



CHAPTER 1

Volunteerism is universal

Volunteering is an expression of the individual's involvement in their community. Participation, trust, solidarity and reciprocity, grounded in a shared understanding and a sense of common obligations, are mutually reinforcing values at the heart of governance and good citizenship. Volunteering is not a nostalgic relic of the past. It is our first line of defence against social atomisation in a globalising world. Today, maybe more than ever before, caring and sharing are a necessity, not a charitable act.

UNV (2000, November)

VOLUNTEERISM AND TRADITIONAL VALUES

Volunteerism is one of the most basic of expressions of human behaviour and arises out of long-established ancient traditions of sharing and reciprocal exchanges. At its core are relationships and their potential to enhance the well-being of individuals and communities. Social cohesion and trust, for example, thrive where volunteerism is prevalent. Volunteerism is not only the backbone of civil society organizations and social and political movements, but also of many health,

education, housing and environmental programmes and a range of other civil society, public and private sector programmes worldwide. It is an integral part of every society.

At the heart of this report are values. Deeply ingrained in many communities around the world are systems characterized by solidarity, compassion, empathy and respect for others, often expressed through the giving of one's time. Volunteering also expresses the desire to act on one's feelings about justice and fairness in the face of inequality and to foster social harmony based on a shared interest in the well-being of one's community. In most languages, there are words to express the concept of volunteerism. Often inspired by indigenous traditions, they describe the principal ways by which people collectively apply their energy, talents, knowledge and other resources for mutual benefit. The act of volunteering is well known throughout the world, even if the word as such is not.

BOX 1.1 : Traditional forms of volunteerism

In many countries, volunteerism is deeply rooted in traditional beliefs and community practices. In Norway, for instance, the term *Dugnad* describes collective voluntary work: a traditional scheme of cooperation within a social group such as family, neighbourhood, community, geographical area, professional sector or nation. An example is outdoor spring cleaning in urban areas. *Dugnad* is about contributing time or money. It is also about creating a sense of community and building relationships between neighbours and community members.

In the Arab world, volunteerism has been associated with helping people in celebrations or at difficult times and is considered as a religious duty and charitable work. Volunteerism in Arabic is (*tatawa'a*) (تَوَاعُت) which means donating something. It also means to commit to a charitable activity that is not a religious requirement. It originates from the word (*al-taw'a*) (تَوَاعُل) which means compliance, smoothness and flexibility. The concept is taking new forms as a result of modernization and the development of governmental and non-governmental institutions.

In southern Africa, the concept of *Ubuntu* defines the individual in relation to others. In Nelson Mandela's words: "A traveller through a country would stop at a village and he didn't have to ask for food or for water. Once he stops, the people give him food, entertain him. That is one aspect of *Ubuntu*, but it will have various aspects. *Ubuntu* does not mean that people should not enrich themselves. The question therefore is: are you going to do so in order to enable the community around you to be able to improve?"

Sources: Haugestad. (2004, July 25-30); Leland. (2010, August 29); Mandela. (2006, June 1); Nita Kapoor, [Director General, Fredskorpset (FK Norway)], Personal Communication. (2011, July 27); Shatti. (2009).

For example, elements of the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, common throughout southern Africa, are found in many traditions around the world.¹ *Ubuntu* values the act of caring for one another's well-being in a spirit of mutual support. It is based on recognition of human worth, communal relationships, human values and respect for the natural environment and its resources.² As an official South African government paper explains it: "Each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others. *Ubuntu* means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being."³

VOLUNTEERISM FLYING UNDER THE RADAR

Volunteerism still flies largely under the radar of policymakers concerned with peace and development, despite a decade's worth of intergovernmental legislation adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Yet volunteer engagement is so important that many societies would be hard-pressed to function without it. A telling illustration is provided by weather forecasts. We may not give much thought to how they are produced, yet they impact greatly on our lives, our health, our leisure and productive activities. Moreover, they reflect the efforts of people acting on a volunteer basis. This is because satellite and weather radar data are most useful when they are matched with what is happening on the ground. Volunteers measuring and reporting local precipitation data are essential to calibrate information collected through remote sensing and to make it more accurate. In many geographic areas, volunteers provide more data points on a daily basis than official observation networks.⁴ Similar examples of volunteerism flying under the radar can be found across the broad spectrum of United Nations work.

