4

CHAPTER 4

Sustainable livelihoods

The poor is one who is alone.

Senegalese expression

INTRODUCTION

The "poor" are people with families, neighbours, friends, ideas and capacities as well as traditions and aspirations. These characteristics are generally overlooked in development policies and programmes which principally define poverty as the lack of an income. Frequently, the income poor lack opportunities to realize their potential. However, they also have a variety of assets, not only their labour but also local knowledge, skills and networks with which they confront challenges.[1] The values that underpin volunteerism, as discussed in Chapter 1, help to ensure that these assets are shared for the benefit of the community.

There is growing evidence from developing countries that the income poor are both givers and receivers of help. They have significant capacity to assist one another through volunteerism, in association with formal organizations and also through informal channels of mutual aid. A study of five countries, covering Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, highlighted how the volunteerism of people from poor backgrounds was part of community coping mechanisms.[2] Another study in South Africa revealed that people who were poor and those who were not were equally likely to give volunteer time. Poor respondents and respondents from rural areas were more likely to have volunteered than non-poor respondents or those from urban areas.[3] The same study found that self-managed, volunteer-based mutual aid groups are found throughout the country. These social structures are open and accessible to all community members and therefore can be said to have "public good characteristics".[4]

There is growing evidence from developing countries that the income poor are both givers and receivers of help

Unmet needs or unresolved problems are the context within which people seek support from others. Such needs and problems are also the context for providing support to other people. Where service delivery to poor communities is weak due to scarce resources, or where governments simply fail to provide for their citizens, volunteer-based community initiatives typically emerge in response.[5] The response may also take the form of a collective voice to advocate on behalf of citizens and insist that governments carry out their obligations. Fragile economic conditions, poor health, limited or non-existent access to healthcare systems, and poverty in general are powerful incentives for people to help one another and to find a common voice.[6] For the income poor, deep engagement in social relations and volunteer-based collective action is entirely rational behaviour given its potential for enhanced psychological, cultural and economic well-being. This chapter explores how people, through volunteerism, build on their assets to address the impact of poverty.

WHAT ARE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS?

There are 1.4 billion people in the world living in extreme poverty of whom about 70 per cent live in rural areas.[7] Through the lens of sustainable livelihoods, we are going to examine the contribution of volunteerism to their lives. The term "sustainable livelihoods" reflects the shift towards a more people-centred approach to development following the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report[8] and the first UNDP *Human Development Report* in 1990.[9] The concept of sustainable livelihoods was then developed further by research institutions including the Institute of Development Studies of the University of Sussex and the Overseas Development Institute in the United Kingdom; NGOs such as CARE and Oxfam; and development organizations including DFID and UNDP. The commonly used definition is a livelihood that comprises the capabilities, assets, which include both material and social resources, and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with, and recover from, stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource

base.[10] During the 1990s the livelihood approach was adopted by many development agencies, including the World Bank and UNDP.

A livelihood approach is a way of thinking about the objectives, scope and priorities for development. It focuses on the multiple resources, skills and activities that people draw upon to sustain their physical, economic, spiritual and social needs. Ultimately, it is an attempt to redefine development in terms of what human beings need[11] and, we would add, in terms of what they can contribute to one other's well-being.

The livelihood approach is a valuable concept for articulating the relevance of volunteerism to people's lives, especially those of the income poor. It is complementary to another concept, namely the rights-based approach to development, concerned with "empowering" the beneficiaries of development as well as giving greater legitimacy and moral force to their demands.[12] Within this frame of reference, this chapter considers six types of capital assets in terms of their relevance to volunteerism.[13] These are:

- *Social capital:* social resources, including networks, social relations and associational memberships, based on the trust, mutual understanding and shared values on which people draw when there is a need for cooperation
- *Human capital:* skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health
- *Natural capital:* soil, water, forests and fisheries
- *Physical capital:* basic infrastructure such as roads, water and sanitation, irrigation, schools, health posts, energy, tools and equipment
- *Financial capital:* savings, credit, income from employment, trade and remittances
- *Political capital:* awareness and participation in political processes supported by relevant legislation, policies and institutions.

VOLUNTEERISM AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital in the context of sustainable livelihoods refers to the range of connections on which people draw in their daily lives. Such connections are a clear manifestation of volunteerism. They include membership of both informal local associations and of more formalised groups governed by accepted rules and norms. The concept of social capital also encompasses relations of trust, reciprocity and exchanges that facilitate cooperation and may provide a basis for informal social safety nets among the income poor.[14]

Depending on the nature of the needs, networks may be simple sets of individual connections or traditional social structures, such as family, community, village, ethnic and professional groups, or they may contain complex combinations of actors.[15] From neighbouring initiatives in the United States[16] to village-level mutual aid systems in developing countries, what they have in common is the key attribute of volunteerism. This is the "glue"[17] that holds a group or society together by motivating people to help others in the community and, in the process, to help themselves. Underpinning social capital is the notion of "relationships" which is at the core of volunteerism.

The key attribute of volunteerism is the "glue" that holds a group or society together

There is a rich global vocabulary to describe the phenomena. For example, for the Zulu people in South Africa, society is built around the saying *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, or "a person is a person through other people." In other words, one needs other people to advance one's individuality. The term *ubuntu*, meaning "humanity" in the isiZulu language, describes the African philosophy of "I am who I am because of those around me". In East Africa, a similar saying is embodied in the Swahili expression *mtuniwatu* meaning "a

person is because of other people". It is a mindset that celebrates community and it is found all over the world: for example, *mutirão* in Brazil; *batsiranai* in Zimbabwe; *bayanihan* in the Philippines; *gotong royong* in Indonesia; *harambee* in Kenya; *shramadama* in Sri Lanka; *tirelosetshaba* in Botswana; *taka'ful* in Arab States; *minga* in Ecuador and Peru; and *neighbouring* and *barn raising* in the United States. In Sudan, *naffir* refers to a common practice of neighbourhood or community groups forming and disbanding when a job such as building a house or harvesting a crop is completed. *Naffir* benefits the community as a whole and often reaches across ethnic borders.[18]

In a number of countries, the state has promoted systems of mutual support based on traditional cultures of self-help. In Kenya, for example, the Swahili word *harambee*, meaning "let us all pull together" was the ideology adopted by Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of the country. The intention was to mobilize and unify the nation, rallying efforts and resources to promote faster national growth. Volunteerism was at its core, as it is for many other self-help systems in many countries. *Harambee* has connotations of mutual assistance, joint effort and community self-reliance. The government of Kenya has promoted *harambee* groups since 1963 "as a way to organize rural people around a new political base and indigenous values" and to encourage communities to work "collectively toward a common goal."[19] With government support, *harambee* self-help projects have built schools, health centres, dispensaries, nursery centres, bridges and rural access roads throughout Kenya.

Both health and education are high up on the MDG agenda and in both areas volunteerism plays a significant role

Another example of state-encouraged systems of self-help is *gotong royong* in Indonesia. This system is rooted in rural Javanese culture and refers to the principle of mutual help in a community. *Gotong royong* covers a wide range of public and private activities including maintaining rural infrastructure, such as rural roads or irrigation facilities, emergency work to cope with natural disasters, mutual help for house construction or for daily agricultural operations, and support in organizing important ceremonies.[20]

Literature describing the connections between social capital and volunteering focuses largely on developed countries and formal organizations. We, however, want to turn the spotlight on informal types of volunteerism in developing countries. We hope this will lead researchers, policymakers and practitioners to pay greater attention to how local self-help groups are formed, how they network and how they should be supported in developing countries.

VOLUNTEERISM AND HUMAN CAPITAL

Human capital is the possession of an ability to use skills, knowledge and good health to pursue livelihood strategies. Poor health and lack of education are core dimensions of poverty. Therefore, overcoming these conditions is both a primary livelihood objective in itself and a prerequisite for making effective use of other assets that enable the income poor to improve their livelihoods. Both health and education are high up on the MDG agenda and in both areas volunteerism plays a significant role.

