

YOUTH VOLUNTEERING, SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND DECENT WORK: INSPIRING LEADERSHIP



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The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. Volunteerism is a powerful means of engaging people in tackling development challenges, and it can transform the pace and nature of development. Volunteerism benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation. UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for recognition of volunteers, working with partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing an increasing number and diversity of volunteers, including experienced UN Volunteers, throughout the world. UNV embraces volunteerism as universal and inclusive, and recognizes volunteerism in its diversity as well as the values that sustain it: free will, commitment, engagement and solidarity.

The difference UNV makes is by demonstrating peace and development results and impact through volunteerism. UNV's comparative advantage is the ability and knowledge to bring about transformational change through volunteerism, community voluntary action and civic engagement through active partnerships with civil society, volunteer involving organizations, UN agencies and Governments. This is inspiration in action.

PREFACE

As we mark the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding (August 2010 to August 2011) as well as the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers (2011), the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is pleased to release this discussion paper which was commissioned for the 48th session of the Commission for Social Development in February 2010 on “Youth Volunteering, Social Integration, and Decent Work: Inspiring Leadership.”

The Economic and Social Council recognized that poverty reduction, full and productive employment and decent work for all are interrelated and mutually reinforcing with social integration; that an enabling environment needs to be created so that all three can be pursued simultaneously; and that a people-centred framework for social development is critical to building a culture of cooperation and partnership. (E/2010/INF/2/Add.1)

The General Assembly has recognized that volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at, inter alia, such areas as poverty reduction, sustainable development, health, disaster prevention and management and social integration and, in particular, overcoming social exclusion and discrimination. (A/RES/63/153)

This discussion paper addresses the inter-relationship among social integration, decent work, poverty alleviation, and volunteerism, especially with regards to young people. It focuses on the experiences of 13 organisations from around the world engaging youth volunteers to address issues of poverty, identity, access to work, HIV and AIDS and achieving the MDGs. It provides examples of how volunteerism can strengthen both the social and economic integration of young people.

Given the UNV mandate to advance the role of youth in development through volunteerism programmes (A/RES/31/131), we are pleased with the evidence presented by these inspiring voices from the field that volunteerism is able to develop young leaders with knowledge of diversity, commitment to inclusion, and respect for human rights. Volunteering can empower youth with a voice, develop skills, increase social networks, and enhance access to decent work.

During these two international years and beyond, UNV will continue to promote an enabling environment for volunteerism to enhance the engagement of youth as leaders in addressing poverty alleviation, decent work, and social integration.

UNV thanks Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA) for leading the research.

Flavia Pansieri
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YOUTH VOLUNTEERING, SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND DECENT WORK: INSPIRING LEADERSHIP

Social integration, poverty alleviation and employment lie at the heart of people's participation in their societies. Social integration is defined as a “dynamic and principled process of promoting the values, relations and institutions that enable all people to participate in social, economic, cultural and political life on the basis of equality of rights, equity and dignity” (DESA, 2009).

According to the Report of the Secretary-General to the Commission for Social Development, 48th session, governments have committed themselves to promoting social integration by “fostering inclusive societies that are stable, safe, just and tolerant, respect diversity and promote equality of opportunity and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons” (UN Economic and Social Council, 2009, clause 1).

Social integration is central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly MDG1 – to halve poverty by 2015. People living in poverty often feel excluded from their societies, while exclusion in turn fosters a cycle of poverty. Ensuring that people have access to decent work opportunities offers one route to addressing many of the issues associated with poverty and a lack of social integration.

But how is this to be achieved? The process of social integration takes various forms and depends on the actions of a variety of stakeholders – public and private. Policy reform by governments or lobbying and advocating for active citizen participation are two such forms. Decent work is another pathway to fostering social integration. **So is creating the conditions for volunteering.**

This paper addresses the relationship between volunteering, decent work and social integration with particular reference to the needs of young people. The argument put forward in this paper is that volunteering contributes significantly to increased social integration in communities, that this is important for the development of young people, and that the principles of social integration and decent work can be fostered through youth volunteering. The paper draws on the experiences of 13 organisations from around the world that are running programmes involving youth volunteers. All of these are based in developing countries, with the exception of the World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA) which works across the world.

The first section of this paper deals with how volunteering can be a way in which to encourage social integration. The second and third parts look at why social integration is particularly important for young people and how social integration can foster the conditions for decent work and poverty alleviation. The fourth part provides key examples of how volunteering is enabling young people to work towards a more socially integrated society by dealing with issues of poverty, identity, access to work, and HIV and AIDS amongst others. Finally, the paper assesses what conditions are necessary for volunteering to have a positive effect for young people, and then moves on to provide recommendations.

1. HOW VOLUNTEERING ENCOURAGES SOCIAL INTEGRATION

A great deal of evidence shows that volunteering, when properly managed and supported, can foster social integration within and between communities. Youniss and Yates (1997) point out that when young people are able to participate in and reflect on voluntary activities within their communities they develop a sense of responsibility for the well-being of that community. “When participation is encouraged by respected adults, youth begin to reflect on political and moral ideologies ... It is this process of reflection, which takes place publicly with peers and adults as well as privately, that allows youth to construct identities that are *integrated* with ideological stances and political-moral outlooks” (Youniss and Yates 1997:36). Secretary General of the YWCA, Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda, echoes this as she reflects on the voluntary activities of young women in that organisation:

People volunteer because they believe in the values of the society they want to see. It is not a job. It is grounded in values of the world and the community that they want to be part of and therefore volunteers give of their own knowledge, expertise and time to creating that possibility not alone but with others.

Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Secretary General, World YWCA

Torney-Purta et al. also point to the role that voluntary service can play in building inter-generational learning and cooperation. "Those community or volunteer settings in which adolescents partner with adults and discuss shared reasoning and beliefs may be important to developing a sense of efficacy or agency" (2007:105). Furthermore, a study by Involve (2007), which focused on volunteering amongst migrant communities in European countries, demonstrates that voluntary service can assist third-country nationals to become more integrated within their new communities.

Volunteerism has enormous potential to bring societies together. In African countries volunteering is a traditional manifestation of community solidarity (described *inter alia* as *ubuntu* in Isizulu, *letsema* in Setswana and *kujitolea* in Kiswahili), that makes it possible, even in the 21st Century, to mobilise citizens to work together in the public interest

(Camay & Gordon, 2004, in UNV, 2006).

A project currently running in Vietnam called Greater Involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GIPA) demonstrates the potential of volunteering to combat social exclusion and encourage social integration. The evaluation report for this UNV-supported project notes that, "the GIPA project has supported people with HIV, particularly women with or affected by HIV who have often come from backgrounds which have included marginalisation and ostracism from mainstream society. The evaluators heard remarkable stories of people building links and developing relationships between communities in which people lived, as well as with the medical profession. This activity will reduce levels of stigma and discrimination." This experience is well articulated by one of the young community volunteers involved with the project :

"You see, they look down on me as I was just a drug user with little self-respect. Since I worked for the project as the community volunteer, I learnt many things and could help other people. They changed their view about me and respect me. It's very interesting that I have chance to meet physicians frequently and they taught me many things including medical knowledge and treatment of simple symptoms. PLHIV and their family members come to me and asked for help when they have opportunistic infections or other problems. I become a resource person for them."

Community Volunteer, Hanoi

Similarly, in 2008 when South Africa experienced a wave of xenophobic attacks, a great deal of solidarity was witnessed in the volunteering response, transcending class, race and political affiliations (VOSESA, 2009). This indicates that volunteering can help to break down social barriers and offers opportunities to work with people who are not in one's "immediate world" (CIVICUS/IAVE/UNV, 2008:15).

The available evidence and lived experienced cited here thus show that volunteering can play a significant role in facilitating social integration, particularly for young people.

2. SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND YOUTH

Studies in different parts of the world show that young people "yearn to be part of society and to be respected for their contributions" and in many cases "possess the desire to play an active role in improving their countries"

(Yates and Youniss, 1999 in UNV, 2006).

The process of social integration is especially important for young people who need to experience a sense of belonging and responsibility to become productive citizens and participants in society. Social integration harnesses youth potential and creativity, which is necessary to meet societal objectives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Although young people today have many more opportunities to participate meaningfully in society, "access to quality education and decent jobs remains the primary concern for young people as they transition from childhood to adulthood" (UN Economic and Social Council, 2009, clause 20). Unemployment and underemployment affect youth disproportionately (World Youth Report, 2007). This

can push young people further into poverty and marginalisation in a variety of ways. Poor quality education limits the life opportunities of young people and makes them increasingly vulnerable to poverty. An inability to access opportunities in the mainstream economy, especially decent work, demoralises young people and undermines their self-esteem as citizens. Lack of access to healthcare means that young people must manage risks such as teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS with little support. Lower levels of social integration, particularly at the family and community level, have been found to increase young people's vulnerability to involvement in high risk behaviours, including violence and substance abuse (Ward, 2007).

However, in many parts of the world young people are still not seen as legitimate role players in community decision making and participation. This is evident in the low profile of youth and the absence of youth-responsive policies in the public policy landscape of many countries. It means that societies miss out on the inherent creativity, inspiration and vision of young people for a better future. In the case of young women or youth from marginalised groups, such as migrants or people living with disabilities, the effects of exclusion are profound.

Social integration is therefore critical to building the resilience of young people and supporting their life transitions from school to productive adulthood. It empowers young people to function as partners of policy makers and programme managers, and to contribute meaningfully to achieving development goals such as the MDGs.

3. COMBATING POVERTY THROUGH SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND DECENT WORK

A key to achieving social integration is ensuring that people are able to meet their needs, i.e. that they do not live in poverty, that they are able to access quality healthcare and education and that they are able to participate in the economic and political life of their society. Since the ability of a person to participate meaningfully in society "is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us" (Sen, 1999: xii), the achievement of the MDGs emerges as a significant development priority and is particularly important for young people.

Economic inclusion is central to social integration, and employment strategies have been implemented to improve employability at different stages in life through education and training. Such policies have focused on removing discriminatory barriers to employment such as those based on race, ethnicity, age, disability or gender, which can prevent people from actively participating in the labour market or discourage them from seeking employment.

