

UNV's Experience in Strengthening Volunteer Infrastructure



EVALUATION REPORT 2014



The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organisation that promotes volunteerism to support peace and development worldwide. Volunteerism can transform the pace and nature of development and it benefits 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 mobilising volunteers. UNV is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

UNV Volunteer Knowledge and Innovation Section (VKIS)

www.unv.org

July 2014

In 2013, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme commissioned a global evaluation on “UNV Contribution to Volunteer Infrastructures”. The evaluation covered national and regional projects aimed at strengthening volunteer infrastructure, partnered and supported by UNV financially and technically. “UNV’s Experience in Strengthening Volunteer Infrastructure” is a series of knowledge products based on the findings of the evaluation, included in one global and eight country reports (Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Liberia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Peru, Togo and Viet Nam). This product presents the findings and knowledge obtained from the global evaluation report.

EVALUATION SCOPE



The impact of VI initiatives was assessed at three inter-connected levels of society that UNV projects commonly address:



volunteers



volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs)



public policy

The geographical scope of the evaluation included:

19

COUNTRIES

2

REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

Evaluation process

220



INTERVIEWS

23



FOCUS GROUPS

281



DOCUMENT REVIEWS

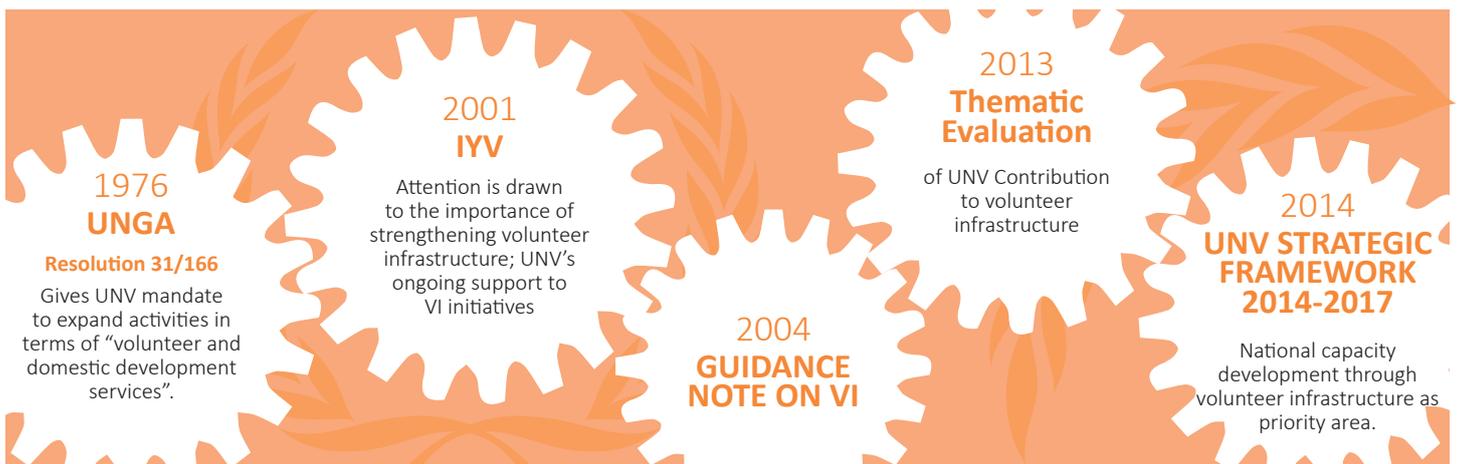
The evaluation methods included desk reviews, interviews, focus groups and eight country missions to Peru, Nicaragua, Nepal, Viet Nam, Cabo Verde, Liberia, Togo and Burkina Faso. Overall 22 projects were reviewed.

MANDATE AND DEFINITION

Since the International Year of Volunteers (IYV) in 2001, UNV has made the promotion of volunteering, through strengthening national and regional volunteer infrastructure (VI), one of its priorities. In 2004, UNV launched a Guidance Note entitled “Developing a Volunteer Infrastructure”, which marked a milestone in the organisational approach to supporting volunteer infrastructure (VI) the field. The Guidance Notes defines VI as:

“... the systems, mechanisms and instruments needed to ensure an environment where volunteerism can flourish...”

