



## **Volunteers Stakeholder Group thematic position paper to the 2022 High-level Political Forum (HLPF)**

**Building Back Better from the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) through  
Volunteering while Advancing with Volunteers the Full Implementation of  
the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

As stated in UN Resolution 75/233, **“Volunteering is a powerful and cross-cutting means of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”** A conducive environment for volunteering enhances our efforts to build back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda. More than one billion people annually take the time to volunteer, and the past year has seen the continued implementation of the [Call to Action for Volunteering in the Decade for Action](#) and, through [UNGA Resolution](#), the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Volunteers programme and the 20th anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers.

When people are encouraged to get involved in solving problems, the solutions are more likely to be feasible and lasting. By volunteering, people take action to improve not only the lives of those around them but their lives as well. It is important, now more than ever, to integrate volunteers and the spirit of volunteering into national and global implementation strategies and to build an inclusive world. Volunteers not only help in times of immediate need but raise awareness and champion change needed for tomorrow.

The 2020 [Quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system](#):

45. Recognizes that **volunteerism can be a powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and the important role that volunteers play in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, and encourages the United Nations development system, in partnership with Member States, civil society and the private sector, to support such efforts and **promote the conducive environment for volunteerism and volunteers to enhance the sustainability of development results.**

And last July as the outcome of the 2021 HLPF, the [Ministerial Declaration](#) adopted by UN member states highlighted the meaningful participation and involvement of volunteers in partnerships:

22. We commit to promoting public engagement and innovative partnerships through a whole-of-government approach, regional and local mobilization and actions, and meaningful participation and involvement of communities, people, civil society, **volunteers**, academia, and the private sector. Resource mobilization is crucial for health systems and social-economic recovery.

Also released in July, a report of the Secretary-General of the UN shared the achievements against the three objectives of the plan of action on [volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#):

- I. Increasing ownership of the development agenda through volunteering
- II. Integrating volunteering into national and global development strategies
- III. Measuring volunteering and its contributions to the SDGs

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized how volunteers as agents of change provide practical action that builds hope and resilience, improves lives, and strengthens communities' ownership of their own development. During the past two years, volunteers have innovated to engage individuals online to meet community needs and to exercise leadership roles on the frontline in national responses and recovery, playing critical roles in addressing the consequences of COVID-19 and mitigating its socioeconomic impacts.

Member States must fulfill their commitments, made under the plan of action on [volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the 2021 HLPF [Ministerial Declaration](#), to the **meaningful participation and involvement of volunteers in partnerships to deliver the SDGs.**

## Recommendations

### NATIONAL STRATEGIES

**Volunteers build bridges** by brokering relationships between communities and state authorities and other development stakeholders. We ask Member States to:

1. Integrate volunteering in **policies and national development strategies** and in their Voluntary National Reviews at HLPF to create a more enabling environment for volunteering
2. Engage as **partners and advocates for policies** supporting an enabling environment for volunteering
3. Explore **national and global partnerships and collaborations** to leverage efforts towards supporting and promoting volunteering
4. Build **coalitions and networks for learning and shared action** on developing and enabling environment for volunteering

### INCLUSIVE DIVERSITY

Volunteering **offers diverse paths to civic participation, but gaps in volunteer practices and aspirations** across countries and regions remain. We ask Member States to:

1. Build on experiences of promoting volunteering among youth and extend these opportunities to **all demographic groups**, especially through virtual and hybrid volunteer opportunities
2. Recognise, work with, and support **community-led volunteering systems and informal volunteers**, involving them as equal partners in the volunteering space
3. Address **barriers to volunteering faced by marginalised groups**, ensuring that all volunteers are valued and supported as partners in social change
4. Address **gender-related volunteering disparities and inequalities**, as the disproportionate burden of care falls on women around the world

### MEASURING SUCCESS

Volunteering enables people of all walks of life **to shape and own the development** in their communities. We ask Member States to:

1. Invest in **volunteer data, research, and measurement** on the scope of volunteer work for the SDGs by accelerating investment in measuring the scale of volunteering
2. Increase support for collection of [evidence and statistics on volunteer work](#) and the economic and social contributions of volunteers, in addition to the stories about the impact of volunteers and the transformational process on their own lives