Under the right circumstances, where volunteering is recognized and appropriately supported, it helps to build human capital. Yet the impact of volunteer action on volunteers is rarely considered in relevant academic literature. Where this has been studied, the results are revealing. For example, a study in the Philippines concluded that the recognition and satisfaction from volunteering, and the respect gained from their communities, were considered more important by the volunteers than material rewards.[21] Another example comes from Iran. In 1992, the government mobilized women in urban

centres to spread family planning awareness. Some 100,000 women joined the campaign as volunteer health workers. Through their work, they earned respect and felt empowered. One woman said: *"Now I believe in myself and I feel I can help to change our lives in the neighbourhood. Now some women have set up their own savings clubs to help each other financially. I learn from others how we can make petitions and ask the municipality for what we need."*[22]

The role of the community health worker (CHW) was first highlighted in the Alma Ata Declaration adopted at the International Conference on Primary Health Care in 1978. Since then, CHWs have been key to extending health services to underserved rural areas in many developing countries. The World Health Organization defines CHWs as men and women chosen by the community and trained to deal with the health problems of individuals and the community and who work closely with the health services.[23] Primary healthcare systems require large numbers of trained and motivated healthcare workers to function. CHWs have a vital role to play in supporting public health systems under pressure. There is a worldwide shortfall of 2.4 million trained healthcare workers[24] with the highest deficits in Africa.

CHWs in developing countries help to ensure that people have access to health services that would otherwise be unavailable due to geographic remoteness, limitations of public services or lack of financial resources. They fill major gaps in health personnel in areas such as reproductive health services, child and maternal health, responses to HIV/AIDS, malaria prevention and polio immunization campaigns. With their local knowledge, CHWs can help to ensure that the most vulnerable population groups are reached and to provide services that may be more appropriate to people's needs. They are active in the establishment of local health committees that promote village health centres and pharmacies. They mobilize local people to join in campaigns in such areas as immunization, contraceptive use and the cleaning of places where disease might breed. Furthermore, CHWs help local organizations to tap resources to support local initiatives. Most importantly, CHWs serve as a bridge between professional health workers and communities. They help communities to identify and address their own health needs and assist in building awareness on the part of health-system managers and health authorities about those needs.[25]

One study in five South Asian countries[26] indicated that CHWs can be extremely effective when undertaking clearly defined, concrete tasks such as a national health campaign. Nepal initiated a National Female Community Health Volunteer programme in 1998 which has now expanded to around 50,000 trained

BOX 4.1 : Cambodian taxi drivers help fight malaria

Taxi drivers in Cambodia take passengers from point A to point B as they do everywhere else in the world. However, they have also become key to malaria control. Mobile and migrant workers often come for seasonal work from the south-eastern region of the country, where the disease is not common, to the western part of the country along the Thai border where malaria is endemic. As those workers are highly mobile, reaching them to raise awareness about malaria prevention and symptoms has proven difficult. Group discussions in the affected communities determined that taxis were the most popular mode of transportation for migrant workers. Since July 2010, as part of the Malaria Control in Cambodia Project, 32 trained volunteer taxi drivers have played malaria information on CDs or cassettes during their rides and provided additional information to the passengers. Sometimes, they have also helped to identify malaria symptoms among their passengers and driven them directly to the hospital. From August 2010 to May 2011, the taxi drivers reached out to 47,723 passengers of whom some 21,660 were migrant workers. A sharp drop in malaria cases over the past years cannot be attributed solely to the taxi drivers' initiative. However, it is worth noting as an example that the Pailin province, a high-risk area, did not report a single casualty due to malaria during the above-mentioned period.

Sources: Soy Ty & Linna, [Chief of Party, USAID/Malaria Control in Cambodia, and Khorn Linna, IEC/BCC Specialist], Personal Communication. (2011, June 13)..

volunteers across the country.[27] The volunteers, who are illiterate, are selected locally by mothers' groups. Their roles include maternal and child health, family planning and the treatment of diseases such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections. A study of the programme revealed that the main motivations to volunteer were gaining social respect and carrying out religious and moral obligations.[28] Brazil's Family Health Programme began on a volunteer basis and was later incorporated into official health programmes with paid staff. In Ethiopia and Malawi, CHW volunteers, trained and deployed to support expanded access to HIV and other health services nationwide, have also been fully integrated as regular staff into the national system of those countries.

