

Volunteers and the Millennium Development Goals



UN
Volunteers



“At the heart of volunteerism are the ideals of service and solidarity and the belief that together we can make the world better. In that sense, we can say that volunteerism is the ultimate expression of what the United Nations is all about.”

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General, United Nations

“Voluntary action and volunteers add great value and will be indispensable in meeting the MDG targets. To succeed in advancing sustainable development in today's world, we need to share ideas and tap the ingenuity, solidarity and creativity of millions of ordinary people. And indeed, each of us should make that personal decision to get engaged.”

Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

“Countless volunteers across the globe are active in every conceivable area of human development. The challenge is to build meaningful networks so that volunteers deliberately address the MDGs while decision-makers empower volunteers through supportive policies.”

Sharon Capeling-Alakija (1944–2003), former Executive Coordinator, United Nations Volunteers (UNV)

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In 2000, ten million people volunteered to support the immunization of 550 million children as part of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. The vast majority were concerned citizens, volunteering in their own communities. They gave their time to ensure that children reported to immunization stations, were properly documented, and received the oral vaccine. The total value of the support provided by volunteers was estimated at \$10 billion, well beyond the reach of governments or international and national organizations.

This example illustrates well how the solidarity and creativity of millions of ordinary people, channelled through volunteerism, are key to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*. Indeed, although the MDGs were first discussed in 2000, countless individual volunteers, volunteer-involving organizations and volunteer networks have through their activities promoted the targets behind the Millennium Development Goals for decades. And most anywhere you look today, the work of volunteers goes on in support of local, national and global development.

* Agreed by world leaders at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, the Millennium Development Goals are a set of measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. They further serve as a framework for governments, the entire UN system, civil society, the private sector, media and academia to work coherently toward a common end in the immediate future.

The Millennium Development Goals

1. **Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**
2. **Achieve universal primary education**
3. **Promote gender equality and empower women**
4. **Reduce child mortality**
5. **Improve maternal health**
6. **Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**
7. **Ensure environmental sustainability**
8. **Develop a global partnership for development**

www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

Millennium Development Goal 1



Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Fighting poverty through voluntary action, individual volunteers and volunteer organizations already help support people living in poor conditions.

They:

- Provide technical support to public services in poverty mapping and analysis;
- Support and coordinate hunger prevention and mitigation plans;
- Enable local associations and cooperatives of farmers, fishermen and cattle raisers to share good practices on production methods, natural resource management and disease control;
- Promote income-generating activities, such as the work of on-line volunteers to market handicrafts produced by unemployed artisans more effectively over the Internet;
- Promote the exchange of experiences through field visits, documentation and Internet connections among volunteer-involving organizations on actions taken in the fight against poverty and hunger.

Case in Point:

The Hoa Sua Vocational Training School in Hanoi is a non-profit organization managed by a group of Vietnamese women, among them many volunteers. Students learn catering, industrial sewing, small-business management and foreign languages. Income generated from three main businesses – a café/restaurant, a bakery and a catering service help to cover administration costs and scholarships for more than 300 students. Volunteers at the school suggest ways to improve the school's management and administration. Since the school opened its doors, over 90 percent of graduates, of which more than 50 percent are young women, are now employed.

Millennium Development Goal 2



Achieve universal primary education

Volunteers promoting education and civic engagement help unleash people's drive for development. Local volunteer organizations and individual volunteers address, for example, low enrollment and issues related to school dropouts and low literacy rates. Volunteers help build the capacity of teachers and other professionals to deliver effective educational services.

They also:

- Support the training of trainers at different levels for national education systems;
- Help develop innovative curricula adapted to local realities and needs, including educational packages for local schools developed by on-line volunteers;
- Assist development partners, schools and communities in strategies to promote girls' education;
- Encourage community-based organizations (CBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide literacy courses and practical skills training for children who do not attend school;
- Connect local parents-teacher associations and community groups with national and international networks of organizations to stimulate innovative approaches to education.