3. Support a wider range of evidence-based, quality volunteering practices; knowledge sharing; and scaling up ways to **address barriers to volunteering for marginalised groups**

## Moving Forward Together

Volunteers make an immense, and often unrecognised contribution, to the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As part of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders to coordinate the United Nations' Volunteers stakeholder group, the Volunteer Groups Alliance (VGA) is a global coalition of more than 70 organisations that contribute to sustainable development through volunteering, and VGA works to gain recognition for the important role volunteers play at local, regional, national, and international levels, as well as in UN processes.

In the past year, several VGA members have published key global research reports to enhance the understanding of global trends in volunteering. These include the International Forum for Volunteering in Development's [COVID-19 and the Future of Volunteering for Development](#), the International Association for Volunteer Effort's [Leadership for Volunteering: the COVID-19 Experience](#), and UNV's [State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2022: Building Equal and Inclusive Societies](#), culminating in the [Future Trends in Volunteering](#) report.

There can be no silver lining from the horrific impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had around the globe in terms of the tragic loss of millions of human lives, the hundreds of millions of illnesses, and the disruption of daily existence for us all. But if there is a bronze lining, it is how volunteers, like in many times of trouble before, have rallied to help their communities face these challenges together and support those most in need. Volunteering continues to enable large numbers of people to participate in development processes, both online and offline and in partnership with authorities and the private sector and through self-organized efforts by communities. The potential to expand citizen engagement through volunteering is tremendous.

In the past three years, the UN General Assembly has referred to volunteering in 34 of its resolutions, nearly triple the previous three years. At least 121 countries, two-thirds globally, now have laws and policies to create a conducive environment for volunteering, particularly for youth empowerment. For example, with the aim of promoting entrepreneurship, the integration of young people, and civic values, **Senegal** adopted in the summer of 2021 an orientation law n°14-2021 on volunteering. This law recognizes volunteering as a powerful and versatile means of action, as well as an essential tool for achieving the SDGs.

Although we are thrilled by the significant progress made in integrating volunteers into the planning and review processes, there is still the need for further efforts to integrate volunteering into wider strategies and plans in order to expand and mobilize constituencies and engage people for the decade of action between now and 2030. And while some progress has been made in the measurement of volunteering and its contributions to the SDGs, we must accelerate the investment in measuring the scale of people's voluntary effects. Further efforts are needed:

1. To integrate volunteering into national development strategies, plans, and policies in order to expand and mobilize constituencies and engage people in national planning and implementation of the 2030 Agenda; and
2. To share data, evidence, and knowledge on the impact of people's engagement through volunteering.

Of the 41 VNRs prepared for the 2021 HLPF, 26 (63%) mentioned the positive contributions of volunteering to the SDGs by highlighting evidence, data, and examples of volunteer activities towards sustainable development. Many countries particularly showcased the role of volunteers in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, and half of the 26 VNRs that document volunteer contributions link volunteering to the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

We advocate for 1) increased government support for volunteer efforts for the broader SDGs and 2) increased evidence gathering that links volunteering policies and investments to development strategies.

## **Volunteering and the Focus for the 2022 HLPF**

We share the below examples with two goals in mind:

1. To highlight the varied and impactful work of volunteers globally on the SDGs under review at the 2022 HLPF, especially in countries presenting their Voluntary National Reports (VNRs) this year
2. To educate Member States on the power of volunteering

## GOAL 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality **education** and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

### **Ghana** | Increasing Literacy

Adequate literacy can set a child on a path to success. In partnership with United Way Ghana, Ford South Africa set up a Reading Oasis in Onwe, in the Ashanti Region, to engage young learners through fun and interactive literacy activities. With support from Ghana Library Authority, United Way Ghana made books available to 121 young learners, assisted by 10 trained volunteers who read and narrated several stories to them.

During the pre-assessment of the young learners' reading proficiency, they discovered that only 56% of the young people could read age-appropriate books. After engaging them weekly for five months, the percentage increased to 92%. Though the initial program has ended, the community leaders have taken up the mantle to continue running the program under the guidance of United Way Ghana and the Ghana Library Authority.

