

# YOUTH AND VOLUNTEERISM



## HIGHLIGHTS

- Youth contribute over \$35 billion per year in volunteer hours and are more likely than any other age group to have volunteered informally in the past years<sup>1</sup>.
- Volunteering is associated with a 27% higher chance of employment, and the effect is especially strong for those without a high school diploma or who live in rural areas<sup>2</sup>.
- Young people are supporting UNDP in Ghana, by strengthening internal and external communications via websites, social networks and an intranet.
- Every year, more than 6,500 online volunteers between the ages of 18 and 30, representing 65% of all online volunteers, are mobilized.

There are more than 1.2 billion young people (defined by the United Nations as between 15 and 24 years of age) in the world today, the largest group in history. Young people are key agents for social change, and are providing the energy, creative ideas and determination to drive innovation and reform.

Volunteerism<sup>3</sup> is an important, and increasingly popular, mechanism for young people to bring about positive change in society, and it is becoming more and more relevant as a mechanism to engage young people in global peace and sustainable human development. For instance, as governments, United Nations entities and civil society organizations debate and articulate the post-2015 development agenda, there is a strong call for a bottom-up process in which young people's voices are included and youth are actively engaged in the process, and volunteering is a viable mechanism for this.

Young people increasingly feel that volunteerism complements formal education in teaching the skills that are required for the job market, such as leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, planning, management, creativity, communication and negotiation. This is especially important given the current global economic downturn, where competition for jobs is increasing.

## United Nations and Youth Volunteerism

The UN entities working on youth issues encourage policymakers, communities and youth themselves to empower young people as a valuable but under-utilized resource. The UN efforts

<sup>1</sup> Guzman (2006) Volunteerism: a tool for Positive Youth Development. available at

[http://www.extension.unl.edu/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?folderId=221677&name=DLFE-3251.pdf](http://www.extension.unl.edu/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=221677&name=DLFE-3251.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> National and community services, USA (2013) Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment available at

[http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment\\_research\\_report.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment_research_report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Defined by the United Nations as "an activity undertaken out of free will, for the general public good, and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor."





focus on encouraging youth participation in programming and policy-making, preparing younger generations to exercise their rights and becoming contributing members of societies.

Recognizing the potential for youth volunteerism and the need to create a global forum for youth to undertake this work, the United Nations General Assembly established and mandated the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme in 1970 to promote volunteerism to support peace and development worldwide. In 1976, the General Assembly widened the mandate to include advancing the role of youth in development.

## Progress

The need to enhance partnerships both with and for youth was underscored in the announcement, on 25 January 2012, of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Five-Year Action Agenda, which calls for the "creation of a UN youth volunteers programme under the umbrella of UN Volunteers".

Since then, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme has been engaging with the IANYD, youth networks, international volunteer-sending organizations, national volunteering and civil society organizations and the private sector to develop and scale-up the UN Youth Volunteers Programme.

The overall aim of the programme is to facilitate the engagement of youth in global peace and sustainable human development through volunteerism, bringing the voice of youth into the development discourse and helping young people to realize their full social, economic and human potential. Through the programme, thousands of young volunteers will be mobilized to support the work of UN entities around the world.

In 2012, nearly a thousand international and national UN Volunteers were under the age of 29. Of these, around sixty percent were female and eighty percent were from developing countries.

In Cape Verde, UNV is establishing a volunteer service scheme in partnership with the Joint Office and Ministry of Youth. The programme will foster the social integration of youth within communities, enhance youth employability, and contribute to the delivery of basic services and actions in priority development areas in partnership with government agencies and NGOs.

Building on the momentum generated by young people during the recent popular uprisings throughout the Arab region, the *Arab Youth Volunteering for a Better Future* project is strengthening the infrastructure necessary to build the skills and capacities of youth in the Arab region, thereby enhancing their social inclusion and active participation in the socio-economic development of their countries.

In Cambodia, UNV is supporting the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport to implement the National Youth Policy through coordinating regular meetings and consultations with NGOs.

Youth mobilized through UNV are contributing to a knowledge and experience exchange project between Brazil and El Salvador. Escuelas Vivas (Living Schools) is a South-South initiative which aims to exchange knowledge and experience from Brazil to El Salvador in order to deepen the knowledge of hundreds of students, their families and local communities, about disaster risk reduction and food security.





## For further information

- World Volunteer Web: <http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org>
- UNV website: <http://www.unv.org/what-we-do/thematic-areas/youth.html>
- “Youth volunteering, social integration and decent work: Inspiring leadership” Discussion paper for the 48th Session of the UN Economic and Social Council side event by United Nations Volunteers with support from Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA), Johannesburg, South Africa.
- “Volunteering and Social Activism: Pathways for Participation in Human Development” Joint publication of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) and UNV, 2008.
- 2003, 2005, 2007 World Youth Report: Youth Participation in decision making and social inclusion. Youth Examples throughout the report show how youth volunteering is a crosscutting method in combating all challenges facing youth today.

This Fact Sheet was prepared by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV). This is part of a collaborative effort of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), coordinated by the Focal Point on Youth, UNDESA.