In western Kenya, over 100 volunteer CHWs provide a "bare-foot doctor" service in Sauri Millennium Village. This programme was initiated by the United Nations Millennium Project and the Earth Institute at Columbia University. The volunteers are important providers and disseminators of information. They play the role of advocates for family planning, HIV/AIDS testing and clean drinking water. They also assist health teams working in Sauri in birth registration, following-up immunization schedules and promoting the use of bednets. The role of CHWs can extend beyond prevention to curative functions.[29] A study in sub-Saharan Africa indicates that well-resourced CHWs are effective in managing non-severe pneumonia and malaria.[30]

There is much debate as to whether CHWs should be volunteers supported in kind by the community or paid with funds from the community, NGOs or the government. Full-time salaried CHWs are rare but a range of financial incentives is often provided – and is necessary. One study in Kenya concluded that 62 per cent of households in the survey relied on the services of CHW volunteers. However, attrition rates among volunteers appeared to be high where they had to bear the cost of travel.[31] It is often argued that, as CHWs are living in poor communities, they require at least a small income, otherwise relying on

BOX 4.2 : Education for building human capital

In 2009, one of the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prizes went to the Tin Tua literacy programme in eastern Burkina Faso.

Tin Tua is an NGO specializing in literacy education. It means "let's help ourselves to develop" in Gulimancema, one of the languages spoken in Burkina Faso. Its literacy programme started in 1986 with educated youth volunteers from Burkina Faso who first received a three-week training programme held in two sessions. These teachers were then deployed to villages to teach basic literacy skills in five local languages. Their motivation was to give an education to children and adults who had not had the opportunity to go to school.

Today, up to 50,000 students, men and women, are trained every year to teach in villages of eastern and northern Burkina Faso. In addition to teaching in the different national languages, the programme offers French courses, thus opening doors to national exams. Tin Tua has extended its programme to Benin, Togo and Niger, all countries with low literacy rates, where its methods and outlook are likely to make a difference.

According to UNESCO: "Tin Tua's greatest achievement lies in the manifold changes brought into the daily lives of villagers. The programme has enabled farmers to better manage food production at the village level, for example, by taking measures to stock cereals in order to avoid speculation in times of famine. It has trained health workers, notably in the field of maternal health."

Source: UNV. (2011, January); UNESCO. (2009); SocioLingo Africa. (2009, August).

them as volunteers for an important part of the health system is unsustainable. [32]

There are, however, problems associated with paying CHWs. For instance, payments can be irregular or simply stop when the project ends. Moreover, the relationship of CHWs with the community changes once financial incentives are involved. Payments can "destroy the spirit of volunteerism and work against the volunteer philosophy of a sense of community".[33] Even a small allowance can reinforce perceptions in the community that CHWs are employees. There is evidence that, when this happens, local people may withhold in kind support. Volunteer CHWs seek personal growth and development opportunities, training and peer support. Above all, they seek a good relationship with the community and the feeling that they have contributed through their volunteer work.[34] Some observers argue that non-monetary incentives such as training, provision of equipment and links with other CHWs should be emphasized.[35] Ultimately, the health sector constitutes an important channel by which the income poor can participate actively in the lives of their communities and gain dignity and respect.

VOLUNTEERISM AND NATURAL CAPITAL

Natural resources range from intangible public goods, such as the environment and biodiversity, to divisible assets used directly for production such as land, trees and forest products, water and wildlife. The relationship between natural capital and the vulnerability of the income poor is particularly close. Many of the shocks that impact on their livelihoods, and destroy natural capital, are themselves natural processes such as fires that destroy forests and floods and earthquakes that ravage agricultural land. Natural capital can also be depleted by expanding populations, declining resources and adverse terms of trade. The sustainability of natural resources is also affected by the levels of solidarity and sense of common purpose in a community. The sinking of boreholes may affect groundwater while felling and marketing forest products depletes the soil and may exacerbate desertification. Access to, and use of, these assets may be inequitably distributed to benefit those who are better off. Watershed interventions, for example, are likely to benefit those who own more land and people living at lower elevation.[36]

Knowledge of local natural resources resides at grassroots where needs and priorities are best articulated. Yet, local people may not have access to information on sound practices available in other parts of the world. This is where international volunteering combined with lo-

BOX 4.3: The Tongan giant clam sanctuaries

Giant clams are an endangered species owing to their dwindling population in the Pacific Ocean. Initiatives led by volunteers are underway to re-establish overexploited species. On Vava'u Island, Kingdom of Tonga in the South Pacific Ocean, an independent environment expert and volunteers from the NGO EarthRights International assisted island communities and the government in establishing giant clam sanctuaries in marine protected areas to preserve the population of Tokanoas, a typical local species of giant clam.

