Volunteering to accelerate development: from exploring concepts to prototyping ideas

Volunteering comprises the formal or informal activities that we do out of free will where the monetary reward is not the main motivation. It is often motivated by solidarity and mutual aid and is particularly relevant among people living under conditions of vulnerability in our country. Volunteerism is capable of mobilizing extraordinary human resources and talents to respond to citizens’ needs, and ignite peer-to-peer trust, cohesion and emotional support. It can also tackle some of the underlying causes of social exclusion, such as lack of employment, education or health.

In July, a Global Technical Meeting on Reimagining Volunteerism for the 2030 Agenda, organized on the sidelines of the high-level Political Forum by UNV and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, aimed to identify volunteerism concepts and practices that can effectively accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We worked together with UNV to anticipate potential future trends which we presented during this meeting by asking...
ourselves: how can we promote volunteering practices to accelerate the SDGs?

"Firstly, volunteerism brings forward knowledge and increases understanding."

During our work, we learned that there is an emerging area in which volunteerism develops to bring forward knowledge and increase understanding capacity. We termed this the crowdsourcing knowledge model and consider it important, because it can help volunteers to visualize and generate information about local challenges in their communities. In turn, this can support the development of local solutions and/or public policies. You may wish to check out an example of such volunteering practices related to air quality that we promoted recently. Besides, there are similar trends taking place at larger scale elsewhere. For instance, the Natural Museum in Berlin received 660 million euros to promote these practices.

"Secondly, we found out that volunteerism is usually based on people-centred solutions."

This is because it relies on the social bonds formed between volunteers and those they are working alongside. Hence, the second model is related to the generation of networks linking volunteers and beneficiaries. Thanks to shared values and personalized social bonds, volunteers working along this model help to enrich beneficiaries' lives and empathize with them. An example of these practices can be seen by the project Puentes from Global Shapers Buenos Aires Hub, in which volunteers support the soft skills development of adolescents under conditions of vulnerability that then become mentors of the next generation of trainees. Hence, by allowing this sustained link between volunteers and beneficiaries, the motivation to continue collaborating and generating collective actions is maintained.
Thirdly, we recognized the ability of volunteering to follow up on the actions, such as policies, implemented to address inequalities. Therefore, it could support the empowerment of informal community organizers. The community meal centers in our country are examples in which such a model is developed, because they are supported by public policies while being led by local volunteers. We have worked and will keep on working with these volunteers, because such experiences imply unique opportunities and experiences for them. This model, however, requires special attention because it can lead to non-transparent practices and/or politicized usage. To overcome this challenge, we suggest future practices to expand the peer-to-peer connections thereby creating networks of local leaders. Therefore, this model can become an extension of the former one.

We wanted to support the practice and fusion of these last two models and evaluate together with UNV whether we could learn from the process to support future volunteerism public policies. We are working together with Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) and 10 exemplary young volunteers from different regions of our country to map out local solutions related to financial inclusion and socioeconomic recovery. In parallel, we are working along with more than 50 volunteers from Shaping Horizons, a volunteering initiative from the University of Cambridge, on organizing an innovation programme during which participants explore challenges in various cities. Our goal is to match local solutions with the challenges identified to foster synergies.

Also, the solutions advancing in the programme will be accelerated effectively, building a volunteering network that is connected to the grassroots and can also scale.

We are not the only ones promoting volunteering for development in Argentina. We invite you to know and get in contact with this initiative that promotes and supports volunteering. Every year, you may submit photos of your volunteering experience and win awards and support for your organization.

If you are also working on this topic, please do let us know, we are happy to collaborate to keep on accelerating collective impact and also, together with
UNV, to keep on learning how to advance volunteering practices to accelerate the SDGs.

• Volunteering • innovation

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals