

# Measuring the Contribution of Volunteering to the Sustainable Development Goals: Challenges and Opportunities

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## Abstract

As with the Millennium Development Goals, the UN's Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will only be achieved with the active engagement of volunteers. Volunteer contributions to sustainable development are distinctive. Volunteers' close engagement with communities in need, their skills and motivation to contribute to more inclusive, active and cohesive societies, and modeling/facilitation of the reciprocal exchange of knowledge and skills among stakeholders make volunteers distinctive actors in support of the achievement of the SDGs. This paper discusses options for documenting and showcasing the collective contributions of a diverse community of volunteers to sustainable development, in the context of recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>1</sup>

**Key Words:** *Volunteering, Volunteering for Development, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations Volunteers, Measurement, ILO Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*

## Abstract

*Freiwillige leisten einen substantiellen Beitrag zur Erreichung der Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Im Rahmen ihres Einsatzes unterstützen sie lokale Organisationen mit ihrem Engagement und Wissen. Sie tragen mit dem gegenseitigen Austausch von Wissen und Fähigkeiten zum Aufbau einer inklusiven und stabilen Gesellschaft am Einsatzort bei. Dieses Papier zeigt auf, wie Entscheide- und Partnerorganisationen oder Verantwortliche der Freiwilligendienstprogramme den ganz spezifischen Beitrag von Freiwilligen zur Erreichung der SDGs dokumentieren können. Das hier vorgestellte Instrument soll der diversen internationalen Freiwilligendienstszene ermöglichen, die unterschiedlichen Aktivitäten im Rahmen der SDGs zu sammeln und sichtbar zu machen*

**Schlagwörter:** *Entwicklungspolitische Freiwilligendienste, Nachhaltige Entwicklungsziele (SDGs), United Nations Volunteers, Wirkungsmessung*

- 1 This paper has been adapted from a discussion paper produced for a conference organized by the *International Forum for Volunteering in Development* (Forum), a global network of International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCOs): See Haddock and Devereux (2015) in the references. As part of its mission to share information, develop good practice and enhance cooperation across the international volunteering and development sectors, Forum has played an instrumental role in bringing recognition of the role of volunteering in achieving development objectives. See *Documenting the Contribution of Volunteering to the SDGs: The Challenges and Opportunities of Universal SDGs for IVCOs and Volunteer Groups*, Forum Discussion Paper 2015, available at: <http://forum-ids.org/2015/12/forum-discussion-paper-2015/>

## 1. Overview and Rationale

The United Nations Secretary-General's synthesis report on the Post-2015 development agenda proposed “one universal and transformative agenda for **sustainable development**, underpinned by rights, and with people and the planet at the centre” (UNGA 2014: 1).

The 17 SDGs endorsed late September 2015 are intended to “transform our world” by addressing the social, economic, and environmental challenges faced by the global community, with all countries and stakeholders acting in collaborative partnership. Associated with each of these goals, are global targets which each include a set of indicators to monitor progress, inform policy and ensure accountability of all stakeholders.

While the distinctive role of volunteers has been articulated within development circles, it has not been widely understood or integrated into the broader development community agenda, though this is gradually changing. As a result of the engagement by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and members of the International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum), there was some recognition of volunteerism in the *International Framework for Civil Society Organization (CSO) Development Effectiveness* developed by hundreds of civil society representatives and groups. The framework, adopted in June 2011, by CSO representatives from 70 countries explicitly recognised the contribution of volunteers to development effectiveness (Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness 2011). Building on this sort of success, volunteer groups<sup>2</sup> came together to form the Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group to elevate the role of volunteers in the post-2015 discussions, and were able to achieve some successes.