- Report of the Secretary-General for the Commission for Social Development, 48th session (UN Economic and Social Council, 2009, clause 15)

The World Development Report of 2006 notes that seven of the eight Millennium Development Goals have outcomes that relate to young people – either directly or indirectly. MDGs that target youth directly relate to achieving universal primary education (goal 2), promoting gender equality and empowering women (goal 3), combating the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria (goal 6), and the role of young people as stakeholders in building a global partnership for international development (goal 8). Even where young people are not the explicit focus of the MDGs, their involvement can be important to the achievement of the MDGs. "All in all, making sure that young people have the opportunity to build and use human capital – whether through better schooling, better health, or more productive employment – will take the world a long way toward meeting goal 1, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger." (World Bank, 2006:29, quoted in UNV, 2006)

Decent work is another mechanism that can foster social integration since it combats poverty through access to the economy and social protection. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) the concept of 'decent work' rests on four pillars: access to work opportunities; recognition of rights within the workplace; social protection and social dialogue¹. Each of these pillars facilitate the process of social integration since they rely on

"While full employment and decent work are recognized as central to social inclusion, casual and informal jobs and long-term unemployment are increasingly the norm rather than the exception."

- UN Economic and Social Council, 2009, clause 3

¹ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc87/rep-i.htm>

respect for human rights, recognition of diversity and the equality of all people, and fostering greater citizen participation and individual agency or voice.

What then are the systemic pathways to increase youth participation, facilitate their access to decent work and foster social integration? It is the premise of this paper that volunteering presents one avenue that can be particularly effective in involving young people as assets in society.

4. THE PROMISE OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Around the world, young volunteers daily demonstrate their commitment to actively contributing towards the achievement of the MDGs. In the process they are working towards becoming full participants as active citizens in their communities and acquiring vital skills and social networks that will better enable them to enter the job market. Many young volunteers also acquire leadership experience as they learn to exercise their agency and their abilities in service of development.

As will be shown below, youth volunteering can foster social integration through promoting diversity, encouraging greater citizen participation, generating respect for equality, fostering social cohesion, facilitating access to work, creating young leaders who take responsibility and developing individual and collective voices.

- **Giving voice to youth perspectives**

Young people who are involved in voluntary service, if provided with good guidance and leadership, are often able to develop a sense of autonomy and agency, and can help others to do the same. A study of the loveLife groundBREAKERS volunteer programme in South Africa demonstrates that the young volunteers felt that one of the most important skills they gained during their service was the ability to stand up and speak to other young people about critical issues (loveLife, 2008). Many of the respondents also commented on their ability to mentor other young people to do the same.

The volunteers of Palestinian Vision were also able to raise a young girl's voice as is illustrated in the example below.

“Once, when I was in one of the marginalised communities, we were talking about decision-making and that you yourself can decide where you want to go in life. One of the girls whispered in my ear “I like to dance.” And the word dance for us, if you say that in your local community, she would be killed.

So we went to this girl and asked her, “What is the problem?” And she said if she talks about dancing and singing then the people in her village will beat her. She is about 16 years and from a conservative area.

We started to talk to her, saying she could study theatre or how to be a musician. Then we started talking to her parents. We also started to do a campaign to talk about why she can't go. We asked: Why can't she go? Just because she is a girl? And a man can go?

So we did a campaign in the village about who can decide what work a person does. There were a lot of people against us but in the end this girl is studying music and we are very proud of this.”

– Rami Naser Eddin, Executive Director,
Palestinian Vision

The literature suggests that significant benefits are likely to flow from involving young people in volunteering and community service programmes. These include increased employability, social capital, and social and civic skills (Johnson, Moore McBride, Olate 2006 forthcoming), enhanced educational performance of learners at school level (Tapia 2004), new jobs being created as a result of volunteering and collaboration between volunteers and governments (UNV, 1999), and increased development benefits through volunteering and social trust (Widner and Mundt, 2000 as cited in Rankopo, Osei-Hwedie & Modie-Moroka, 2006).

- Youth volunteering for development in Africa (UNV, 2006)

The South African YMCA programme in Athlone, Cape Town, encourages young volunteers to demonstrate their voice by acting in plays, some of which are written by other young volunteers:

We encourage young people not to have 'voice poverty.' In other words they must speak about how they feel and what they think. Most of the youth don't know they are talented. Their voice may come out more in a play or through singing, including songs and plays that they have written.

– Ricky D. Johnson, Youth Coordinator, YMCA Athlone, South Africa

Because voluntary activities allow young people to demonstrate their skills, talents and potential, they are able to demonstrate a sense of autonomy and belief in their own abilities. When they are afforded opportunities for guidance and mentorship, they are also able to reflect on how they can help develop other young people in the same way.

- **Creating young leaders who take responsibility**

Just as young people are able to develop a sense of autonomy and confidence through the volunteer experience, they are able to demonstrate their ability to make a difference and to lead others towards the future they envision.

loveLife groundBREAKERS in South Africa, for instance, are seen by community members and prominent business people and policy makers as leaders (loveLife, 2008). As one prominent businesswoman commented on her experience of loveLife groundBREAKER volunteers: *These young people are leaders in their field. They will be tomorrow's leaders.* Many of the young people are also holding leadership positions in community fora because of their volunteer experience.

Yuliya Makluik's experience with Challenge Europe has enabled her to identify herself as a leader in the area of climate change. After being asked to coordinate the 'clean transport' activities of the organisation (see box) she went on to initiate an Information Centre on Climate Change at her university in Kiev, which she now coordinates. At the moment it is the only initiative that gathers and spreads information specifically about climate change and provides open access to printed materials in the Ukraine. She also attended the climate change conference in Copenhagen in 2009. She has generated interest in climate change from the Department of Natural Sciences through the Information Centre on Climate Change. Through her efforts and those of fellow volunteers, a network of youth leaders on climate change has been established. They went to Copenhagen in 2009 and are hoping to influence environmental policy in the Ukraine through academic work, civic participation and the career paths they will choose.

These examples show how volunteering can provide young people with opportunities to demonstrate their leadership skills and to become recognised as leaders in particular fields. This increases their involvement in issues that currently impact on their lives and that will continue to do so in the future, and serves as one indicator of how they are starting to function in the mainstream. As the Peer Education and Youth Outreach Coordinator of YMCA in the Cape Flats, South Africa notes,

"We with Challenge Europe in the Ukraine decided we would focus on three issues to do with climate change: energy efficiency, raising awareness and clean transport. I was the coordinator of the clean transport activities. At first I didn't want to be the coordinator since I didn't think I was good, but after it just happened. There was a team and I was the coordinator.

We organised a car free day in Ukraine (21st September) and we still have a car free day even though the project is over. We closed main streets to cars in the cities with the support of local authorities and opened these streets for walking, cycling, for games and competitions."

– Yuliya Makluik, Volunteer, Challenge Europe, Ukraine

We are discovering a new generation of leaders that are informed, active within communities, role models to their peers and advocates for change.

– Monique Warden, Peer Education and Youth Outreach Coordinator, YMCA, Cape Flats, South Africa

- **Access to work**

The volunteer programmes that participated in the research for this paper mention how the volunteer experience can assist young people to access work opportunities. Firstly volunteering can build the skills of young people, particularly their life skills. Secondly, well-managed volunteer programmes can introduce the young people to various fields, thereby enabling them to experience different types of work and make informed decisions about a future career path. And, finally, volunteering can connect the young people with social networks through which they may be able to access bursaries or work opportunities. For poor and marginalised youth, the introduction to new social networks is once of the most significant benefits of volunteering, which provides one way of escaping the ghettoisation of poverty.

The experience of ATD cited below shows how volunteers can provide skills training to young people in order to enhance their prospects for decent work.

When young volunteers involved in the International Movement ATD Fourth World street libraries programme in Madagascar responded to a query from the organisation about what skills they were interested in learning, they opened up an opportunity to learn skills and gain work experience in the information technology sector.

With funding from government, the private sector and international donors ATD was able to set up a system that enables their young volunteers to learn computer skills, life skills and language skills.

Many of the young people have since been able to access job opportunities in government positions, the private sector and in civil society. Even those that have not yet accessed jobs have still gained valuable work experience through the internships.

For ATD international volunteer, Lucas Rodwell, this is a major success since many of the young volunteers, before joining the programme, had to make the difficult decision of leaving the work they were doing to help their families survive in order to come over and learn new skills. "There were young people who worked in a rubbish dump at night to find stuff they could sell in the day." By funding their studies many of the volunteers were able to learn the skills they needed to access better and more secure employment.

- ATD Fourth World, Madagascar

In Burkina Faso young professional volunteers, supported by UNV, UNDP and government of Burkina Faso, are currently being recruited and trained to help the Ministry of Education to meet the MDG of universal primary education. Trained young volunteers who are still to pass the integration test that will qualify them to teach are putting their skills to work and gaining valuable workplace experience whilst at the same time helping their communities to deal with illiteracy and lack of access to education.

Literacy is a key area of the MDGs and our partnership with the Ministry represents a response to this urgent need. These volunteers make a significant contribution to their country and gain work experience which, I hope, will stand them in good stead when it comes to passing the integration test and finding salaried positions.

- Helene Agnelli, Programme Coordinator, Burkina Faso National Volunteers Programme (PNVB), Burkina Faso

The value of volunteering as preparation for employment emerges strongly in Yuliya Makluik's experience in the Ukraine as a volunteer with Challenge Europe:

In Challenge Europe there were trainings about how to plan projects and others on how to develop your skills and how to find necessary information. They were helpful. Just a few days ago I received a work proposal from a company that deals with environmental questions related to landfill waste. It is a company that works with joint implementation projects. They need an assistant – a person that

will gather information, who will write articles, update their website. When they saw my volunteer experience they invited me to interview. For sure, volunteering is a very good practice and opportunity to get your future job.

