



CHAPTER 3

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION THROUGH VOLUNTARY ACTION

Engaging civil society

1 ACCESS TO SERVICES AND SERVICE DELIVERY

2 INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

3 COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION THROUGH VOLUNTARY ACTION

This contribution focuses on fostering community mobilization through voluntary action to address local development issues. It includes: promoting greater awareness among communities of common issues and alternative ways to address them; enhancing local capacity to develop project proposals and manage implementation; improving networking and communication among local people; establishing systems for interaction and knowledge sharing; familiarizing local people with improved group action techniques; strengthening community leadership; and creating or upgrading instruments available at the local level to document processes and accomplishments. An example of this type of contribution is support UNV provides for the implementation of self-help initiatives in a wide range of areas on the part of local volunteer based groups equipped with relevant skills and materials, which results in increased local self-reliance.

••• Partnering with UNICEF's fight against infant mortality in Mali, UNV promoted the involvement of thousands of families in six health districts across the country. Districts covered saw a 21 per cent decrease in child mortality over three years – 12 per cent above districts without such large-scale volunteer-based community mobilization. UNV volunteers organized a network of more than 5,000 community workers to train households on practices conducive to child health, such as disease prevention, proper hygiene and nutrition. Other health indicators also improved, including reduced incidence of malaria and increases in child immunization. Mobilizing volunteer community workers was integrated as a key programming component in expanded child health programmes in an additional six districts.

••• Attending funerals was not in Tsholofelo Barei's job description when she signed on as a national UNV volunteer in Botswana in 2004. Yet she developed an unusual approach to get people to listen to her talks on HIV/AIDS. To educate youth, she used every possible occasion and the death of a village teenager from an AIDS-related illness provided no better time than to discuss the reality of the epidemic in her country. Outside of the Southern Africa context, Tsholofelo's actions may be considered insensitive, but in Botswana, with a 37 percent adult infection rate and a life expectancy hovering at 38, extreme measures were necessary. Tsholofelo was one of several UNV volunteers mobilized in the country to tackle HIV/AIDS head-on. They used the Kgotla, a traditional community-gathering place in Botswana, as a platform for sharing information about

HIV. They also provided skills and expertise in a range of fields, such as medical, planning, policy and technical support, to complement the actions of governments and civil society. A major focus of their efforts was to mobilize and train community volunteers to reinforce local capacity, especially in areas where external help for education and support to those affected and infected was limited.

••• For Olga Kolosyuk from the Ukraine, clean water represents progress in a post-Chernobyl world. The fact that her village has safe drinking water demonstrates what people can accomplish when they get organized. Olga was one of numerous volunteers who with support from UNV set-up a community organization in their village. More than 200 community-led organizations like Olga's exist throughout the Chernobyl nuclear disaster affected area. The organizations were established between 2002 and 2005 as part of the Chernobyl Recovery and Development Programme, a joint initiative of the Government of Ukraine, UNDP, UNV and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), with financial support from various donors. With a focus on self-governance, inclusion and community development, the programme used mixed teams of Ukrainian and international UNV volunteers to train the organizations' members in all aspects of project implementation. With participation a key aspect of the process, the UNV volunteers promoted engagement through volunteerism, especially among youth, to encourage residents to take the lead in bettering their situation. As a result, the community-led organizations raised funds and received grants to renovate clinics and schools, rebuild water system infrastructure and open youth centres.

••• UNV also assists in broadening human rights and justice institutions at the sub-national level. UNV volunteers in Uganda helped to strengthen the National Human Rights Commission's outreach in post-conflict areas. Tapping into existing local volunteer practices, they assisted citizens in forming voluntary action groups, training them to promote and monitor human rights in their villages as well as to report human rights violations on behalf of community members. Mobilizing the community led to a marked increase in the reporting of human rights violations.

••• In Egypt, a human rights-based community outreach strategy for eliminating the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) was supported by UNV.

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Botswanan UNV volunteer Tsholofelo Barei visits the home of a man living with HIV/AIDS. Photo: UNV/Jean-Baptiste Avril



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National UNV volunteers were involved as youth leaders at the village level to raise awareness about the health-related consequences of FGM, and to advocate against the social pressure on young girls and women. Reaching out to peers, they mobilized more than a thousand young people to further disseminate the message. Several villages made public declarations renouncing FGM. In addition, national partners announced plans to replicate the approach of mobilizing young community leaders in other fields of child and women's rights protection.

••• Desertification is both a major cause and consequence of rural poverty. Partnering with the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), UNV introduced an innovative approach to address youth unemployment in Cape Verde. UNV worked with national youth centres across the country to establish a youth volunteer corps for the environment that engaged jobless young people in combating land degradation.

The volunteers, mostly women, acquired skills in implementing environmentally sensitive income-generating projects. Reinvigorating the Cape Verde tradition of mutual assistance – 'djunta mô' in the native Creole – the volunteer corps also stimulated renewed national dialogue on volunteerism, the development of a volunteer law and a national volunteer programme.

••• Recognizing that regional integration can be an important catalyst for development and confidence building in post conflict environments, UNV in 2005 launched an initiative for cross-border volunteer exchanges to foster poverty reduction and social cohesion in South-Eastern Europe. Volunteers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro served within civil society organizations working to achieve the MDGs. In Africa, UNV teamed up with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to promote the contribution of volunteerism to stabilize the region.

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••• From giant banners covering the façade of the nation's stock exchange, to advertisements on MTV Brazil, and a float at the Carnival in Rio de Janeiro, the MDGs have taken Brazil by storm. In the past year, mixed teams of Brazilian and Italian UNV volunteers and university volunteers from the United Kingdom worked with local partners to generate awareness and encourage participation. The team, together with the NGO Natal Voluntarios, partnered with Brazil's postal service Correios in the state of Rio Grande do Norte to train postal staff on how to promote the MDGs. As a result, an innovative and cross cutting publicity campaign boosted awareness of the MDGs.



UNV and the NGO Natal Voluntarios have teamed up with Brazil's postal service Correios in the state of Rio Grande do Norte to promote the MDGs. Chiara Guidetti, an Italian UNV volunteer (right), speaks to postal staff on the roll-out of the MDG campaign. Photo: UNV/Andrew Smith