

UNV IN ACTION



UN

Volunteers

inspiration in action

Working with Returnees, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that promotes volunteerism to support peace and development and its benefits to both society at large and the individual volunteer. UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for volunteerism globally, encouraging partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing volunteers. These beliefs inform the concept of **volunteerism for peace and development**, which is at the core of UNV's mission.

The difference UNV makes is by demonstrating peace and development results and impact through volunteerism. UNV's comparative advantage is the ability and knowledge to bring about transformational change through volunteerism, community voluntary action and civic engagement through active partnerships with civil society, volunteer involving organizations, UN agencies and Governments. This is inspiration in action.

Front Cover: UN Volunteer Ashgar Ali Shan in the aftermath of the 2006 Pakistan earthquake with an internally displaced woman (UNV)



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GENERAL BACKGROUND

Since the Universal Declaration on Human Rights was signed 60 years ago, the problem of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) has become increasingly dramatic and complex. Civil conflict and political unrest are coupling with food insecurity, climate change and other factors to drive ever more people away from their homes and into the unknown.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that today there are 37 million such people worldwide: 11 million outside their own countries and 26 million displaced within them.

In partnership with UNHCR and other UN agencies, UN Volunteers are often at the forefront of the response. In 2010, there were 1,049 UN Volunteers assigned to UNHCR, making it one of our biggest partners.

Whether assisting with the protection, registration or resettlement of displaced people, or helping in the daily management of refugee camps, or providing livelihood training, tools and opportunities for the refugee community - for over three decades, UN Volunteers from around the world have provided critical support in safeguarding the rights and well-being of refugees, stateless people, returnees and internally displaced persons.

UN Volunteers are doing an excellent job and are contributing decisively to UNHCR's work as an integral part of our organization. Few deserve recognition more than these professionals who brave hardship and danger in some of the toughest places, receiving an allowance but no salary. Some of our finest staff started as UN Volunteers.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, at the closing of the sixtieth session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR in September 2009

For example, between 2004 and 2010 the number of UN Volunteers with UNHCR grew by approximately 11% per annum. During 2010, over one thousand UN Volunteers worked in 76 countries with UNHCR. The volunteers represented 17% of UNHCR's total personnel in the field. UNV also works with UNICEF and UNDP in reintegration of returnees and IDPs.

Specifically, UN Volunteers participate actively in a wide range of activities - setting up camps (often on inhospitable and sometimes remote tracts of land), transporting refugees and displaced persons to sites, distributing tents and basic household items. UN Volunteers also **help register** refugees upon arrival, **assist returnees to reintegrate** into their places of origin or in host communities. Importantly, UN Volunteers also **help with legal advisory and protection services**. UN Volunteers as part of their assignments build on traditional and/or local forms of volunteerism in the host country.

The following good examples illustrate the support provided by UN Volunteers in community participation, resettlement/integration and protection. The final part lists the roles and activities of UN Volunteers based on these good examples and what they can do in support of Returnees, Refugees and IDPs.

HELP WITH LEGAL ADVISORY AND PROTECTION SERVICES

Respect and protection for refugees in Chad

When refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) cross the border into Chad, those most in need receive immediate medical assistance and food. People are issued temporary identity bracelets and then transferred to camps.

There are three main UNHCR-run camps near the town of Gore; Amboko, Gondje and Dosseye.

Belgian national Alexia Nisen worked as an UNHCR Assistant Protection Field Officer and was tasked with ensuring that border guards were aware of the law and that displaced people were not exploited or turned back.

Nisen worked closely with the local police, ensuring they were familiar with the relevant procedures. She also helped monitor conditions in the Chadian prisons outside the camp. It is essential that human rights are respected for all, both victims of crimes and those identified as perpetrators.

It was important too that people displaced from CAR knew Chadian law. Disputes within the camps are sometimes resolved via traditional methods, and UN Volunteers oversee these when possible so that human rights are not degraded.



Traditional dance and theatre is used to sensitize residents to sexual and gender-based violence in Camp Amboko in Chad.

Nisen also addressed issues of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and the rights of children.

Many people in the camps hold to traditional tribal values, so great tact is required when discussing human rights. Just as much sensitivity is needed when talking with women who have suffered abuse. Nisen referred abused women to volunteer representatives

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within the refugee community and ensured that women could consult a doctor.

Children in refugee situations are especially vulnerable and are at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriages. Unaccompanied children may be sexually abused or forced to work as domestic servants.

The UN Volunteer **helped set up committees of camp volunteers to monitor these difficult issues, circulate information and sensitize the population to SGBV and child abuse.** Another method used to keep human rights in people's minds is through traditional dance and theatre, where the performers are the women and children of the camps themselves.

INVOLVING YOUTH IN COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Youth Festival in Somalia

By volunteering, young Somali refugees gain confidence and hope.

The refugee camp had never seen anything like it. More than 200 young people had gathered for a festival of drama, dance, and oration contests. Thousands of people had come to watch.

The festival was the brainchild of UN Volunteer Yoko Kuroiwa from Japan. Working with UNHCR, Yoko had been spending the majority of his days among 280,000 Somali exiles living in camps in Kenya.

Yoko, a UNV Programme Associate with the Hiroshima Peace building Centre/UNV, promoted volunteerism for peace and development as part of his assignment. He noticed that there were few opportunities for youth in the camps and they appeared deeply frustrated.

“The camps are almost 20 years old and many of the young people have lived here most of their lives, relying on assistance from UN agencies and NGOs,” noted Yoko.

With limited education and employment options in the settlements, young people become susceptible to joining militant groups or succumbing to apathy.



