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New Delhi, India



Attending a motivational talk on employment and skill development, the youth in Andhra Pradesh, India are presented with a choice to a better life with volunteering. (UNV, 2016)

L'Inde s'illumine quand sa jeunesse brille

A testament to India's Society Above Self mantra – these volunteers are the force for social change.

A young man walks down a crowded street. To the left of him is a gang offering him quick cash to join them. To the right is a group of young volunteers, cleaning up the nearby river, handing him a leaflet that says, "volunteer to make a difference". Which way does the young man turn? To the left for quick cash, or to the right where his potential lies?

If he chooses the path of joining volunteerism, he is also choosing a path that the nation is advocating for in partnership with our organization, United Nations Volunteers: the path of volunteerism as a means to sustainable development and a way for all individuals, including youth, can thrive and shine.

Millions of volunteers contribute to peace and development worldwide. They work for people, planet and prosperity – an inclusive and equitable world. UNV alone mobilizes 20,000 volunteers every year around the world and over the internet to assist UN agencies, governments, private sector and civil society in the long journey to sustainable development. Everyday they help to eliminate poverty, improve basic health and education, stop environmental degradation, reduce the risk of disasters, combat social exclusion and violent conflict.

By 2020, India shall have a demographic profile with a median age of 28. Acutely aware of demographic dividend for inclusive and sustainable development, the authorities in India are recognizing the importance of engaging youth in volunteerism that supports human development.

Since 2014, youth and UN Volunteers are working in partnership with the government to strengthen one of the largest youth volunteer movements in the world – Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan and National Service Scheme – reaching 11 million people.

Hindprabha Karve, is one of the UN Volunteers with the Nehru Yuva Kendra. She is the District Youth Coordinator in the state of Maharashtra and works with the state’s Thane-Palghar region – home to the Katkaris – a particularly vulnerable tribal group. Hindprabha mobilizes youth to help village children get adequate nourishment. Volunteers have helped more than 5000 tribal villagers get job cards – putting an end to outward migration and displacement.

This is the power of volunteerism – and making a difference with youth and communities.

Toney Thomas, another UN Volunteer, is assigned to Ernakulam district, Kerala. Under “100 volunteers, 100 toilets” initiative, he is on a mission to make the impossible possible. Toney and his team mobilize youth volunteers to end open defecation among tribal communities. Around 37 pits were dug entirely by youth volunteers, while living in harsh conditions, without electricity, piped water supply, sanitation facilities and phone connectivity.

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Engaging youth to decide for themselves and their communities – and giving them the power to change their destinies – that's when youth shine. UNV is committed to keeping the light on in partnership with the government.

We commend millions of young women and men who are turning to the right as they walk on their life journeys, take the metaphorical leaflet and volunteer to make a difference.

Mr. Toily Kurbanov, Deputy Executive Coordinator, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, was in New Delhi on a two-day (14/15 March) mission to meet the Government of India to discuss global priorities between India and UNV, and the expansion of India's largest youth volunteer movement - Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan.

This opinion editorial was originally published in The Asian Age:
<http://www.asianage.com/opinion/oped/170317/when-youth-shine-india-shine...>

In the last ten years, India has had 354 international UN Volunteers serving with 11 UN partner agencies, and 498 national UN Volunteers serving with seven UN partner agencies, including the 32 volunteers who are currently working on the Nehru Yuva Kendra project.

• India • UNDP • youth • Toily Kurbanov

Sustainable Development Goal: **SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals**