

# 2

CHAPTER 2

## Taking the measure of volunteering

*If you can't count it, it doesn't count.*  
**Anon.**

## WHY TAKE THE MEASURE OF VOLUNTEERISM?

The sheer size of the worldwide contributions of volunteerism calls for some measure of its magnitude. This is no different from other areas of human endeavour that play important roles in the functioning of societies. Interest in understanding the scale of volunteerism has grown in recent years, as evidenced by various studies at national, regional and global level.

In this chapter, we attempt to take the measure of volunteerism, looking also beyond the numbers. Calculating the dimensions and value of volunteerism, including economic value, is obviously important. Yet numbers are not the whole story. Some argue that putting a figure on volunteering detracts from its intrinsic values in terms of its impact on communities and causes and on the volunteers themselves. Others would say that the main contribution of volunteerism, its true value, lies in creating harmonious societies marked by high levels of social cohesion

and well-being, also factors which are very hard to quantify.

The human values that reside in people and communities run throughout this report. Better methods need to be found to recognize these values. There are sound reasons to measure volunteerism, the actions it inspires and the economic benefits derived from those actions. The principal arguments in favour of measuring volunteerism are considered below.

It is important for the volunteers themselves that the impact of their actions be recognized. Documenting the time and efforts expended by many millions of volunteers helps to provide recognition and to stimulate the desire to engage. In the process, others may be motivated to participate when they see the contribution of volunteer action and appreciate that volunteering is a normal part of civic engagement.

For volunteer involving organizations, measuring helps them to gain new perspectives on their programmes. Moreover, with facts and figures at hand they can enhance their public relations efforts, increase accountability, expand their options for resource mobilization, and provide volunteers with an overall picture of the sum total of their efforts.

On another level, if national governments are to take volunteering into account in national policy, they have to be convinced of its value, including its economic value. Too often, governments are unaware of the extent of volunteering, the different segments of society that it includes, and the value it creates. Once they are convinced of the benefit of factoring volunteerism into decision-making, governments need reliable data to develop appropriate strategies. This ensures that this resource is properly nurtured and harnessed for the overall well-being of the country.

### BOX 2.1 : Volunteer values

Volunteers are essential to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IFRC). But exactly how many volunteers are there and how much value do they offer? A 2011 IFRC study provides answers. Around 13.1 million active Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers donated nearly 6 billion US dollars worth of services that reached about 30 million people in 2009. Volunteers extend the IFRC paid workforce by a global average of 20 volunteers to every paid staff member. In sub-Saharan Africa it is 327 volunteers for every staff member; in South East Asia, 432 volunteers to one staff member; while the lowest ratio is in the United States and Canada with 11 volunteers to one staff member.

The survey, based on figures from 107 National Societies, not only provides the value and numbers behind the volunteering contingent but also describes the many social contributions that they make in their communities in the fields of health, poverty reduction and response to emergencies.

*Source: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). (2011).*

**BOX 2.2 : Using community calendars to measure the value of volunteering**

Municipal expenditure, provincial government allocation, corporate social investment and other forms of development assistance are captured in numbers and financial records. However, there are no figures that assign a value to the contributions that citizens make to local initiatives. The many ways in which community members participate, such as mothers' unions, men's associations and youth clubs, are such a routine part of people's daily lives that they tend to overlook the benefits that they bring to the development of their communities. One approach to creating awareness in communities of the value added by such volunteer action is to use community calendars. To empower a community to recognize its own contributions, an action research study in Jansenville, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, mapped the amount of volunteer time, skills, goods in-kind and money that community-based, non-governmental and faith-based organizations received from members in the community.

These contributions were added up and costed at financial values that the participating organizations felt reasonable. The results translated into a total contribution of 19 years and eight months of unpaid labour a year. In a community where the local government estimates that 60 per cent of families live in poverty, the total contribution of volunteering was estimated to have a value of 53,000 US dollars generated by 4343 people across 378 households. This valuing of community assets has been eye opening, motivating and inspiring to participants, encouraging them to build on their "investment". *"Funders want to know that we will still be there after their money is finished. Our members fill our bucket, it shows their sustainability and that they can stand on their own,"* says Notizi Vanda, Director and founding member of the Jansenville Development Forum.

