Latin America Forum highlights volunteering as a means to ensure inclusion and equality in the region

On April 25, 2019, the side event "Regional Consultation on the Integration of Volunteerism as a powerful means for the achievement of the SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean" was held in Santiago, Chile during the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development.
organized by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program with the support of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, in its role as Secretariat of the Action Plan, organized the regional consultation on volunteering with the aim of providing a space for interested parties to discuss evidence, data and approaches on volunteering in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, and share good practices in terms of promotion and integration of volunteering into the 2030 Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly recognizes volunteer groups as key actors to achieve the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Following the launch of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Plan of Action for Integrating Volunteerism into the 2030 Agenda, through Resolution A/RES/70/129 "Integrating volunteering into peace and development: the plan of action for the next decade and beyond". As part of the Plan of Action, the results of the regional consultation will feed the Global Synthesis Report for the Global Technical Meeting (GTM) on Volunteering that will take place during the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in July 2020 in New York. During this LAC regional consultation, about fifty representatives from civil society, public sector, private sector, academia and the United Nations participated. A high-level panel was held, made up of representatives from different sectors and moderated by UNV LAC Regional Manager Lita Paparoni.

Ms. Emma Morley, Chief of Volunteer Advisory Services Section, United Nations Volunteers Programme HQ, explained that the 2030 Agenda explicitly mentions volunteer groups as a means of implementation to reach the SDGs. Nevertheless, it is important to ask ourselves if we are maximizing the potential of volunteering. Also, Ms. Piera Zuccherin, Regional Programme Analyst for Volunteer Advisory Services Section, UNV LAC Regional Office, presented several examples on how volunteering contributed to the SDGs in LAC. Regarding the integration of volunteering in national strategies and policies, Piera mentioned that 16 countries in the region have frameworks that regulate, promote and protect volunteerism. Regarding the measurement of volunteering, she mentioned that in the region, according to the ILO, only 16 countries of the 33 LAC countries measured voluntary work in official statistics since 2007 and 2017.

The Government of Paraguay was represented by Mr. Carlos Alberto Pereira Olmedo, Ministry-Executive Secretary for the Technical Secretariat for
Economic and Social Development Planning, who commented on the benefits of having a National Volunteering Law and their programme AROVIA.

"Through volunteering, the gaps and inequalities resulting from the lack of access to goods and services in these prioritized areas, were successfully reduced". Mr. Carlos Alberto Pereira Olmedo, Ministry-Executive Secretary for the Technical Secretariat for Economic and Social Development Planning, Government of Paraguay.

Mr. Arnaud Peral, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System in Ecuador, highlighted that in the context of current transformation processes, where the future of work, populations, and climate change is discussed, volunteering plays an important role. In addition, he pointed out the importance of incorporating mutual learning processes into volunteer programs, to enhance the development of mutual skills and the acquisition of technical knowledge for professional work. Also, Mr. Milko Salfate, Director of the National Institute of Youth, Government of Chile, stressed that volunteering becomes a fundamental part of the harmonious development of societies, by two essential elements: i) Volunteering is good for those who practice it, by giving them transformative experiences that redirect vocation and reaffirm convictions; and ii) volunteering is good for the society as a whole as it gives a sense of belonging, generates links and spaces for social innovation, reaction and resolution of collective problems, and above all social cohesion. In short, it generates more resilient and more capable societies.

“The region must advance in the construction of a greater and better social fabric, with a stronger, empowered civil society, from which a more resilient, cohesive and happier society can be built”. Milko Salfate, Director of the National Institute of Youth,
The Municipality of Querétaro, Mexico was represented by its Secretary of Human and Social Development, Mr. Arturo Torres Gutiérrez, who highlighted how his local government promoted programs with a focus on social equality and inclusion to leave no one behind, guaranteeing the participation of many young people, including vulnerable people in contexts with few resources or opportunities. Ms. Alessandra Scalioni Brito, Researcher on Work and Performance, IBGE, Brasil, explained their experience on measurement of volunteer work since it was integrated into the Household Survey, following the recommendations of the International Labor Organization (ILO).

“What is not measured, does not exist”. Ms. Isabel Ramos, Vice-Rector of FLACSO Ecuador.

From the Academia, Ms. Isabel Ramos, Vice-Rector of the University of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences in Ecuador, affirmed how it is a challenge for social sciences and research, to conceptualize volunteerism due to the differences that exist in our understanding of volunteering and to link the notions to the different cultural contexts and organizational tissues; also, she highlighted the importance to position volunteers within the context of the 2030 Agenda, linking volunteering with development, citizenship and participation. And finally, from the private sector, Mr. Jesus Andres Zarate represented CentraRSE Guatemala, and explained their experience in promoting corporate volunteerism, alliances with the Academia, and the creation of decentralized training models to create volunteer programs with local communities.

Ms. Cielo Morales, ECLAC’s Director of the Latin American and Caribbean
Institute for Economic and Social Planning ILPES, closed the panel by highlighting the key role of volunteering as a powerful accelerator of the SDGs, generating solutions for the region's main development challenges, such as inequality, exclusion, poverty, violence and climate change - among others.

“Communication, measurement and compilation of evidence about the powerful role of volunteering for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is substantial”. Ms. Cielo Morales, ECLAC’s Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning ILPES.

The Plan of Action is still implemented in the region. You can still be part of the discussions by joining the online POA Conversations. For the complete report of the regional consultation, check the document attached below.

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