- Yuliya Makluik, volunteer, Challenge Europe, Ukraine

And the study on the South African loveLife groundBREAKERS programme (loveLife, 2008) demonstrates that the young people who participated in the voluntary programme had a significantly higher success rate in terms of accessing employment opportunities than the national average.

It is clear therefore that a volunteer programme that exposes young people to areas of work that they may be interested in, develops their skills through training and on the job learning, and connects them with opportunities and networks can facilitate the ability of youth to access decent work opportunities. Volunteering can also enhance the quality of young people's interaction in the workplace, once employed:

We are creating a network and a pool of empowered young people who, when they enter their labour market they not only give their labour but they enter to contribute to the conversations around the quality of environment in which they provide their services.

- Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda, Secretary General, World YWCA

- **Fostering social cohesion**

Where young people face particular experiences of social exclusion, volunteering can provide them with pathways of belonging, which can help them to feel included and valued. This in turn can inspire other young people in similar settings to do the same. The case of YMCA in Athlone Park in South Africa is a case in point:

Because many of the kids are in gang areas, when you ask them what they want to be, they say "a gang member." So the volunteers are trying to motivate them not to be gangsters by telling them there are other things out there. You can go to school for example. One of the Y-Teens, her family is all into gangs. She is the only one in school. She passed Grade 12 this year. She could have quit school or gotten pregnant young, but she didn't. She came to us and we spoke about these issues. She is a very talented young woman. A month later she came to me with a play that she had written herself called "Dreams Can Become Reality." It was acted out with other volunteers. I'm trying to get funding for the play so we can bring it to a big theatre.

- Ricky D. Johnson, Youth Coordinator, YMCA Athlone, South Africa

By providing young people with alternative and productive pathways, volunteering provides a good prospect for young people to find a space for belonging. This enables them to feel included in societies where they otherwise might face social dislocation and exclusion.

Depending on the content of the volunteering experience, volunteering can also explicitly contribute to the goal of social cohesion. Volunteers from Palestinian Vision take part in a programme that reinforces their identity as Palestinians and is intended to foster social cohesion.

We explore the old city of Jerusalem through treasure games, storytelling and hunt games. We also train youth as storytellers so they can talk about the history of Jerusalem. Now we are bringing groups from all over Palestine to come to Jerusalem to go on a tour and the tour is free. It is a contribution from the youths themselves to their city of Jerusalem. This is part of our belonging to a city because we are very divided and we have stereotypes about each other. In this programme we try and break the stereotypes and barriers between us to emphasize that we are all from Palestine.

- Rami Naser Eddin, Executive Director, Palestinian Vision

Programmes that aim to teach young people about conflict resolution also provide opportunities for young volunteers to foster social cohesion within the communities in which they work:

We started to work in four villages, and the four villages didn't like each other. We started to do a needs assessment and we discovered that most of the needs are the same. So we gathered people from each of the villages to have a discussion. And they eventually realized that they had the same needs, such as school drop outs, no health clinics, and no schools. Since they all felt the same and they are not far from each other, they decided to have one playground where they could come and play together.

– Rami Naser Eddin, Executive Director, Palestinian Vision

And this example from Bolivia shows the high level of identification between this volunteer and the rural communities in which she was involved:

Upon completion of the Volunteer programme, I was very happy because I learned so much professionally. Furthermore, I grew personally as I lived and I ate and I felt like them (the people in the rural communities), which one must experience it yourself. Thanks to this experience, my mind is broader and my outlook on life is different in every way.

- Volunteer, Voluntarios de las Naciones Unidas, Bolivia

Volunteering thus offers young people various opportunities for building socially cohesive societies, particularly if this is a key aim of the volunteering programme.

- **Generating respect for diversity and equality**

Volunteering, if properly managed, has the potential to contribute to young people's knowledge of and acceptance of people from other social groups. For example, Liberia's National Youth Volunteer Service, supported by UNV, has witnessed how young volunteers are able to encourage different groups within communities to work together, making friends with people from diverse backgrounds through serving in communities other than their own.

Social relations are often marked by racism, ageism and prejudice. Abuse, violence and exploitation towards those at the margins of society remain widespread and have not been adequately addressed. Gender-based discrimination, the most prevalent form of institutionalized inequality, continues to obstruct social inclusion efforts. The situation of indigenous and older women is especially critical, as they are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination, violence and neglect.

The volunteers in the programme come from different institutions and different backgrounds and it helps to bring them together. I remember when we repatriated the first cohort they were interacting with their friends and I asked them if they knew one another. They said they met when they volunteered together.

- Report of the Secretary-General for the Commission for Social Development, 48th session (UN Economic and Social Council, 2009, clause 4)

– Isaac Bropleh, Programme Manager, National Youth Volunteer Service, Liberia

Because volunteering provides opportunities for young people to work with people they otherwise might not have encountered, and because it exposes them to a range of situations they may not have thought about, it offers the potential to foster greater equality through generating a respect for diversity.