Source: Wilkinson-Maposa. (2009).

The international community has recognized the need for governments to "establish the economic value of volunteering to help to highlight one important aspect of its overall contribution to society and thereby assist in the development of informed policies."<sup>1</sup> However, we firmly believe that taking the measure of volunteerism should be more than computing bottom-line economic value and "number crunching". In 2008, the General Assembly of the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) expressed it precisely: "Measuring and presenting the economic value can be a good way of winning recognition for volunteering especially with policy makers. But it has to be employed cautiously and together with other measurement tools for the so far 'immeasurable impacts' of volunteering, such as on social capital, social cohesion, personal development and empowerment. Such measurement tools should be developed in order to enable the description of the full picture of volunteering and its true value."<sup>2</sup>

**DIVERSE MEASURES OF VOLUNTEERING**

Recent country-level studies, largely in developed countries, of the size and composition of volunteering have proven a solid basis for discussions of many aspects of volunteerism. For example, the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, conducted by Statistics Canada, recorded a total of 2.1 billion volunteer hours with both an increase in the number of volunteers (5.7%) and volunteer hours (4.2%) from 2004.<sup>3</sup> In 2004, in the United States, the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the Department of Labor indicated that 62.8 million people had volunteered for an organization at least once in the previous 12 months. The Bureau of Statistics of Australia found that, in 2007, 5.2 million people volunteered for a sum of 713 million hours of work, the equivalent to 14.6 billion Australian dollars of paid work time. The study showed that 34 per cent of the adult population volunteered (36 per cent of women and 32 per cent of men).

Beyond economic data, there is ever more research into the nature and motivations of volunteers. These include studies that look at student volunteering in 12 countries;<sup>4</sup> senior well-being in Europe;<sup>5</sup> people in Israel on welfare benefits who volunteer;<sup>6</sup> the role of religious organizations in promoting volunteerism in Latin America;<sup>7</sup> and volunteerism policies and legislation globally.<sup>8</sup>

In 2006 at the Fifth African Development Forum, organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, a study entitled *Youth Volunteering for Development: Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*<sup>9</sup> was presented. The research, covering nine countries, showed how young people's capacities develop when they volunteer. They become active development agents in their communities. Moreover, it emphasized how volunteer programmes can be linked to policy frameworks on a sustainable basis. The outcome statement declared: "It is essential, therefore, that African governments, working with their development partners, foster the spirit of volunteerism among young people."<sup>10</sup> In 2010 and 2011, both the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) launched regional youth volunteer corps to contribute to peace and development in their regions.

### BOX 2.3 : Beyond the economic value

The 2010 National Survey of Volunteering conducted by peak-body Volunteering Australia, found that 83 per cent of volunteers say that volunteerism has increased their sense of belonging to their community. The survey highlights the important role that volunteering plays in providing opportunities for people to learn with 26 per cent saying the training received as part of their volunteer work has helped them to acquire an accreditation/qualification. The survey also found that volunteerism plays an important role in social inclusion in Australian society. The survey found that volunteering can help reduce feelings of personal isolation, offer people skills and social contacts, support a greater sense of self-worth and challenge stereotypes about different groups.

Source: ProBono News (2010).

In 2010, the International FORUM on Development Service mapped international volunteerism in 20 countries in Asia. It found that, when compared to other locations, volunteers

### BOX 2.4 : African Union youth volunteers

*"The youth should be the primary target of investment initiatives in Africa because, in a world in which skills and expertise are becoming increasingly indispensable, the youth constitute a huge asset for Africa."*

In December 2010, the first group of African Union Youth Volunteer Corps (AU-YVC) members concluded intensive pre-deployment orientation training in Obudu, Nigeria. The AU-YVC is a development programme that recruits and works with youth volunteers in all 53 countries in Africa. The initiative, a product of the African Youth Charter, the Fifth Africa Development Forum and the African Union, promotes volunteering to address poverty, weak professional and leadership development and slow development of a Pan-Africanist orientation, and to promote a better socio-economic climate. It aspires to improve the status of young people in Africa as key participants in the delivery of Africa's human development targets and goals. The 60 volunteers serve across the continent, sharing expertise in areas including education and ICT, gender and development, advocacy and communication, post conflict reconstruction and peace building, health and population, infrastructure and energy, and agriculture and economy. Together, these volunteers will share skills, creativity and learning to promote the spirit of service to Africa, their countries and communities, while developing leadership skills.

