



UN Volunteers Victor Igbokwe (Nigeria), DRR Specialist, and Utkarsh Pandey (India), DRR Associate, leading a training on disaster risk reduction with a group of local volunteers in Himachal Pradesh, India. (UNV, 2016)

## Volunteerism adds unique value to disaster risk reduction and resilience within communities

UN Volunteers have been working tirelessly since the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami to provide new ways of coping with natural disasters. Their work has led to policy changes, increased awareness, and improved structures of support in the affected countries.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) has been supporting implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience in South and East Asia and the Pacific since 2014. Realizing the danger which disasters posed to countries affected by the 2004 earthquake, UNV, together with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) partnered on the project *Support for*

*enhancing the capacity of the United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience in South and East Asia and the Pacific.* This project aims to strengthen disaster risk reduction (DRR) by supporting volunteerism in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

By partnering with the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) and the UNISDR, UNV placed one international—and in some cases, one national—UN Volunteer specialist, in each programme country. A total of 12 specialized UN Volunteers are providing technical and coordination expertise to the project. These UN Volunteers utilize their expertise in disaster risk reduction to facilitate policy development initiatives and awareness-raising activities.

These UN Volunteers worked closely with local institutions, governments, and partners to help develop strategies that address disaster risks in the countries affected, also lending their knowledge towards producing sustainable development strategies. The project also promoted volunteerism as a viable strategy for disaster relief, provided guidance on disaster risk assessment, and assured disaster risk prevention as a priority in the post-2015 framework.

### **National actions that make volunteerism a key component of disaster risk reduction**

Following the August 2015 floods in Myanmar, a review of surveys and the lessons learned from the disaster was presented to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR), during the Myanmar Monsoon Forum. The review recognized that “volunteers play a key role in warning dissemination”. They are integral in making sure that people are warned about impending disasters.

In Malaysia, a model was created in association with the Malaysian Red Crescent Society, which would help to co-ordinate 14 NGO partners in the event of a disaster. UNV has also engaged with the Malaysian University Student Foundation, with the potential for future collaboration in developing the model further.

In Sri Lanka, UNV helped to incorporate volunteerism in the Draft National Action Plan to implement the Sendai Framework, directly helping address disasters.

Meanwhile, a Study on Volunteerism in Disaster Management is taking place in Thailand, run by a UN Volunteer with the aim of providing a list of recommendations for improving the role of volunteerism in disaster relief reduction.

The programme has done more than helped boost policy and administration, the UN Volunteers have worked with many people on the ground, training local volunteers to assist local communities in addressing their own risks and vulnerabilities. In 2016 alone, UN Volunteers supported over 60 disaster risk reduction initiatives and consultations, bolstering the skills of about 7,255 men and women.

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*This case study was drafted with the kind support of [UN Online Volunteer](#) Robert W. Bailey.*

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 **Asia and the Pacific**

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