



Sustainable Development Goals:

information
and guidance
for volunteer
organizations

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Resources



This document is part of the products of the UNV post-2015 project, which supported the positioning of volunteerism in the post-2015 process. Through the project, UNV enhanced the UN system-wide efforts to shape the new development agenda beyond 2015 while highlighting the specific contribution of volunteerism to sustainable development, in close coordination with global and national stakeholders.



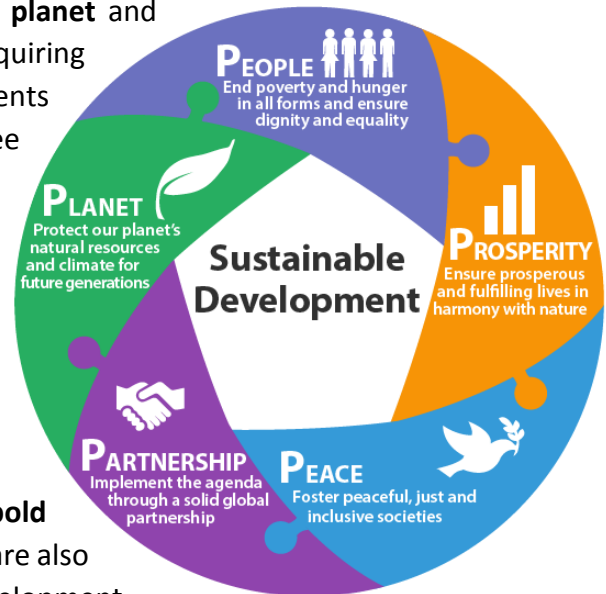
Q1. What are the Sustainable Development Goals?

A1. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets are part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will guide policy and funding for the next 15 years.

The 2030 agenda is a plan of action for **people**, **planet** and **prosperity**, strengthening **peace** and requiring **partnership** for implementation. These five elements of sustainable development are all connected – see the sustainable development wheel.

Building on the successes, but also the shortcomings, of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs focus on new areas such as economic inequality, innovation, climate change, sustainable consumption, peace and justice - among others.

The SDGs are **universal**, **inclusive** and a **bold commitment to people and the planet**. The SDGs are also referred to as the Global Goals for sustainable development.





Q2. Where do I find the Sustainable Development Goals?

A2. UN Resolution A/RES/70/1 on [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, contains the full definition of the complete SDGs set.

The *2015: Time for global action* website presents the list of clickable goal icons, along with an abstract and some key figures on the theme of each of the goals (see for example the page about [Poverty – Goal 1](#)).

Q3. Why are the Sustainable Development Goals important?

A3. The SDGs represent a **people-driven, transformative** agenda built on the foundations of **transparency, participation** and **inclusion**. The SDGs matter to all of us as we have a shared responsibility for our future and that of our planet. Without clear goals and measurable targets, as well as comprehensive data sets that allow to analyze the situation, including at the local level, we risk leaving the most vulnerable behind and not properly addressing new challenges that impede development and harm our planet. Achieving the SDGs will depend, among others, on the degree of ownership and engagement of people in addressing them.

Q4. How different are the SDGs compared to the MDGs?

A4. The MDGs rallied the world around a common agenda to tackle the indignity of poverty. While the number of people living in extreme poverty has dropped by more than half, the job is unfinished for millions of people. The new agenda needs to take forward and further the commitments made under the MDGs, e.g. to end hunger, fully achieve gender equality, improve health services, and make sure every child goes to school, while ensuring that the benefits of the achieved results are maintained.

One key difference is that the agenda is **universal**, i.e. all countries need to align plans and identify shortcomings and strategies to address them in all areas. The SDGs are more ambitious and complex but will also reinforce what the MDGs have achieved after they conclude at the end of 2015. The agenda also includes issues that were not in the MDGs such as climate change, sustainable consumption, innovation and the importance of peace and justice for all. While the SDGs include many more goals, these target specific areas based on shared principles and commitments. Building on the MDGs, **the 2030 agenda aims to couple sustainability with inclusion and a commitment to leave no one behind by adopting an equality-focused and rights-based approach at all levels**. This should be underpinned by a strong accountability framework.

Q5. Who are the key players in the SDGs and what is their role?

A5. **The primary responsible for achieving the SDGs are the governments and the people they represent**. UN Member States are the signatories of the new 2030 agenda. They will



need to reformulate policies taking into account their national realities to help achieve the Goals, as well as provide the regulatory incentives that will align business decisions with the SDGs.