Source: African Union. (2010, April).

in Asia were principally concerned with addressing development issues, including poverty alleviation and the MDGs. In South and South-East Asia, there was a tendency towards South-to-South volunteering with developing country volunteers largely serving in other developing countries of the region. The study identified new ways to boost volunteering in Asia. These included targeting the Asian diaspora and linking with national volunteers to increase the effectiveness of international volunteers. The research also found close linkages with the state in public-private partnerships and in state-supported NGOs. Two further trends in Asia were international volunteer service as a form of corporate social responsibility, especially short-term corporate volunteering, and the growing influence of the Internet.<sup>11</sup>

A study in Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe between 2005 and 2007 confirmed the challenges of volunteerism research in the South, namely poorly documented experiences, lack of academic research and limited library collections.<sup>12</sup> In the absence of comprehensive studies of the scope and impact of volunteerism, the literature available was largely that produced by NGOs and international volunteer organizations and focused on the impact of specific programmes on beneficiaries and their communities. There are clear limits, however, on the extent to which the findings of small-scale research at local level can be extrapolated to reflect the situation at the national level.

### NATIONAL VOLUNTEER STUDIES

The regular national surveys on volunteering and giving in Canada, the United States and Australia provide detailed data that demonstrate the relevance of ongoing measuring of volunteering. In 2008, the United Nations Secretary-General noted 15 country specific studies in developing countries.<sup>13</sup> In 2010, UNV identified 14 new developing country studies and reports on volunteerism.<sup>14</sup> These are generally one-off studies which aim to

increase public recognition and awareness of volunteerism and its contributions and to assess volunteering as a part of community needs. Such studies also perform resource mapping in support of national development planning and programming.

#### BOX 2.5 : First-ever volunteerism survey in Bangladesh

In 2010 the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) conducted a comprehensive national survey on volunteerism, the first of its kind ever carried out in the country. The survey addressed rural and urban volunteering; age, gender and education level of volunteers; volunteering rates; formal organizational and non-organizational volunteering; annual volunteering hours; and monetary valuations.

The results were discussed at the National Volunteering Conference in Dhaka in July 2011. The main recommendation was the establishment of a National Volunteer Agency responsible for planning, guiding and managing all volunteer activities in the country. Its purpose will be to enhance the contribution of volunteerism to individual and social welfare and well-being in Bangladesh.

The household labour-based survey revealed that a total of 16,586,000 people over 15 years of age volunteered in 2010. The survey estimated the contribution of volunteering to the Bangladesh economy in 2010 at approximately 1.66 billion US dollars. The findings also showed that the economic value of volunteering in 2009-2010 was equivalent to 1.7 per cent of GDP.

Nearly 80 per cent of volunteering in Bangladesh is conducted outside formal organizations. Mostly it takes the form of informal, spontaneous and sporadic help by individuals or groups. Volunteering by men constitutes 76.3 per cent with women at only 23.7 per cent. This, however, could well be an underestimate since the survey questioned heads of households who are usually men.

The National Volunteering Conference strongly recommended that the BBS undertake a follow-up qualitative survey to substantiate the results in question. It also called for a more broad-based survey for further examination of regional and gender differences in volunteering and to provide information on reasons for, and barriers to, volunteering.

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. (2011, July).

### PURSuing A GLOBAL MEASURE: HIGHLIGHTING INTERNATIONAL MEASURING INITIATIVES

Notwithstanding these positive developments, few countries have taken on the task of systematically and recurrently measuring volunteerism with a view to incorporating results into policy. This is partly due to the absence of internationally recognized standards for defining and measuring volunteering. This limits comparisons between countries based on official statistics. However, a number of independent measuring initiatives are under way which offer a global perspective of volunteerism.