Most notably, volunteer groups were recognised as a stakeholder in the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), the UN body that follows up and reviews the implementation of sustainable development commitments and, as of 2016, the post-2015 development agenda and the SDGs. This is important because it gives volunteer groups the authority to contribute in an official capacity. As a result, volunteers were recognized in the United Nations Secretary General's synthesis report on the Post-2015 Development Agenda as a “powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation” of the SDGs, able to “help to localize the new agenda by providing new spaces of interaction between governments and people for concrete and scalable actions” (UNGA 2014: 36, para. 131), in the final draft of the Post-2015 outcome

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2 The term “volunteer groups” refers to all groups that work with and through volunteers – locally, nationally and internationally. Volunteer groups have historically often worked independently but the most concrete current expression of their collective organisation and action has been through “The Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group”. This working group includes international volunteer cooperation organisations, and national and international volunteer involving organisations.

document adopted by Member States in September 2015 (UNGA 2015b), and in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda which was adopted in July 2015 (UN TICFD 2015). The growing recognition of volunteerism's role in development reflects the hard work of a diverse community of volunteer groups, including the UNV, in strengthening their coordination, particularly through the Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group, to make visible the distinctive, and often hidden, contributions of volunteering as part of the national and international post-2015 consultation processes (UNV 2014).

***Despite this progress, volunteerism does not permeate the SDGs' plans and processes at all levels.*** It is not clear that member states fully recognise the value that volunteers bring to sustainable development, let alone what makes their contribution distinctive. Nor have Member States or the HLPF articulated concrete steps to translate the recognition of the role of volunteers in achieving the SDGs. This is noticeable in the lack of mention of volunteers among the proposed indicators for measurement of the SDGs.<sup>3</sup>

A lack of sufficient recognition for the contribution of volunteerism to sustainable development has multiple origins, including historically limited coordination among volunteer groups in rigorously documenting and showcasing the collective contribution of volunteerism to peace and sustainable development, and also a lack of common definitions and measurement standards for doing so.<sup>4</sup> It is also, in part, a result of the fact that volunteering is a cross-cutting endeavour that contributed to all of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and will do to all of the SDGs, and is not limited to supporting one single area of development.

***What's next for volunteer groups?*** With the SDGs adopted, the international community is focusing now on the implementation, monitoring and measuring of the goals. In this context, it is timely for volunteer groups to reflect together and make some decisions about the contributions they expect to make to the SDGs, and how they will measure, report and get recognition for these contributions. Volunteer groups seek the widespread and systematic integration of volunteerism into policy and practice at global and national levels. Without this, volunteer groups are at risk of being under-funded, under-valued and left on the margins of the SDG process as it is rolled out and shapes the development architecture for the next 15 years.

For this reason, volunteer groups have raised the idea of pursuing efforts to collectively document the contribution of volunteerism to the SDGs and to use this information to secure a stronger partnership role for volunteer groups in the SDG

3 Final List of proposed indicators: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/2016-2-IAEG-SDGs-Rev1-E.pdf>, Annex IV (Access on March 28th 2016)

4 Some reflection of these issues was made in UNV's contribution to the CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report. See United Nations Volunteers (2014).

implementation process. The idea was discussed at a number of workshops over the last few years and was further developed by the Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group and presented at the October 2015 Japan Forum IVCO conference. This was timely because in his 26 June 2015 report, *Integrating volunteering in the next decade*, the UN Secretary-General recommended that “volunteer-involving organizations should prepare regular reports that demonstrate how volunteerism accompanies the implementation of the sustainable development goals. Inter alia, a combined report could be presented at the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council...” (UNGA 2015).

***Why report the collective contributions of volunteer groups?*** An effort to document the global contributions of volunteers to the SDGs provides an opportunity for volunteer groups to engage in a collective way in generating and reporting information about their work to Member States and other stakeholders. This could achieve four simultaneous purposes:

- A. Connecting the objectives of volunteer programs to the objectives covered by the SDGs;
- B. Facilitating the collection, organisation and reporting of the contributions individual organisations make to the SDGs through volunteering;
- C. Allowing volunteer groups to feed into an aggregating reporting framework at the global level; and
- D. Providing a basis for diverse volunteer groups to demonstrate their substantial collective contribution to sustainable development and coordinate their work in areas of mutual interest and synergy.

