

Working for a  
Better World

# Volunteering and the United Nations System



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**Volunteers**

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2001 UN Volunteers

“Volunteering is indeed the ultimate expression of what the United Nations is all about.”

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

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## Preface

One of the initial tasks that the United Nations Volunteers (UNV), as focal point for the International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001, undertook during the early stages of planning for the Year was to contact organizations of the United Nations system to engage their full support. These contacts were made with the more obvious partners in volunteering, in particular, agencies dealing with the social dimension of development, where volunteering was perceived to be making its most significant contribution. An unsolicited letter of strong support for IYV from the Geneva-based World Meteorological Organization (WMO) took us by surprise and led to a reassessment of the nature of voluntary action in areas of concern to the United Nations system. According to WMO, millions of farmers and fishermen volunteer time to provide meteorological and hydrological data to weather services around the world, a fact it intended to recognize during IYV. In a subsequent conversation with the United Nations Secretary-General, reference was made to this example of the extent of volunteering in the United Nations system. He immediately suggested that UNV organize and disseminate a study of the contribution of volunteering to the work of the United Nations.

This paper represents the fruits of several months of consultation with many of the organizations that make up the United Nations family. In partnership with bodies ranging from the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and the International Labour Organization to the Universal Postal Union and WMO, UNV has undertaken a voyage of discovery that has led to the conclusion that volunteering is, indeed, at the core of the ideals and the mission of the United Nations.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge various contributors to this paper. First and foremost, mention should be made of the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who had the insight and vision to set this project in motion and whose continual and active support of volunteering has contributed so much to the International Year of Volunteers. Many UN system organizations

took the time to provide information and discuss issues as they arose. Without their efforts the paper would not have been possible. I would like to express my appreciation to Richard Campanaro for his dedication and hard work in carrying out the extensive research work and for preparing the draft text; to the Government of Canada, which sponsored him under its youth internship programme, and to the United Nations Association of Canada which organized his placement; to Robert Leigh, UNV's North America Representative, who supervised the work; and to Barbara Brewka, who edited the final version.

This paper is dedicated to all the volunteers whose collective efforts make for a strong and vibrant United Nations and a safer and more equitable world.

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## Introduction

The relationship between volunteering and the United Nations is one of shared values and common goals. It is rooted in a common reliance on collective action, one of the central themes of the Secretary-General's Millennium Report, *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*. Founded on the belief that the needs of the individual are best served by pursuing the shared interests of the group, both volunteering and the United Nations strive to empower individuals, build solidarity, encourage participation and create networks of reciprocity, reinforcing society's most basic social safety net: collective responsibility.

Volunteers, be they international professionals, peasant farmers or urban migrants, contribute to every branch of the United Nations system. The present paper looks at the synergies that exist between the efforts of volunteers and the programmes of the United Nations system. Through examples that draw on a broad range of United Nations-related activities, it illustrates the many and varied roles volunteers play and, in doing so, celebrates their achievements.

For the purposes of this paper, volunteering is defined as an action that meets all three of the following criteria:

- (a) it is undertaken freely and without coercion;
- (b) it is undertaken for reasons other than financial gain; and
- (c) it is undertaken to benefit the community as well as the volunteer.

The contribution of volunteering to the work of the United Nations system is discussed in three chapters. The first, *Freedom from Want*, focuses on the themes of development, governance, gender and employment. The second, *Freedom from Fear*, addresses the role of volunteering in mitigating the impact of socio-economic disasters, both man-made and natural.

The third, *Sustaining the Future*, looks at the contribution of volunteering in the fields of health, population, HIV/AIDS and the environment. The paper concludes with some Final Remarks highlighting actions taken on a voluntary basis by United Nations staff members in connection with their work as well as volunteering by other individuals in direct support of the operations of the Organization.

## Chapter One: Freedom from Want

Volunteering has been a valuable partner in a broad spectrum of development activities having as their overriding goal the eradication of poverty and the betterment of the human condition. This chapter looks at the added value of the work of volunteers in the areas of poverty reduction, governance, information and communication technology, gender and employment.

### Volunteering and Development

Volunteering makes a significant contribution to a wide range of development activities worldwide. The actions of local volunteer-based organizations in Africa, for example, are a major component of environmentally sustainable poverty-reduction efforts. In the past 50 years, overgrazing, land clearance and the intensive farming of marginal lands have contributed to the severe depletion of the African environment, leaving communities to grapple with deforestation, erosion and the degradation of their farmland. In the face of this environmental crisis, individuals undertake volunteer action to preserve their communities' economic and environmental sustainability.

While local volunteer-based organizations have enormous potential, many suffer from limited technical knowledge, financial capital and links to public- and private-sector policy-makers, making it difficult for them to initiate projects or advocate for resources. The Africa 2000 Network of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) harnesses the potential of these local volunteer-based organizations by providing them with the resources they need to build on their existing capacities. Since 1989, the Network has provided technical and financial resources to associations whose total membership surpasses 16.5 million people. The volunteer members of these associations have given their time freely in 12 African countries, achieving environmentally sustainable poverty reduction through popular mobilization and community empowerment. In the North, their actions would be extolled as a demonstration of volunteering,

earning awards and recognition for themselves and their organizations. In developing countries, their remarkable efforts are usually described as a "contribution in kind". There is little or no recognition of the key role they play in the success of the sustainable poverty-reduction strategies of their countries. This reaction is, perhaps, part of a broader phenomenon since the impact of volunteering on the work of the United Nations is also often overlooked.

Volunteering is also an important means by which individuals gain the skills necessary to realize their economic potential. Volunteers of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, recruited on the basis of post descriptions submitted from the United Nations system, Governments and the private sector, help to ensure that isolated populations can access resources, training and national development actors. A programme initiated by a UN Volunteer in Chad, for example, has addressed problems of urban development through volunteer action, leading to the creation of a number of income-generation schemes. In the capital, N'Djamena, the absence of an effective municipal refuse-collection service led to piles of waste dotting the city. The response of a team of UN Volunteers was to bring together different socio-economic groups to rid the city of the garbage and the health risk it represents. The team facilitated the organization of monthly clean-up drives in the city's five districts, drawing in community members to volunteer their time. Although the local volunteers received no wage for their service, they did receive reciprocal benefits in the form of training and extended social networks, opening up opportunities for future income-generation and social mobility. Young people have learned to make rubbish bins and carts, to calculate the costs of their manufacture and to carry out marketing studies. Groups of collectors have now become sufficiently organized as to be able to fan out across the city to collect garbage from a client's doorstep for a small fee, transforming a volunteer-based community project into an income-generating private enterprise.

Volunteering is a key enabler of innovation, mutual learning and productivity in the programmes of the United Nations system, facilitating efficient socio-economic relationships by drawing on and reinforcing the reservoirs of trust and mutuality that form the basis for all transactions. Trust builds predictability into social and economic enterprises, allowing parties to make reasonable assumptions as to the value of their contracts and the final outcomes of their initiatives. Thus, pressure applied through volunteer-generated social networks can make socio-economic relations possible despite the absence of powerful legislative and market incentives. Micro-finance is one area in which the participation of volunteers creates the conditions for a successful poverty-reduction strategy.

These conditions are:

- (a) a risk advantage, resulting from the use of social incentives generated by peer accountability to reduce creditor risk; and
- (b) a cost advantage, stemming from the use of voluntary labour to minimize transaction costs, thus improving sustainability.

The use of joint-liability incentive structures to pressure debtors to repay loans is common to micro-finance programmes around the world. The micro-credit programme of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Benin is one of many mixed micro-finance/local mobilization programmes supported by the United Nations system. Working closely with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), IFAD has created a system of 30 volunteer-administered financial services associations (FSAs) in that country, serving over 5,000 members. Limiting enrolment in FSAs to a few neighbouring villages has enabled IFAD and its national development partners to maximize the leverage provided by social incentives, which tend to be most effective in a limited geographical area. As a result, reimbursement rates have remained nearly 100 per cent, ensuring the scheme's sustainability and the communities' continuing access to needed capital. Despite a seeming contradiction between finance and volunteering, FSA members are volunteers. In return for their

efforts to maintain local initiatives, the volunteers receive access to the communal resources generated by their actions. The benefits of membership are thus an indirect result of the volunteer's action rather than a form of payment for labour provided. NGOs were the first to demonstrate that the social incentives generated by volunteering made creditor risks manageable and created programme sustainability, opening the way for the entry of the United Nations into the field. Thus, in recognizing the success of micro-credit schemes, the work of NGOs must also be given recognition.

### **Volunteering and Poverty Reduction**

The creation of opportunities for all members of a community to influence and contribute to the development process is central to sustainable poverty reduction. Even highly marginalized communities are capable of contributing to, and even initiating, poverty-reduction schemes. However, poor and marginalized people often lack the financial and technical resources and the organizational capacity to maximize their effectiveness. In order to achieve the highest level of productivity in terms of economic and social benefits, many United Nations programmes have partnered with local volunteer-based organizations, providing technical and capital assistance in return for access to the community's store of indigenous knowledge and community structures. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), for example, has accomplished this by helping small-scale and marginalized farmers, especially women, to realize increasingly viable economies of scale in struggling rural communities through loans and agricultural expertise. The most successful of these associations, implemented under the FAO People's Participation Programme (PPP), are based on small groups of individuals with similar backgrounds, which decreases the number of internal conflicts and maximizes the pressure exerted by a group's social incentive structure. Furthermore, the groups address problems common to all of their members instead of those identified by outsiders, thereby increasing local ownership of the project and reinforcing the bonds of trust out of which the impulse to volunteer first

emerges. The benefits generated by these volunteer-based PPPs can be measured from two perspectives: that of the individual participants and that of the social milieu of which they are members.

These benefits include:

- increased food production. In Ghana, groups' maize output is 20 per cent higher than that of non-participating farmers, with similar results recorded in Kenya, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka;
- higher net family incomes. Proxy indicators such as high loan repayment rates, rising levels of group savings and visible improvements in participants' housing conditions point towards increased net family incomes;
- increased employment. Production technologies employed by PPP groups tend to be low in cost and labour intensive. The most common indicator of greater rural employment opportunities is the participants' increased output per hectare, which generates demand for more farm labour.
- higher rates of saving. Per capita savings registered in PPP projects represent a major achievement;
- acquisition of new skills. A clear benefit emerging from PPP evaluations is the acquisition of technical, organizational and leadership skills by participants.

The success of the FAO PPP is based on its effective organization and a combination of local capacities and external resources, generating significant economic and social benefits for participating individuals and their communities while using local knowledge and expertise to maximize programme sustainability.

In a project predicated on a similar division of responsibility, the World Food Programme (WFP) partnered Peruvian farmers'

organizations with technically knowledgeable, nationally recruited UN Volunteers to facilitate the dissemination of information on environmentally sustainable agricultural techniques. Furthermore, WFP has found that aiding the formation of rural women's organizations with UNV support has proved to be an effective means by which to facilitate community access to public services and ensure local participation in the planning and implementation of development programmes. Around 33,000 women, supporting an estimated 66,000 pre-primary school children, have benefited from a WFP programme in remote provinces of Peru, obtaining access to basic health services, childhood immunization, literacy courses, and early childhood education as well as gaining experience in sustainable small-scale agriculture. Like the programmes of other United Nations entities, the WFP projects help populations to meet their immediate economic needs by facilitating participation in their own development. In this case, food aid has been used as a lever to gain access to financially vulnerable rural women for whom organization is a key means of meeting the challenges of poverty, sickness and marginalization. The provision of limited food aid gives beneficiaries the opportunity to volunteer time in activities that would otherwise be beyond their means, producing practical solutions to the problems of economic and political marginalization.

Established volunteer-based advocacy organizations can also benefit from United Nations support in their campaigns against poverty and exclusion. United Nations agencies can help communities to contribute to national development debates by using their connections in government and the private sector to convince development actors of the importance of community participation. With this in mind, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS or Habitat) has signed partnership agreements with associations of the urban poor as part of its Global Campaign for Tenure Rights. Using its connections in government, the private sector and civil society, UNCHS has facilitated the opening of political space for organizations such as the South African Homeless People's Federation and the National Slum Dwellers Federation of India, both of which are members of

Shack Dwellers International (SDI). Through constructive dialogue, SDI and national governments have worked to recognize the homeless as autonomous development actors, providing the enabling environment within which they can initiate and maintain development programmes on their own behalf.

