

IVCO Conference: People to People – Volunteering as a Catalyst for Post-2015 Development Policy and Practice¹

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The conference was organized by the International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) and France Volontaires. It was held right after the United Nations General Assembly in September 2013, where member states acknowledged for the first time that volunteering plays an important part in fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).² The conference's participants pointed out that volunteering constitutes a worldwide social and human contribution to development. They developed joint initiatives aiming at bringing volunteering to the fore in the international discussion.

A few figures about the IVCO conference

- 117 participants, 68 organizations from 24 countries
- 11 plenary sessions, 12 workshops, 14 projects and studies presented
- 50 organizations involved in over 145 countries have signed the “Paris Accord”, a digest of recommendations for the post-2015 development agenda (www.france-volontaires.org/-Accord-de-Paris)
- The next IVCO conference 2014 will be held in Lima, Peru from October 19-22th 2014 on *Volunteering in Convergent World: Fostering Cross-Sector Collaboration towards Sustainable Development Solutions*. Registration starts May 2014 (www.wusc.ca).

1. The impact of voluntary commitment on societies and individuals

Studies presented at the conference show that volunteering fuels social development. It helps securing citizenship, maintaining social cohesion and building

1 The conference of the International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCO) took place in Paris, France, from 27th to 30th October 2013.

2 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 67/138 “Integrating volunteering in the next decade” (http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/docdb/pdf/2013/resources/RES_67_138.pdf)

expertise in sending and hosting societies. The presentations gave evidence that volunteering gives a decisive impulse to development projects by making them more efficient and establishing long-term partnerships in civil societies. Volunteering also contributes to fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals through learning programs, civic commitment and raising awareness on human rights. Last but not least, this experience gives volunteers the ability to take action in our multi-cultural world and become united citizens helping to build global societies. As Nita Kapoor, chair of Forum, pointed out: “We promote volunteering for people of all ages, for we think it fuels social development all around the world.”

2. International volunteering and global challenges

2.1. The contribution of volunteering to the post-2015 development

The new post-2015 development agenda will combine poverty-fighting and sustainable development goals in one system, which is universal and applies to all countries. In this context, volunteering is identified as a key factor in several strategic areas, namely promoting peace, sustainable development, equitable access to resources, adapting to climate change, and prevention. Mr. Richard Dictus, executive coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers, insisted on the importance of volunteers in awareness programs: “Volunteering is not just a means to implement development programs; it is mostly a way of getting the people involved.”

2.2. Volunteering equals asserting oneself as an active citizen

Volunteering fuels sense of citizenship. It does not belong to any specific age group or social situation. International exchanges can only benefit from citizen commitment – whether the volunteers are young people, employees or retired people – especially as they become players in their own country’s social change. Several studies show that volunteering experiences make civic commitment a part of cultures, and thus, are a key element in providing countries with active citizens: “The impact of volunteering can be proven mathematically. We must convince people that this investment is worth it”, said Mr. Martin Hirsch, chairman of the French Civic Service Agency.

2.3 Volunteering facilitates young people’s insertion and commitment

Nowadays, all over the world, young citizens feel disconnected from society. Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, the United Nations’ Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, wishes to draw attention to this paradox: “Young people have serious issues in accessing their rights. For me young people are the driving force but have never been in the driver seat”. To meet the challenge of involving young citizens, civil society and volunteering organizations have been called upon to have young citizens’

opinions taken into account while defining public policies at national and international scales. We also have to ensure that young people are seen as actual partners in developing public policies, and not just as those who benefit from them.

Volunteering also helps young people to get jobs as the experience and abilities they acquire work as a springboard to employment for them. However, volunteering must not be limited to its positive impact on occupational integration; it will always benefit from being considered a place for freedom, creativity and thriving for both individuals and communities.