Volunteerism is universal and immense, representing an enormous reservoir of skills, energy and local knowledge for peace and development. Yet no comprehensive, comparative study of worldwide volunteerism exists. Most developed states have country studies of their own. Initial efforts to map volunteerism, largely supported by UNV, have been made in a limited number of developing countries. Among the challenges of researching volunteerism, three stand out. Firstly, there is no common agreement on what volunteerism is and how it is manifested; secondly, there are widespread misperceptions, contradicted by empirical data and anecdotal information, that obscure the nature and extent of volunteerism; and, thirdly, there is no agreed methodology for assessing the volume and value of volunteer action.

WHAT IS VOLUNTEERISM?

This question appears simple but scholarly literature and national legal frameworks reveal a multitude of definitions. In parts of the developing world, the term "volunteer" is a recent import from the North and refers essentially to expressions of international volunteering. However, this fails to appreciate that forms of mutual support and self-help, which are included in this report, also fall under the definition of volunteerism and deserve to be studied and recognized as such. Our working definition is that adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2001.

Firstly, the action should be carried out voluntarily, according to an individual's own free will, and not as an obligation stipulated by law, contract or academic requirement. The decision to volunteer may be influenced by peer pressure, personal values or cultural or social obligations but the individual must be able to choose whether or not to act. "Mandatory volunteering," such as community service as an alternative to military duty or

Volunteerism still flies under the radar, yet many societies would be hard-pressed to function without it

BOX 1.2 : Volunteers in weather forecasts

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) chose "Volunteers for weather, climate and water" as the theme for World Meteorological Day 2001 to give broader recognition and greater prominence to the contribution of volunteers to meteorology and hydrology. Indeed, since the early days of these sciences, volunteers, both individuals and institutions such as schools and religious groups, are known to have assisted meteorologists and hydrologists, especially in their operational work and in the promotion of the sciences. In this field, volunteers are known for their perseverance and commitment and for sharing a fascination for meteorological and hydrological phenomena. In some countries, especially in the event of natural disasters, volunteers are often called upon to take measurements and communicate near-real-time data, such as on precipitation, temperature and river levels, for use in early warnings to the populations under threat. Volunteer storm spotters provide on-the-ground and up-to-date information that often complements the information provided by weather radars and satellites.

Source: WMO. (2001).

The three criteria of free will, non-pecuniary motivation, and benefit to others can be applied to any action to assess whether it is volunteerism

custodial sentences for criminal offenders, falls outside of this report. There is no value judgment here on such forms of service. Under certain circumstances, they can be positive, even sowing the seeds for future volunteering.

Secondly, the action should not be undertaken primarily for financial reward. Some reimbursement for expenses or stipend-type payments, or payments in kind such as provision of meals and transport, may be justified. Indeed, these kinds of payments are often regarded as good practice as they make opportunities for volunteer action more accessible and inclusive. Actions undertaken on full pay, such as when the volunteering takes place on company time, are also recognized as volunteerism, provided that the employee receives no additional financial incentive. It is understood that, in such instances, the company is voluntarily forgoing the employee's work time, an aspect of corporate social responsibility. The parameters of our definition also include full-time volunteer placement programmes, both domestic and international, which may pay allowances, normally calculated on the basis of local expenses. They take into account costs associated with living away from one's home environment and the absence of one's normal source of income.

Thirdly, the action should be for the common good. It should directly or indirectly benefit people outside the family or household or else benefit a cause, even though the person volunteering normally benefits as well. In many cultures, a volunteer is often described as "someone who works for community well-being".⁵ The notion of what constitutes the common good may be contentious. For example, when people participate in peaceful activism for or against animal research or the building of a dam, both sides seek what they consider beneficial outcomes. They are included in our definition. Activities involving, or inciting, violence that harm

society and actions not corresponding to the values attributed to volunteerism are not included in our definition.