Efforts to open political space for the participation of volunteer-based local organizations can be severely hampered by national legislation that limits the ability of poor and marginalized groups to organize freely. Meaningful advances in poverty reduction should be based on an explicit concern for secure and sustainable employment and conditions of work, founded on the application of the core Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other relevant labour standards concerning individual sectors. As the Chadian example mentioned earlier shows, the training and networks associated with volunteering facilitate employment and increase workers' organizational capacity. This strengthens their ability to form volunteer-based collective bargaining units to protect their rights and through which they can participate in public life.

Poverty reduction is not simply a matter of economics. The causes of impoverishment are often rooted in social phenomena, as are some of its worst consequences. The United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) has identified poverty and social fragmentation as two of the main causes of illicit drug use. This is particularly true for cities, where individuals are separated from their community, weakening society's ability to impose sanctions on its members. Moreover, drug use can be a determining factor in the process of impoverishment, feeding back into the process that creates it and initiating a vicious cycle of abuse and poverty. However, the social benefits of volunteer action can counteract negative factors and their impact, undoing processes that divide societies and weaken social incentives. UNDCP has formed a multidisciplinary team of UN Volunteers who contribute to demand-reduction activities in Barbados, the Dominican Republic, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. They provide information and organizational expertise to grass-

roots demand-reduction and drug-rehabilitation centres, opening the drug debate to the public and persuading many people to participate in prevention and demand-reduction campaigns. Similar projects are under way in the UNDCP/World Health Organization (WHO) Global Initiative on Primary Prevention of Substance Abuse, which involves UN Volunteers in building community networks, facilitating the development of local programming and participation, and providing training and organizational expertise to fledgling associations. As communities become reconnected through mutually beneficial volunteer action, the incentives that prevent drug use are strengthened, lowering the incidence of abuse and removing one factor that contributes to poverty and social marginalization.

### Volunteering and Governance

Volunteering is central to the quality of governance enjoyed by social groups within a country. It determines the level of public participation in affairs of State, a vital component of any governance strategy. Good governance is typified by the rule of law, effective State institutions, transparency and accountability, respect for human rights and the participation of all citizens in decisions that affect their lives. Where public institutions fall short of these ideals, those who rely most heavily on public goods for their livelihoods are the first to suffer. Thus, poor and vulnerable populations inevitably bear a disproportionate share of the socio-economic costs of imperfect regimes. The United Nations system uses a two-pronged approach to promote effective governance:

- (a) collaboration with community-based organizations (CBOs) to build organizational capacity within society's most vulnerable populations; and
- (b) partnerships with government to ensure the equitable delivery of public goods.

Vulnerable populations, by virtue of their socio-economic weakness, often lack political space in which to volunteer their opinions and participate fully in, and influence, their country's

political processes. UNDP has worked to address this vicious cycle by facilitating the creation of political space, such as the South African War on Poverty Forum, where poor citizens had the opportunity to share their experiences and ideas with national and international development actors. In partnership with the Government of South Africa and the South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO), UNDP acted as a liaison between the Forum and vulnerable communities, opening space for their inclusion in the nation's political dialogue. Poor people came forward in large numbers to give testimony on the conditions of poverty, with over 10,000 petitions received and recorded from those living below the poverty line. Such testimony has formed the basis for South Africa's pro-poor national development programme and has led to immediate improvements in the lives of those who gave time to take part. Other UNDP governance initiatives have used national and international UN Volunteers as social animators to help populations to develop their capacity for effective programme planning and management.

The relationship between volunteers and governance extends, however, beyond issues relating to poverty eradication. A Government's ability to distribute vital public goods adequately and equitably can also be strengthened through volunteering. For example, an effective post office ties distant populations together and facilitates the flow of information between them, often providing the only means of communication with social contacts that might otherwise disappear. In conflict and post-conflict situations, the disruption of this vital public service deepens social fissures, decoupling citizens from their social networks and limiting society's reservoir of social capital. This constrains the individual's willingness to volunteer time, further dampening trust and social cohesion. Opportunities provided by the Universal Postal Union (UPU) for experts from existing postal services to volunteer their time to rebuild postal services in conflict-affected administrations influences positively a population's capacity to organize for self-help and participation by facilitating basic communication.

By taking responsibility for wider social issues and movements, volunteers also serve their communities' interests by validating their claims to the rights and privileges of citizenship. In times of severe socio-economic dislocation, volunteers are forced to take on more and more responsibilities, filling gaps left by retreating public and private sectors. In refugee situations, volunteers often take over the role of State institutions, organizing themselves to manage the coordination of humanitarian assistance at site level. In most refugee camps, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) relies on refugee volunteers to register beneficiaries, organize food distribution, ensure that distribution is fair and equitable, and identify vulnerable cases that require special care and assistance. In Kenya, the Community Self-Management (CSM) initiative has resulted in the construction of basic infrastructure improvements, distribution of food items, mediation of conflicts and management of local micro-credit schemes. Without State or private-sector institutions to undertake these services, volunteers have stepped forward, filling the gaps left in the aftermath of their socio-economic dislocation. However, it must be noted that volunteering cannot be used as an excuse for government downsizing. Where the State becomes temporarily unable to meet its obligations, volunteers may be forced to bear the costs of maintaining the public goods system, but the presence of this social safety net does not free the State from its responsibilities and it should not be taken for granted. Although evidence shows that volunteering can increase in socio-economic crises, volunteers cannot be expected to contribute to meeting the basic needs of marginalized populations without support from government resources.

### **Volunteering and the Digital Divide**

The widening gap between the digital capacities of different socio-economic groups is a major concern for the United Nations in the twenty-first century in so far as it has important effects on the world's marginalized populations. The inequitable distribution of information technology is speeding global economic polarization. Because globalization accelerates economic growth by rewarding

the efficient use of resources, it naturally favours those who possess substantial productive capital. Information is a capital resource. Those without access to information capital remain locked in low-level economic growth. The digital divide has also put the organizational benefits of modern communication technology beyond the reach of most of the world's citizens. Information technology has allowed Northern volunteer-based organizations to mobilize on a wide range of political and social issues. If information technology were made available to the world's poor, it could play a major role in bolstering their regional and transnational organizational capacity.