The SDGs also call for a global partnership. The alignment of national priorities to the SDGs represent a great opportunity to identify upfront all partners that are needed to achieve this ambitious agenda, including communities and citizens' groups. Key players such as civil society, development agencies, business leaders and communities everywhere will be essential in supporting governments to achieve these goals. **Volunteer Groups** are explicitly mentioned as stakeholders in their own right in the 2030 Agenda (see §45 of UN Resolution A/RES/70/1 on [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)). **The UN** will also have an important role to play in strengthening policy coherence and supporting governments to take action towards achieving these Goals. Please refer to question 8 for UNV's specific role in SDG implementation.

Q6. How will the new SDGs be financed?

A6. All sources of finance – public and private, domestic and international – will need to be mobilized, scaled-up and made more effective in support of the new agenda. Some goals can also be advanced by changing approaches and policies. Implementing the goals is not only about Official Development Assistance or foreign aid. Financing the agenda can include a strong commitment to tackle illicit capital flows and improve cooperation on international tax issues, as well as building capacities for domestic resource mobilization. Inevitably, much of the finance for the post-2015 agenda will come from the private sector and will require incentives and regulatory frameworks that promote local economic growth and entrepreneurship.

Q7. How will progress on the SDGs be tracked?

A7. The UN will support implementation at national level through its Resident Coordinator's system. **The new agenda poses however a significant challenge in terms of tracking progress in all countries, for all people.** Its sheer breadth, plus the call to leave no one behind, mean that the UN will have to change the way it supports governments (and others) to produce, make available, and analyze data. The UN development system is fully committed to strengthening data collection in key areas and to improving the quality and availability of data for implementing and monitoring the 2030 agenda. **Volunteers** can play a role in strengthening participatory forms of planning and monitoring as well as in enhancing quantitative and qualitative data collection, especially in remote areas.

In the next 15 years, the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) will review progress on the SDGs and provide Member States with political leadership, guidance and recommendations on sustainable development. The GA Resolution that established the HLPF ([A/RES/67/290](#)) explicitly mentions **Volunteer Groups** as stakeholders. Therefore,



volunteer groups have the opportunity to present evidence about volunteerism's contribution to the SDGs at HLPF meetings alongside the progress reported by Member States.

In relation to this opportunity, the Plan of Action for Integration of Volunteering in peace and development in 2016-2030 (see question 8) recommends to measure volunteerism to a) contribute to a holistic understanding of the engagement of people and their well-being, and b) as part of the monitoring of the SDGs.

Q8. What is UNV's role in the process of SDGs definition and implementation?

A8. During the process of definition of the new agenda and goals, UNV has contributed to UN dialogues and consultations by widening spaces for all people to participate in defining the key issues to be addressed in the new framework and to start identifying ways to actively engage in developing community-based solutions. UNV has also supported volunteer groups in achieving recognition and integration of volunteerism in the post-2015 context.

Now that the agenda has been approved and the implementation phase is starting, UNV supports UN system initiatives to achieve the global goals by selecting and training skilled and motivated volunteers that serve in UN programmes, projects and field operations for peace and development worldwide. UNV's comparative advantage is the capacity to reach out to the most remote communities and foster adapted local solutions and long-term attitude changes.

Upon mandate by the UN General Assembly, UNV has also developed a **Plan of Action** for the next decade and beyond (2016-2030), which identifies three strategic objectives:

- strengthen people's ownership of the development agenda through enhanced civic engagement and enabling environments for citizen action;
- integrate volunteerism into national and global implementation strategies for the post-2015 development agenda; and
- measure volunteerism to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the engagement of people and their well-being and be part of the monitoring of the SDGs.

The Plan of Action is part of the [Secretary-General Report A/70/118](#) (see **chapter IV**) about progress made with regards to the recognition and promotion, facilitation, networking and integration of volunteerism worldwide since 2012. UNV will facilitate multi-stakeholder efforts to deliver on the Plan of Action.

Q9. What is the specific relevance of volunteering in the context of the SDGs?

A9. **Sustainable development cannot be achieved through institutional action only.** The 2030 agenda recognizes that traditional means of implementation need to be complemented by participatory mechanisms that facilitate people's engagement and capacity to benefit



other people and the planet. The SDGs cannot be achieved without people's engagement at all stages, and without new partnerships, including **with volunteer groups**. Volunteer groups can be brokers of and provide spaces for engagement, connecting institutional initiatives with volunteer action at community level. It is crucial that they are involved from the planning stage when governments and institutions align their plans to the SDGs. Volunteering transforms the volunteers as well as the people they work with.

UNV's [position paper](#) on the post-2015 development agenda maintains that 1. volunteerism is universal and strengthens civic engagement, social inclusion, solidarity and ownership; and 2. volunteerism should be part of a new measuring framework that goes beyond GDP and demonstrates progress in human well-being and sustainable human development.