This paper provides a broad overview of existing measures of volunteer activity, discusses the pros and cons of various methodologies for collecting additional information from organizations and individuals, and describes possible tools for doing so. The first of these is a tool to map specific volunteer activities against the SDG goals and targets. This sort of exercise could result in the production of a crosswalk, i. e., a directory that would connect typical volunteer activities to specific SDG goals and targets. The second provides a flexible structure for reporting volunteer group inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts – both in quantitative and qualitative terms – against the SDGs and other distinctive contributions volunteer groups make, at either the SDG goal or target level, and can be used to report individually, or as a collective, at the national and/or international levels. The tools presented in this paper were designed with IVCOs in mind, but are adaptable for use by other types of volunteer groups and, in theory, to individual volunteers.

It is hoped that this paper will spark discussion among volunteer groups and help them come to some conclusions about their interest in and capacity to produce and

report collective measures, and identify next steps in doing so. In short, what we hope to impress upon readers is that the discussion of tools for collective measurement and reporting provides an opportunity for volunteer groups to discuss how volunteer groups can engage with the United Nations, the HLPF, Member States and other stakeholders in the next 15 years. Volunteer groups have achieved success in being officially recognised for their contributions to date, and with the adoption of the SDGs, the publication of the report by the UNSG, and the work together on a global research agenda, volunteer groups are poised to translate this recognition into policy action.

## 2. Target Audience and Outcomes

Identifying the outcomes volunteer groups hope to achieve by estimating the scale of volunteer contributions is a crucial first step because this will frame subsequent decisions about what to measure, how to measure it, and how to report it. This may involve a shift from reporting largely against donor requirements to a more proactive endeavour to capture what is considered to be the most distinctive and valuable contributions. And a collective approach that includes many types of volunteer groups can make a strong case that has added credibility because of the volume and weight of diverse organisations that participate.

Four broad types of outcomes might underscore the rationale for collective measuring and reporting by volunteers and volunteer groups.<sup>5</sup>

- A. Perhaps the most salient is its potential to demonstrate in concrete terms the real power of volunteerism to national and local governments who are critical for creating enabling environments to foster volunteering (Wallace et al. 2015). Key outcomes include the generation of mechanisms for the integration of volunteer groups into national planning, implementation, and monitoring of the SDGs, and the strengthening of civil society, volunteer infrastructures, and enabling environments at the national and international levels.
- B. Also important is its potential to bolster engagement by diverse volunteer groups with the High-level Political Forum, UN agencies, intergovernmental bodies and Member States by providing tangible evidence of the scope and scale of volunteerism and its contribution to the SDGs.
- C. Measurement and reporting opens up opportunities for self-reflection and improved performance among volunteer groups.

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5 These are indicative suggestions only and volunteer groups will need to discuss and agree on their own priorities.

D. Reporting volunteer contributions can result in increased recognition and support among donors and home governments in the form of funding, media recognition, policy recognition, support and understanding, and integration in national planning.

### 3. Scope of volunteer activity

Multiple forms of volunteering will contribute to the SDGs. A collective measurement effort would therefore need to ensure that various forms of volunteering are considered in developing a measurement framework. And any tool for measurement that is developed must be broadly appealing to a variety of organisations, some of which support several different types of volunteer engagements, including:

