deprivation. Grassroots data collection on a mass scale can be accomplished through combining online and offline efforts, and requires systematic multi-stakeholder partnerships, including volunteer engagement. Accessibility of data is crucial to increase transparency and thus accountability. Thereafter, data visualization facilitates communication and sharing of data for evidence-based advocacy. Furthermore, multi-stakeholder monitoring, which brings policy makers together, along with civil society and other actors, is a way to contribute to monitoring SDG progress.¹³

Governments, by guaranteeing the rights of access to information, freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in law and practice for all, in line with international standards, support a necessary precondition for public participation.

Government at all levels would also benefit greatly by committing to citizen involvement in decision-making and institutionalizing mechanisms for mutual accountability, while instilling a culture of genuine participation and citizen engagement. It will be crucial that the voices and volunteer actions of ordinary people be at the very heart of accountability structures. The SDG

¹³ Joint UN-NGLS – UNMC - UNFPA - UNV Report of Global Meeting on Post-2015 Dialogues on "Partnerships with Civil Society", 20-21 October 2014, Siem Reap, Cambodia.
<http://www.worldwewant2015.org/file/467503/download/509496>

monitoring process should foster enabling conditions for citizens' voices and volunteer actions to be heard and acted upon by development decision-makers.

Volunteering can help roll out large scale data collection efforts, and is also a way to actively engage people of all socioeconomic backgrounds in participatory processes at the local level. Initiatives to increase public participation need to be put in place, and concrete mechanisms of dialogue between citizens' groups and local authorities need to be applied to advocate for and monitor commitments, increasing the accountability of local officials.

A crucial element of any accountability framework is the principle that no goal or target be considered until it is met for all groups. This paper recommends that the HLPF commission thematic reviews of progress and challenges, on the basis of linkages between relevant international initiatives and organizations and the expert advisory groups established alongside the High Level Political Forum. The success of the SDGs will depend on the extent to which development is owned, and whether people have the information and channels so they can support effective decision making.

Summary of key recommendations for the High Level Political Forum for sustainable development (HLPF)

Volunteer groups ask that the HLPF:

1. formally recognize the importance of volunteering as a cross-cutting means of implementation for the SDGs, and in monitoring and evaluating progress towards meeting the SDGs at a global, national and local level

2. note the commitment of volunteer groups to sharing in the accountability for the successful delivery of the SDGs
3. follow the lead of Member States by affirming their full support for the implementation of A/RES/67/290, which supports the participation of non-governmental actors
4. ensure the data for monitoring of the SDGs is captured through participatory processes and includes the perspectives of the most marginalized, as well as the volunteers that work closest to them
5. ensure the accountability, transparency and review framework for the SDGs involves community consultation at all levels, including representation of the most marginalized voices, as well as the volunteers that work closest to them.
6. create a dedicated, permanent and independent Secretariat in order to deliver on its role in the global review and follow up of the Post-2015 agenda. This would need to be sufficiently resourced to enable the HLPF to effectively coordinate the HLPF sessions and reviews, to support states in their efforts, to coordinate the assessment of global progress, to facilitate the broad engagement of civil society and other stakeholders and to manage an agenda of thematic and institutional assessment.