Bright Agyei Ababio, one of the beneficiaries, reflected, "At first, I did not like reading my notes and textbooks because it was difficult for me to read and understand them. But now, I enjoy reading, so I always read my notes. Thank you, Ford South Africa, and United Way Ghana, for helping me to discover my love for reading."

### **Jamaica** | Preserving Jamaican Language and Culture

In Jamaica, Amashika Associates has released a book called Chat Tu Mi (Chat to me) & Color. It aims to preserve Jamaican-Patois language and culture in youth through a fun interactive coloring book. Each page of the coloring book aims to highlight a specific cultural point and celebrate diversity. The author of this book and founder of the organization, Amashika Lorne, is a youth advocate and communication consultant born in Jamaica. Through her book, she wishes to preserve the Jamaican culture in new generations of youth. Through partnership with the Jamaican Observer, a national news organization, they hosted many online workshops in 2021 to reach more kids. Lorne was awarded the Points of Light award in 2021. For more information, visit [https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/jamaican-volunteer-gets-207th-commonwealth-points-of-light-award\\_238973](https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/jamaican-volunteer-gets-207th-commonwealth-points-of-light-award_238973)

## **Senegal** | Teaching Blind Students

In Senegal, Sightsaver fights to campaign for the rights of people with disabilities to participate equally in society, leaving no one behind. The organization in corporation with the Senegalese government runs three schools in Dakar to educate blind and visually impaired students alongside other students in the community. The project is crucial in changing the perception within the local community that blind children are unable to learn. Aliouné Ba is a teacher at the school. On top of his busy day job, he also volunteers as an itinerant teacher four evenings a week, helping blind students by visiting them in their homes to give additional support. He's a quiet, softly spoken man, but when talking to his fellow students, it's easy to see just how important his work is to them as with his mentoring: they feel that they can achieve anything in life. For more information, visit <https://www.sightsavers.org/stories/2019/03/mbathios-story/>

## GOAL 5: Achieve **gender equality** and empower all women and girls

### **Jordan** | Empowering Women

In Jordan, as women are facing all forms of violence, Girl Guides launched a project with the purpose of spreading awareness among the Girl Guides, school students, and local community of women's rights as stipulated by religion, constitution, and human rights, as well as empower women throughout society in all social, economic, and political fields.

Women became more aware of their rights within society by 80%, and Girl Guides provided training to the students on small economic projects to support the empowerment of women.

### **Nepal** | Educating Girls

In Nepal VSO is working to promote access to the education for marginalised girls through the "Sisters for Sisters" programme, funded by the UK Government. Community volunteers are trained to act as "big sisters" and mentor girls who are at risk of dropping out of school. Volunteer teachers from abroad work alongside Nepalese teachers to improve the quality of teaching, and British and Nepalese youth volunteers are working to raise awareness of the value of education and to challenge some of the traditional attitudes and cultural norms which are preventing girls from attending school, such as child marriage. The project has led to significant increases in both attendance and achievement for girls, with 98% of the girls from the first phase of the project remaining in school.

## **Turkey** | Improving Outcomes for Women

For Ekin Su Yilmaz from Turkey, joining UN Women as a UN Youth Volunteer was her life-long dream. UN Women in Turkey works closely with the Government and civil society to focus on initiatives in leadership and political participation, ending violence against women and girls, and peace, security, and engendering humanitarian action.

As an integral part of the UN Women country team, Ekin contributes to the empowerment of women and girls in Turkey, including women with disabilities, refugee women and girls under temporary protection and their advocacy networks.

**GOAL 14: Conserve and sustainably use the **oceans**, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development**

## **United Arab Emirates** | Preserving Marine Biodiversity

Emirates NBD, a leading banking group and a pioneer in private sector volunteering in the UAE runs Exchanger as an integral part of the bank's CSR strategy and commitment to advance the sustainable impact agenda through volunteering. Exchanger is an award-winning Volunteer Programme for employees, friends and family, and partners to exchange their time for community service and make a real difference.