- A. *Domestic-oriented, small and local organisations and Volunteer involving organisation (VIOs)* that engage volunteers in carrying out their missions. Most of the organisations through which volunteers engage are small and local, often not affiliated with any network. Additionally, there exist many large national networks that are exclusively domestic-focused.
- B. *Direct (informal) volunteering outside the context of an organisation.* These volunteers that operate outside the context of an organisational setting, sometimes called “helping” or “neighbouring”, is thought to be the major share of volunteer activity in many countries (Salamon et al., expected 2016). This may be especially true in developing countries where organizational outlets are less prevalent. Included here are those micro-volunteers (those that participate in very short term engagements), online volunteers and anyone else that engages outside the context of an organisation, including the individual actions of volunteers in collective action on environmental, human rights and other issues.
- C. *Corporate or employee volunteer programs.* Increasingly, corporations are recognizing the value of encouraging, or even organizing, their employees to spend time in local communities or to use the expertise resident in their companies to support community efforts. The approach varies – some volunteer during off-hours, some are granted paid time off to do so. Some employees find projects on their own, and in some cases businesses find areas where they can be supportive.
- D. *International Volunteer Cooperating Organizations (IVCOs).* In the past, IVCOs engaged primarily in international sending programs, dominated by programs that sent volunteers from richer countries to poorer countries. For most IVCOs, the focus was commonly on technical assistance, centred around concerns like poverty alleviation, health and agriculture, but also often with a sense of solidarity. While earlier forms of volunteering continue, many IVCOs today also engage in a broader set of volunteer programs, including South-South and

South-North sending programs, online volunteering, international corporate volunteering, and efforts to build up a local volunteering base and supportive infrastructure. Here, their contributions are increasingly focused on providing support through facilitating local volunteering, advocating for enabling environments, and furthering research on volunteering. This aspect of their work makes IVCOs similar to volunteer support groups that do not engage volunteers directly, but rather carry out activities in support of volunteers. And finally, a growing area is when emerging economies send international volunteers beyond their borders, and the experiences of countries like China, Brazil and Korea will provide new insights into this.

E. *Short-term travel-related/voluntourism* is a voluminous contribution to international volunteering numbers that is now an area receiving very significant academic attention in publications and journals. The frequent negative critiques as well as occasional positive recognition this draws make it an important area for attention given the huge numbers involved and will eventually require discussions about how to include such wider representation of groups within the community of volunteer groups.

## 4. Existing measures of volunteer activity

Certainly many individual organizations gather information about volunteering activity that they support, and similarly many individuals keep records of their own volunteer activities, either to take advantage of national reporting/tax rules, or for personal interest. Ideally any collective reporting system would first take advantage of existing data, at least in the short term, to gather baseline data and limit costs. An overview of basic sources of existing information on volunteering is provided below.

### 4.1 National level Data

Volunteering is largely performed irregularly, often sporadically, and in fewer numbers than paid workers. Therefore, adequately capturing its magnitude requires a methodology that surveys a relatively large number of individuals and covers multiple reference periods. However, such surveys are expensive, so most volunteering surveys involve relatively small samples (such as the World Values Survey, 2009 and the Gallup Worldview Survey (English 2011)), and attempt to cover a long reference period (typically one year), or try to bundle information about volunteering with information about other activities, like philanthropic donations, organizational membership, or other aspects of wellbeing (as is the case in the European Quality of Life Survey, (McCloughan et al., 2011)). As a result, these surveys suffer multiple problems that can lead to distorted and unreliable results.

Regularly updated basic data about volunteer rates and essential characteristics of volunteers at the national level are largely limited to high income countries, such as Austria, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, or the United States, who systematically track volunteering by robust national surveys.<sup>6</sup> Many other countries have developed one-off national surveys of volunteering, giving us some idea of basic data. But countries mostly limit their efforts to measuring volunteering that takes place through organisations, and for the most part ignore volunteering performed directly for other people or communities, i. e. informal volunteering (Einolf 2011). And perhaps the most difficult aspect is the fact that these data are largely not comparable because different definitions of volunteering and methodologies for measuring it are used. This in fact may well be part of the reason for an underestimation of domestic volunteering in developing countries, though a number of studies and publications over the last 15 years start to demonstrate evidence that corrects this (Patel et al. 2007; Butcher 2010a and b; Salamon et al. expected 2016).

#### 4.2 The International Labour Organization Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work

To overcome problems inherent in general surveys of volunteering, and to facilitate the assembly of reliable and cross-nationally comparable measurements of volunteering, the International Labour Organization (ILO) developed in 2011 a *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work* (ILO 2011). The ILO-approach to gathering basic quantitative data about the amount and character of volunteering was developed by a group of international volunteer measurement experts and national labour force statisticians, with support from UNV and the Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society Studies. This ILO Manual recommends the use of official labour force or other household surveys as the platform for measuring volunteering. The use of labour force and household surveys has particular advantages: they are based on large samples, involve short reference periods that minimise recall bias, and entail interviewing techniques aimed to minimise non-response bias. The ILO Manual captures organisation-based and direct (formal and informal) volunteering, and connects these data to all of the demographic variables of interest disaggregated by age, sex, employment status, household income, etc., being gathered as part of the survey platform, making this approach more cost-effective and efficient than stand-alone or private surveys.

6 Time Use Surveys (TUS) are conducted by national statistical offices in over 70 countries and collect information on the amount of time people allocate to their everyday life activities. Volunteering, both direct and organisation-based, is often included among these activities. However, the TUS methodology does have limitations, the most important of which are that volunteering often ends up hidden within other forms of activity for reporting purposes (mixed in with household duties or leisure) and that it does not record the type of volunteer activity carried out or the institutional setting where it was performed.

### The ILO Manual Definition of Volunteering:<sup>7</sup>

*“Unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organization or directly for others outside their own household or related family members.”<sup>8</sup>*

Implementation of the ILO Manual is voluntary, so it has been implemented only in some ten countries to date. However, in 2013, at the ILO’s five-yearly gathering of the world’s labour statisticians, it was decided that the measurement of volunteering should be more strongly recommended as a matter for labour statisticians (nothing can be made compulsory by the ILO, but this recommendation is very strong), who are seeking to better measure the various forms of productive activity (19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, 2013). With time, and with the support and encouragement of volunteer groups, it is hoped that basic data on volunteering will be routinely collected as part of regular data gathering efforts at the national level.

### 4.3 Collective measures of groups of volunteer organisations

In some cases, affiliations of like volunteer groups have made collective efforts to report on their collective contributions. Thus, the Committee for Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy (CECP) runs a regular survey about corporate philanthropy that includes questions about corporate volunteer programs (Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy, 2014). At present, this survey most likely represents the best available source of information about corporate volunteering. This survey could potentially be adapted to more specifically target the generation of information related to the SDGs. Of immediate note is that Impact 2030, a group representing corporate volunteering programs addressing the SDGs, is currently in the process of developing a measurement tool for documenting the contribution of their members to the SDGs. International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE)’s Global Corporate Volunteering Council, which boasts 50+ members, could also be usefully engaged.<sup>9</sup>

The International Volunteer Cooperating Organizations (IVCOs) members of Forum have discussed approaches for generating information on the impact of IVCOs as a collective group, but less progress can be reported here.

7 The definition is described in significantly more detail in the ILO Manual to clarify important concepts, such as the difference between reimbursement and payment.

8 “Work” in this context means the production of goods and services of value and should not be confused with paid work or employment. It should also be noted that the definition highlighted here reflects changes made after the 2013 International Conference of Labour Statisticians and is therefore slightly different than the version in the printed ILO Manual.

9 <https://www.iave.org/corporations/gcvc/>

#### 4.4 Related available information

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme has now produced two *State of the World's Volunteerism Reports*, the most recent of which has focused on capturing and reporting information on the contribution to global governance (Wallace et al., 2015). This report would be particularly useful in developing a measurement framework focused on SDG Goals 16 and 17.

Also related is the DATASHIFT project, which is working to draw together citizen-generated data to complement official data gathering efforts and promote citizen partnership with government institutions in the development of official data.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that much of the citizen-generated data will be gathered by volunteers, and volunteer groups might be interested in discussing how the role of volunteers in generating citizen data might be highlighted, or how volunteers might partner with government agencies in developing official measures of volunteer activity and contribute to government efforts to collect qualitative data particularly in remote areas.