The United Nations Information Technology Service (UNITeS) was one of three new initiatives in the field of information and communication technology (ICT) cited by the Secretary-General in his Millennium Report. Working in collaboration with public, private and community partners, UNITeS uses a high-tech corps of volunteers coordinated by UNV to facilitate the application of information-technology solutions to the challenges of poverty. The transition into the information age will not be an easy one, especially for the very poor. A dearth of resources and skills are part of the problem, inadequate basic infrastructure another, illiteracy and language barriers a third. Internationally and nationally recruited UNITeS volunteers are working with local groups to tackle technical dilemmas, using increasingly inexpensive hardware to generate flexible, relevant solutions to a community's needs. In the Indian State of Orissa, for example, eight Indian UN Volunteers pass on computer skills to local government officials, NGO leaders and members of their communities. Much of the local outreach work is accomplished through local volunteer organizations, such as women's self-help groups and student organizations, reinforcing these groups' capacity to access needed development resources.

At present, the individual consumer model of the dissemination of ICT that prevails in the industrialized world is too expensive for developing countries. With the help of two volunteer consultants from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization (UNESCO), public telecentres have been established in Kenya and Mali. UNESCO has found the selection process to be particularly important in overcoming the reluctance of some organizations to consider volunteer assistance: candidates must have solid technical skills, international experience and cultural sensitivity.

The United Nations system has also taken a significant step forward to encourage the incorporation of ICT into its projects through online volunteering. As of February 2000, people can share their skills with developing countries through the UNV-managed volunteer component of the Netaid.org web site. Qualified, part-time volunteers raise funds, publicize development work overseas and donate their time online to organizations around the world. They have advised on child health care, created graphics, built databases for community associations, translated government legislation, and provided important technical knowledge to remote populations. In the two years following the launch of Netaid.org as a partnership between the United Nations (represented by UNDP) and the private sector (represented by Cisco Systems), 3,000 applicants responded to more than 2,600 postings by 130 development organizations. Nearly two thirds of the applicants were women, many from developing countries, representing an important development in South-South volunteering.

### **Volunteering and Gender Issues**

The creation of opportunities for women's participation in mainstream development has been facilitated by strategies to enhance women's political skills and strengthen partnerships between governments and volunteer-based women's organizations. As the lead United Nations agency on gender issues, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has embraced volunteering as a mechanism to promote its mandate.

Using its connections in government, UNIFEM has built bridges between State authorities and volunteer-based women's

organizations such as the Federation of African Women's Peace Networks (FERFAP), enabling associations and their members to participate in policy dialogue at the national, regional and international levels. Through partnerships with local volunteer-based organizations such as the Cambodian Women's Crisis Centre (CWCC), UNIFEM mobilizes communities against domestic violence by promoting social empowerment and women's participation in the political process. Since attending the CWCC one trainee, Srei Mom, has become a local expert on the causes and consequences of domestic violence, mobilizing male and female community members against spousal abuse and pressing chiefs to mainstream gender issues in local politics. The strength of such partnerships lies in their ability to mobilize entire communities against injustices such as domestic violence. As Srei Mom observes, "Before, domestic violence was a family problem. Now it is everyone's problem."

In 1997, UNIFEM partnered with UNV and UNDP to station 21 UN Volunteer gender specialists in the developing world. Like other UN Volunteers, the gender specialists combined their programme assignments with volunteer mobilization activities, bridging the gap between gender policy and gender programming by means of women's participation. The success of the gender specialist experiment resulted in a number of parallel ventures between UNIFEM and UNV and within UNV itself. In one of these, Gabriela Elroy, a Swedish UN Volunteer posted in Jerusalem, worked with Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy (MEND) to develop and implement a gender-awareness curriculum for teenage Palestinian girls. The bulk of her time was spent training 14 teachers, who give their time freely in order to run the six-month after-school programme. In return for their services, teachers received training in gender issues and women's rights, becoming local experts on issues of gender and equality. Using videos and the Internet to connect girls with strong female role models, the "Choose a Future" campaign combined the resources of UN Volunteers with those of local time-givers to produce a sustainable, highly successful programme for local empowerment.

UNIFEM has also built networks of women's organizations worldwide, using ICT to construct lasting alliances. In doing so, it has strengthened the voices of female volunteers, giving them a real chance to participate and be heard on issues relating to their development.

### Volunteering and Decent Work

The development needs of poor workers are most likely to be met in work environments characterized by organization and collective strength. Workers have turned to mutual aid/advocacy organizations to press their claims where governments and the market have not lived up to their expectations. Typically, the early stages of the organization process are carried out by volunteers, often workers who give their leisure time and risk their jobs to found unions and gain collective bargaining power for their fellow employees. For example, support for volunteering is central to ILO support for unionization as a means of ensuring secure, non-discriminatory work-place practices for people around the world.

## Chapter Two: Freedom from Fear

Since the end of the Cold War, the concept of security has undergone a number of dramatic changes, opening space for volunteering in discussions of war, peace and crisis management. Once synonymous with the protection of the State from external attack, modern security policy deals increasingly with the protection of communities and individuals from internal violence and natural disasters, making poverty reduction and good governance key areas of concern in efforts to ensure security. With volunteering playing a major role in both fields, it is not surprising that volunteers are major contributors to United Nations security operations.

Most wars today are fought in countries that lack the economic and political resources to manage conflict. Without the resources to transfer wealth to marginalized groups or the political strength to devolve power to regional authorities, countries are vulnerable to the deep ethnic and cultural cleavages that have marked the last decade of international relations and that have fragmented many apparently pacific States. Because these same countries tend to lack the economic and political capacity to distribute effectively aid for reconstruction, they are also particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. This section focuses explicitly on the contribution of volunteer-based community action to the building of safer, more stable societies.

### Volunteers and Peace-building

The economic contribution of a locally initiated, volunteer-based development programme is complemented by its ability to generate trust and mutuality. This can be seen in Burundi, where the Africa 2000 Network promotes collaborative efforts between rural Hutu and Tutsi communities, contributing to the growth of a new understanding among participants. François Museruka, a former United Nations Volunteer and a founder of the Network, has witnessed the growing rapport between Hutus and Tutsis engaged in mutually beneficial volunteer action – proof, he says, of the

efficacy of volunteering in community-building and conflict prevention. The Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/305) underlines the point that poverty reduction should be the prime engine by which the United Nations system works to prevent conflict while the Secretary-General, in his Millennium Report (A/54/2000), states that “every step taken towards reducing poverty and achieving broad-based economic growth is a step towards conflict prevention”. Volunteers have an important role to play in poverty-reduction programmes and in United Nations peace-building plans.