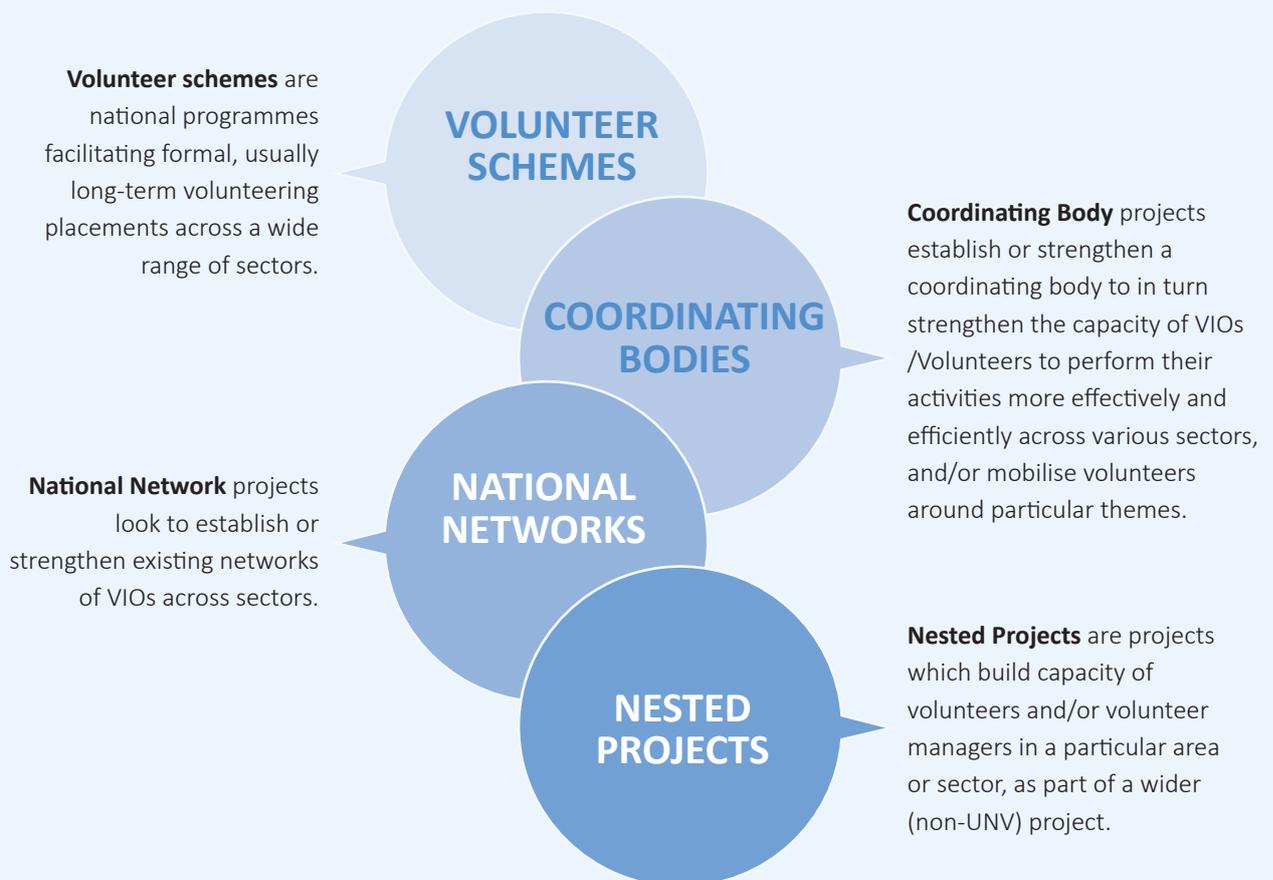
A Thematic Evaluation of UNV Contribution to Volunteer Infrastructures was carried out in 2013/2014, to study the impact, results, good practice and limitations in its approach and support to VI. The VI definition used for the purpose of this evaluation is: “a UNV supported plan, design, project, or programme for strengthening volunteerism at national or regional levels as an ongoing resource to address specific peace and development objectives”, all aimed to contribute to one of the four pillars.



UNV'S INTERVENTION ON VI

In the analysis of trends and characteristics four categories of UNV supported volunteer infrastructure (VI) projects were identified:

VOLUNTEER INFRASTRUCTURE INITIATIVES



CONTRIBUTING TO 4 AREAS



RELEVANCE

Volunteer infrastructure can refer to a variety of interventions, such as volunteer centres, networks, services, corps, management systems, movements, platforms, coordinating bodies. UNV's approach to supporting VI takes into consideration the needs and context in the different countries.

“While there is no common model of volunteering that works in every country, there are common elements that can work together to strengthen volunteerism as a strategic resource for development. These actions, taken together, form the backbone for the development of an effective volunteer infrastructure.”

Guidance Note on Volunteer Infrastructure, UNV, 2004.

PRECONDITIONS

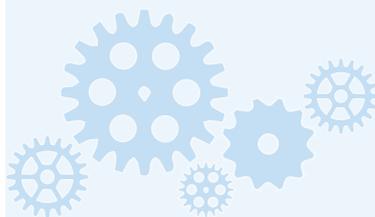
Feasibility study and extensive consultations



Phased approach building on existent initiatives/ experiences



Contribution to both global development and the volunteer sector



In **Ecuador** the VI project built on UNV's prior engagement through a nationwide study on the state of volunteerism and the support of the national VIO coordinating body.