Other information is available through both the Volunteer Action Counts<sup>11</sup> and 500 Days 500 Ways<sup>12</sup> initiatives. The 2015 report of the Secretary-General on Integrating volunteering in the next decade (UNGA 2015) is also a rich compilation of individual and collective volunteer action that might be usefully tapped for a collective reporting framework.

### 5. Key criteria for measurement

Reporting the collective contribution of volunteering to the SDGs may involve the aggregation of existing information and/or the collection of additional information directly from volunteer groups and volunteers themselves. Volunteer groups should thus keep the following criteria in mind as they weigh the various approaches in developing a collective measurement and reporting framework:

- A. Relevant:** The information that is collected must reflect the specific work contexts, activities and policy goals of volunteer groups. The information collected should also assist downward accountability to communities and volunteers and be useful to them too.
- B. Feasible:** Volunteer groups must be able to collect and report this information at various levels of detail, and must consider the availability of staff and volunteers to dedicate time to such an endeavour.

<sup>10</sup> <http://civicus.org/thedatashift/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.volunteeractioncounts.org/en/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://500ways.org/>

- C. Efficient:** The information should, as much as possible, build on existing data-gathering and reporting frameworks.
- D. Comparable:** The information should seek to be comparable across organisations and countries to ensure the widest possible use.
- E. Reliable and Objective:** The approach should be designed to obtain the same data regardless of who collects it so that it can be captured repeatedly over time to show trends. To assist this, the information collected should, where feasible, be grounded in empirically observable and testable features, or at least verified by triangulation of different sources.

## 6. Bringing diverse Volunteering Voices together: Options for gathering diverse Information about Volunteering

This section provides an overview of how information on the contribution of the many forms of volunteering might be captured as part of a collective measurement and reporting framework, and discusses the benefits and drawbacks of each approach. As mentioned above, two non-mutually exclusive options exist for gathering and reporting information: national level surveys to gather a broad range of basic data and self-reporting of organizations and individuals.

### 6.1 National level surveys

As noted above, existing data on organization-based and direct volunteering are available on a number of countries and will become increasingly prevalent as more countries adopt the International Labour Organization's *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*. National level surveys thus offer volunteer groups the opportunity to take advantage of a growing body of existing information in reporting basic data on the scope and character of volunteer contributions to the SDGs with minimal cost. Where these data are comparable, it seems feasible that they might be adapted for SDG reporting (by field, activity, region, etc.) and complemented by information that the ILO Manual doesn't cover, such as information generated by the corporate and international volunteering groups and more detailed qualitative information.

Of course, an important downside is that reporting existing national-level survey data does not particularly facilitate the participation of volunteer groups in the generation of the data (beyond the engagement of the limited groups that collaborate with the survey-administering institution in designing the surveys and analysing and reporting the results). For many active in this discussion, the engagement of volunteer groups in the generation of data is just as important as the resulting data themselves because of the sense of collective ownership and community building it brings in the process.

Thus, we presume that any data collection and reporting framework that is developed using national-level surveys will be complemented by the collection of information at the organizational and individual volunteer levels. The next section thus offers a discussion about how and when such a tool might be used, and is followed up by our initial attempt to develop the measurement tool itself.