The bank's Keep the Creek Clean initiative is a marine conservation programme supported by volunteers. Since inception, volunteers and partners have successfully removed more than 5,400 kilograms of various types of refuse from the ocean through dive, kayak and beach clean ups.

## **The Philippines**

The coastal ecosystems around the Philippines are some of the world's most heavily fished. Changing weather patterns and the effects of overfishing mean that daily life is hard for locals, dependent on the fishing industry. Fighting has left Mindanao significantly less developed than other parts of the Philippines. VSO is working with fishing households to support their communities to become more self-sufficient. Participants have been trained to make organic biofertilizer from fish waste, vegetables and the seaweed crops ruined by storms and typhoons. The women make an income from selling the biofertilizer, which contributes to protecting their families from the economic shocks caused by changing weather. The biofertilizer is organic, cheaper than chemical alternatives and supports soil health. Last year, the project



expanded to train 100 men, women and youth who were members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, who have successfully forged a peace agreement with the government. The project encourages the indigenous Moro people and non-Moro communities to work together through sharing skills and technology.

**GOAL 15: Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse **land** degradation and halt **biodiversity** loss**

### **Botswana** | Supporting Women Farmers

In Botswana, Unitech Farming provides training and support to youth and female farmers, most of whom are smallholders operating on a couple of acres or less. Pearl Gaone Ranna is a mother, a farmer, a social entrepreneur, and a visionary. At the age of 26, she convened the first-ever women in farming expo held in Botswana, drawing participants from across Southern Africa to network and discuss the barriers and opportunities they face in their respective countries. She is the founder and managing director of Unitech. Ranna is excited, in part, because the program is being launched in the village where she was raised. She fell in love with farming as a teenager helping on her mother's farm. She says her father wanted her to set her sights higher than being a farmer. Indeed, she did. She intends to transform the agricultural sector for all women. For more information, visit <https://www.bread.org/blog/mothers-day-postcard-botswana>

### **Cameroon** | Improving Agriculture

In Bafut, Cameroon, Better World Cameroon develops local regenerative agricultural strategies and promotes local government action that drives innovative development of resilient food and water systems. Crystal Koh, a university student, attended a conference where Better World Cameroon presented the work of their organization. She immediately connected with the mission of the organization, and as a result, she started volunteering with the organization as a university student in 2011. Her volunteer work revolved around planting trees and creating gardens in the local community. Currently, she conducts work on youth development, women empowerment, and high-value agricultural products. For more information, visit <https://betterworld-cameroon.com/interview-crystal-koh/>

## **Liberia, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Senegal** | Conserving Energy, Forests, and Biodiversity

Environment-related issues represent one of the most pressing challenges worldwide, especially in Africa. To help communities sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt biodiversity loss, UN Volunteers in Liberia, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, and Senegal support sustainable livelihoods programmes that are eco-friendly or focused on waste management and wildlife conservation.

### **Senegal** | Fighting Coastal Erosion

AVENIR, a two-year project funded by the European Commission through its EU Aid Volunteers facility, has allowed France Volontaires and partners in Togo, Guinea, and Senegal to deploy about 30 couples of volunteers (each made of 1 international and 1 national volunteer). In these three countries, France Volontaires has coordinated about 20 local CSOs hosting volunteers and helped them to implement activities related to food security, health and nutrition, land reclamation, anti-erosion interventions, protection of the environment, etc. AVENIR, in French stands for “Action of European and National Volunteers Working Toward Resilience.”

In Senegal, France Volontaires mobilized volunteers within the Communal Development Agency of Saint-Louis to raise awareness among the populations of the Langue de Barbarie to fight against the effects of coastal erosion. This action has reached more than 480 people.

## **GOAL 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global **partnership** for sustainable development**

### **Ghana** | Strengthening the Relationships between Countries

Ghana and France, through the schemes of France Volontaires Ghana, have deployed over 30 volunteers to and from Ghana. This collaboration has also led to the signing of a cooperation agreement between the two countries to facilitate the deployment process between the two countries, particularly regarding residence permits.

In the same light, France Volontaires Ghana has begun negotiations with the National Service secretariat to potentially increase the number of volunteers deployed between the two countries and, possibly, to make the voluntary missions of Ghanaian volunteers count as their National Service.