For **volunteer schemes** (e.g. Togo, Liberia, Burkina Faso), relevance was often contextualized within the demographic youth bulge, and the challenge of youth employment considered so pressing by many governments.

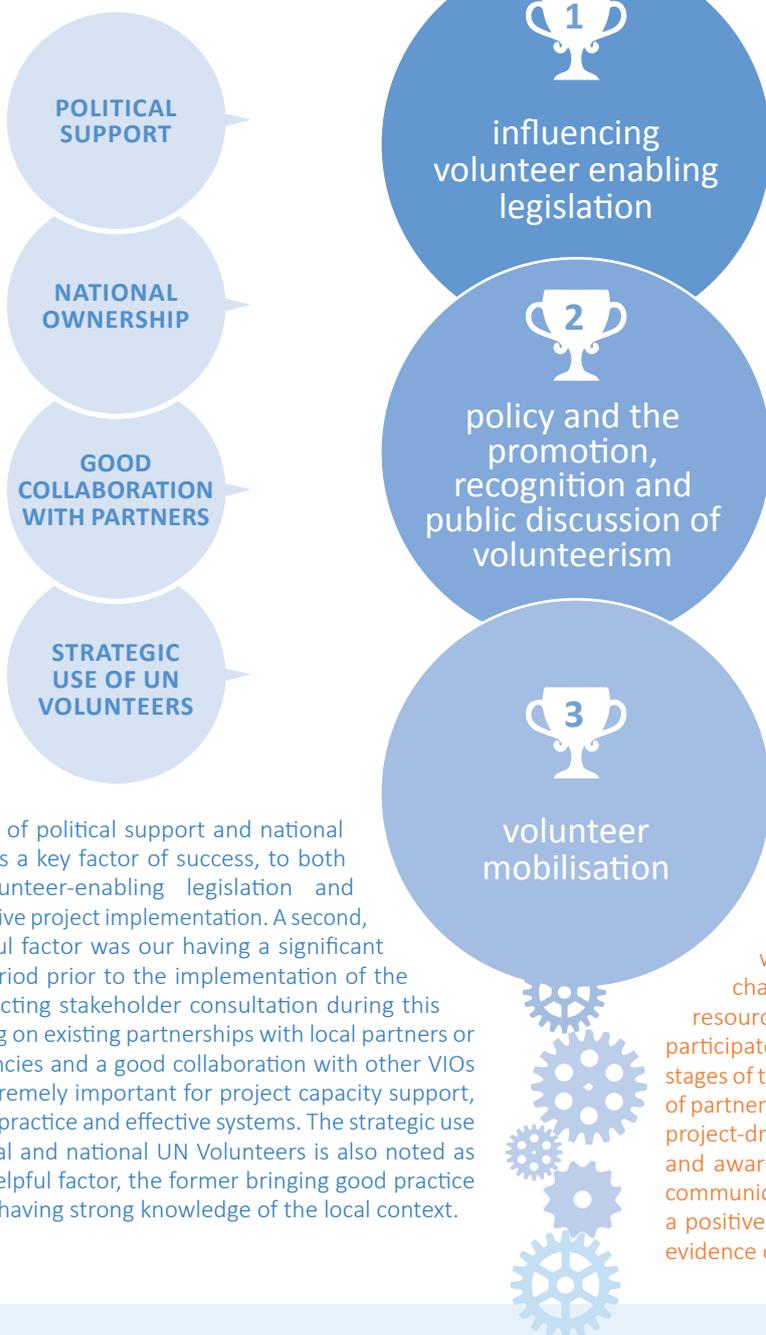
ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL PRIORITIES

One of UNV's greatest achievements is its consistency in ensuring objectives of VI projects are aligned with priorities and policies of host nations, local stakeholders and partners. For instance, volunteer schemes provide youth with opportunities for participation in the social and economic development of their countries, while they gain skills for future employment. In post-conflict countries, volunteer programmes were designed to promote peace and social cohesion.

EFFECTIVENESS

In terms of the effectiveness of VI projects, the evaluation concluded that there are notable achievements in three main areas:

ENABLING FACTORS



The high level of political support and national ownership was a key factor of success, to both promote volunteer-enabling legislation and facilitate effective project implementation. A second, related, helpful factor was our having a significant lead in the period prior to the implementation of the project conducting stakeholder consultation during this phase. Building on existing partnerships with local partners or other UN agencies and a good collaboration with other VIOs have been extremely important for project capacity support, training, good practice and effective systems. The strategic use of international and national UN Volunteers is also noted as a significant helpful factor, the former bringing good practice and the latter having strong knowledge of the local context.

