



Indian youth volunteers from civil society organisations discussing the role of youth in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during a special event for International Volunteer Day 2016, "Youth volunteering for SDGs", New Delhi, India. (UNDP India, 2016)

## Joint youth volunteering project "Strengthening Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) and National Service Scheme (NSS)"

India, which has the world's largest population of young people—more than 350 million—is at a crossroads. India's youth are an unparalleled resource for innovation and leadership, a potential engine to drive economic and social progress and propel India's development. Harnessing their energy and enthusiasm through volunteerism will require investments in education and health, as well as country-wide mechanisms to engage them.

In 2013, UNV, the Government of India, and UNDP launched a flagship initiative to provide help young people to reach their full social, economic and human potential, while instilling a strong sense of civic engagement facilitating greater youth participation in achieving sustainable development goals. Called [\*Strengthening Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan \(NYKS\) and\*](#)

[National Service Scheme \(NSS\)](#), the project mobilizes UN Volunteers to strengthen the capacity of youth clubs throughout 29 districts.

In 2016, the capacity of rural youth clubs was strengthened, with more diversified opportunities for Indian youth volunteers created. All 29 districts involved in the project conducted situational analyses to better understand the needs and aspirations of local youth. UN Volunteer District Youth Coordinators worked to enhance the of youth clubs, while also forming more than 2,000 new youth clubs with over 22,500 new youth volunteers as members (taking the total number of youth clubs to more than 7,000 in 29 districts) and conducted youth development and volunteering programmes for more than 124,000 young people. To strengthen NYKS, the UN Volunteers are also engaging facilitators to train volunteers in volunteering, skills development, and communication.

In order to build the evidence base for the impact of youth volunteerism in India, a nation-wide research initiative linked to the project was launched. As a part of the research, field visits were conducted in 11 states to obtain a diverse perspective of youth volunteerism in India.

During 2016, the project also began developing an online volunteering portal to connect volunteers and volunteer seeking organizations in India. The portal will help to promote youth volunteerism in the country, connect youth networks, volunteer-involving organizations, civil society, governments and the private sector. The portal will be launched in 2017.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the project is its ability to initiate a South-South transfer of knowledge and best practices. This is done chiefly through the International Youth Exchange through Peer Learning (IYEPL) initiative, which was implemented in 2016 with the support of UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) India, UNRC, Sri Lanka, UNV/UNDP India and UNV/UNDP Sri Lanka. Under the exchange programme, five youth volunteers were selected to undergo a residential one-month immersion programme in Sri Lanka with the objective of contributing towards strengthening of NYKS work at their own respective districts. The five youth volunteers were selected from Mangalore, Rajkot, Nalbari, Ri Bhoi and Ernakulam by UNV, UNDP and the Indian Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MoYAS). The exchange programme was implemented with UNV and UNDP Sri Lanka along with National Youth Services Council, Sarvodaya Shramadana and Foundation of Goodness (FoG).

The youth volunteers who participated in the exchange gained valuable hands-on experience to learn about and better understand youth and volunteerism. The exchange also provided an opportunity for Sri Lankan

youth volunteering organizations to learn about youth volunteering in India. After returning to their respective countries, the youth volunteers developed year-long action plans to build on their participation.

The 29 UN Volunteer District Youth Coordinators have become the backbone of MoYAS in the implementation of this project at the grassroots level. In particular, they are performing a very valuable role in reaching the most marginalised youth—including young women from minority communities and disabled youth, among others—by engaging with them in thematic debates on SDGs, awareness-raising, vocational training and leadership development (through neighborhood youth parliaments).

The District Youth Coordinators have also initiated good practices in the area of social inclusion, gender justice and equality, social entrepreneurship, skills development and environment and disaster risk reduction. These good practices hold immense potential to be replicated in all other districts to support in strengthening of NYKS work thus reaching out to large number of young people.



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