



REACHING PEOPLE

Violent conflicts within or among nations leave no individual untouched. Media covering the build-up of tension and eruption of violent conflict inevitably also document the stream of refugees and internally displaced persons forced to flee their homes in search of peace and stability. Uprooted from their homes, they have lost access to their accustomed livelihoods and support networks. As humanitarian needs intensify, development actors rush to respond, with UNV support.

UNV mobilizes vulnerable and marginalized people to identify and address their needs by empowering them to volunteer and promoting volunteerism among partners operating in situations of impending or existing conflict. Working together with volunteers, such communities emerge with strengthened trust, solidarity and reciprocity; and with institutions better equipped to ensure human security and progressive development, particularly in times of humanitarian crisis.

UNV volunteers work with development partners to reach out to communities affected by conflict. In Chad, they support the workings of a large-scale peacekeeping mission, providing different levels of specialized and technical skills. In Colombia, Ecuador and Afghanistan they work with development partners to alleviate the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons. In the occupied Palestinian territory, UNV volunteers reach youth in need of access to basic services like education and training within the confines of conflict areas. And in Guatemala they come to the aid of protagonists of human rights in addressing human rights violations and appropriate legislation.

The humanitarian situation in Chad is of challenging proportions. The country hosts approximately 240,000 refugees from Sudan, 45,000 refugees from the Central African Republic, and 180,000 internally displaced persons uprooted by the activities of armed groups from eastern Chad, north-eastern Central African Republic and western Sudan.

UNV volunteers in Chad are working with the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) to support the creation of security conditions conducive to the voluntary, secure and sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons. This involves protecting the security of the

civilian population, facilitating humanitarian operations and creating favourable conditions for the reconstruction and economic and social development of affected areas.

For Victor Angelo, Special Representative of the Secretary General and Head of MINURCAT, the added value of UNV volunteers is their commitment. "Volunteers hit the ground running. I am very impressed by volunteer engineers or volunteers who work in movement control in extremely harsh conditions and still remain calm, principled and in control, insisting on the respect of rules. Their volunteer spirit is admirable. I have many staff who are professionals, but

UNV volunteer Vehicle Technician Adama Aissatou Sheriff inspects a UN vehicle at the transport section of MINURCAT in N'Djamena, Chad. She comes from Sierra Leone, a country that has itself experienced conflict. (Harald Franzen, 2009)

Meet a volunteer

Nureddin Amro is a national UNV volunteer working in the occupied Palestinian territory for people with special needs. With a background in education and social development, Nureddin coordinates a project for the integrated education of disadvantaged blind and visually impaired people. Nureddin (left) appreciates the challenges they face, because he himself is blind.

Directly benefitting 250 adults and children, this project has improved visually impaired people's access to full formal education and modern educational strategies, adaptive technology and assistive instruments. The services enabled by this project are treasured and appreciated in a setting where basic services are a challenge.

"Being a UNV volunteer has given me the opportunity to make a lasting difference in my own community," says Nureddin. "This has also helped the families of the blind and raised community awareness of the issues and the rights of people like myself."



who could learn a couple of things about dedication from UNV volunteers."

More than a hundred UNV volunteers currently support the MINURCAT mission. UNV volunteers constitute 25 percent of the technical support staff of the mission and provide technical expertise in a range of areas, from civil engineering to transport and medical services. According to Guy Siri, Chief of Mission Support at MINURCAT, UNV volunteers are key in ensuring that the DIS (*Détachement Intégré de Sécurité*) carries out its protection role. "UNV vehicle mechanics undertake the maintenance of the DIS vehicle fleet; they ensure that fuel is delivered on time and monitor communications equipment. Their contribution to the smooth functioning and operation of the National Police Force facilitates the operational activities of hundreds of non-governmental organizations working in eastern Chad."

Some UNV volunteers serve as Human Rights Officers, visiting camps to monitor the situation and advocate for the respect of human rights. They engage with local administrations and community leaders, mobilizing them to reduce gender-based violence and the recruitment of child soldiers. "The strength of UNV is in its capacity to efficiently mobilize UNV volunteers who are professional and experienced people, who greatly contribute to strengthening local capacity and maintain close contact with host

communities," says Guy Siri. "That's why in our 2009-2010 planning, we intend to double the number of UNV volunteers."

UNV reaches out to youth living in challenging conflict situations who lack access to basic services including education, training or employment. In the occupied Palestinian territory, UNV works with the Sharek Youth Forum, mobilizing youth to enhance social cohesion through volunteerism. 'Sharek', which means 'participate', started as a UNDP project in 1996, but has since evolved into an independent non-governmental organization. The Forum operates throughout the occupied Palestinian territory with the primary goal of creating space for youth to engage actively in civil society and in the development of their local communities through volunteerism.

About 35 UNV volunteers work with Sharek in its three core programmes. 'A Step Forward' is a comprehensive academic and economic empowerment programme offering youth career and academic counselling, training and business development support. The 'Bridges' programme empowers youth to voluntarily share their skills and knowledge with children, in an attempt to fill the void in the formal education sector. Through the 'Partners' programme, UNV volunteers help build the capacity of youth organizations to mobilize volunteers and utilize their skills in their activities.

Victor Banguera serves as a national UNV volunteer assigned to UNHCR in Lago Agrio, Ecuador. One of his responsibilities is to assist Colombian refugees in legalizing their status while they are in Ecuador. Here he meets with a family that includes 12 children who were all sharing a house of less than 20 square metres in size. (Andrew Smith, 2009)



Ukora iciza ukagisanga imbere

Your good deed will greet you down the road

For Sufian Mushasha, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Sharek Youth Forum, the success of this project can be attributed to the strength of the voluntary spirit.

“The driving force at the implementation level is the huge pool of youth volunteers who form a wide grassroots presence for Sharek. Throughout the past year, more than 2,500 youth volunteers have been active in campaigns, activities, projects and administrative work.” He continues: “We were privileged to partner with UNV early on. We started with four or five UNV volunteers, and with their passion and devotion built what is now the largest youth organization in the occupied Palestinian territory. Our relationship is founded on a common appreciation of the importance of volunteerism in effecting change.”

Volunteers can also make a significant improvement to the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons. UNV works in partnership with UNHCR to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees and internally displaced persons, and enable access to basic services in their adopted communities or communities of origin.

Colombia has been dealing with people displaced by the complex security situation for years. The UNV volunteers in Colombia who work with UNHCR engage with community leaders, communities and local

institutions to identify and analyze immediate risks for refugees and internally displaced persons. They then support local authorities and institutions in implementing appropriate protection measures. This is particularly true in critical situations, where vulnerable groups like women and children require special protection.

“We have been leading a participatory diagnosis process with local institutions and communities to identify protection risks for each population group,” says UNV volunteer Community Services Officer Sergio Castelblanco, a Colombian national. “From this diagnosis, we generate action and response plans with the institutions, and accompany them in order to respond to the problems that have been identified. In effect, we are generating mechanisms that allow state institutions to respond to the needs of their people. It’s about improving the living conditions of these people.”

The effects of the Colombian situation spill over the border to Ecuador, which hosts the largest number of registered Colombian refugees. According to UNHCR figures, 20,000 people have refugee status and an additional 37,000 are considered asylum seekers. However, UNHCR estimates that there are some 130,000 Colombians in Ecuador in need of international protection.



On International Volunteer Day, 5 December 2008, national UNV volunteer Adel Sabaeneh instructs children from the village of Biddo in the occupied Palestinian territory about the Millennium Development Goals as part of a partnership between UNV, the Sharek Youth Forum, the Nawafeth Youth Forum and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East. (UNDP/PAPP Archive, 2008)

Usaba umwiza mugasa

Court goodness and you'll reflect goodness

UNV volunteers have been working with UNHCR in Ecuador since 2000, and constitute more than 50 percent of UNHCR personnel in the country. Their work contributes to improving the social and economic rights of refugees. They provide local integration assistance to refugees, ensure their protection and strengthen the protection capacity of local authorities.

UNV volunteers also work with UNDP in Ecuador to support the Peace and Development Programme in the Northern Border Zone. To deal with high levels of violence, organized crime and poor socio-economic indicators, they support the coordination of United Nations and other interventions, ensuring that conflict prevention is an integral part of development initiatives.

UNHCR facilitates the voluntary, safe and gradual return to Afghanistan of refugees from host countries such as Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and supports their reintegration. Working with UNHCR, UNV volunteers facilitate the resettlement of returnees, providing them with immediate shelter and food. They monitor respect for the rights of returnees, interview returnees on their experiences and challenges and report violations. They also conduct needs assessments among the returnees to determine their health and education requirements.

Following more than two decades of conflict, Afghan returnees often find their villages of origin completely different; their former houses are either in ruins or have been occupied by others during their period in exile. Kenneth Grant is a UNV volunteer Field Protection Officer from the Netherlands working with UNHCR in Mazar-e-Sharif. "Returnees face integration problems. Some have not lived in Afghanistan for 20 years, and some of the younger ones have never lived in Afghanistan. There are no functioning primary schools or health clinics for miles and miles. We distribute materials to enable people to rebuild houses and schools, and also provide school supplies. The implementation of these projects is done by local non-governmental organizations. Communities provide teachers and take over the running of the schools."

With the onset of winter last year, severe drought and food shortages generated another wave of internally displaced persons as tens of thousands of people left their villages in Afghanistan's north and west to find work and food. In designing small income-generating projects, UNV volunteers mobilized the skills available among the returnees: people volunteered to rehabilitate neglected irrigation systems or construct housing, thus taking ownership of developing their settlements and establishing sustainable livelihoods.

PILOT PROGRAMME ON HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT FOR ASIA IN PEACEBUILDING

The Pilot Programme on Human Resource Development for Asia in Peacebuilding is essentially a “school to teach peacebuilders”, to quote former Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso, who proposed the idea in 2006. The programme is aimed at providing professionals from Japan and other Asian countries with the capabilities and experience necessary for providing on-site peacebuilding assistance. The Hiroshima Peacebuilders Center (HPC) at Hiroshima University has managed the programme since mid 2007, with UNV as the implementing partner. UNV deploys participants as UNV volunteers for short-term peacebuilding assignments in which they are able to enhance their skills while responding to the country’s related needs.

Kumiko Katayama, from Japan, was assigned as a UNV volunteer Programme Support Associate with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Myanmar. She trained the staff of local and international organizations in community-based psychosocial support, also developing a handbook, module guide and picture cards for community level workshops. “I really enjoyed my experience as a UNV volunteer, particularly learning from colleagues and from the management of the projects I was involved in,” Kumiko says.

Sokveng Ngoun was assigned as a UNV volunteer with UNDP in Timor-Leste. He was responsible for the implementation of the Preparatory Assistance Project for Recovery entailing national cohesion, youth, gender and equality, access to justice, durable solutions for internally displaced persons and disaster risk management. In his native Cambodia, Sokveng works for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “My UNV volunteer assignment significantly enhanced my knowledge and skills in contributing to peacebuilding upon my return home,” he says.

UNV volunteer Tawseef Kashoo from India participated in the programme during 2008. Assigned to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Regional Office in Thailand, he was responsible for advocating and building peace as part of ‘Memory of the World’, a UNESCO initiative to safeguard documentary evidence on conflict and war. The initiative helps to identify the root causes of conflict in different parts of the world and analyze possible solutions. “My role is to stimulate initiatives and develop partnerships for peacebuilding projects,” Tawseef says.

Volunteers play a critical role in advocating and providing the skills necessary to advance human rights. UNV volunteers in Guatemala are working with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights, addressing torture, racism, discrimination and violations of the rights of vulnerable groups. They support the activities of an office opened in 2003 which closely observes the human rights situation in the country, while providing essential technical assistance to public institutions and civil society organizations. The office’s mandate was recently extended to 2011.

Lucy Turner, an Australian UNV volunteer, explains: “As part of our observance activities, we are protecting those who defend human rights in general, as well as protecting the rights of indigenous people and of women and children in particular. We organize

training courses for civil servants, policemen and prison officials designed to strengthen their capacity to protect human rights. We also raise awareness about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and empower people to denounce human rights violations and demand the respect of their rights.”

UNV also contributes to the development of human rights legislation in accordance with international standards and principles, thus strengthening the capacity of institutions to improve the observance of human rights. Renata Delgado-Schenk, a German UNV volunteer, comments: “Civil servants being trained and made aware of possible human rights violations are better equipped to identify and deal with these problems. We are also empowering vulnerable groups and supporting the drafting of legislation to guide reparation to victims of violations and to address the search for missing persons.”