2.4 Volunteering enhances reciprocity in international exchanges

For the past few years, the cooperation field has been facing a paradigm shift. A new international order is in place: now, multilateral relationships between all countries are developing, thus overcoming the traditional North-South boundaries. In this new context, solidarity schemes are now evolving into exchanges based on reciprocity, during which volunteers are those who make things easier, maintain connections and establish new ones. “The expansion of South-South and South-North volunteering is a key element to enable mutual enrichment for all countries”, said Mr. Pascal Canfin, the French Minister for Development. He added: “Volunteers will have to meet the challenge of giving the world a new balance based on the fundamental values that are sharing and innovation. They are the ambassadors of solidarity and bring optimism to everyone.” And Ibrahim Ouedraogo, regional coordinator of the ECOWAS (Economic Community Of West African States) volunteering program, said: “We must invest in volunteering to fight bias, to develop cooperation between peoples, and because volunteers promote peace between countries.”

3. Together, let's move international volunteering forward

3.1 Writing an appeal to make volunteering a part of the development agenda

In the last decade, tremendous efforts have been made to fulfill the MDGs, thus contributing to fighting poverty and inequalities. Yet, just a few of them could be achieved. Volunteering organizations have been called upon to help laying down new sustainable goals for post-2015, but their role in the political agenda still is not worthy of their potential. To fill that gap, governments are invited to build appropriate public policies, while volunteering organizations are encouraged to work in coordination in order to influence future development policies. This appeal could also be stronger if national and international volunteering programs were more efficiently connected and if civil societies were better structured on a regional basis. Volunteering organizations are invited to contribute to this process actively. As Pascale Andreani,

ambassador and permanent French representative at the OECD, points out: “Civil society’s expertise will be important for development matters and to elaborate the post-2015 agenda. Volunteering organizations will play a key role in this process.”

Forum wishes to actively participate in redefining post-2015 goals. To voice volunteering organizations’ concerns about this new agenda, participants are to approve a roadmap and a list of recommendations found in the Paris Accord, which all organizations are invited to sign.

IVCO 2013: a common event to voice international volunteering actors’ concerns – the Paris Accord

Throughout the conference, participants have been invited to contribute to the writing of the Paris Accord. Its main goals are:

- Having volunteering acknowledged as the keystone of future policies and programs linked to the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),
- Supporting measures to encourage everyone’s involvement in volunteering to monitor the new sustainable development goals that are to be set,
- Promoting volunteering throughout people’s life as the catalyst of human and social development at a local and global level,
- Encouraging investment in youth volunteering and facilitating young people’s contribution to political processes and to implement the development agenda.

3.2 Building common projects

To have more impact, volunteering organizations get involved in common projects by combining their resources and their networks to serve all players of international cooperation. A website like *Volunteer Spaces*,³ which is resource center for volunteering, is one of the initiatives likely to make organizations unite, and thus strengthen their presence in the field with volunteers, host organizations and local players. A universal index is also being built. It will be open for organizations to collaborate and enable to measure the impact of volunteering on the world continuously, with regards to societies’ well-being. Private players are encouraged to pool existing initiatives in order to capitalize experience and provide companies with means to help volunteering.

3.3 Developing tools to measure the impact of volunteering

According to Markus Held, focal point of the EU Aid Volunteers initiative at the European Commission, nowadays, the impact of volunteering cannot be calculated

3 <http://reseau-espaces-volontariats.org/>

with mere figures, because their impact is mostly social and human, and thus, sometimes hard to measure. Therefore, we must conduct studies to get an accurate idea of the effects of volunteering. Forum as well as all the actors are led to reconsider their idea of involvement in volunteering by focusing on solidarity, making social change easier and showing that volunteering is fully compatible with development projects. “We wish to have the contribution of volunteering to development acknowledged” said El Bachir Boukshimi, chairman of Réseau Marocain de Jeunesse et de Concertation (REMAJEC).

3.4 Improving interaction between players

Nowadays, cooperation policies for development are being established. Therefore, approaches combining several players and several branches are essential. Partnerships with new players on the development scene must be established. Though private players are not very involved yet, they are considered as an important piece of the puzzle: volunteering organizations are encouraged to build connections with them to support existing initiatives. Diasporas are also acknowledged as development partners. Last but not least, governments are also considered as major assets as they create societal and legislative environments conducive to volunteering around the world. It's also up to these new players to shape the future of international volunteering.