Over five years, around 200 volunteers visited Vava'u to collect information on the rapid decline of the clam population. This volunteer action provided evidence of the falling clam yields and inspired the creation of giant clam sanctuaries. This entailed placing adult clams in breeding circles in shallow protected waters. The establishment of giant clam sanctuaries with stocks of clams was successful thanks to the support of local leaders. Information disseminated by the media in villages raised awareness of preserving giant clams for the benefit of the community in order to ensure a food supply for future generations.

Today, the sanctuaries on Vava'u are considered part of the people's collective cultural obligation towards future generations. *"If anyone takes clams from the community sanctuary, he causes damage to sea production and does not meet his social obligations to himself, his family or his community,"* said a village district officer. Villagers have learned how to establish and maintain sanctuaries for clam protection and cultivation. Communities in Vanuatu and Fiji have replicated this example.

Source: Dinh. (2011); Community Environmental Research in the Pacific Islands. (n.d.).

cal volunteer action can have a profound effect on livelihoods. One example is in the South Pacific where external knowledge and local engagement resulted in the preservation of a vital ecological and cultural asset, namely giant clams, for future generations of South Pacific islanders.

Ethiopia is experiencing one of the worst cases of erosion in the world, with 70 per cent of the country affected. The spread of desertification aggravates land degradation and increases poverty. A UNV-supported pilot project, with the Ethiopian Federal Environmental Protection Authority in the Amhara and Oromia regions, involved training 200 youth volunteers in soil and water conservation, forest management, water harvesting, nursery establishment, bee-keeping and horticulture. The young people gained useful skills and hands-on experience while improving their own and their families' livelihoods. They constructed trenches and micro-basins to conserve soil and water and planted tree seedlings. Their efforts helped to raise awareness of environmental issues in surrounding communities which emulated their efforts.[37]

International volunteering combined with local volunteer action can have a profound effect on livelihoods

VOLUNTEERISM AND PHYSICAL CAPITAL

Physical capital refers to basic infrastructure needed to support livelihoods. It includes adequate water supply and sanitation, affordable transport and energy, secure shelter and access to information. Much of this is normally considered to be part of public goods but, as for many other facets of livelihood assets, the income poor often do not have ready access to them and thus have to develop their own strategies. Poor communities are typically involved in communal activities such as constructing and maintaining feeder roads, schools, health centres, irrigation ditches and flood protections. As one author observed: "The rural communities cannot afford to fold their arms and wait for the government to bring all the facilities to them." [38]

In the early 1960s, African leaders agreed that infrastructure was vital to lubricate the wheels of intra-African trade and to distribute its benefits. Yet, a major obstacle to trade among African countries remains the dire lack of infrastructure beyond urban areas or around coastal ports. A far-reaching road network is essential in sub-Saharan Africa to promote development. However, low levels of traffic make expensive paved roads difficult to justify while unpaved roads require more frequent maintenance interventions. Participation of local communities is therefore vital, not only to ensure maintenance but also to enhance a sense of ownership. One study identified some of the key factors for successful community participation: a large, homogeneous group that accrues benefits from having good roads; the ability of the community to organize; and previous positive experiences with similar programmes.[39] While payments are made to community members for road maintenance, volunteer-based local committees are in charge of the planning and monitoring tasks related to road construction.

Despite overall progress in the Millennium Development Goal to halve the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015, in sub-Saharan Africa only 60 per cent of the population enjoys such access. Moreover, eight out of ten people without access to an improved water source live in rural areas.[40] The key issue is a failure to plan for maintenance of boreholes, wells and hand pumps. Surveys of dysfunctional wells in Mali and Ghana indicated that 80 per cent and 58 per cent respectively required repair. "For the whole of Africa, the estimated number of dysfunctional water supply installations is 50,000."[41] Massive top-down interventions made in the past decade by governments and donors have resulted in the provision of clean water only until the first major breakdown occurs.[42] Where effective maintenance of water supply infrastructure takes place, it is usually because of the presence of well-functioning, volunteer village-

based water committees, which are a common feature in rural areas in many developing countries.[43] Their accountability to community members helps to ensure that there is local ownership and commitment to the upkeep of the facilities while the provision of basic training in maintenance ensures efficiency.