Volunteering programmes can also be designed to teach young people how to approach the issues of inequality and conflict in societies so that they can teach others about diversity and equality. The experience of volunteering may enable young people to take the lead on difficult issues and thus foster greater social integration. The work that volunteers do can often also encourage communities to consider the effects of discrimination and inequality as this example illustrates:

If we want to talk about gender it is problematic. We are smart about approaching this issue. When we go and create a group with equal numbers of males and females that's about gender

equality. Once we went to a place and they refused to have males and females work together. So we had two groups. And then we started to discuss the decision-making, and through that we talked about gender. As a youth volunteer you have to follow what is happening in the community to slowly get to your goal.

– Rami Naser Eddin, Executive Director, Palestinian Vision

Young volunteers in Liberia have been active in ensuring that discrimination is challenged and that equality for all is fostered.

Before they used to cane children in the school, but that is stopping because we are talking about this in the schools. We teach children that children have a right to education, they have a right to life. School enrolment is actually picking up now – they are going to schools now rather than going to the farms. The volunteers in the school are addressing issues of child and forced labour.

– Isaac Bropleh, Programme Manager, National Youth Volunteer Service, Liberia

Youth volunteering thus offers the promise of helping young people foster respect for diversity both within their own lives and the lives of the communities in which they serve. However, this is dependent on a well-managed programme that offers young volunteers opportunities for critical reflection (CIVICUS/IAVE/UNV, 2008).

- **Encouraging greater citizen participation**

One of the key elements of volunteering is that it fosters in volunteers a greater sense of their ability to participate meaningfully in society with a view to improving it for the better. Young volunteers are more likely in later life to vote, to continue volunteering and to be active in their communities. This is critical for effective democracies and for greater social dialogue that is underpinned by a vibrant and robust civil society. The experience of Yuliya Makluik is a case in point:

Through our actions we are trying to show our government that we want changes in the policy. “Please we are young and we are strong. This is our future and we know how our future should be.” As students and young professionals we feel we can make a contribution, we can write an analysis and make a submission.

– Yuliya Makluik, volunteer, Challenge Europe, Ukraine

In Bolivia, UNV is launching a new initiative with the Prefecture of Oruro, which aims to provide a space for young volunteers from indigenous communities to become leaders by involving them in the development of their own community.

These many examples show that youth volunteering offers young people opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities and their ideas, develop leadership skills, generate respect for diversity and equality, and gain their own voice as they inspire change in societies.

This however does not happen automatically. It requires a range of factors to be in place to ensure that the volunteer experience is a quality one for young people. What conditions create an enabling environment for youth volunteering?

5. CONDITIONS FOR QUALITY YOUTH VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES

As has been shown above, volunteering offers immense potential for young people to discover their own potential as they work towards meeting the MDGs. They gain valuable experience that could help them to access decent work opportunities and they learn the principles that underpin the process of social integration. However, it is clear that there are a range of factors that need to be in place to ensure that volunteer experiences are of a quality that will encourage such learning for young people.

First and foremost, young people need **easy access to volunteer opportunities**. If young people are easily able to identify volunteer opportunities that interest them in their local communities, they are far more likely to volunteer. Civil society organisations and local government departments therefore need to make volunteer opportunities available, visible and attractive to young people. Tapping into their interests and skills is one way of being able to achieve this.

It is important to place volunteers based on their interests and what they can do, so they feel like they are contributing.

– Monique Warden, Peer Education and Youth Outreach Coordinator,
Cape Flats YMCA, South Africa

In addition, it is important to ensure that all groups of young people are able to access opportunities. Certain groups such as young women, young people living with disabilities and young migrants may require particular measures that open up pathways for their participation.

We noticed that more men than women were participating in the first round (of volunteer intake) so for this round, we got on the radio with the Minister of Youth and Sports and we encouraged females to join the programme.

– Isaac Bropleh, Programme Manager, National Youth Volunteer Service, Liberia

However, for the young volunteers to get the most out of their experience, they must be managed and guided through their volunteer experience.

One of the biggest mistakes NGOs make is not nurturing the volunteer. In volunteer management there are a number of stages. You need to first look at the skills and interest of a volunteer and see how you can use the volunteer. Another important component is how you are looking after the interest of the volunteer and creating opportunities for the volunteer.

– Monique Warden, Peer Education and Youth Outreach Coordinator,
Cape Flats YMCA, South Africa

Effective volunteer management is therefore another key condition for quality volunteer programmes. Part of this process is providing young people with opportunities to reflect on their experiences:

Mentoring and debriefing are two of the most important things to remember when you are working with volunteers.

– Monique Warden, Peer Education and Youth Outreach Coordinator,
Cape Flats YMCA, South Africa

The volunteers have a retreat where they come together and share experiences about what they have learned.

– Isaac Bropleh, Programme Manager, National Youth Volunteer Service, Liberia

Volunteers also need to go through a process of **training** that enables them to gain the skills required to do their work. This is important not only for the volunteer who will take these skills through life, but also for the community who need to benefit from the volunteer. Training can often involve orientation around issues such as diversity and awareness of sensitive matters such as HIV and AIDS stigma.

You can't place a local or an international volunteer with a particular community if they don't understand the dynamics of that particular community ... [and] don't ... empathise with the people in the communities and situations of the people.

– Monique Warden, Peer Education and Youth Outreach Coordinator,
Cape Flats YMCA, South Africa

There is a need for training to get volunteers to see things from the perspective of the population and the needs of the population, rather than from their perspective.

– Lucas Rodwell, International volunteer,
ATD Fourth World, Madagascar

In many instances **volunteer policy and legislation** can help stimulate youth involvement in volunteering, but also needs to protect volunteers. The risk is that unless volunteering is carefully planned and managed, supported by appropriate legal frameworks, some volunteers could actually be doing the work of paid employees and could thus be exploited. This would go against the principles of decent work and social integration. In order to protect against this, national volunteer policy as well as organisational volunteer policy is critical in guiding the activities of volunteer-involving organisations:

We talk about the definition of volunteerism and the need to be careful that you are not essentially encouraging people to treat what are really employees as volunteers. You want to create incentives and remove obstacles for volunteering, but at the same time protect the rights of employees and volunteers.

– Catherine Shea, Vice-President - Programs, International Centre for
Not-for-Profit Law

Most importantly perhaps is the need for **a holistic approach to youth volunteers** if volunteering is to provide an avenue towards greater social integration. Young people who find that volunteering does not develop their skills or produce prospects for education or economic participation may become disillusioned and feel excluded. As the UNV document on youth volunteering for development in Africa notes, "There is a need to consider youth development initiatives in a holistic manner because youth needs all tend to be interlinked. Programmes that target single issues (e.g. health or education) are often undermined by factors common to the experience of youth (such as poverty and the need for both health and education)" (United Nations Volunteers, 2006)

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that volunteering offers one pathway to facilitating social integration. The examples provided illustrate how well-managed volunteer programmes can provide young people with opportunities to develop leadership ability and become active partners in working towards achieving the MDGs. At the same time youth volunteering can foster within these young people a respect for equality, knowledge of diverse groups of people, a commitment to the inclusion of marginalised groups, and a respect for human rights. These are all necessary principles underpinning the process of social integration. In addition, the volunteer experience can provide young people with a sense of individual agency and with a voice. Together with skills development and increased access to social networks, this has been found to facilitate their access to work opportunities.

"Opening opportunities for volunteerism is increasingly seen as a means to promoting social integration. Volunteerism has contributed to developing social capital for social groups, including those that have traditionally found themselves marginalized from mainstream participation in development activities."

- Report of the
Secretary-General for
the Commission for
Social Development,
48th session

Thus volunteering can provide young people with opportunities for contributing to the MDGs; it helps youth break out of a poverty cycle by facilitating access to decent work and promotes a more socially integrated society.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to ensure that many more young people have the opportunity to participate in well-managed voluntary programmes, a range of actions must be taken by national governments and civil society organisations in strategic partnership with the private sector, as well as bodies in the international community.

7.1 Recommendations to governments

- a Ensure that national policy frameworks and the appropriate legislation are in place to guide the direction, planning and resource allocation for programmes that support youth volunteering for peace and development, protect the rights of young volunteers and foster youth leadership. In this regard it is important to actively engage with young people in the development and implementation of such policy frameworks.
- b Make provision for the dedication of financial and human resources to youth volunteering strategies and structures within national budgeting cycles and processes.
- c Ensure that where national volunteering strategies and structures are in place they are youth-friendly i.e. they are easily accessible, of interest to young people and respond to their needs. In this regard partnerships with civil society organisations and the private sector are considered essential.
- d Put in place a national programme to develop awareness of youth volunteering for peace and development and to raise the profile of youth leadership in this regard.
- e Ensure appropriate mechanisms for the accreditation of youth volunteering. Encourage institutions to recognise accredited volunteering experience as a basis for young people to gain access to opportunities for further learning, career development, employment, micro-finance and other mechanisms for fostering their development, leadership and self-reliance.

7.2 Recommendations to regional bodies

- a Collaborate on the formation of networks through which cross-national projects can be mounted e.g. through regional bodies such as the African youth volunteer corps, CARICOM, ASEAN Youth Volunteer Corps Exchange Programme and others.
 - i. Promote the exchange of volunteers between countries and organisations through structured volunteering and civic service projects that can foster mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and peace.
- b Influence policy discussions and regional collaboration so as to strengthen the volunteer infrastructure in terms of:
 - i. Capacity building
 - ii. Youth-responsiveness
 - iii. Sharing good practice
 - iv. Developing effective mechanisms to ensure the engagement and leadership of youth in key social, economic and political issues e.g. HIV/AIDS, desertification, conflict resolution and peace-building.

7.3 Recommendations to civil society organisations and institutions

- a Launch advocacy and awareness programmes to generate a supportive environment for youth volunteering for peace and development.
- b Develop networking opportunities between volunteer-involving organisations to share information and good practice, and facilitate training for volunteer management and capacity building.
- c Establish volunteer centres and other mechanisms (e.g. Internet sites) to ensure that young people are easily able to access volunteer opportunities.
- d Build the capacity of volunteer programme staff to run effective programmes involving young people, to manage and monitor youth volunteer assignments and to foster youth leadership.
- e Ensure that monitoring and evaluation systems are in place to measure the contribution of young volunteers, track their access to education and employment opportunities, and assess their leadership in civil society organisations as active citizens.
- f Establish mechanisms to document and disseminate the positive contribution of youth volunteering in national, regional and international forums.
- g Empower community-based organisations to support volunteers.
- h Ensure that youth are equal partners in the development of the programmes and policies in which they are involved.