The three criteria of free will, non-pecuniary motivation, and benefit to others can be applied to any action to assess whether it is volunteerism. The United Nations applies a "big tent" approach by recognizing the many and varied manifestations of volunteerism found in very different social and cultural settings. A further parameter of volunteerism which is sometimes mentioned is an element of organization.⁶ Most empirical studies are concerned with volunteering undertaken in the context of formal organizations. However, focusing only on this aspect of volunteerism overlooks a large amount of volunteer action. Our definition is broader. It includes many acts of volunteerism that take place outside of a formal context. This wide-ranging definition reflects what we strongly believe to be the universal nature of volunteerism.

There are, of course, countless individual acts of kindness that people undertake, such as taking care of a sick person, helping a neighbour's child with school work, or providing food and lodging to a stranger. We recognize that "volunteering" is often applied in general speech to acts where time, energy and skills have been expended freely and without a charge. Such acts are a vital part of caring and supportive societies in which high levels of well-being are recorded and most surveys indicate a positive correlation with volunteering. This report focuses largely on volunteer action undertaken on a regular basis. The main exception is the spontaneous and unorganized outpouring of volunteerism commonly encountered following natural disasters or other types of emergencies when individual acts coalesce into a critical mass with significant impact. These tend to be quite well documented.

HOW IS VOLUNTEERISM EXPRESSED?

The first, most commonly understood expression of volunteerism is formal service delivery, meaning the provision of a service to a third party. It normally takes place through existing structures encompassing a broad range of social, cultural and development fields. Such organizations, whether formally registered or not, can help to deliver a plethora of services, including the building of low cost houses; care and support for people with HIV/AIDS; the spread of information about using bednets against malaria; the teaching of basic literacy skills; and participation in school-parent associations. This form of volunteering may involve delivering a service or raising and administering funds to support the service. Usually there is an agreement about the terms of engagement between the person volunteering and the organization concerned which includes an element of training. Recognition schemes may exist as may some form of stipend or reimbursement of expenses.

A second form of volunteerism is mutual aid or self-help when people with shared needs, problems or interests join forces to address them. In the process, members of the group benefit. Examples are youth-led youth clubs, women's associations and natural resources user groups. In many cultures, entire communities engage in collective endeavours such as planting or harvesting, building flood defences, collecting firewood for communal use or organizing weddings or funerals. In some societies, volunteer activities are organized at community level. Mutuality also takes the form of self-help groups where people come together to address common concerns, often covering mental, emotional or physical problems. In addition to holding face-to-face meetings that provide moral support and offer space for the sharing of information, they can also be engaged in advocacy. This is often the case, for example, with HIV/AIDS support groups. Mutual aid is also found in professional affiliations such as trade

unions. While protecting the interests and promoting the welfare of members, they also address social concerns in the community. Similarly, volunteerism is found in professional and scientific bodies and business and trade associations. Such bodies normally have officers and governing bodies elected by the membership who carry out functions on a volunteer basis.

There are also many volunteer actions that can best be labelled as "civic participation". For example, there is advocacy and campaigning that aim to effect or prevent change. Civic partici-

BOX 1.3 : Teaching the poor in India

Teach India in 2008 was the largest literacy campaign ever led with volunteers teaching disadvantaged children and adults in the cities of India.

The initiative was launched by *The Times of India* newspaper with the support of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. Its aim was to facilitate progress towards achieving primary education for all, one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations.

The Times of India held a high-profile media campaign with the slogan: "What you teach here isn't something that will help a child get to the next class. But to a future free of poverty and deprivation".

Within days, the campaign mobilized active and retired professionals, men and women, as well as students who committed to three months of teaching with one of over 60 NGOs involved. Recruitment of volunteers began with the launch on 6 July. By the close of applications, 83,000 men and women had registered.

