



**SUMMARY PRESS RELEASE**

*Embargoed until 5 December 2011, 00:01 hours EST*

# Volunteerism should become an Integral Part of the New Development Consensus

*There is an urgent need to measure volunteerism in order to include it among the greatest assets of nations, says a United Nations report*

Bonn, 5 December 2011 (United Nations Volunteers) - The first United Nations State of the World's Volunteerism Report (SWVR) published today calls for making volunteer action an integral part of the new development consensus.

The report was launched at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, United States, and many countries around the world, coinciding with the marking of International Volunteer Day and the closure of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers.

Following recommendations of United Nations Member States in their 2010 review of progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, the SWVR shows that volunteerism is an effective way to implement community-led strategies. While it is clear that major efforts are needed to achieve the MDGs, there is also growing recognition that the current development paradigm, based on economic development and access to services, is severely limited. The dimension of well-being, putting people's life satisfaction at the centre, needs more attention.

Concern is growing regarding the effectiveness of development cooperation. The focus needs to switch from the processes and coordination of aid to the downstream outcomes and impacts of those processes. The report highlights that it is necessary to understand the role and contributions of volunteerism in order to incorporate this vital asset into the development agenda.

## **Well-being essential to the new development architecture**

The view that gross domestic product (GDP) provides an adequate picture of a society is increasingly being challenged. The report states that "strong and healthy economies are desirable, but only inasmuch as they enable people to lead lives that bring them wellbeing." Solidarity, passion for a cause and the desire to give back to society are inherent in both well-being and volunteerism.

"It is clear that measuring progress only in terms of GDP growth fails to consider all essential parameters for progress," said UNV Executive Coordinator Flavia Pansieri. "A new development paradigm is needed, based on new ways to measure progress. GDP remains essential, of course, but measures of individual and social attainment also need to

For further information, contact:

Bonn/New York: Lothar Mikulla, T. +49 (0)228 8152113, M. +49 (0)1578 7679771, [swvr@unvolunteers.org](mailto:swvr@unvolunteers.org)  
[www.unvolunteers.org/swvr2011](http://www.unvolunteers.org/swvr2011)





be considered along with environmental sustainability. Values like participation, engagement and inclusion are all needed to promote the well-being of individuals and society.”

#### **Producing reliable data and addressing misconceptions about volunteerism**

The SWVR shows that volunteerism is universal and massive in terms of numbers but misconceptions, and the lack of standard measuring methodologies, obscure its reach and scope. “In order to live up to its full potential, volunteerism’s true dimensions and values need to be generally acknowledged as an essential component for the sustainable and equitable progress of communities and nations,” Ms Pansieri said.

The report demonstrates that volunteerism permeates every aspect of life and every culture. Many public sector services worldwide rely on volunteers. Private sector volunteer engagement has also been growing steadily since the mid-1990s. Furthermore, volunteerism is not the preserve of the well-off and well-educated: volunteerism is widespread among the income poor. Female and male volunteers contribute approximately the same number of hours. While the participation of young people in formal organizations is declining, there appears to be a shift to less structured forms of engagement, including through the Internet.

The report notes that while volunteering action is not primarily for financial reward, reimbursement of expenses and some payments may be justified. The growing numbers of policies and laws at national level that encourage volunteerism and safeguard volunteers’ rights highlight that governments have a role to play in the field of volunteerism. However, states should not see volunteerism as a way to justify reductions in service provision.

The report concludes that research about volunteerism is at an early stage and assigns to governments the task of encouraging more empirical study. As a first step, one single public body should be responsible for measuring volunteering in a country instead of relying on sector by sector counting. This should be accompanied by international agreement on minimum standards and a methodology in order to ensure international comparability of data.

#### **New forms of volunteerism contribute significantly to human development**

The SWVR illustrates how three major trends are changing the face of volunteerism in the wake of globalisation and the digital age: migration and travel are transforming the way people volunteer; the private sector is increasingly involved in volunteerism; and information and communications technologies (ICT) are opening up new means of voluntary participation.

Online volunteering is on the rise despite the significant gap between developing and developed countries in terms of Internet access, the report notes. International volunteerism is undergoing enormous changes with the introduction of South-to-South or South-to-North volunteering schemes. The new form of volunteering tourism (“voluntourism”) is on the rise and the private sector is increasingly involved in volunteerism through the framework of corporate social responsibility (CSR). The SWVR finds that “modern forms of volunteerism have the potential to contribute significantly to human development”. Despite drawbacks, these new opportunities, which include CSR, open volunteerism to more people. “This is excellent news for the fabric of our societies,” the SWVR concludes.

For further information, contact:

Bonn/New York: Lothar Mikulla, T. +49 (0)228 8152113, M. +49 (0)1578 7679771, [swvr@unvolunteers.org](mailto:swvr@unvolunteers.org)  
[www.unvolunteers.org/swvr2011](http://www.unvolunteers.org/swvr2011)



### Volunteerism important in overcoming barriers

Volunteerism provides an important path out of poverty by building up social, human, natural, physical, financial and political capital. Volunteerism can be especially empowering when resources in local communities are pooled but, as the report notes, in order to move people out of poverty, there is a need for supportive linkages with the external world and investments to provide a favourable environment.

The report finds that volunteer action is an essential means of overcoming social exclusion as it can improve feelings of self-worth and help to develop vocational and other skills. For communities, it can lead to greater cohesion through building trust. This also activates previously dormant human resources and can thus lead to economic gains. The SWVR notes that volunteerism needs to be fully recognized in order to give this asset the place that it deserves in the public debate about social inclusion. Governments could make greater use of volunteerism as a complementary tool for social policies.

### Essential asset in the face of war and disaster

The report calls for the integration of volunteer action into policies and programmes aimed at preventing and responding to conflict. Numerous examples showcase how volunteerism can play a positive role in conflict and post-conflict situations. It can be highly effective in turning people away from violence as well as in building cohesion and peace after an open conflict. "Strengthening the values of solidarity and mutual support is as important for a peaceful society as rebuilding the infrastructure and stabilizing the economy," UNV head Flavia Pansieri said.

In preventing, mitigating and responding to disasters, volunteers add immeasurably to the resilience of communities, the report finds. Disaster programmes are increasingly striving to enhance prevention, mitigation and preparedness, in which volunteer action plays an essential part. In the recovery phase, the report notes, rebuilding efforts too often focus on physical infrastructure and ignore social infrastructure. Empirical research shows that communities with more trust, civic engagement and stronger networks, which are largely volunteer-based, have a better chance of recovering after a disaster than fragmented, isolated ones.

Summarizing, UNV Executive Coordinator Flavia Pansieri said in her message on the SWVR: "Volunteerism is more than a tool for development. Its underlying values are key to moving the world towards a more sustainable future. Around the world, people are increasingly recognizing that our unsustainable production and consumption patterns need to change. In order to achieve this, political will alone is not sufficient. People need to participate and play a role."

For further information, contact:

Bonn/New York: Lothar Mikulla, T. +49 (0)228 8152113, M. +49 (0)1578 7679771, [swvr@unvolunteers.org](mailto:swvr@unvolunteers.org)  
[www.unvolunteers.org/swvr2011](http://www.unvolunteers.org/swvr2011)