UN Volunteer Yoko Kuroiwa addresses Somali refugees in a camp in eastern Kenya during the youth festival. (UNV, 2010)

RESETTLEMENT/INTEGRATION OF DISPLACED PERSONS

Assisting with resettlement in India



Khirabhati Chhachan (right), talking to Sibaram Das, is one of the leaders of the town's self-help groups and acts as their informal spokeswoman. (UNV, 2010)

Overshadowed by the cooling towers and chimneys of a newly-built power plant, life has changed for indigenous people living in Jharsuguda, Orissa State, India.

Industrialization has caused the displacement in Orissa and neighbouring states of many of the original inhabitants. Known as the “Scheduled Tribes” these people have been pushed off ancestral lands and away from their rural lifestyles.

Companies are obliged to compensate people who have been moved from their ancestral lands when industrial plants are built. One resettlement colony, Maa Samaleswari Nagar, was constructed with the assistance of one of the industrial companies. Located in Orissa's Jharsuguda District, Maa Samaleswari Nagar is home to about 145 families from the so-called Scheduled Tribes.

Initially, people were apprehensive about moving to the resettlement colony. UN Volunteer Sibaram Das is himself from Orissa. He not only speaks the local dialect, but he understands the thorny issues at play. This gives him a vital insight into the needs and aspirations of the various stakeholders he works among under the UNDP-supported Government of Orissa Resettlement and Rehabilitation Project.

Sibaram and other UN Volunteers have **helped communities with the resettlement and reintegration process.**

"My role as a UN Volunteer is to facilitate and raise awareness about what rights they are entitled to," says Sibaram.

The UN Volunteers have **encouraged displaced people to form village level committees that can promote voluntary action, community empowerment and that can ensure equitable and gender-sensitive approaches.**

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Planting trees in Sudan

UN Volunteer Murdakai Titus from Nigeria, working as a UNHCR Associate Eligibility Officer, was assigned the routine task of determining refugee status at the Shagarab Refugee Camp outside of Kassala in eastern Sudan.

During his visit, Murdakai noticed that the area surrounding the 40-year-old camp was largely devoid of trees. Most had been cut down for firewood and building materials needed by the (then) 22,000 refugees from neighbouring countries who now lived there.

Among the few trees to have survived he noticed the *terminalia mentalis* – a large, tropical tree from the Indian Almond family, also common to Abuja, Nigeria, his hometown. On Murdakai's next trip home, he gathered thousands of *terminalia mentalis* seeds to carry back to Sudan. This was not part of his assignment but he wanted to find a way to help the refugees to easily integrate with the local communities.



A woman from Girba Refugee Camp in eastern Sudan tends tree seedlings (UNV, 2010)

Murdakai found an ally in Wegdan Abdelrahm Idriss, head of FAO in Kassala. Wegdan had spoken stirringly about her work to engage refugee women in camp activities. *“When I approached her about the tree planting, she embraced the idea,”* Murdakai recalled.

Murdakai sought approval to plant the seeds and coordinated testing of the seeds for germination and survival with the Sudan Forestry National Corporation.

Community elders and camp residents planted over 600 tree seedlings throughout the camps in late 2010. The activity was carried out jointly between the refugees and UN staff and camp authorities.

With Murdakai’s seed delivery as a catalyst, the refugees demonstrated to their host country that camp inhabitants are not only recipients of aid and Sudan’s hospitality, but can also play a valuable role in the area’s welfare by helping to improve the environment for all.

Wegdan also set up a tree nursery at the Girba Refugee Camp between Kassala and Shagarab. There 500 seedlings were planted and tended by refugee women for eventual use in camps in the region.

UN Volunteers can / do support UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes as follows:

Enable disadvantaged groups and communities to gain wider access to opportunities and services and enhance the delivery of these services;

Include, participate and promote the involvement of all stakeholders, in particular the disadvantaged, in processes that affect their well-being;

Mobilize communities through voluntary action.

At the policy and capacity development level, UN Volunteers can:

Advocate for recognition of the role and contribution made by local communities who are hosting and dealing with large influxes of people from other areas or neighboring countries or from within their own country;

Facilitate the development of inclusive ownership and local human and institutional capacities to strategically plan, constructively negotiate, coordinate, mobilize, and support participation and voluntary action in refugee/IDP camps and settlements to assist with national coping mechanisms;

Provide coordination, training and technical assistance to district administrations, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, both within and on the periphery of camp/settlement communities, to undertake livelihood needs assessments, planning and management (for example, receiving influxes of people, including registration processes and legal and/or psycho-social counseling);

Strengthen local governmental capacity to mobilize communities to participate in government-sponsored recovery programmes in crisis affected areas in order to help facilitate greater potential for voluntary return of displaced persons or refugees;

Engage in public information campaigns, in partnership with government and other stakeholders, to raise awareness of refugee/IDP issues, civic rights and duties and potential voluntary actions for a more inclusive and engaged response.

At the community and camp level, UN Volunteers can:

Create a space for inclusive dialogue that allows community-based organizations to increase awareness, volunteer, engage, empower, and mobilize host, refugee and displaced resettlement communities;

Mobilize communities, community-based and non-governmental organizations to voluntarily expand their capacity to provide basic social services in areas such as health, shelter and education to refugee and displaced populations;

Facilitate the inclusion and participation of affected communities, including with camps and resettlement areas, and especially targeting women and youth, in the planning and implementation of assessment needs and livelihood skills;

Mobilize and support protection awareness, protection measures and direct line support to victims, especially for women and youth, to prevent their exposure to camp and resettlement vulnerabilities in the areas of gender-based violence, HIV&AIDS, and abusive treatment;

Monitor and track camp and resettlement community actions that help achieve durable solutions for refugee, displaced, and host communities in order to institute good practices in crisis management.

NOTES

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