VOLUNTEERISM AND FINANCIAL ASSETS

Among the financial assets that underpin livelihood objectives are remittances. The "economy of solidarity" or the "social economy" refers to monetary income shared with people beyond the immediate family or household. Although the idea of social economy is not new, it rose to prominence at the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2002. Social economy combines two concepts: "economy", referring to the production of goods or services that contribute to a net increase in wealth, and "social", referring to social profitability as opposed to economic profit. Social economy is understood to contribute to an active and empowered citizenship and to improved quality of life and well-being of the population, particularly through an increase in available services.[44] It is a form of solidarity that has evolved with growing numbers of migrants who generate income outside their home countries and send remittances to families and communities there. Financial transfers to developing countries have increased from 18 billion US dollars in 1980 to 30 billion US dollars in 1990; and 126 billion US dollars in 2004. That part of the transfers over and above what families need to survive is directed to the well-being of communities: ambulances, health stations, medicine, school buildings, teachers' income etc. As such, it has the values of volunteerism at its core and should be included in our discussion of the assets of the income poor.

The "economy of solidarity" together with the "economy of volunteerism" and the "economy of tradition" were the subject of a 2005 colloquium entitled "The Hidden Actors of Development", held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and organized by the Fondation pour l'Innovation Politique and the Institut Afrique Moderne.[45] With the participation of governments, the scientific world and civil society organizations, the objective was to examine major contributions to development that were underrecognized and to bring together their main actors including migrants and their associations. Among the outcomes of the meeting was a greater recognition of the impact that financial transfers of migrants have on local markets and their effect as an economic growth factor.[46]

BOX 4.4 : Community volunteers taking the lead

Twenty years after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, many affected communities were still facing environmental, economic and social problems. Additionally, there was a widespread sense of "dependency-syndrome" with communities expecting the government to provide.

From 2002 to 2007, 192 Chernobyl-affected villages created 279 community organizations with the help of the Chernobyl Recovery and Development Project. This initiative aimed to support community-centred long-term development. It was implemented jointly by UNDP, UNV and the Ukrainian Ministry for Emergencies and Affairs of Population Protection from the Consequences of the Chernobyl Catastrophe.

Through democratic planning, community organizations engaged with local and regional governments and businesses to implement social, economic and infrastructure projects. More than 200,000 people benefited directly from community projects that brought heating to communities; improvements to the water supply system; access to computers and the Internet; and refurbished health centres, schools and youth centres.

Locally-mobilized resources accounted for more than 70 per cent of total project costs. Numerous activities were conducted independently of the project funding, some thanks to the efforts of volunteers from the communities. One example is the Kirdany village where Olga Kolosyuk leads the Dryzhba community organization. According to Ms. Kolosyuk, the 1000 inhabitants of her village now have access to safe drinking water because village residents took the lead in improving their own situation.

Source: Russel. (2007, December); UNV. (2006, April 26).

Volunteerism contributes to laying a sound basis for citizen participation in governance

VOLUNTEERISM AND POLITICAL ASSETS

Political assets are the power and capacity to influence decision-making through formal and informal participation in political processes. They include the freedom and capacity to collectively organize in order to claim rights, campaign for a cause and negotiate resources and services. This also involves active participation in support of national efforts for development and holding government and service providers accountable. We have seen already how activism is an important expression of volunteer engagement at all levels. The extent to which the income poor can count on political assets depends on many factors including legislation and the level of law enforcement; the nature of the institutions and public access to them; and people's awareness of their basic rights. The degree to which community members are organized greatly impacts on their ability to play a transformational role as does their ability to occupy "public space" and to own the processes.

Volunteerism contributes to laying a sound basis for citizen participation in governance. It promotes and sustains feelings of being able to express one's views and to influence decisions that have an impact on one's community. This may come about through formal channels of civic engagement such as wards in South Africa, constituency development in Kenya, and panchayats in India. It may occur through civic associations and participation in social movements, protests and activism. There is abundant evidence that volunteer-based associations act as "training grounds" or schools of democracy. They impart key civic skills to citizens, from learning how to organize collective actions to running and speaking in meetings, advocating for issues and writing letters. Such action brings local issues into the political sphere while also helping people to take on responsibilities as citizens. From this perspective, the role of civil society organizations extends well beyond the usual functions of advocacy, monitoring and service delivery. Civil society provides space for people to engage politically and contribute, in a meaningful way, to building the democratic foundations of society.