- i Develop partnerships with private sector organizations to ensure that young people are better able to access work opportunities once they have completed their volunteer experience. This may involve sensitizing companies to the needs and contributions of young volunteers.
- j Involve media partners in showcasing the activities and success of young volunteers in order to generate a supportive environment and to recognise the value of youth volunteering.

7.4 Recommendations to all UN agencies and international bodies

- a Youth volunteering must be promoted at the highest levels to ensure that national governments and regional bodies facilitate greater access to volunteering opportunities for young people. In this regard international organizations can:
 - i. Promote the role of young people in meeting the MDGs;
 - ii. Take note of the needs and contributions of young people as a particular target group in all policies and strategies developed at the international level;
 - iii. Actively involve young volunteers in their programmes.
- b UN agencies have a significant presence throughout developing countries and many are already involved in programmes supporting youth participation in development. In view of the extensive experience and resource base that UN agencies bring, it is recommended that UN agencies:
 - i. Support local partners in putting in place the recommendations listed above;
 - ii. Collaborate with each other in increasing the number of opportunities for youth to be involved in volunteering in their own programmes and in country programmes which they support.
- c UNV in particular has been mandated to play a key role in supporting youth volunteering ([A/res/31/131 of 16 December 1976](#)) and must continue to do so. In this regard it needs to continue assisting national governments to develop policies that support volunteering and set up national volunteer programmes to involve young people. The 10th anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers, IYV+10, presents a significant opportunity to raise awareness of the potential of youth volunteering for social integration. Specific recommendations for UNV are to:
 - i. Support the creation of an enabling environment for local, national and international youth volunteering for peace and development;
 - ii. Support the building of capacity among individuals, organizations and agencies to involve young people successfully in volunteering as leaders and active participants;
 - iii. Strengthen the quality of youth volunteering programmes;
 - iv. Help build the body of knowledge about youth volunteering for peace and development.
- d There is an opportunity for the Commission for Social Development to continue its leadership role in raising the profile of volunteering with key stakeholders and interest groups. It will be important to focus on the value of youth volunteering for social integration.
- e The UN Resolutions² on youth taken in 2009 and the resolution to proclaim 2010 as the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding³ provide the context in which governments, regional bodies and international agencies can take steps to ensure that national public policy is more youth responsive. A focus on these questions will be necessary at both national and international levels in order to promote social integration through youth volunteering for peace and development.

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² <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/csd/2009/resolutions/youthres.pdf>

³ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/N09/614/30/PDF/N0961430.pdf?OpenElement>

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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

Organisation	Country	Region	Contact	Title	Background
YMCA - Athlone branch	South Africa	Africa	Ricky Johnson	Youth Coordinator	YMCA Youth Department with youth volunteers are running programming in the impoverished Cape Flats on youth development, HIV/AIDS, and empowerment through drama and sports.
YMCA/YWCA - Mitchells Plain branch	South Africa	Africa	Monique Warden	Peer Education and Youth Outreach Coordinator	YMCA in impoverished Cape Flats areas running a major peer education program/youth volunteer programme in relation to a range of health and personal development issues. Strong mentoring component.
National Youth Volunteer Service	Liberia	Africa	Isaac Bropleh	Programme Manager	National Youth Volunteer Service supporting education/enrolment in education, HIV/AIDS awareness, social cohesion, agriculture, gender and youth development.
ATD Fourth World	Madagascar	Africa	Lucas Rodwell	International Volunteer	ATD volunteers are engaging groups of young people from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds, both in the capital and in the southern city of Toliara, in the Street Library program. Some of these young people have written a book about their experiences
World YWCA	Global	Global	Nyaradzai Gumbonzranda	Secretary General	Leading organisation in young girl/women leadership development with strong focus on volunteerism and collective action.
ILO	Global	Global	Adriana Mata		Statistician working on measurement issues related to decent work and volunteerism.

Organisation	Country	Region	Contact	Title	Background
UNV Bonn Symposium Youth Forum participant	Ukraine	Europe and CIS	Yuliya Makluik	Challenge Europe volunteer	Youth participant in UNV Bonn Symposium on Climate Change. Also participant in Challenge Europe in the Ukraine and a leading information centre on climate change in the country.
UNV Field Unit, Bolivia	Bolivia	LAC	Cyra Daroca	County Office Assistant	Project in Bolivia with youth volunteering to strengthen local governance and capacity at the municipal level. One is specifically targeting youth indigenous population. It's a UNDP project with local governments and universities.
ICNL	United States	North America	Catherine Shea	Vice President - Programs	Conducting research on policy/legal framework related to both social integration and volunteerism in developing context.
PAL Vision Ru'ya (Palestinian Vision)	Israel		Rami Naser Eddin	Executive Director	UNV Partner in Jerusalem promoting active citizenship and social cohesion among youth through a social development/volunteerism approach.