## 6.2 Self-reporting of organizations and individuals

- *Organizations/volunteer groups.* The development of robust data on volunteering at the organizational level centres on participation rates, i.e., ensuring that data is gathered on as many organizations as possible in order to ensure that the resulting data are relevant and representative of the global scope of volunteer effort. Those organizations that are connected to national networks, such as government volunteer schemes or national members of the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE), or those affiliated with a network of like-organizations (such as IVCOs and corporate volunteer groups) would be easier to reach and made aware of a collective measurement and reporting framework. Given their interconnectedness to a larger network, they might be more likely to see its value to shaping policy interventions and making a difference, and therefore might be convinced to participate in reporting data. However, it may be more of a challenge to make particularly smaller-scale, domestic-oriented groups aware of the effort and convince them of its relevance to them in the context of their very local efforts.
- Therefore, if the participation of most or more volunteer groups in a measurement effort is considered to be the priority of a global measurement and reporting framework, then two options for engaging these groups are apparent. One method would be to develop an aggressive awareness-building campaign and encourage groups to self-report. A second method would be to target a sample set of organisations that could form the basis of a larger global estimate of activity.
- Both approaches would have the benefit of engaging volunteer groups in the development of the information and allowing for the incorporation of the relevant variables of interest, including the addition of qualitative data, but unfortunately, these approaches would suffer from methodological weaknesses, even if large numbers of volunteer groups could be mobilised to participate. The dominant weaknesses would include 1) a strong likelihood of response bias, with certain volunteer groups more likely to engage than others, thus skewing the sample; and 2) the lack of information available on the universe of organisations (typically, but not always civil society organisations) through which people volunteer would make it difficult to develop a stratified random sample of groups to measure. In other words, smaller organizations are more likely to be left out of the sample.

- If, on the other hand, the priority is to generate maximum data for domestic and local volunteer groups, and their participation in the development of these data is considered of secondary importance, then using national surveys of individuals represent the more efficient option. This approach would allow for the collection of data on a known universe (people) and would therefore be less likely to skew the information.
- *Individuals, organization-based (formal) and direct (informal) volunteering.* Volunteer groups may seek to engage individuals in self-reporting their contributions to the SDGs. While information about those volunteers who work through organizations could also be captured by organizational surveys, information about direct volunteering can only be derived from individuals themselves as they do not engage with organizations. Various options for gathering information are available, with pros and cons for each, depending on the priorities for a measurement and reporting framework.
- If the participation of individual volunteers in a measurement effort is considered to be the priority, then the focus should be on engaging individuals to self-report. As with the groups, one approach would be to launch an aggressive campaign to encourage people to self-report their volunteer activities that contribute to the SDGs. As is the case for small and local organisations, this approach is fraught with self-reporting bias problems. Those who recognise their activities as volunteering, and those who do it in the first place, those in more urban settings with access to technology, those who are literate, etc., are much more likely to participate in self-reporting, thus skewing the sample.

## 7. Measurement Tools to document the Contribution of Volunteer Groups to the SDGs

This section turns to the question of developing a measurement and reporting tool for volunteer groups to document their contributions to the SDGs, once the methodology for engaging organizations to report their contributions, as described in the preceding section, is determined. No tool for individual reporting is developed in this paper, but any tool that is developed in the future might draw on the approach developed here for organizations. We underscore that these tools are not designed to provide prescriptions for how volunteer groups might carry out impact assessments on individual programs and projects. Rather, these tools provide some initial thoughts about how this information might be collected at the organizational level, reported, and aggregated at the national/global level.

Fundamentally, documenting the contributions of volunteer programs and projects to the SDGs requires explicit linking of these activities and outcomes to the SDG goals and targets. To do so, volunteer groups will need to take a look at their existing and planned activities and determine how the objectives of these programs relate to the stated objectives of the SDGs.

At first glance, one might assume it very straightforward to link a volunteer activity to one of the goals. For example, providing training to school teachers is clearly linked to SDG Goal 4.



**Upon further reflection, however, it becomes clear that many programs/activities respond to many SDG goals simultaneously and in synergy.** This is actually what the goals are designed to encourage! Consider the following activity drawn from an actual volunteer posting found on an organization’s website: *technical support & advice to teachers of children with special needs through workshops & sports activities*. Here, we can see that the training provided contributes not only to education goals, but also supports the reduction of poverty and inequality (inclusion of marginalised groups in education, providing them with skills needed to avoid a life of poverty); the empowerment of women (if the teachers being trained are women); advancement of decent work (if the training opens up new employment opportunities); and potentially the development and strengthening of partnerships (if the training is carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, for example).

And this kind of mapping could also be carried out at the more detailed target level, as shown in Table 1.