Piyush Dhawan, a student in business economics at Delhi University, joined a not-for-profit organization teaching underprivileged children in the capital. He says: "*Teach India provided a perfect platform for like-minded people to combat social and educational inequities within India. I had the chance to engage students at multiple levels in computer literacy and inculcating basic knowledge of English which also helped me grow personally. Teach India has the potential to catalyze and develop a nationwide movement which can provide opportunities to many of India's underprivileged children.*"

Sources: *itimes*. (2008); *Times of India*. (2008, July 6); UNV. (2008a).

BOX 1.4 : Farmers' cooperatives help Zambian farmers survive and thrive**Radio Script 8 (Excerpts):**

Presenter: The agricultural sector in Zambia is faced with several challenges, including the climate becoming harsher, destabilizing crop and livestock production . . . Farmers' cooperatives provide a crisis mitigation strategy in many rural communities in Zambia . . . Cooperatives have a voluntary and open membership; they are democratically controlled by their members; their members participate economically in their activities; they are independent of control by government or industry; they offer education, training and information to members; and they are concerned with their local community.

Why did you form the Nakabu Cooperative?

Farmer: *In 2006, I cultivated two hectares of land and planted maize with a view to selling it to sustain my family. But, unfortunately, that year Mumbwa was hit with a drought and I ended up harvesting very little, too little to even eat at home, let alone to sell and get my six children to school. Life became difficult for me and my family.*

I sat down with four of my friends who were also farmers in my area and we discussed the idea of forming a farmers' cooperative in order to do farming seriously and find ways to survive.

Presenter: How many members did you have at first?

Farmer: *There were a total of 49 members . . . All members have an equal vote – one member, one vote, so everyone is equal in the cooperative. After putting our money together, we bought maize from farmers in nearby villages then travelled to Lusaka and sold the maize to a milling company. It was easy for us to sell the maize because we were a group and had a large volume when we combined our harvests.*

Presenter: What differences have you seen in your lives from the time you started this cooperative?

Farmer: *There has been a lot of progress in my life as an individual as well as in the lives of other members. Speaking for myself, all my six children are in school now.*

...

There are so many cooperatives with different skills. We are visiting each other to learn from one another . . . We have learned new techniques to reduce damage from flooding and to conserve water in times of drought.

Nakabu Cooperative is doing fine, even with all the challenges in the agricultural sector in this country, because we are united and because we work together to secure the future of our families.

Source: Banda. (2008).

pation includes local, small-scale campaigns of limited duration. Examples might include lobbying local authorities to provide street lighting, waste disposal or safe drinking water or campaigning to prevent a private company from building a pollution-spewing processing plant in the vicinity.

In other cases, small-scale volunteer action can build momentum and blossom into na-

tional campaigns such as the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa or the Chipko movement in India. The latter began in the 1970s with a small group of peasant women in the Himalayas of Uttarakhand fighting for the protection of their forest. It grew into a national movement that succeeded in having bans imposed on tree felling in many parts of the country.⁷ Most recently, some Arab states have seen large numbers of pro-

testers actively seeking democratic change through street demonstrations and other forms of protest. Social movements can go global when a constellation of organizations, campaigns, networks and individuals coalesces around major social issues such as advocating for the rights of women or indigenous people or for eliminating land mines. In all of these cases, people provide the hands-on support, enthusiasm and ethos that transform the status quo. In addition to the direct benefits of such volunteerism, there are more intangible benefits for society. Volunteer action gives people a sense of controlling aspects of their lives about which they feel strongly.