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In a recent effort to devise a comprehensive measurement of volunteerism, the **European Commission (EC)** commissioned a **study** as part of the European Year of Volunteers 2011. The aim of the study was to help it to consider ways in which the voluntary sector could be further promoted and to examine how volunteering could help the European Union to achieve its wider strategic objectives.<sup>15</sup> The intention was to aggregate national data on volunteerism. However, a review of national and regional studies, surveys, reports, and the views of key stakeholders on volunteering in each EU Member State revealed considerable discrepancies. These prevented the drawing up of a statistically accurate comparison across the European Union. Some of the challenges and lessons related to this study are described below as they represent a microcosm of the state of measuring volunteerism.

- *Complexity of the institutional landscape:* responsibility for country data on volunteerism was not coordinated by one public body. Rather, it was managed by different ministries on a "sector-by-sector" basis and sometimes supported by various sector-specific umbrella voluntary organizations. "In practice this means that ministries dealing with issues such as justice, educa-

tion, finance, sport, health and social affairs, and interior and foreign affairs can all be involved in volunteering and it was not possible within the scope of this study to consult every single ministry."<sup>16</sup>

- *Difficulties in comparative quantitative analysis:* analyzing quantitative information on the number and profile of volunteers was challenging because national studies were conducted at different times, using different definitions, methodologies, survey samples and target groups, and focusing on different types of volunteering. The finding that an estimated 92 to 94 million adults volunteer in the EU, around 22 per cent of Europeans over 15 years of age, with most volunteers aged 30 to 50 years "should be seen as indicative only."<sup>17</sup>

- *Limited statistics on voluntary organizations:* many EU countries have a national registry of not-for-profit associations or organizations. This is normally managed by a public body and updated regularly. This is a valuable data source when associations are obliged to register with the relevant public organization. Weaknesses include the fact that databases do not distinguish between associations relying entirely on paid staff and those fully or partly dependent on volunteers and that organizations may not necessarily give notice if they cease activities. A further weakness is that in some countries, registration is not compulsory and voluntary organizations have no incentive to register.

- *Lack of consensus on economic data:* voluntary organizations are developing tools and instruments to monitor the economic value of their volunteers' contributions. However, national statistical offices vary greatly in terms of data collected and their interest in measuring the economic value of volunteering. Efforts are hampered by the aforementioned difficulties arising from the inconsistency in approaches to quantifying

volunteer numbers, time dedicated and activities undertaken. Where calculations have been made, there is usually no consensus on estimated economic value due to differing ways of valuing volunteer work. Finally, the study does not use figures on monetary value provided by Member States. Instead, it uses gross estimates of the economic value of volunteering based on the common replacement cost method for all countries.<sup>18</sup>

- *Social and cultural impacts of volunteering:* national reports highlighted many social, economic and cultural benefits beyond economic value. “However, in practice benefits often vary considerably between countries as well as between different volunteers, local communities and amongst the direct beneficiaries of voluntary activities and services.”<sup>19</sup> Impacts relating to key EU objectives in the areas of social inclusion and employment, education and training, active citizenship and sports are identified but the data are overwhelmingly qualitative.

In summarizing the current situation, not only for national studies but also for the measuring of volunteering in general, the Report states: “The extent to which each national report relies on primary and secondary data sources varies, depending on the availability of data and reports, the number of stakeholders that could be consulted and the specific context of each country.”<sup>20</sup>

The methodological challenges encountered by the EC are even more pronounced for the developing world where statistical data are at times less comprehensive. Nevertheless, it remains essential to attempt to reach an understanding of the size and extent of volunteering. We shall refer briefly to four attempts that cover both industrialized and developing countries: the Gallup World Poll, the World Values Survey,<sup>21</sup> the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, and

the CIVICUS Civil Society Index. All four employ different measurement approaches and definitions of volunteerism. Unsurprisingly, they produce very different findings.

The Gallup World Poll and the World Values Survey are cross-country population surveys that seek to profile behaviours and opinions of people through nationally representative samples. Given the broad range of topics covered, few questions can relate to volunteering. Additionally, given the diversity of terminology and understanding of volunteerism, certain questions are open to different interpretations by respondents.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the surveys have wide global reach and can be regularly repeated to provide longitudinal trends as well as comparative data.