## **Morocco** | Partnering for the SDGs

In Morocco, led by the Moroccan Collective of Volunteering, a national association promoting volunteering and a member of International Association for Volunteer Effort's Global Network of Volunteering Leadership, 21 organizations have united to gain recognition of volunteering as a tool to achieve the SDGs. They have an interest to focus on youth, and it is in their plans to write policy about this, as it is particularly relevant because the population in Morocco, and in the Middle East overall, is very young.

## **Suriname** | Creating a New Community Center

In Paramaribo, Suriname, Stiwewa, a neighborhood association, supports the citizens and the environment through education, informative activities, and recreation. It focuses on physical education and recreational sports. Ramesh Dwarkasing, the managing director at Pittsburgh Plate Glass (PPG) Varossieau, headed the initiative to get his company to donate funds and painting facilities to Stiwewa for the construction of a new neighborhood center in the area. Having been a volunteer with Stiwewa for a long time, he headed the project to completion allowing for a vibrant community center to be established and used for increasing awareness, education, and wellness activities among the locals.

## **Tunisia** | Providing Face Shields

Hospitals in Tunisia did not have a large supply of face shields prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, which became a great problem at the onset of the pandemic. The Social Innovation Hub, EL SPACE, recognized that while the tech field does not have the capability to treat those who are sick, they could support the medical staff by helping them stay healthy to help those who are not. EL SPACE called together locals and makers with 3D printers to provide needed face shields for hospitals and medical staff, using a 3D printed face shield design approved by the ministry of health to ensure they are providing something that can be used in hospitals.

Atlas Corps Alumnus Nino (Class 26, Tunisia) returned home after his Fellowship and started to work as the Executive Director of EL SPACE Social Innovation Hub, which he co-founded in 2015. In 2019, EL SPACE Social Innovation Hub became an affiliate hub of Open Gov Hub, Atlas Corps Host Organization. EL SPACE Social Innovation Hub is a social entrepreneurship and innovation organization that is creating sustainable community practices for a better Tunisia and a better world – such as providing essential protective equipment through this difficult time. EL SPACE does this by supporting innovators in training, networking, and design for their social impact projects.

The shield is made from recycled vegetable plastic. Additionally, while the mask is only sanitary for about 4 hours, it can be disinfected for longer use. It is designed by one of EL SPACE's community members and is printed by people and makers all across Tunisia. There is lots of engagement with anyone with a 3D printer, and many are working day and night to print these and deliver them to the nearest hospital. Right now, there are more than 40 3D printers all working all across Tunisia, and more and more people are engaging every day.

This sustained initiative is called Makers Against Corona, and the organization is taking donations of 3D printer material and 3D printers that are not in use at this time. The ELFABSPACE lab is using various materials for this initiative and believe that together we can all do our part to support each other in these difficult times.

## **UK and Rwanda | Sharing Knowledge and Expertise**

Since 2018, VSO has facilitated a twinning partnership between Lewisham Sexual health services (part of Lewisham and Greenwich NHS trust in the UK) and Nyagatare District Hospital in north-eastern Rwanda. The initiative unites two institutions and medical professionals working in the same sector in different parts of the world to share staff knowledge and learn from one another. The twinning arrangement has mobilised volunteers from the UK and from Rwanda and has led to increased understanding of community outreach in both countries.

## **Conclusion**

We need to ensure that volunteers are at the heart of efforts to respond, rebuild, and recover from the pandemic and that volunteering provides those furthest behind with opportunities for greater ownership in the decade of action for the SDGs. Even as volunteers continue to respond to the most urgent needs, we must consider how volunteering can support efforts to build back better.

To read more about how volunteers are delivering on the SDGs, or to contribute your own stories, please visit [www.volunteergroupsalliance.org](http://www.volunteergroupsalliance.org) to see stories from around the world.

For the generations to come, people must take responsibility for the changes needed now, and recognizing, encouraging, and supporting volunteering are all essential for a more just future for all.

Contributors: Members of the Volunteer Groups Alliance - <https://forum-ids.org/about/vga/>