The UN Secretary-General's Synthesis report on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda ([A/69/700](#)) recognizes **volunteering as a "powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation"** for the SDGs. It highlights the role of volunteerism in expanding and mobilizing constituencies, engaging people in planning processes and localizing the agenda by providing new spaces of interaction between governments and people for concrete and scalable action.

By **mobilizing capacities and extending the reach of action**, volunteers can facilitate and support people's engagement in planning, implementing and monitoring the SDGs, bridging social capital and strengthening social cohesion. They can:

- provide technical support and enhance capacity in all thematic goal areas, such as for example sustainable livelihoods, health, education, employment, environment, gender, or youth;
- facilitate new spaces for dialogue and action; reach out to people, including those marginalized or difficult to reach; bring people's voices and knowledge into collective actions - to help leaving no one behind. This is crucial to build ownership and localize the SDGs;
- raise awareness or champion changes and inspire others, to facilitate durable changes in mindsets and behaviors;
- help measuring progress on SDG implementation through collecting data, providing expertise and supporting participatory forms of planning and monitoring.

Q10. What kind of activities can be envisaged for volunteers?

A10. **Volunteerism and volunteers** can contribute to the transformational delivery of the SDGs across all thematic areas (Goals 1 – 17) in a range of ways that address one or more goals at once. In Goal 17, the 2030 agenda explicitly mentions **volunteer groups** as actors for implementation of all Goals.

Volunteers can deliver technical expertise - for example in areas such as health (Goal 3), education (Goal 4), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), renewable energy (Goal 7),



sustainable ecosystems (Goal 13, 14, 15). They can develop skills and build capacities, thereby enhancing the employability, especially of young people and people with limited access to the employment market (Goal 8 and all Goals).

Volunteers also have a proven record of modelling attitude and catalyze behavior changes - this applies for example to issues such as gender equality (Goal 5), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), sustainable consumption (Goal 12), climate action (Goal 13), as well as reconciliation, relationship and trust building, leading to increased social capital and strengthened social cohesion (Goal 16).

Potential activities for volunteers in the context of the SDGs

Volunteers can:

- **raise awareness** about the 2030 agenda through local campaigns and creative approaches, including in remote areas and with marginalized populations, to contribute to SDG domestication (all Goals);
- **deliver technical expertise** to complement essential basic services in the thematic areas of the so-called “MDG unfinished business” (Goals 1 – 5), where they are lacking or where they are insufficient, as well as in other areas (for example, Goals 6, 7, 13-15);
- **model behaviors** and attitudes, helping the agenda to be truly transformational, and enhancing knowledge and willingness to contribute to SDGs locally (for example, Goals 5, 6, 12, 13, 16);
- **mobilize people** to develop a sense of opportunity and ownership with regards to the challenges they are facing, to leverage collective action and engagement across all Goals during planning, implementation and monitoring phases (Goal 17);
- **develop skills** across different goal areas through transfer of knowledge and experience, while facilitating the dissemination of local expertise (for example, Goal 8 and all Goals);
- **collect data**, assess SDG progress and leverage local expertise through participatory forms of monitoring, local outreach and dissemination of tools such as the MY World 2030 survey (Goal 17 and all Goals).

Overall, by increasing people’s engagement and community action, **volunteerism** fosters local ownership for development solutions, builds resilience and strengthens preparedness – therefore supporting the achievement of all Goals.

Volunteer groups can also play a significant role by brokering engagement and connecting governmental strategies and initiatives with complementary, yet essential, community voluntary action (all Goals).

Combining the action of international, national and community volunteers into a ripple effect can increase outreach and multiply results across all goal areas.



Resources

Key references on volunteerism and the 2030 agenda

- 2030 Agenda: UN GA Resolution A/RES/70/1 Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, §45 (2015)
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>
- UN Secretary-General Synthesis Report on the post-2015 agenda A/69/700, §131 (2014)
<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N14/670/01/PDF/N1467001.pdf?OpenElement>
- UN GA Resolution establishing the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) A/RES/67/290, §16-17 (2013)
http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/290&Lang=E

Key online information and materials

1. UN Volunteers / Achieving the global goals: why volunteers are important
<http://www.unv.org/en/what-we-do/mdgspost-2015/doc/achieving-the-global-goals.html>
2. Volunteer Action Counts / Resources
<http://www.volunteeractioncounts.org/en/post-mdg/download-center.html>
3. UN - The Sustainable Development Goals
<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
Multilanguage site maintained by UN DPI
4. UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>
Technical platform maintained by UN DESA (English only)
5. MY World 2030 (currently available as beta version)
<http://www.myworld2030.org>
6. UNS Staff College / Post-2015 learning HUB
<http://post2015.unssc.org/>
7. The Global Goals
<http://globalgoals.org/>
Civil society website with information and audiovisual materials for the general public



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