Volunteerism as an expression of civic participation is often associated with religion which, like volunteerism, is strongly value-based. All major religions acknowledge the benefits of giving in terms of justice, humanity and kindness, as well as self-fulfilment. Studies show that religious people are, generally speaking, more engaged than non-religious people.⁸ For most religions, community work is a feature of their congregations, either in helping with worship-related activities or encouraging members to use their knowledge, skills and energy to benefit the larger community. The kind of volunteer action promoted can range from direct services to disadvantaged people, education and health services, supporting community based activities such as neighbourhood associations, and advocacy for changing social situations in areas such as the environment and civil rights.⁹ In Latin America, for example, churches play a significant role in supporting volunteer-based programmes and organizations that promote social and economic development. They provide volunteers with a strong sense of community belonging.¹⁰

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) involve large numbers of volunteers. Many focus on people living in extreme poverty such as the Chilean Hogar de Cristo, a Jesuit organization that pro-

BOX 1.5 : Arab Spring – Egypt in Colors

After 25 January 2011, a day of peaceful protests by hundreds in Cairo, five fine art graduates decided to speak to the crowd in their own language: art.

On 11 February, the five young women created simple graffiti on a wall with motivational messages: "With science and hard work, nations progress", "Tafa'al" (be optimistic). Inspired by the positive response to their initiative, the young women realized that they could reach out to the Egyptian community with a creative message to make a difference in their day using art and colour in the streets.

The young artists decided to paint a huge wall in Maadi, a suburb of Cairo. They announced it on Twitter and Facebook, inviting people to join them. They were surprised to find enthusiastic engagement from the local community. Eighty-five volunteers joined them in painting, including dozens of interested kids. Community members not only witnessed the walls taking on bright new colours, they also engaged in the process by volunteering to clean the area.

Thrilled by this experience, the young women decided to create a group and called it "Egypt in Colors". The group now has 25 young members, women and men, with one thing in common: their love of Egypt and art. They have moved on to projects in different schools and communities of Cairo and aim to take their inspirational and motivational messages across Egypt.

Source: Teen Stuff magazine. (2011, August).

motes the social inclusion of the poor.¹¹ In Thailand, the Interfaith Network on HIV/AIDS mobilizes volunteers from Buddhist, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant communities across the country to organize home-based care activities for people with AIDS living in remote areas.¹² International FBOs such as World Vision and Islamic Relief involve significant numbers of volunteers. Caritas, with its focus on reducing poverty and injustice, helps some 24 million people a year with 440,000 paid staff and around 625,000 volunteers worldwide.¹³

According to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, FBOs are the critical providers of rural health care and care of or-

A proper understanding of the universality of volunteerism requires that the fog enveloping volunteer action be dispersed to reveal the true extent of its contours

phans in many parts of the developing world: "A critical component of the world's response to these diseases is the work of faith-based organizations (FBOs). Historically, FBOs have been at the forefront of the fight against disease in the developing world. They provide life-changing prevention, treatment and support to those who need it the most. This is particularly relevant in rural and isolated areas around the world, where the work of FBOs directly impacts the lives of millions of children and families."¹⁴

The many and varied categorizations of volunteerism pose serious challenges for assessing the size and extent of volunteerism and contribute to the misperceptions that surround volunteering. They do, however, reflect the richness and very broad based nature of volunteer action. "Words such as 'volunteering' are folk concepts as well as scientific concepts ... Often their meaning is contested. People do not agree on what should count as volunteering. Sometimes they use words like 'volunteering' as labels to pin on people and their actions in order to denigrate them; at other times, these same words are used to indicate approval."¹⁵ Taken together, the perceptions described fall into what has been termed the "dominant paradigm"¹⁶ of volunteerism. A proper understanding of the universality of volunteerism requires that the fog enveloping volunteer action be dispersed to reveal the true extent of its contours. Once the scale of volunteerism is truly appreciated, it will be possible to move on to examine its contributions to global issues.

The remainder of this report uses the United Nations framework of free will, non-pecuniary motivations and benefit to others as the defining parameters of volunteerism. Formal service delivery, mutual aid and self-help, and civic participation are used to define its expressions. However, it is important to note that the expression of volunteerism is also influenced by local cultural and social circumstances.

COMMON MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUT VOLUNTEERISM

There are a number of misperceptions that cloud a proper understanding of the universality of volunteering, despite being largely contradicted by a growing body of empirical and anecdotal evidence. These illusions need to be erased in order to reveal the true extent of volunteerism and make it possible to analyze its contributions to global issues.