The recent introduction of nation-building, public-administration and governance components into United Nations peace operations has called for the recruitment of civilian personnel with competencies outside the normal parameters of peacekeeping missions. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has formed a partnership with UNV to establish a roster of versatile, talented civilian specialists who are willing to serve in peace operations. UNV participated in its first United Nations peace operation in early 1991, when over 700 UN Volunteers were assigned to the United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC). The ability of UN Volunteers to carry out effective electoral registration in the face of extremely difficult post-conflict conditions played a role in the success of both UNAMIC and its successor, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). UN Volunteers in both Cambodian missions were able to gain the trust of communities across the war-torn country, providing local residents with the resources necessary to participate in their own reconstruction. For example, the district electoral supervisor for Oudong, a French UN Volunteer, and 10 members of his support staff opened a free evening school in his community’s main pagoda. Teaching was done on a voluntary basis and everyone was free to attend language classes in English and French and lessons on the United Nations, human rights and the peace process. The classes brought together Cambodians of all ages and social groups, building solidarity even as the villagers were taught their fundamental human rights and basic literacy. The pagoda school is still active today.

Since 1991, over 4,000 UN Volunteers have served in 19 different peace operations from Guatemala, Haiti and Mozambique to East Timor, Kosovo and Sierra Leone. Two recent United Nations peace operations, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), have witnessed profound changes in the way peacekeeping operations are organized. By August 2001 over 900 UN Volunteers were serving in Timor in civilian capacities ranging from fishery and forestry officers to trade and treasury managers. In Kosovo, over 700 UN Volunteers served in UNMIK at the height of UNV operations in the area. Of these, 400 participated in the registration of one million voters in the run-up to municipal elections in October 2000. Others have coordinated the Administration's youth department, protected the environment and built bridges between the deeply divided Serbian and Kosovar Albanian communities.

The UNV contribution to the electoral components of United Nations peace operations has been among its most significant to date. Since the beginning of the mission to Cambodia in 1991, over 5,000 UN Volunteers have served in a variety of electoral positions in developing countries around the world. DPKO, the Department of Political Affairs, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union count on UN Volunteers to serve as electoral officers. Their affinity for grass-roots work and local mobilization allows them to work effectively as electoral agents under difficult circumstances in remote areas. In Haiti, Mozambique and more recently East Timor, Bangladesh, Sao Tome and Principe and Guyana, UN Volunteers facilitated municipal and national elections, providing logistical and operational support to national and provincial electoral councils while carrying out a multitude of other programme tasks ranging from judicial reform to the provision of development assistance. UN Volunteers in these and in other missions speak fondly of their opportunity to participate in these historic moments, living the United Nations' ideal by helping fellow humans empower themselves through the ballot box.

## Volunteering and Resilient Societies

Degrees of resilience – described as the extent to which socio-economic systems are susceptible to the impact of natural hazards and related technological and environmental disasters – are shaped by a combination of hazard awareness, the pattern of human settlements, infrastructure, governance and organizational capacity in crisis management. Poverty, which negatively affects each of these features, remains the single greatest factor working against resilience-building efforts around the world. Volunteering, now recognized as a modality for the delivery of locally initiated poverty-reduction schemes, is well placed to help to address this issue.

Despite its origins in natural-disaster management, the concept of social resilience can apply to human as well as natural crises. Both test the ability of public, private and civil-society actors to manage critical situations with sufficient material and political resources. The experience of the ILO in Central America has shown the effectiveness of voluntary action on the part of labour and business organizations to promote public-private partnerships in the reconstruction and renovation of the economic infrastructure on which poor governance, poverty and economic polarization have had a negative impact. In post-conflict situations, workers' and employers' organizations have promoted volunteering for the reintegration of ex-combatants and other vulnerable groups, such as women and the disabled, through training, job searches and placement. As earlier examples illustrate, volunteering and its resultant reservoirs of social trust and mutuality have an enormous impact on the economic and social performance of a community, spurring on the broad-based economic growth and social cohesion that are at the heart of resilience.

UNESCO, in partnership with UNV, has initiated a programme to ingrain conflict-resolution processes into Burundian society, training State official and civil-society actors to resolve and prevent conflict through social dialogue. National and international UN Volunteers also carry out extension work in village schools, rooting

conflict resolution in the minds of Burundi's youth. In 1996, UNESCO embraced cultural restoration as a means of building resilience, assigning UN Volunteers to restore historic sites in the mixed ethnic communities of Punjab, India. By encouraging cross-cultural mutual aid, the programme has contributed to social reconciliation in a highly charged mix of ethnic and religious groups. Similar projects have followed in Guatemala, Nepal, the occupied Palestinian territory and Uzbekistan.

UN Volunteers have become important partners in Governments' attempts to build crisis-management capacity into their institutions. After 13 years of civil war between the Government and a variety of insurgent groups, Peruvian UN Volunteers were tasked with extending the reach of the National Ombudsman's Office. The Office, which had been charged with further enhancing the responsiveness of the Government to the needs of the Peruvian people, lacked the means to reach many isolated regions of the Andes and Amazonia. The Ombudsman's absence from remote areas of the country limited the Office's ability to deal with citizens' complaints quickly and effectively. The relative peace in recent times, combined with the Office's clean electoral record during the 2001 national election, is a testament to volunteers' ability to connect State and community mechanisms, creating a viable national oversight structure and building resilience into the State organs responsible for addressing the concerns of Peru's most remote communities.

The effects of resilience in situations of human suffering can be dramatic. Many internally displaced and refugee populations, torn from their homes by war and natural disaster, have shown themselves capable of withstanding tremendous fragmentary pressures. By supporting self-help and participation among refugee communities, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has sought to empower vulnerable individuals, with refugees setting their own development priorities and initiating their own programmes. In many cases, women have spearheaded these efforts. In the southern Caucasus, for example, uprooted women have played a vital role in the

rehabilitation and construction of social infrastructure. In Azerbaijan, women have volunteered in the construction of schools for children since 1998, while in Georgia, women refugees have reconstructed cultural centres, reinvigorating cultural life and providing a meeting hall for community organizations. In Armenia, women refugees with nursing backgrounds have volunteered to staff medical centres, receiving additional training from NGOs to facilitate their eventual integration into more institutionalized health structures.

### Volunteers and Natural Disasters

Resilience within societies can mitigate the effects of natural disasters and it can be built up through the implementation of an early warning system, effective crisis response and pro-poor post-disaster reconstruction. In 1999 alone, 100,000 people lost their lives as a direct result of severe weather and natural disasters, helping to make the 1990s one of the most calamitous meteorological decades on record. If communities are to brace themselves for weather-related shocks, they must be provided with sufficient warning so as to be able to put emergency plans into operation. As part of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) daily routine of weather observation, millions of volunteers give time to the most basic level of meteorological prediction: data collection. Every day, millions of farmers, fishermen, pilots and sea captains read hydrological and meteorological recorders, measure rainfall and test climactic conditions, reporting their findings to national meteorological and hydrological surveys around the world. In South Australia, for example, the Hawker family has recorded rainfall on a daily basis since 1860. In 1999, the Irish Meteorological Society presented an award for diligent service to a 93-year-old man who had read hydrological metres every day for an unbroken period of 56 years. These volunteers are the core of modern weather reporting. Without their efforts, meteorologists would have a greatly diminished capacity to know about conditions in remote areas, negatively affecting their ability to provide accurate forecasts of weather patterns around the world.

The devotion of volunteers to the cause of climatic forecasting has been underscored by their willingness to undertake assignments in harsh, sometimes dangerous conditions. In response to recent emergencies, Costa Rica and Guatemala have adopted an approach based on risk reduction rather than disaster response. With support from WMO, volunteer observers have gone out in severe weather to measure rainfall and report their results to forecasting centres every hour. As measured rainfall surpasses a critical level, volunteers begin to measure water levels in rivers and tributaries to confirm the possible geographical extent of any resultant flooding. This allows forecasting centres to target emergency plans where they can be most effective, focusing communities' limited management capacity in the areas worst affected. In recognition of volunteers' contributions to meteorology, WMO dedicated World Weather Day 2001 to volunteering, celebrating the efforts of millions of ordinary people to protect life and property and safeguard the environment.

Volunteering also plays a central role in post-disaster reconstruction efforts. Following the devastating cyclone that inundated the Indian State of Orissa, seven female UN Volunteers proved invaluable in reigniting hope in the region's most vulnerable populations. Keeping in mind the gender issues that are at the root of many cases of socio-economic polarization, they set out to build capacity within vulnerable female populations through training and the organization of volunteer-based self-help groups. These mahila mandals (women's groups) established thrift funds, distributing credit to needy families, and set up local infrastructures for sanitation and immunization. Working in concert with the UNICEF ongoing rural water and sanitation programme, local women also organized educational workshops on hygiene and the merits of healthy water habits. By focusing their attention on the most vulnerable, many agencies of the United Nations system have embraced a trickle-up approach, using economic and social regeneration at the lowest socio-economic levels to spur similar efforts nearer to the top.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Activities (OCHA), as the department charged with mobilizing and coordinating the efforts of the international community to meet the needs of those subjected to human suffering or material damage in disasters and emergencies, is strongly committed to the mobilization of volunteer efforts. The White Helmet initiative, originating in Argentina, is one part of this commitment, providing the United Nations, through UNV, with a pre-identified, standby corps of trained volunteers for immediate relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development activities. For example, in response to an OCHA appeal in March 2000, the White Helmets posted volunteer relief workers to facilitate food distribution and monitoring on behalf of the WFP. Similarly, a team was mobilized in 72 hours following the February 2001 earthquakes in El Salvador.

### Chapter Three: Sustaining the Future

On 6 June 2001, the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the President of Rotary International signed a Memorandum of Cooperation, agreeing to work together on population and reproductive health issues to promote awareness of the social, economic and environmental implications of population growth. The partnership combines the human and financial resources of Rotary International's 1.2 million volunteers with UNFPA technical expertise and field experience, creating a powerful force for global advocacy and training. Rotary International, which has already partnered with UNICEF on a number of programmes, provides the United Nations with a ready constituency for its messages. As a volunteer-based association of business and professional leaders united through 29,000 clubs in 163 countries, Rotary International has proven itself to be a highly effective partner, leveraging large sums for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and providing the United Nations with links to community gatekeepers around the world. Such partnerships are vital to the success of the United Nations mandate in the twenty-first century, augmenting the number of volunteers associated with the implementation of complex UN global campaigns and programmes.

#### Volunteering and Health

Volunteering is an essential input in any comprehensive global health campaign such as the Global Polio Eradication Initiative referred to earlier. Spearheaded by UNICEF and WHO, and in partnership with NGOs such as Rotary International, the Initiative has been powered by the dedication of volunteers around the world. In 2000, 10 million people volunteered to support the immunization of 550 million children. The vast majority were concerned local citizens, volunteering in their own communities, who gave their time to ensure that children reported to immunization stations, were properly documented and received the oral vaccine. As of 2001, the total value of the support provided by volunteers to the Initiative, as calculated by WHO,

was \$10 billion, putting it well beyond the reach of either the United Nations or its partner organizations if it were not for the volunteer effort. In return for their time, local volunteers have received health training and the opportunity to become entry points for future international efforts in their communities.

The benefits of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative extend well beyond the immediate eradication of the disease. The training provided to the millions of volunteers associated with the Initiative has created a significant new resource for future global health campaigns, incorporating a culture of disease prevention into the daily routine of villages around the world, convincing people to live increasingly healthy lives and mobilizing advocates for healthy communities. Long after polio's eradication, the effects of the Initiative will live on in the actions of those who have learned the importance of basic health care, hygiene and inoculation. Economic development will be facilitated by communities' willingness to participate in health programmes in return for access to training and resources. Governance will benefit from relationships between volunteers and the public sector and from the development of organizational capacity among isolated populations. Finally, social inclusion will be promoted by the generation of social capital across economically differentiated groups, building bridges between communities and linking the interests of the wealthy to the interests of the vulnerable.