The **Gallup World Poll** (GWP)<sup>23</sup> asks the following questions related to volunteering:

*In the past month have you done any of the following?*

*How about volunteered your time to an organization?*

*How about helped a stranger or somebody you didn't know who needed help?*

The first is an open-ended question about organization-related volunteering which assumes a consistent understanding of the term. The GWP found that 16 per cent of adults worldwide volunteered their time to an organization. People in North America, Australia and New Zealand were the most likely to volunteer, followed by those in South-East Asia (specifically Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines) and Africa. The lowest levels of volunteerism were in the Middle East, North Africa and East Asia, i.e. China, Japan and South Korea. The second question refers to actions outside an organization. As such, it may or may not be measuring “volunteering”, as defined in this report,

**It remains essential to attempt to reach an understanding of the size and extent of volunteering**

depending on the extent and nature of an individual's involvement.

The **World Values Survey** (WVS)<sup>24</sup> found that people in East Asia were most likely to report doing "unpaid voluntary work", followed by people in Africa, North America and the Pacific region. The lowest levels of voluntary work were found in Western Europe, Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The **Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project** (CNP)<sup>25</sup> provides a common survey form to participating countries with suggested questions and examples of the kinds of activity about which respondents would be asked.

*Think about the past 3 months. During that time period, did you help, work or provide any service or assistance to anyone outside your family or household without receiving compensation?*

Respondents who answered "no" were then prompted to think broadly about such activities even if they thought it "natural that everyone would do such a thing in a similar situation." While this also applies to formal types of volunteerism, it is especially relevant for the informal types often so embedded in cultures and traditions that they may not even be considered volunteering. This makes the task of measuring more challenging.

The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project estimates that, between 1995 and 2000, the number of volunteers contributing through voluntary organizations in 36 countries, taken together, would make the ninth largest country in the world in terms of population (see Figure 2.1).

In those same 36 countries, volunteers comprised 44 per cent of the work force of civil society organizations representing the equivalent of 20.8 million full-time workers. Using a "replacement cost" approach, CNP

**FIGURE 2.1: If volunteers were a nation**

1. China	1,306 million
2. India	1,094 million
3. United States	296 million
4. Indonesia	229 million
5. Brazil	186 million
6. Pakistan	158 million
7. Bangladesh	144 million
8. Russia	143 million
<b>9. "Volunteer Land"</b>	<b>ca. 140 million</b>
10. Nigeria	129 million
11. Japan	128 million

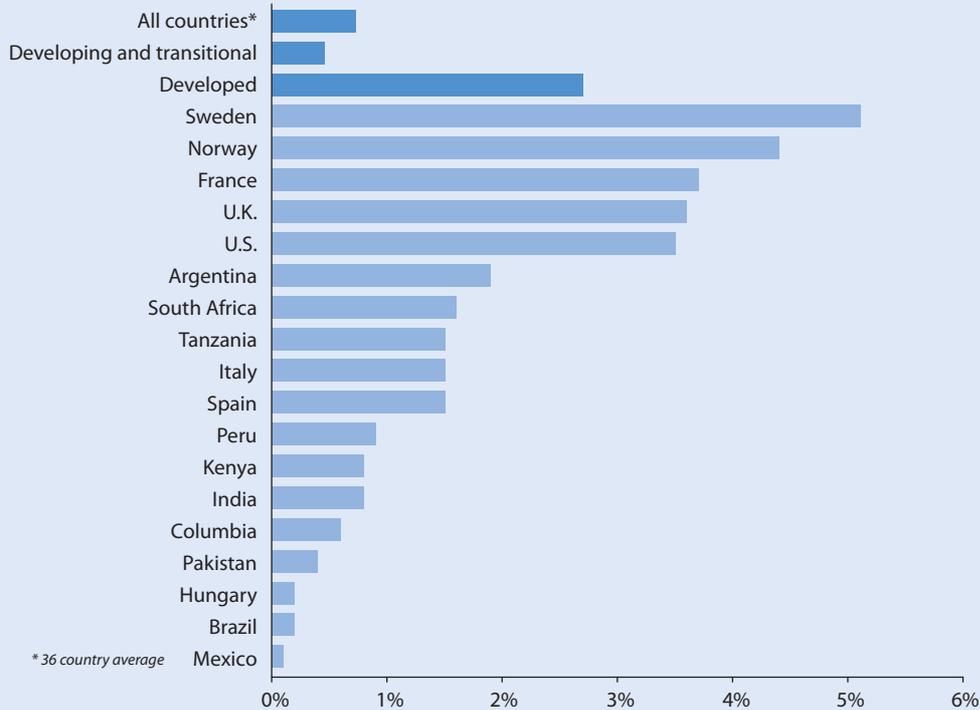
Source: Volunteering – Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project; Population: United States Census Bureau