Misperception 1: Volunteering occurs only through legally recognized, formal and structured NGOs, usually in developed countries, with some type of agreement between the volunteer and the organization. As such organizations are predominantly located in developed countries, this contributes to the notion that volunteerism is found largely in such countries. In reality, much of the volunteerism described in this report takes place through small local groups, clubs and associations, which are the bedrock of a civil society in industrialized, as well as developing, countries. Furthermore, empirical evidence in developing countries paints a different picture. To cite just one example, research from Mexico found that most volunteer activity there happens outside of formal organizations. This is because legal and fiscal circumstances in Mexico do not encourage the creation of formal civil society organizations. Moreover, there is a limited culture of participation in formal groups.¹⁷

Misperception 2: Volunteerism takes place only in the civil society sector. This is false. Volunteer action is universal; it does not happen exclusively in one "sector" but rather it permeates every aspect of life. Many public sector services, for example, rely on volunteers: schools and hospital care services, neighbourhood policing, coastguards and fire services all rely on volunteers. Volunteerism is also found in nationwide government social programmes in such fields as immunization and literacy. Since 1988, the

Global Polio Eradication Initiative, spearheaded by national governments, the World Health Organization, UNICEF and Rotary International, has immunized more than 2.5 billion children against polio, thanks to the unprecedented cooperation of more than 200 countries and 20 million, mostly local, volunteers, backed by an international investment of over 8 billion US dollars. By 2006, only four countries remained in which polio transmission had not been halted and annual case numbers had decreased by over 99 per cent.¹⁸

Moreover, the private sector's volunteer engagement has grown steadily since the mid-1990s, much of it under the framework of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The sector employs a significant proportion of the world's population, many of whom volunteer. Volunteerism is an important expression of CSR with over 90 per cent of Fortune 500 companies having formal employee volunteer and giving programmes.¹⁹

Misperception 3: Volunteerism is the preserve of the well-off and well-educated, those who have disposable time and income. In fact, an expanding body of empirical research indicates that volunteerism is prevalent among the income poor who undertake voluntary work to benefit themselves and their communities. Their assets, including local knowledge, skills, labour and social networks often play a critical role in surviving stresses and shocks, as discussed in Chapter 4 on Volunteerism and Sustainable Livelihoods.

A World Bank study focusing on the poorest of the poor highlighted the need to uncover "existing networks of solidarity" and stressed that the "mobilization of local communities often begins with the detection of local groups such as community centers."²¹ Another study from the United States on transforming distressed, low income neighbourhoods concluded: "Among the most undervalued of [community] assets are the

BOX 1.6 : Public and community partnership against poverty and tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease associated with poverty and low incomes. In Karakalpakstan, a semi-autonomous region of Uzbekistan, the disease has reached epidemic proportions and exacerbates poverty there. The Uzbek health ministry is tackling the high incidence of poverty and tuberculosis together with the United Nations, local civil society, district government and the Mahalla, traditional local volunteering committees which support welfare and improve livelihood. Since 1994, the Mahalla has been given ever more responsibility for the channelling of social assistance from Central Government. Through the Mahalla Committees and local authorities, 32 Community Volunteer Trainers were trained. They in turn recruited and trained 30 more volunteers. After three training cycles, there are close to 3000 volunteers raising awareness on TB, assisting in enhancing health-care systems and water supply, supporting successful treatment of TB patients and supporting household-based income generation activities among TB patients and their immediate family.

"Thanks to the Community Volunteers and their hard work, now more people are coming to see doctors and visiting them in time which is extremely important in treating TB" (N Orazimbetova, 2011).