Volunteering also plays an important role in the maintenance of effective blood delivery services. Safe and adequate blood supplies are the basis of modern medicine. Research carried out by WHO during World Blood Year 2000 indicates that people who volunteer to give blood are less likely to conceal personal health information that could endanger the recipient's life than remunerated donors. To ensure that safety considerations are paramount, successful donation schemes combine information about dangers to the blood supply with medical check-ups of would-be donors. Thus, volunteers may find themselves obliged to defer their donation in the interests of safety. Although there are probably more deferred than active blood donors in the world

today, it is important to remember that deferred donors help to ensure the safety of the blood supply by withholding their contributions and thus limiting the risk posed to others.

In communities with little or no access to public health, the services provided to protect the blood supply might constitute a vulnerable population's best hope for basic medical coverage. However, this does not diminish the generosity of the donation. Rather, these are complementary motivations: compensating donors for their time and protecting the blood supply from contamination. Besides the direct benefit, volunteers also act out of a belief in delayed reciprocity. Donors give blood to a general supply, trusting that even if their blood is used to treat a stranger, enough donors will give so as to ensure that they will have access to safe blood should they need it. Each voluntary act reinforces this expectation, building trust and facilitating future donations on the part of others.

### Volunteering and Population Issues

Following the adoption of the Programme of Action at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) became one of the first agencies to receive a rights-based mandate from the Member States. As the United Nations lead agency on population issues, this has allowed it to focus on the needs of individuals through a vibrant programme of community-based initiatives that stress local empowerment through community participation. This can be illustrated by the experience of Fatima, who, in 1998, struggled, along with her husband and eight children, to survive on less than one dollar a day on the outskirts of Umdurman in central Sudan. Unable to afford schooling for her children and fearing for their future without an education, Fatima attended a UNFPA advocacy session on reproductive health, female empowerment and micro-credit. Later that year, she received a micro-loan from the income-generation activities component of a UNFPA-supported reproductive health project, enabling her to buy clothes from the Umdurman market for resale to women in her camp.

Fatima volunteered to pass on reproductive health and family planning information to her clients while delivering her goods, thereby becoming an important part of UNFPA outreach efforts. Within a year, she was able to repay her loan, return her children to school, educate her community and empower both herself and the women whom she reached by providing them with information that allowed them to manage their own reproductive concerns. Fatima now practices family planning and has become an advocate for reproductive health issues, family planning, the eradication of female genital mutilation and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. Financial independence and volunteering have provided synergistic benefits, each reinforcing the positive outcomes of the other.

Stories like Fatima's are not uncommon. Around the world, people from every walk of life give time to spread information on issues vital to the attempts by the United Nations to slow the world's population growth. Often, these efforts are undertaken by what UNFPA refers to as community gatekeepers, that is, individuals and associations capable of providing external agencies with access to various groups. These include community leaders, church groups, politicians and traditional healers who initiate community-level dialogue on such sensitive matters as reproductive health. For example, when the idea of taking part in an adolescent's reproductive and sexual health programme was first raised with church leaders in Papua New Guinea, there was much resistance. Three years later and after discussions with parishioners and UNFPA workers, seven denominations have become full programme partners. Together, the Lutheran, Seventh Day Adventist, United, Salvation Army, Roman Catholic, Assemblies of God and Anglican churches have incorporated reproductive and sexual training into their education programmes, thereby spreading vital information to remote populations and advocating for increased education at public gatherings. The leaders who undertook these campaigns were not paid for their work in reproductive health; they were simply taking responsibility for the welfare of their communities, increasing local access to information and thus creating conditions for empowerment.

Finally, volunteering can be a useful mechanism for community mobilization and local capacity-building. UNFPA has fostered the Partners in Population and Development (PPD) programme, which provides opportunities for experts from the developing world to volunteer at partner institutions elsewhere in the developing world. The PPD programme is an important example of South-South volunteering, a growing area of activity that builds professional ties between countries facing common challenges, facilitating the communication of information on best practices and building capacity to deal with population and reproductive health issues. Sixteen countries, representing more than half of the world's population, have joined the programme, which is expanding into the fields of training, communication and fundraising. Volunteering is likely to play a major role in each of these areas in these countries.

### Volunteering and HIV/AIDS

Theresa, 34, twice married and twice divorced, lives in a two-room mud house with her two children, Aaron, 10, and Mavis, 8. "I thought of crushing a bottle and putting it in water and drinking it. That way I could end it all." Theresa recounts how Regina, the home-based care volunteer who visits her three times a week, said: "It was better to stay alive for my children, even if they have to look after me. She says I should die when the time comes and that volunteers will look after my children when they become orphans." This is a disturbingly common situation. With few resources and little training, volunteers struggle to keep up with the growing demand for their services.

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and WHO, nearly 14 million adults and children died of AIDS between 1981 and 2001. As of January 2001, an estimated 36.1 million people were living with the disease and 11 people were being infected every minute. Over two thirds of the total population living with HIV/AIDS reside in sub-Saharan Africa, where high levels of denial, fear and stigmatization have excluded those living with the disease from participating in the

political and social efforts to stop its spread. Two factors have contributed to this tragic state of affairs. First, the dearth of appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the experiences and capacities of people living with HIV/AIDS are expressed, valued or recognized has limited their opportunities to participate. Second, even where opportunities exist, people living with HIV/AIDS often lack the skills and socio-economic stability to engage institutions and the Government in policy dialogues. The joint UNAIDS/UNV Greater Involvement of People Living with or Affected by HIV/AIDS (GIPA) programme attempts to address these problems. Like other initiatives that rely on volunteer contributions, the GIPA programme works to ensure that the experiences of its participants reach the widest possible audience by strengthening communities' networks for strategic planning and programme management. In Malawi, UNAIDS has sponsored Hetherwich Chisendera, an HIV-positive national UN Volunteer, to share his experiences with patients and their companions in Lilongwe Central Hospital. As an active member of the HIV-positive community, Hetherwich puts a human face on the hospital's HIV/AIDS programme. This has led to a steady increase in the number of people entering the hospital's counselling service. In return for his time, Hetherwich has become a leader in the HIV/AIDS community and an important resource on health policy for the Government of Malawi.

The economic vulnerability of people living with HIV/AIDS has often kept them from participating fully in their own care, spurring UNAIDS to place renewed importance on strengthening the economic foundations of HIV/AIDS-related organizations. In Zambia, another HIV-positive national UN Volunteer, Martin Chisulo, has worked to stabilize the economic foundations of the Copperbelt Health Education Project (CHEP), a support organization for those living with HIV/AIDS. With Martin's help, CHEP has acquired the title to a building that has been renovated with support from the Roman Catholic Church. The organization has also gained tenure rights over a plot of land where members are growing vegetables for consumption and income generation. By helping to stabilize the economic situation of his fellow

HIV/AIDS sufferers, Martin has tapped a new source of potential advocates and volunteers, with the promise of greater participation by Zambians living with HIV/AIDS in their country's struggle against the disease. A different type of advocate, former President of Ghana Jerry Rawlings, was appointed as Eminent Person for IYV 2001 to support the struggle against HIV/AIDS in Africa through a campaign which has taken him to a number of African countries to speak on the subject.

### Volunteering and Environmental Protection

The steady degradation of the earth's natural resources has led the world's youth to take up the cause of environmental protection through advocacy, self-help, service and participation. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has played a key role in supporting the global environmental campaigns of young people, providing resources and guidance without stifling the participants' creative energies. To facilitate networking among young volunteers, UNEP has sponsored youth-produced environmental publications and workshops and has helped to introduce young people's voices into the environmental policy debate. Pachamama is a magazine published by UNEP in collaboration with UNESCO, UNICEF, Peace Child International, and hundreds of young volunteers around the world. Among the many issues that they tackle, the young writers showcase the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation. As young activist Ayub Osman of Kenya explains, "When poverty overrides everything else, people forget about the environment." In areas where the poor have little or no access to public goods or private income, the environment becomes their last resource in the struggle to survive. It is a connection to which young people are especially sensitive.

Volunteering for the environment also occurs through United Nations-supported philanthropic/self-help activities. In the Gambia, a group of boys collects spent batteries and moves them to safe sites away from their community's fragile agricultural land. "We realized that batteries were being dumped all over,"

said one boy. "Young people are not aware of the health dangers they bring. We are extending this new project to many schools and eventually the whole area." Using their school as a staging ground, the boys have rallied other schools to set up similar schemes, initiating a movement that may have a real impact on their futures. The role of the school is particularly important to young volunteers. As the centre of their educational and public lives, it is the natural forum for volunteer-based efforts. The implementation of organized school activities in which young people have real and lasting opportunities to give time to their communities has proven to be effective in creating both a new generation of dedicated volunteers and responsible members of society. Other examples of direct environmental action on the part of young people abound. In Peru, a youth organization named Grupo Sawite found their beach becoming a resting place for garbage and waste. Starting in 2001, Grupo volunteers began to organize teams to clean the beaches and educate members of their community about the effects of pollution on marine life and human health. Aided by their parents, teachers and local UNEP workers, youths were able to give their time for the good of their community with the understanding that the future is not something that will happen to someone else; the future is theirs, making its protection a matter of necessity.

## Final Remarks

This paper has provided an overview of expressions of volunteering in the many programmes and projects of the United Nations system. It is important to recognize, however, that UN staff and other individuals closely associated with the UN system directly support the activities of the organization in a variety of ways.

Stories of staff members going above and beyond the call of duty are common both in the field and at headquarters. Staff members take a justifiable pride in their ability to contribute to their host communities by teaching children, caring for the sick and training local workers. Associations of retired United Nations staff members exist in various parts of the system and many of their members carry out voluntary work.

In the Secretariat buildings of many United Nations system organizations volunteers provide staff members with information on tours, housing, travel and cultural opportunities in the host city. Often, in the summer, they are supplemented by international university students. Interns are a particularly significant volunteer resource for the United Nations system, playing much appreciated roles for their host agencies: undertaking research, drafting reports and working with the media.

National delegations to the United Nations also undertake volunteer action, as in the case of The Ambassador's Club, which works with young entrepreneurs and university students. The Club is a venue for discussion and debate between Heads of Permanent Missions of Member States to the United Nations and young executives and academics. Celebrities appointed as Honorary Ambassadors by the United Nations and its sister organizations find volunteer time in their busy schedules to undertake advocacy work around the world.

In addition, the United Nations provides space for the participation of groups that are not usually targeted by its programmes. UNICEF has successfully integrated volunteers from industrialized

countries into its fundraising and advocacy programmes with close to \$380 million being raised through UNICEF volunteer-based National Committees in 2000 – around a third of the Fund's total budget. The Committees have also played a key role in widely disseminating information on children's rights through school presentations and community events. Their focus on the recruitment of young volunteers is a particularly good investment because volunteering in one's youth is a strong predictor of volunteering later in life, giving UNICEF a self-sustaining base of public support. UNV is working to establish a network of volunteers and volunteer-based organizations whose resources can be drawn upon by the United Nations system in pursuit of common goals. By October 2001, the IYV web site had connected over 18,000 groups, ranging in scope from individuals to the 105 million members of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. This network can provide the United Nations system with an extraordinary resource for popular mobilization and international advocacy of the goals of the organization.

Through efforts such as the Global Compact, the United Nations system is building relationships with the private sector which also provide opportunities for voluntary action. For example, OCHA and UNV have, with Ericsson, agreed to the use of Ericsson Response Volunteers in the provision of telecommunications equipment and services for United Nations humanitarian operations. An extension of this partnership programme to all branches of the private sector, including trade unions, small- and medium-scale businesses and workers' associations, could increase the resources available to the United Nations for its work in the areas of governance, development and peace-building, benefiting all the peoples of the world.

The International Year of Volunteers 2001 has provided a valuable framework for highlighting the many facets of volunteering around the world. As the Millennium Report states: "We have many success stories to tell and positive trends to report." There is no question that volunteering figures among one of these successes and this fact needs to be recognized and taken into account in

strategies and policies of Governments and the United Nations system. The General Assembly has accepted this notion and called for discussions at its fifty-sixth session on 5 December 2001 on how volunteering can be promoted. Again, in the words of the Millennium Report, “No shift in the way we think or act can be more critical than this: we must put people at the centre of everything we do.” As the Secretary-General has pointed out:

“Volunteering is indeed the ultimate expression of what the United Nations is all about.”

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