



During a visit to Burkina Faso in 2014, Mr Richard Dictus, then Executive Coordinator of UNV, spoke with Adama Ag Boubacar, a refugee from Gambia, at the Sag-Nioniogo refugee camp.

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UNV at 50: fielding heroes for a new age

Former UNV Executive Coordinator (2012-16) Richard Dictus argues that volunteers are an essential part of the global partnerships that will bring solutions to global sustainability. To save the planet and humanity, volunteers need to gain visibility as the heroes of a new age, providing especially young people with new role models. UN Volunteers themselves are such heroes and UNV is a truly global organization that plays a key role in achieving the SDGs. Visibility and recognition are the key to future success for volunteerism at the global level.

The big problems of the world are usually solved in partnership – and the problems confronting sustainable development are no different.

The global response to COVID-19 has given us many examples of partnerships in action.

Government-led information campaigns in partnership with media and civil society have helped educate people to remain safe and healthy during the pandemic. Partnerships between academic institutions and pharmaceutical companies have accelerated

development of safe vaccines and proven treatments. And, health systems around the world have worked in partnership to develop care and treatment to care for those who have fallen ill from the disease.

Supporting these incredible efforts and often behind the scenes are millions of volunteers, who donate their time and energy to people in need.

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Volunteers are integral to the efficacy and impact of many organizations. Volunteers with the Red Cross/Red Crescent of Médecins Sans Frontières support health systems and provide essential health services in remote and war-torn regions. Community volunteers transport the sick, distribute food and provide connection and reassurance. Across the world, volunteers donate their time and skills to teaching, building, educating, sharing and connecting people and communities.

UNV is the global champion of and for volunteers. UNV contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. And, UNV is a powerful model for partnerships, demonstrated by its work with partners to integrate qualified, highly motivated and well-supported UN volunteers into development programming.

“ At the foundation of nearly every social improvement that has taken place over the last 75 years, you can see that there is an act of unselfish volunteer work. A real change, a real transformation requires volunteers. It requires you to find the volunteer in you. It requires you to find the volunteer sitting next to you. And it requires all the volunteers in the world to get behind sustainable development. --Mr Richard Dictus, former UNV Executive Coordinator, during a TEDx talk on the [future of volunteerism](#) in Bonn, 2014

Over the past decade, UNV has given voice to volunteers in conflicts and crisis. It is a staunch advocate for the importance of volunteerism and participation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. UNV acts at the intersection of government, civil society and the private sectors, which gives it unique experience of the role of volunteerism and how volunteers come to be.

The UN Declaration on Sustainable Development clearly articulates the need for

transformation and change if we are to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. By giving voice to, and raising the profile of, volunteerism, we can inspire many more to unite behind our shared purpose.

“ Volunteers need new visibility as heroes of a new age – everyday people doing extraordinary things, who give hope and foster change for a sustainable future. –Richard Dictus

As UNV's series of State of the World's Volunteering Reports have shown, data is rarely enough to convince decision makers of the importance of volunteering. Rather it is up to the volunteers and volunteer-led organizations, like UNV, to tell their stories and inspire action.

In the spirit of sustainability and diversity and inclusion, volunteers need support by way of proper management, resources, security and training, to ensure they can conduct their work in a safe and effective manner. Without enabling architectures and protection mechanisms, fewer volunteers will come forward to serve. UNV has argued many times, and in many countries, for volunteer instruments to be put in place and has had many successes along the way.

UNV deserves to celebrate the success of the 9,500 volunteers it brings to the UN system each year, across 158 countries. This is a huge mobilization effort with incredible impact. I have personally met many volunteers, doing the impossible in impossible locations.

UNV recruits from 192 countries from over 100 professions, for 60 partner UN agencies. It does this with a secretariat and field staff that represent close to 110 nationalities. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNV has demonstrated agility and flexibility, and created new volunteer categories to increase participation and engagement.

It is itself the best example of a truly global organization that can mobilize truly global responses – or as a Russian delegate once put it at the Executive Board: UNV represents the noblest of causes of the United Nations.

Not bad for a small outfit in Bonn.



 Global

• UNV50 • COVID-19 • Coronavirus

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)