HINDERING FACTORS



Objectives relating to capacity building saw mixed levels of achievement. Whereas numbers of volunteers/VIOs trained appear high, the need for formal capacity building for coordinating bodies/host ministries was a major factor in cases where objectives were not achieved and where challenges in institutionalising supportive policies and resource allocation persist. UNV has taken a successful participatory approach to involving stakeholders in the early stages of the project, but the diversity, roles and responsibilities of partners tended to fade during the implementation. Tools for project-driven civic engagement have included public festivals and awareness raising events, media coverage, web based communication and social media. Whilst these seemed to have a positive effect on the achievement of results, there is less evidence of reaching marginalised groups.

UNV'S COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

UNV's unique status gives it legitimacy to harness the power of volunteerism, at global, regional and national levels. Given its 'convening power', UNV can act as a catalyst and facilitator of a national process from the position of a neutral agency. This is critical given that the development of a national volunteer infrastructure should evolve through dialogue, national ownership and collaboration among the main stakeholders.

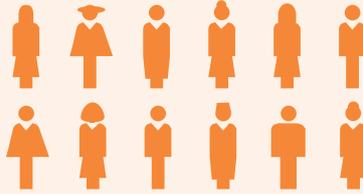
EFFICIENCY

In terms of efficiency, the evaluation concluded that VI projects were often able to achieve considerable results with minimal financial and human resources at their disposal.

GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY



UN VOLUNTEERS



Part of the vantages offered exclusively by UNV is the deployment of UN Volunteers in a service capacity to VI project - a cost-effective means of project support.

However the high turnover of UNV field personnel and UN Volunteers can act as a barrier to successful implementation.

LESSONS LEARNED

RESOURCES ALLOCATED VARIATION

There are some cases where resources allocation was not aligned with project objectives.

OBJECTIVES AT TIMES TOO AMBITIOUS

At times, aims and objectives, such as change in legislation, have been too ambitious for short project time frames and have not taken into account key risks or reliance on assumptions.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

There are no systems and practices at the field level to properly capture, store and retain monitoring and evaluation data, and facilitate easy access, in order to capture innovation and enhance knowledge sharing and learning.

KNOWLEDGE GENERATED

Clear lessons are not captured in order to generate useful and appropriate evidence to support UNV advocacy and influencing, and to identify practices and tools for replication.

GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Gender within VI projects, most commonly understood as the ratio of female to male volunteers/trainees, is not consistently integrated into programming. Gender related risks, such as negative experiences due to different needs across sexes, as well as special considerations, such as the need for outreach efforts to target women or marginalised groups, and how the gender or social inclusion dimension affects the process of volunteer recruitment, are key elements which need to be analyzed during in project planning. VI project performance measurement also needs to include assessment against gender and social inclusion indicators.

IMPACT AND RESULTS

There is evidence across the VI projects of impact and results at all three of the interconnected levels within the evaluation scope. Although these varied across projects and countries, some of the positive effects that were showcased include:



Policy level: commitment of national leadership to volunteering; stakeholder discussion; new law on volunteering; favourable policy and regulatory framework; state budget line for volunteering; recognition and promotion of volunteering for development.

Organisational: volunteer management capacity development; resource and technical support; strengthening existing structures and partnerships.

Individual level: increased levels of employability; more confidence, self-esteem and recognition; new skills and knowledge acquired; sense of solidarity, empathy and empowerment.

RESULTS

Better understanding

Greater appreciation

Increased mobilisation

Influencing policies

Building capacity

UNV has played an important role, in conjunction with others, in: the promotion of a better understanding of volunteerism and appreciation of its value, both to the individual and local/national peace and development goals; increasing mobilisation of volunteers within and between nations; influencing policies and regulatory frameworks at local and national level; and, to some degree, building capacity at individual, organisational and national levels.

GOOD PRACTICES

Networks

The low costs and high benefits of networks in Peru and Nicaragua demonstrated how leadership from civil society can be fostered in a manner that is highly participatory and sustainable.

Volunteer schemes

The well-organized management processes and systems; formal protocols; transparent and efficient mechanisms for volunteer assessment and recruitment of the PROVONAT project in Togo. The scheme saw particularly high demand from potential volunteers. UNV's initial project investment catalyzed a sustainable state-supported programme.

Coordinating bodies

The development of a comprehensive internationally recognised approach to capacity building in China; achieving autonomy and/or statutory recognition of the coordinating body in Viet Nam and Cabo Verde; successful promotion and recognition of volunteerism through a wide-ranging programme of events that reach wide audiences in China and Viet Nam; and the volunteer passport introduced in Cabo Verde.

UNV is extremely grateful for the outstanding support received from UN Online Volunteers in designing some of the info graphics for this knowledge product.