Sources: UNDP. (2011); Nesibe Orazimbetova [Chief Doctor, Karauzyak district], Speech at the opening ceremony of TB dispensary. (2011, January 14).

naturally occurring networks through which neighbors and residents volunteer to address and resolve common problems. Strategic attention to, and more intentional nurturing and use of, these networks could be a major contribution to sustainable, resident-driven community transformation."²²

Misperception 4: Volunteerism is the domain of amateurs who are unskilled and inexperienced. This misunderstanding arises

BOX 1.7 : African philanthropy – a strong tradition

African philanthropy isn't something that needs to be introduced by anybody because Africans have strong traditions of self-help, self-support, voluntary institutions, and rotation credit and associations like South African stokvels. But, we haven't been able to tap into this tradition and don't usually think of its various expressions as development tools.²⁰

Source: Wilkinson-Maposa, Fowler, Oliver-Evans & Mulenga. (2005).

from the perception that professionalism, both in knowledge and behaviour, is exclusively associated with a paid job. It may also be influenced by the impression that most volunteers are young people. Throughout this report there are references to professionally qualified women and men motivated by the values that drive volunteerism. They range from lawyers working pro bono to community fire fighters to medical doctors, who chose to bring their know-how and many years of experience to volunteer action.

Misperception 5: Women make up the bulk of volunteers. Wrong again. While studies indicate that women are slightly more likely to volunteer, men and women volunteer for about the same number of hours. The perceived predominance of women in volunteering stems in part from the association with social service provision and health care in particular. The feminist movement in the 1970s depicted volunteering as an extension of women's domestic work outside the home.²³ While women are predominant in

areas such as volunteer care of children and older persons and hospice work, men appear to dominate in sports, the environment, fire and sea rescue.²⁴

A more cogent case can be made that volunteering reinforces gender roles and that women's volunteer work occurs in areas which, in the paid labour market, are assigned lower status. Men's volunteer work is typically in the "public domain", in civic and professional activities including serving on the boards of organizations. Conversely, women volunteers are found in the "private domain", helping others in need. A study of women volunteer health workers in Lima, Peru, demonstrated how health-care work was viewed as an extension of their maternal role. A study from South Africa and Zimbabwe of women caregivers in HIV/AIDS came to a similar conclusion.²⁵ Among activists, men are more involved in national campaigning while women are more likely to participate in local campaigns.²⁶ The United Nations recognized the need to avoid gender stereotyping when it highlighted the need to ensure "that opportunities for volunteering in all sectors are open both to women and men, given their different levels of participation in different areas."²⁷

BOX 1.8 : From house building to active citizenship

In 1997, a group of Chilean young people concerned with extreme poverty in their country set out to build 350 basic houses for families living in slums. The programme has since expanded to 19 countries in Latin America and mobilizes more than 50,000 young volunteers every year between the ages of 17 and 28. They have not only improved the housing situation of thousands of families in the region. Through direct contact with poverty, the experience has changed the way that they see their country. They are now raising awareness about poverty through campaigns and lobbying for adequate housing for all. From building houses, young volunteers become active citizens and leaders in their communities.

"As a volunteer, I understood that each and every one has an important role to play to fight poverty. We come together as, for us, there is no other way to denounce poverty if this is not through our collective involvement. Ansanm nou kapab (Together we can)"

Donald, volunteer from Un Techo in Haiti.

Source: J. Serani, [Director Mexico and Caribbean Region, Un Techo para mi País], Personal Communication. (2011, July 21).

Misperception 6: Young people do not volunteer. On the contrary, young people are not a passive group waiting for resources and opportunities to be handed to them. They are actively engaged in the development of their societies in a vast range of actions. One well-known example from Latin America is the organization Un Techo para mi País (A Roof for my Country).

It is also the case, however, that many young people find participating through formal organizations less appealing than in the past. These opportunities are themselves decreasing as the global economy and social and political institutions undergo major change.²⁸ However, the commitment of young people to civic engagement remains strong even though there

appears to be a shift towards participation in non-formal, and less-structured, situations. For young people, political and social activism that offers informal, non-hierarchical ways to engage is more appealing. An example is the Ukraine youth-led “Irpinskyi velorukh” (Irpın town movement for cycling). This is an informal group promoting cycling and a car-free lifestyle which organizes annual Car-free Day events in the community. In 2009, 56 people participated. Twenty media covered it and local officials and community members participated in the music, speeches, poster making, cycling parade and cross-country competition.²⁹

Misperception 7: Volunteering takes place face-to-face. Significant new developments in digital technology mean that volunteerism is not limited to activities that entail face-to-face contact. The new technologies with which people connect are possibly the most significant development in volunteering. Rapidly evolving mobile phone technologies and the spread of the Internet are enabling larger numbers of people from broader cross-sections of the population to engage on a volunteer basis. As such, these technologies are contributing to its universal nature. This is discussed in Chapter 3.

Misperception 8: Volunteerism should be off-limits for state intervention. This view is far less widespread than a decade ago, as is evident by the growing number of policies and laws adopted by governments, especially since 2001. Most are aimed at encouraging volunteer action by citizens and/or safeguarding the rights of volunteers. However, there are instances of states trying to control volunteer action and use it for their own political purposes. Volunteerism, for example, can be a means of compensating for insufficient services, making up for the inability of the state to deliver services. These cases need to be monitored and exposed wherever they arise.

Policies can inadvertently stifle the driving forces behind volunteerism. Governments

are well-placed to contribute to an environment in which all types of volunteerism can flourish. However, the intention is certainly not to pursue the notion of the self-reliant community with the state neglecting its responsibilities for ensuring that the basic needs of citizens are met. The challenge is how to integrate volunteer action by citizens with action taken by governments and other stakeholders in a mutually reinforcing way, emphasizing cooperation and complementarity. Ultimately, this can increase the efficiency and outreach of government programmes while strengthening people’s confidence in their abilities to affect the well-being of their communities.

BOX 1.9 : Promoting laws and policies that support volunteerism

South Korea’s first national law on volunteering, the Basic Law on Promoting Volunteer Services (2006), established the National Committee on Volunteer Promotion. This committee comprises government and civil society representatives and has been working to encourage public participation in volunteering.

Through the law, national and local governments are mandated to ensure that voluntary service is performed in a safe environment, and that the government provides insurance to guarantee against physical and economic injury to volunteers.

Volunteering continues to grow in the Republic of Korea, also promoted through the government commitment to support volunteers. Of particular note was the extensive citizen involvement in cleaning up oil spills in Taean County on the west coast of the country in 2007.

In July 2008, the Hyundai KIA Automotive Group founded a volunteer organization, Happy Move Global Youth Volunteers. Since then, the organization has been sending around 1000 Korean university students every year to contribute to humanitarian, cultural and other volunteer efforts in India, Brazil, China, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Turkey and Thailand. This programme helps young Koreans to understand the true meaning of volunteer work and develop their own identity with first-hand experience of a new culture and close cooperation with the people.

Sources: The International Centre for Not-for-profit Law. (2010); UNV. (2009).

With this first SWVR, we hope to clarify views as to what volunteerism is and what it achieves, in keeping with realities on the ground

Misperception 9: Volunteerism is free. There is an old adage that while volunteers are not paid, they do not work for nothing. Applied to more formal types of volunteering, this relates to infrastructure required to ensure effective contributions. It includes the establishment and running of volunteer centres, volunteer management, training and recognition, and costs associated with the proper functioning of volunteers such as transportation, meals and stipends. In terms of governments, this might include the establishment of appropriate policy and regulatory frameworks, national volunteer corps, and youth and older persons volunteer schemes.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Misperceptions obscure the universality of the values and actions associated with volunteerism. They are obstacles to understanding

the breadth and depth of volunteer action around the world. With this first SWVR, we hope to clarify views as to what volunteerism is and what it achieves, in keeping with realities on the ground.

Research on the topic is at an early stage and needs to be intensified. Governments clearly have a role in encouraging more empirical study that will result in a more accurate picture of the universal nature of volunteerism. The academic community has to question fundamental assumptions about volunteer action. The United Nations system and other development actors, including civil society, have a responsibility to ensure that this research reaches all of the stakeholders. Establishing robust data on volunteerism is the surest route to develop strategies which take into account the powerful and universal force that volunteerism represents.