calculated the economic contribution of volunteers in the 36 countries to be 400 billion US dollars annually. This represented, on average, 1.1 per cent of GDP in these countries. However, in developing and transition countries, volunteer work represented a somewhat smaller 0.7 per cent of GDP. In developed countries, volunteer work represented 2.7 per cent of GDP (See Figure 2.2).<sup>26</sup>

**CIVICUS Civil Society Index** (CSI)<sup>27</sup> creates 72 indicators on different aspects of civil society. The indicators are then grouped into five dimensions: Civic Engagement, Level of Organization, Practice of Values, Perception of Impact and External Environment. Together they present a comprehensive picture of the strength of a country's civil society, expressed visually through the Civil Society Diamond (see Figure 2.3).<sup>28</sup>

The CSI findings show interesting regional variations in volunteer participation rates between socially focused CSOs and CSOs with an activist orientation. The percentage of people undertaking voluntary work on a regular basis for socially-focused CSOs is far higher in sub-Saharan Africa than in any other region with Latin America, Eastern Europe and the CIS

**FIGURE 2.2: Value of volunteer work as share of GDP**



Source: Salamon, L. (2008, April). *Putting volunteering on the economic map of the world*. Paper presented at the IAVE Conference, Panama, Costa Rica.

following. Activism-oriented NGOs also record the highest participation rates in sub-Saharan Africa. However, here Eastern Europe ranks ahead of Latin America, followed by the CIS.

The CSI also measures the extent and nature of citizen engagement, including volunteerism, in relation to the other key dimensions of the diamond. This can enable comparison and reflection on some of aspects of volunteerism such as trust and solidarity which have not, thus far, readily lent themselves to quantification.

The CSI data also indicates that countries with high rates of volunteering in socially-focused CSOs have high rates of volunteering in politically oriented CSOs. The data also show a positive connection between higher rates of volunteering and greater civil society effectiveness. This suggests that volunteering brings benefits to civil society as a whole.

**FIGURE 2.3: CIVICUS Civil Society Diamond**



Source: Civil Society Index Diamond

CIVICUS identified this as an opportunity, especially in developing countries, to strengthen the bridge between less formal types of volunteering, many of which are linked to new technologies, and campaigning and advocacy by CSOs, thus broadening the space for civic participation.<sup>29</sup>

### THE MANUAL ON THE MEASUREMENT OF VOLUNTEER WORK

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has made a valuable contribution to standardizing measurement of volunteerism by preparing and launching a Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work.<sup>30</sup> Developed by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies, at the request of the ILO, and supported by the United Nations Volunteers programme, the manual outlines a standardized set of measures of volunteering to supplement country labour force surveys. Its main objective is to facilitate estimates of the economic value of volunteer work.

Labour force surveys collect a range of work-force and demographic data. Adopting the ILO manual recommendations can substantially increase the availability of reliable, comparable measures of volunteering to supplement labour force statistics.

The definition of volunteering in the Manual is similar to that described in Chapter 1, namely "unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities

performed either through an organization or directly for others outside their own household."<sup>31</sup> The Manual provides recommendations on how to administer the survey effectively.

