Applying innovation to volunteering research: Can you contribute?

Deadline extended to January 2020 Participate in this Innovation Challenge and share your ideas on measuring the economic and social contributions of volunteer work⬚

Meeting the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda requires the efforts of all of society. Everywhere, every day, ordinary people are acting on the issues that they care about. Over one billion active volunteers are carrying out a wide range of roles, from providing care and support to neighbours, extending basic services to under-served areas, campaigning for policy change, or building new relationships across polarized communities.

Measuring the scale and scope of volunteering is important, and UNV has been working with ILO since 2017 to strengthen tools and systems to generate official statistics. Figures like these remind us that achieving the sustainable development goals is a joint effort. For example, in Mongolia, 4 million volunteer hours are contributed per year at a value of 5.5 billion Tugrik, in the UK the health service relies on 78,000 volunteers providing 13 million volunteer hours per year, to name just a couple of examples.

But we know that the true value of volunteering goes beyond the hours that people contribute and the tasks that they perform. The impact of volunteering is multi-faceted, for both volunteers and for others. For example, beyond direct contributions to a sector such as education services, volunteering has benefits participants via improved health and well-being, or increase skills and confidence. Furthermore, volunteering can bring wider benefits even to those that don't participate, such as increased trust, cooperation and innovation in communities and societies.

To date, there has been limited investment in building from academic research to consider models for integrating volunteering into policy debates at national or sub-national level. Bridging this gap could help nurture volunteering and its most positive contributions both for individuals and for societies. Looking at ways of valuing volunteering beyond its contribution to GDP could also help think about what measures of success that governments and others can use more strategically to help understand the well-being of populations.

That is why, UNV and partners are launching an Innovation Challenge and are asking innovators working in the field of social science, economics, governance and other areas to generate ideas of how to use existing data on volunteer work to help understand:

- Analytical approaches: What are some potential qualitative and quantitative analytical frameworks or models that could help understand the contributions of volunteers at community, district, municipal or national level to the Sustainable Development Goals?
- Alternative data sources: What are some freely available data sources that can be combined to provide insights or analysis on volunteerism and how would this be done?
- Measures: Which supplementary indicators or targets could better integrate an understanding of citizen contributions under specific SDG goals, targets or indicators?
- Models of development: can analytical models incorporating volunteering tell us more about the nature and quality of human development?

Individuals, organizations, institutions from public or private sector are all eligible to apply. Based on the selection process, 6-8 'innovators' will produce a 5,000-word paper based on their proposal and will also participate in Innovation Challenge activities as part of a community of practice convened under this initiative. The papers will be published as part of an anthology for the Global Technical Meeting on Volunteering 2020 and will also inform a toolkit being developed on the measurement of volunteer work by UNV.

The link to the call for proposals can be found here. Any questions must be sent directly to procurement@unv.org

Good luck!

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Sustainable Development Goal: