



## ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERISM

### VOLUNTEERING FOR OUR PLANET

The symptoms of climate change have a severe impact on the poor and the marginalized, and those who live in the developing world will bear the greatest burden.

Yet the cornerstone to meeting the challenges of global climate change is the creativity and knowledge of local communities. Indeed, ensuring environmental sustainability and protecting the most vulnerable will require the ingenuity and solidarity of every citizen, not just governments and the private sector.

Recognizing this fact is the first step towards harnessing the capacity of voluntary effort to help meet the challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradation.

The environmental movement was started by volunteers, and it has thrived on volunteer effort. It will require the ingenuity and actions of millions of volunteers to address the challenges ahead.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme encourages people to contribute to environmental sustainability by 'volunteering for our planet'.



**“Our planet needs more than just action by governments and corporations; it needs each of us. Although individual decisions may seem small in the face of global threats and trends, when billions of people join forces in common purpose we can make a tremendous difference. I encourage all people to take concrete steps toward making the planet greener and cleaner. Switch off the lights. Take public transportation. Recycle. Plant a tree. Clean up your local park. Hold corporations responsible for their environmental practices. And urge your government representatives to Seal the Deal in Copenhagen.”**

*United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon  
World Environment Day, 5 June 2009*

#### **Volunteerism supports environmental sustainability in multiple ways:**

- Raising awareness and mobilizing community members for locally-relevant, integrated environment management practices.
- Engaging community members in participatory environmental assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring of natural resource management efforts.
- Playing a mediating role where the use of scarce resources causes divisions in communities.
- Sensitizing and mobilizing community members to periodically undertake vulnerability reduction assessments.
- Promoting cooperation and self-help among small-scale farmers and community members.
- Promoting community cooperation on solid waste management including their contributions/fees to sustain the efforts.
- Providing technical support and transfer of knowledge to improve land management skills and diversify livelihoods, enhancing resilience and ensuring long-term sustainability.
- Convening local government, professional groups, academia, NGOs and other stakeholders to improve community access to information and resources.



## How UNV supports environmental sustainability

UNV works as a development partner with more than 25 UN organizations such as UNDP, UNEP, GEF SGP, UNCCD, ISDR, FAO and WFP, mobilizing close to 8,000 UNV volunteers annually, mostly from developing countries. UNV has helped to deploy skilled people into a range of environmental projects that are improving access to safe drinking water, developing sanitation services, creating sustainable livelihoods and addressing risk management and disaster response and adapting to climate change.

In China, for example, UNV worked with the Government and community groups to establish and promote the '2008 Green Olympic Games' which raised public awareness of the potential for individuals to make a tangible difference to their environment.

UNV is focusing its efforts on addressing environmental challenges through specific programming approaches, including the following:

- *Community-based natural resource management and sustainable use of biodiversity:* Ecosystems and biodiversity are used and conserved through various informal institutions and using traditional ecological knowledge systems. Volunteerism supports culturally-appropriate, sustainable management of water, land and forest resources through the engagement of community and local level stakeholders.
- *Community-based adaptation to climate change:* Communities act to alleviate or respond to the negative impacts of the changing climate, increasing their resilience to adverse changes, improving human security and enhancing socio-economic development. Community-based adaptation encompasses many aspects including sustainable livelihoods, new agricultural practices, biodiversity and water management.
- *Addressing food security concerns through sustainable livelihoods:* Worldwide, up to two billion people intermittently lack food security due to varying degrees of poverty. Climate change would further impact food availability, food accessibility, food utilization and food systems stability. At the community level, sustainable food production depends on agricultural practices that maintain the necessary local ecosystem. Community volunteerism can play a crucial role.

## About United Nations Volunteers

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that promotes volunteerism to support peace and development worldwide. Volunteerism can transform the pace and nature of development, and it benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer. UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for volunteerism globally, encouraging partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing volunteers.

For more information about UNV's work and environmental volunteerism please visit these websites:

[www.unvolunteers.org](http://www.unvolunteers.org)

[www.worldvolunteerweb.org](http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org)

[www.onlinevolunteering.org](http://www.onlinevolunteering.org)



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