The manual also provides suggestions for analyzing the data and estimating the economic value of volunteering. This includes reporting

#### BOX 2.7 : Best Practices in the measurement of volunteering

Describe volunteering for the participant while avoiding misunderstandings related to using the term: "The next few questions are about unpaid non-compulsory work that you did, that is, time you gave without pay to activities performed either through organizations or directly for others outside your own household."

Ask about volunteering within the previous four weeks, which facilitates recall.

Provide prompts or examples about the potential types of activities to include in reporting if a respondent indicates that they have not volunteered, which also aids recall.

Collect information about hours spent for each volunteer activity mentioned, the type of work done to enable the assignment of occupational codes (e.g., professionals, clerks, craft and related trades worker) that can be used for estimating the value of the activity performed.

Collect information about whether the activity was performed through or for an organization and, if so, collect the name of the organization and what it does (to enable coding by type of organization). Ask about the type of institution for which the volunteering was done (e.g., charity/non-profit, business, government, other).

#### BOX 2.6 : From house building to active citizenship

*There is no doubt that volunteer work contributes significantly to the ILO objectives. It straddles both the economic objectives, even though it is not carried out to generate an income, and the wider social objectives. Its contribution is recognized by society and policy makers as essential for the well-being of any society. However its volume, value and characteristics do not feature much in mainstream information systems.*

Source: Young. (2007, September).

Source: International Labour Organization (ILO). (2011).

direct volunteering by people as well as volunteering through organizations. This enables analysts to assess both the volunteer resources of community organizations and the extent of volunteerism outside organizational contexts. This initiative represents an important step forward towards a more uniform approach to measuring volunteering around the world and to the development of a comparative perspective. It builds on the fact that capacity for implementing household labour-force surveys, unlike other more complex methodologies, already exists globally. While the focus is on determining economic value, the approach should enrich understanding of the nature and degree of both organized and less formalized volunteering.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter confirms that volunteer action is found the world over and is huge. Taking the measure of volunteerism, in all its diversity and rich expressions, is occurring in many places and in many different ways. However, it is still at a very early stage and presents considerable challenges. The range of studies mentioned here points to the diversity of issues covered as well as the absence of common approaches. Due to the highly variable definitions, methodologies and purposes among national, regional and global initiatives, it is not yet possible to provide a composite picture of the dimensions of volunteerism by country, region or any other categorization. However, the purpose here is not, in any way, to curtail current and new initiatives aimed at measuring volunteerism. These meet specific needs. They help to add to the knowledge base on volunteerism. As such, they should be encouraged and supported, especially in the developing world. National studies of volunteerism are of particular importance to “ensure that consideration of the issues regarding volunteering is based on a sound appreciation and analysis of the parameters, profile and trends of volunteering in the particular country context.”<sup>32</sup>

Effective policies to support volunteerism cannot be put in place without understanding its dimensions and profile. Yet national studies are not enough. There is a pressing need to compare and benchmark volunteerism at regional and global levels. Notwithstanding the inconsistency of existing measures, a common approach has to be pursued.

There are concrete steps that can be taken to begin establishing the field of volunteer measurement. Sector-based approaches to involvement in volunteerism by government, civil society and businesses are relevant to ensuring the benefits of volunteerism nationally. However, one public body should be held responsible for coordinating the measuring of volunteering in a country. Globally, these coordinating institutions, along with national, regional and global volunteering stakeholders, need to agree on a minimum standard quantitative data set and methodology for gathering data on volunteers and volunteerism suitable for use in comparative cross-national analysis. Since volunteer involving organizations provide a basic common data source for volunteer measuring, there should be internationally agreed practices for ensuring reliable databases.

Similarly, there is a need for agreed methods for placing a value on volunteerism, such as those proposed in the ILO *Manual on Volunteer Work*. Funding sources need to be generated and mechanisms created to encourage research in order to build a knowledge base. Countries should be encouraged to fulfill their commitments in intergovernmental legislation with regard to encouraging and supporting national studies and assessments of the economic value of volunteerism. It is accepted that measuring the contribution of volunteerism in economic terms represents only one piece of a much larger array of benefits that volunteer action brings to communities and societies. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to move forward with this aspect of the measurement agenda.

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