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Catalino Benitez Jr., National UN Volunteer Field Monitor, UNDP, the Philippines. Monitoring the coconut lumber production in sawmill sites operated by a local cooperative to assist farmers affected by Typhoon Haiyan to regain their livelihoods and use the lumber as shelter materials for reconstruction. (UNDP, 2014)

## Leveraging employee skills for development impact

To answer the challenge set out by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, start by leveraging your community investment and employee volunteer programme.

The [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) have an important focus on partnerships and have a vital function to achieve peace and development in the coming years. Partners in the private sector are certainly major stakeholders, and their involvement is now expanding much beyond charity. The private sector has a wealth of knowledge, expertise and implementation capacity that must be leveraged to find development solutions.

There is an increased awareness and shift from companies to move away from isolated CSR and have a more integrated approach to sustainable business. But when it comes to their community investment and volunteering, many still look at it from an internal

perspective e.g a fun group activity, supporting team spirit while doing good in the community. Most of us probably participated in community tree planting or supported bake sale for to send students build school in some far land countries. Unfortunately very often limited attention is given to understanding the complexity of the development challenges they are trying to address and how best the skills of the employee could be leveraged to support that process.

One private sector partner of ours was telling me, *“the day I realized I was spending CSR resources for employees to build houses when they have no idea and skills on how to build houses but that I have some of the best IT people in my team, it completely changed by CSR vision and programme”*.

I think there are two underlying assumptions that sometimes limit organizations from understanding the full potential of leveraging employee volunteering. The first one is assuming that because of the positive nature of volunteering (based on good will – to benefit others and with no expectation of financial remuneration) it will automatically have a positive impact. Regrettably, good intentions with volunteering can also turn into negative or unintended consequences. The second one is that organizations should always be grateful for employee volunteers. But sometimes, activities are not really meaningful to them and can generate more work than benefits for receiving organizations.

Here are some of the initiatives you can do to start leveraging your community investment and employee volunteer programme for longer and meaningful impact.

- **Align your programme to broader development vision and target specific development needs.** The SDGs provide a vision and framework for all actors and citizens to align and contribute to a sustainable future for people and planet. Generate a discussion between your employees and your partners on the SDGs and how does it relate to community/national/partners needs. Discuss how best skills from the company can be leveraged to support those needs.
- **Apply the same level of standards used in your core business.** Planning and

implementing employee volunteering uses resources, just like your usual operations in business. Then, think what impact you want to bring through volunteering. Apply the same level of standards to volunteering efforts as for your core business, and take time to analyse the expected outcome for your company and the community.

- **Diversify your types of engagement to enhance a long-term and sustainable commitment.** There are various ways of volunteering: people can work in the country where your offices are located or can be in different countries, and they can also provide online support. One of the challenges for the organizations receiving volunteers is often the limited time employees have available on for the assignment. Longer term collaboration using online and onsite support can build longer term relationship and more meaningful impact. The [online volunteering](#) service is an excellent place to start!
- **Think about leveraging your broader network.** Your assets are sitting within but also outside your company. Your network is a huge asset which can be leverage for impact. CISCO is working with UNV on mobilizing its CISCO Academy Students to [support innovation work with UN projects and programmes](#). This provides an opportunity to support concrete development initiatives while for their graduate, an opportunity of getting a better understanding of development issues and challenges.
- **Put efforts in raising awareness, preparing volunteers and asses results of programmes.** Include the process for your employees to understand the larger picture of the assignment, briefing the context of the issue, challenges, and culture of the community. Partnership with NGOs or UN agencies can be effective to understand those challenges and complexity of the issues. Assess the impact of corporate volunteering to inform future direction of your company volunteering efforts.

Achieving the SDGs is a not a nice to have but a **must do** to secure a future for our planet and the future generations that will call it home. The SDGs call for engaging all partners and citizens' knowledge and creativity. If the same drive which supports the corporate core business needs is applied to community investment, we can really create win-win results for all partners and the beneficiaries and generate sustainable impact.

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