

**UN****Volunteers**

In FACT: UNV and the 2001 Brussels Programme of Action (BPoA) for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs)

The BPoA was a reaffirmation by the international community of a commitment to address the special needs of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). In the BPoA, voluntary action is explicitly encouraged to help improve the quality of life of the poor by extending to them social infrastructures and basic social services; providing services in educational and training fields; and enhancing social integration and social safety nets.

The UN Volunteers (UNV) programme is the focal point in the United Nations for the promotion of volunteerism for development (V4D). In most cultures volunteerism is deeply embedded in long-established, ancient traditions of sharing. Whether expressed through mutual aid and self-help, philanthropy and service, or civic participation and campaigning, voluntary action reflects people's willingness and capacity to freely help others and improve society.

Since the adoption of the BPoA in 2001, there has been a growth in UNV support for the development efforts of the LDCs. By the end of 2005, UNV was working in 42 of the 50 LDCs, helping to introduce and strengthen volunteer infrastructure and placing UNV volunteers in development and peace building programmes. Over half of all serving UNV volunteers, around 4,400, were nationals of LDCs.

UNV focuses on three areas of support for the application of V4D in its partnership with programme countries, namely:

- (1) *Advocating for volunteerism and development globally:* Advocating for the contribution of volunteerism as a sustainable, cost-efficient and culturally adapted development asset. Advocacy activities include: stimulating national policy and legislation supportive of volunteerism; supporting research to describe the nature of volunteering and assess its impact in the national context; and promoting the sharing of best practices.
- (2) *Integrating volunteerism into development programming:* Engaging in efforts to include volunteerism in activities that contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Special Voluntary Fund (SVF), for example, supports innovative pilot activities that demonstrate the added value of volunteerism.
- (3) *Mobilizing volunteers for development and peace:* Placement each year of over 8,000 professionally qualified and committed women and men as UNV volunteers in UN system-supported programmes and projects in over 140 countries and the mobilization of many times that number of ordinary citizens as volunteers associated with UNV.

The framework for the BPoA are seven key commitments which, if achieved, are expected to result in the LDCs making substantial progress towards meeting the MDGs.

UNV's distinctive contributions in supporting LDCs to meet their development goals fall within the following three categories:

- (1) *Access to Services and Service Delivery:* Enabling disadvantaged groups and communities to have wider access to services and enhancing the delivery of such services. UNV works with targeted groups to better articulate their demand for services and with service providers to ensure they understand local needs and are able to integrate them into the programming of service delivery.
- (2) *Inclusion and Participation:* Promoting the inclusion of all stakeholders, in particular the disadvantaged, in processes that affect their well-being. It includes making information available on opportunities and how to participate; putting in place sustainable strategies and processes for participation; establishing and strengthening networks to facilitate access of targeted groups to decision making processes; and ensuring mechanisms are set up in a way that facilitate dialogue between actors at various levels of decision making.
- (3) *Community Mobilization through Volunteerism:* 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

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UN Volunteers is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)



for local interaction and knowledge sharing; strengthening community leadership; and creating or upgrading instruments available at the local level to document processes and accomplishments.

UNV and the BPOA – The First Five Years (2001-2005)

During the first half of the BPOA decade, UNV's work in the LDCs focused on five of the BPOA's seven commitments:

Commitment 1: Fostering a people-centred policy framework

According to the BPOA, "human beings are at the centre of the concerns for sustainable development". Citizen involvement is both an imperative and an opportunity, and volunteerism can be a highly effective channel through which such action can be mobilized. UNV is close to communities in terms of its people-centred participatory approaches and the physical proximity of most UNV volunteers to the grass roots. People-driven development activities and effective community based organizations (CBOs) are crucial to the success of poverty reduction programmes. In this context, UNV particularly recognized role youth can play in shaping the development of their societies, and the need to engage the energies of young people, which represent more than 50 percent of the population of LDCs. Together with its partners UNV undertakes pilot projects to explore ways in which, by building up and promoting a culture of volunteerism, youth can be mobilized and engaged in activities at community, regional and national levels. In Bangladesh, for example, UNV volunteers provide guidance to youth clubs to plan and carry out community-level activities such as road repair, tree planting or building latrines; to assist women and children to access health care services; and to support women's efforts to benefit from small-scale income-generating activities.

Commitment 2: Good governance at national and international levels

Volunteerism is an indispensable component of effective governance. UNV has a long-time record of supporting democratic governance initiatives in LDCs in fields such as decentralization and local governance, elections, justice and human rights, public administration reform, and anti-corruption measures. These efforts have contributed to enhancing the capacity of public institutions to deliver essential services, and have helped disadvantaged groups to better identify and articulate needs and implement and monitor development initiatives.

Commitment 3: Building human and institutional capacities

The BPOA refers to the negative impact on human capacities in LDCs of low school enrollment, low health, nutrition and sanitation status, the prevalence of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, as well as other natural and man-made disasters. It proposes that "an immediate priority should be to focus a greater effort on fighting HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis and their economic and social impact". UNV is deeply engaged in the fight against HIV/AIDS through people-centred approaches. UNV volunteers provide immediate relief to over-stretched capacities of public institutions at national and local levels, as well as longer-term capacity building assistance. They also work within communities mobilizing local human resources, including people living with HIV/AIDS, as prime actors in prevention, treatment and care. UNV supports the Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GIPA), an initiative of UNDP and the joint and co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS).

Commitment 4: Building productive capacities to make globalization work for LDCs

In the UN Secretary General's report to the Millennium Summit in September 2005, the importance of information and communications technologies (ICT) in reducing poverty is emphasized. UNV has long recognized the potential of ICTs as an avenue to create earning opportunities, improve access to education and facilitate information and knowledge-sharing in LDCs. One initiative to bridge the digital divide is the UNV managed UN Information Technology Service (UNITeS) that promotes volunteer involvement in the application of ICT for development.

Commitment 6: Reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment

UNV's contributions to this commitment embrace reducing vulnerability and protecting the environment as a primary objective and as an opportunity to pursue other aims such as job creation, enhancing local governance, and fostering cross-cultural dialogue. Promoting the involvement of communities in the sustainable use of common property resources contributes to the successful integration of environmental dimensions into poverty reductions strategies. In



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Cape Verde, for example, UNV supported the government in launching an initiative to harness volunteers to address land degradation, desertification, and youth unemployment. Together with local partners, UNV volunteers have conducted training of trainers on social mobilization techniques and helped to initiate pro-environment small businesses.

UNV and the BPOA – The Second Five Years (2006-2010)

For the second half of the BPOA, UNV looks forward to strengthening its partnership with LDCs within its broadened mandate as the lead UN body for the advocacy and the promotion of volunteerism for development. It aims to support the mainstreaming of volunteerism as a national resource in policies and programmes aimed at meeting country-level MDGs, including through the continued provision of professional services of UNV volunteers for capacity building. While volunteerism is deeply embedded in most societies, there are great variations in the extent to which it is understood and valued in terms of its contribution to society in general, and to volunteers themselves. There is a trend, including among LDCs, of seeking to develop different aspects of volunteer infrastructure, including supportive legislative frameworks, volunteer centres, and national volunteer schemes. The latter appear to be especially relevant for a number of LDCs as far as encouraging the participation of youth is concerned. However, a great deal still needs to be done to reach a shared understanding of the role of volunteerism and of the measures that can be taken to help maximize its full potential as a development asset. UNV sees this as an area of potential collaboration and partnership with LDCs during the second half of the BPOA.

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