In the context of democratic decentralization, moving the power base closer to people and their volunteer groups at local level can help to engender a political framework within which other assets can be mobilized. In the 1960s, for example, Uganda adopted a decentralized system with two categories of local governance. The first is government, merit-based appointment for technically led development interventions; the second is locally appointed leaders elected by adult suffrage to provide political guidance and supervision and to coordinate local development activities. In terms of the political and leadership contexts, and their effect on access

BOX 4.5 : Cross-border volunteering in Mexican Hometown Associations

Mexican Hometown Associations (MHTAs) are diaspora communities in the United States that send collective remittances to their home communities in Mexico. MHTAs also provide a sense of community for immigrants in the United States. The associations support civic works, such as the construction of health clinics, facilities and improvements in urban services in the former hometowns of their members. They support and finance various types of social projects selected through a volunteer network.

Grupo Union is an MHTA based in New York consisting of migrant workers from Boqueron, Mexico. Although members are busy and low-paid, they find time and motivation to meet weekly to pool their money. Members give what they can, usually in the range of 10 to 30 US dollars a week. The money is then deposited in a local bank to fund projects in Boqueron. The association supplements the contributions through raffles and other fundraising activities. Grupo Union has raised money for a kindergarten cafeteria, an ambulance, bought in New York City and driven 3,000 miles to Boqueron, and a 2,000-seat baseball stadium.

Source: Belizaire. (n.d.)

to services, community members noted that the decentralization of fiscal and administrative authority for resource utilization had led to improvements in the quality of services such as roads and water supplies.[48]

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Using a sustainable livelihoods approach to address how the income poor engage in volunteer action helps to illustrate the broad range of assets available to them including their knowledge, skills and networks of relationships. It highlights the need to take such assets fully into account in projects and programmes aimed at reducing poverty. These assets are often mobilized through collective action based on the values of solidarity and reciprocity inherent in volunteerism. These are values which, as we argue elsewhere in this report, need to be promoted and nurtured. The examples provided make it clear that the benefits from volunteer action are many. They include reduced vulnerability with support from others through mutual aid arrangements; sustainable use of the resource base; access to health and education; innovative financial resource mobilization; and the transformative power of political activism. They also point to increased well-being in terms of enhanced self-esteem and sense of control over one's life.

Volunteerism in local communities can be especially empowering when resources are pooled and utilized to resolve some of the immediate development problems faced by people living in poverty. However, moving people out of poverty requires connections with an external world that is supportive. Investment is needed to ensure a favourable environment in which volunteerism can flourish. This includes local capacity-building in general, and training in particular, which in turn calls for sound knowledge of local institutions and leaders, issues and constraints, including competing interests.

BOX 4.6 : Volunteering for gender equity in Latin America

The poverty rate in Latin America would be 10 per cent higher today without the voluntary work carried out by women, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.[47] Yet women's contributions to development remain largely invisible in policies and budgets across Latin America. For the past five years, a UN Women and UNV regional programme has strengthened women's volunteer engagement through participatory processes, increasing their involvement in, and impact on, local decision-making and enhancing local, national and regional accountability.

In Bolivia, the programme provided training on rights and active citizenship, decision-making, negotiation and accountability. This significantly empowered women who had previously been excluded from decision-making processes, enabling them to become involved in planning municipal budgets in their communities.

For example, in one municipality in Tarija, women formulated their own project proposals and advocated for their inclusion in the municipal budget. As a result, authorities are now more aware of the importance of having gender-sensitive budgets. An agreement was signed to ensure inclusion of the women's proposals in the 2012 municipal budget. In the words of one of the women involved: *"This is an historical moment for the municipality. I was very proud to see that our volunteer efforts were recognized and produced results in favour of gender equity."*

Source: CEPAL. (2007).

Strategies are needed to ensure that local leadership and structures are responsive to the needs of the income poor, for example ensuring that there are mechanisms in place that allow access to information on local government programmes. Local institutions upon which volunteer groups depend for funds and other services to support livelihood initiatives need to be strengthened. Citizen participation and oversight of local government authorities, need to be in place to help to ensure transparency and accountability. Broader constraints such as corruption and clientelism, unresponsive bureaucracies and inconsistent administrative machineries all impact negatively on the income poor and prevent them from taking full advantage of opportunities for enhancing livelihoods. Volunteerism will flourish best

where such issues have been addressed and resolved. Nevertheless, the benefits of volunteer action are clear. Initiatives that rely on the spirit of cooperation, burden sharing and self-help are clearly more likely to succeed than initiatives lacking those virtues.