Case in Point:

The Southern African Student Volunteers Organization (SASVO) works with development partners to renovate and reconstruct infrastructure for primary schools and nurseries in South Africa. It runs student vacation camps at which communities contribute 50 percent of resources to complement SASVO's input in primary education activities. SASVO also operates a long-term local volunteer scheme to support poor communities in primary education. Working closely with authorities, the communities identify their own primary educational priorities.

Millennium Development Goal 3



Promote gender equality and empower women

Volunteer activists form the backbone of the international women's movement, raising their voices on policies that have an impact on women, speaking from their everyday practical experience on the ground. Working to mainstream gender throughout society,

they:

- Assist development institutions in mapping and collecting data on gender disparities;
- Develop networks and training programmes for women decision-makers and lobby for greater gender balance in key positions, such as in parliaments;
- Support single mothers and their families;
- Help local groups advocate for compulsory education for girls and boys;
- Protect the rights of teenage girls, including those pressured to marry at an early age.

Case in Point:

Volunteers at Egypt's Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women (ADEW) work to improve the status of women by making credit and income generating opportunities accessible to low-income women. Empowering marginalized adolescent girls who have dropped out of school by improving their skills and building their self-esteem, they also teach women to read and write and increase their awareness of public health issues. On the legal front, they lobby policy makers, the media and the general public for women's rights and help women obtain identification cards and other legal papers.

Millennium Development Goal 4



Reduce child mortality

Almost one in six children in Africa will not see their fifth birthday as a result of poverty, a lack of basic health care and HIV/AIDS. Local and international volunteers work together to address child mortality, including through local health committees and village pharmacies run by indigenous people.

Volunteers and their organizations also:

- Support capacity development of local gynecologists, midwives, doctors and nurses;
- Train traditional birth attendants on basic child delivery techniques and hygiene;
- Help organize and implement national immunization campaigns;
- Promote ICT use by communities and local volunteers to facilitate their access to health information about prenatal care and health care for children, including on nutrition, child spacing and breastfeeding.

Case in Point:

As health care personnel in Nepal are mainly concentrated in the urban areas where only 12 percent of the total population lives, rural people have little access to health care services. According to recent statistics, there are only four doctors and five nurses per 100,000 people. To help ensure sufficient health care, Village Health Workers and Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs) have become the main health care providers for over 21 million rural people. Some 43,000 FCHVs and 13,000 trained traditional birth attendants provide their services to the population.

Millennium Development Goal 5



Improve maternal health



Thousands of volunteers serve as health workers and birth attendants in communities around the world, helping women prepare for the life-giving tasks relating to motherhood.

Individual volunteers and organizations also:

- Train local medical personnel and traditional healers;
- Expand the outreach of medical care, such as through mobile medical units;
- Help set up local health committees to promote village health centres and pharmacies;
- Mobilize local human resources to volunteer time and services in response to national public health issues;
- Support CBOs in launching community initiatives critical for health improvements, such as safe motherhood and health counseling hotlines.

Case in Point:

Assisted by international volunteers and local health officials in Rwanda, 8,000 women are now trained in community health, nutrition and the prevention of communicable diseases. Of this number, 850 work as volunteer health trainers in their own communities. As a result, the malnutrition rate where these trainers are working has dropped from 30 to 15 percent. The local women volunteers work on a peer-to-peer basis to create a birth registry system and community pharmacies. Through networking with development partners, the volunteers are able to stock these pharmacies with essential medication.



Millennium Development Goal 6



Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

No health campaign can be effective without the support of local communities and groups. The involvement of local communities through their volunteer-involving organizations is key to promoting public health, including prevention of epidemics such as HIV/AIDS and malaria.

Fighting disease and bringing hope through their care, volunteers:

- Support development partners in preventing and mitigating epidemics;
- Fill vital human resource gaps caused by epidemics such as HIV/AIDS;
- Mobilize volunteer-involving organizations' support for health campaigns in such areas as immunization, the use of condoms and contraceptives, cleaning of disease-breeding places;
- Inform people at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS through prevention programmes – youth seminars, debates and health-related web sites – many of which are supported by on-line volunteer writers, researchers and organizers;
- Support networks of people living with HIV/AIDS that aim to share experiences about, and knowledge of, the epidemic and reduce its stigma.

Case in Point:

In central Malawi, more than 1,000 volunteers from the Salima Aids Support Organisation (SASO) work in 457 villages, covering a population of almost 250,000. With support from a group called Southern Africa Training, they identify patients through word of mouth or from counselling sessions. They also receive referrals from hospitals no longer able to provide assistance. Volunteers help people living with HIV/AIDS with bathing and going to the toilet. They fetch water and carry out housework. Through information campaigns, the volunteers also increase HIV/AIDS awareness in communities.

Millennium Development Goal 7



Ensure environmental sustainability



Harnessing the potential of civic engagement for the environment, local volunteers and volunteer organizations raise awareness about environmental issues affecting their communities and sometimes, through networks, influence policy decisions. Many volunteers support local initiatives that promote the sustainable use of environmental resources and address related challenges.

They also:

- Provide hands-on training to municipalities in natural resources management – water, land, forests;
- Strengthen local capacity to ensure access to natural resources;
- Encourage the participation of volunteer organizations and local user associations in natural resources management;
- Stimulate exchanges of experiences, knowledge and skills among environmental volunteer organizations at the local, national and international levels.

Case in Point:

Volunteers at the Jatun Sacha Foundation work with local communities to create a forestry reserve on Ilalo Mountain near Quito, Ecuador. Centuries of occupation have resulted in the almost complete deforestation of the region. The volunteers help set up nurseries and germinate tree saplings to re-establish a forest cover with native tree species on the 2,600-hectare ecological area. The volunteers, nearby school groups and community members combine their efforts to produce about 25,000 tree saplings each month.



Millennium Development Goal 8



**Develop a global partnership
for development**

Volunteers are strong networkers who constitute a force for development by building partnerships with the private sector. Volunteers work with corporations to create job opportunities and enlist company programmes to support social development in communities.

Promoting a better world, volunteers and volunteer organizations are tapping into expanding global networks to:

- Organize international campaigns such as the ban on landmines, debt reduction or the protection of the environment;
- Channel affordable medicines, freely available computer software and other resources from governments, companies and private foundations to where it is most needed;
- Advise companies on how to set up corporate volunteering schemes;
- Encourage dialogue between private companies, local CBOs and NGOs;
- Promote, through volunteer networks, the spread of good practices on civil society/corporate partnership for community development.

Case in Point:

SUEZ, a French group of companies specializing in energy, water and waste management, has sent many of its employees as corporate volunteers to help address waste and energy needs in developing countries. So far, missions have been carried out in Albania, Ecuador, Honduras, Mali and Timor-Leste, and many more are in the planning stage. In 1996, SUEZ employees formed a humanitarian organization to help poor communities in the development and management of water resources through sharing of knowledge and skills as well as material resources.

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United Nations Volunteers
Postfach 260 111
D-53153 Bonn, Germany
Telephone: (49 228) 815 2000
Fax: (49 228) 815 2001
Email: hq@unvolunteers.org
Internet: <http://www.unvolunteers.org>

WorldVolunteerWeb:
<http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org>

CIVICUS House
PO Box 933
Southdale
Johannesburg 2135, South Africa
Telephone: (27 11) 833 5959
Fax: (27 11) 833 7997
Email: info@civicus.org
Internet: <http://www.civicus.org>

IAVE Secretariat
1400 I Street, NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20005, USA
Telephone: (1 202) 729 8250
Fax: (1 202) 729 8100
Email: iave@iave.org
Internet: <http://www.iave.org>

“Volunteering is no longer seen as a ‘nice-to-have’ optional extra, but as the must-have building block of communities and civil society.”

Elizabeth Burns, President, International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE)

“The Millennium Development Goals are owned by the people. The role of volunteers as MDG campaigners is essential in connecting the global community and its people around the goals.”

Eveline Herfkens, Executive Coordinator for the Global Millennium Goals Campaign

“There is a strong element of voluntarism in much advocacy work as social activists often give their time and skills freely to various causes. And the best advocacy work is drawn from a thorough understanding of local needs.”

Kumi Naidoo, Secretary General and CEO of World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS)

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