TABLE 1: MAPPING OF ONE EXAMPLE OF A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM TO THE SDG GOALS AND TARGETS

<p>Technical support &amp; advice to teachers of children with special needs through workshops &amp; sports activities</p>	<p><b>SDG Goal 1: Eliminate Poverty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Target 1.5</b> build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations</li> </ul>
	<p><b>SDG Goal 4: Education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Target 4.5</b> ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable</li> <li>• <b>Target 4.a</b> build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive</li> </ul>
	<p><b>SDG Goal 8: Decent Work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Target 8.5</b> achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities</li> </ul> <p><i>And possibly:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Target 8.6</b> substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training</li> </ul>
	<p><b>SDG Goal 10: Reduce Inequality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Target 10.2</b> empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all</li> </ul>
	<p><b>SDG Goal 17: Means of Implementation: Partnerships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Target 17.16</b> enhance the global partnership for sustainable development complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries</li> </ul>

### Step 1: Develop a crosswalk

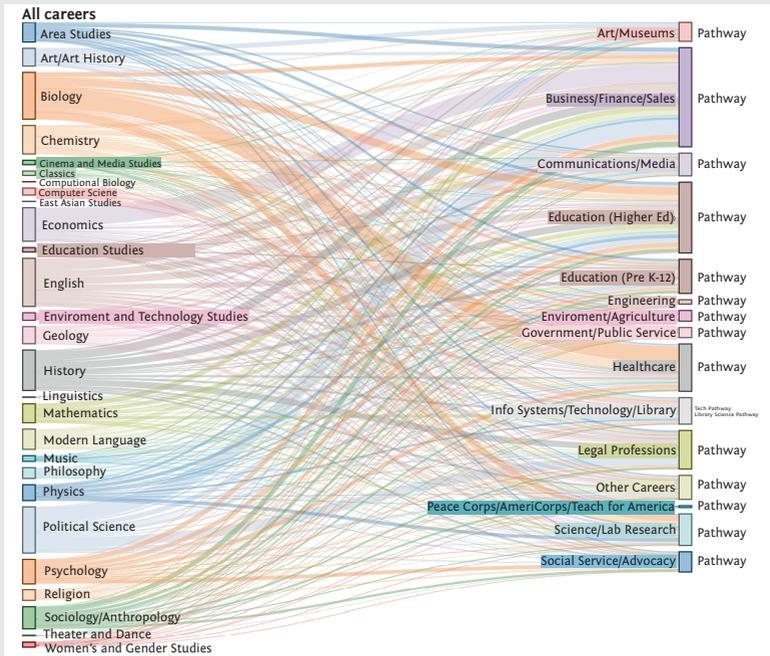
A first step, then, would be to develop a tool to map their specific volunteer activities and projects against the SDG goals and targets. This sort of exercise could result in the production of a crosswalk, i. e., a directory that would list typical volunteer activities in one column by type, and permit users to translate these activities across to the SDG goals and targets in another column (as shown in Table 1).

Developing a crosswalk would require preparation of a listing of typical volunteer activities. An initial list of volunteer activities is provided in the ILO *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*, usefully links volunteer activities to established national classification systems for occupations. This list could be complemented by other activities identified by volunteer groups.

Reversing the crosswalk would provide a comprehensive listing of the various activities that contribute to each SDG goal. The production of a crosswalk of this kind would, before any numbers are applied, on its own highlight the cross-cutting nature of volunteerism and show that the SDGs can be achieved in many different ways. For example, a crosswalk might show that volunteer groups might take several approaches to meet Goal 1: Ending Poverty. Thus, they might build capacity of teachers and improve curriculums, promote education and enforcement of actions to protect natural ecosystems that sustain livelihoods, create new jobs, design/deliver employment training programs, channel microcredit to small businesses, or improve productivity of subsistence farms, for example.

A visual representation of this crosswalk could make the point quite powerfully. One example of how this might be achieved is shown in Figure 4 below. In this case, the crosswalk was developed for an entirely different purpose: it identifies courses of study that college students pursued as a major, and then tracks these students across to the other side which lists career types where these students found employment. Thicker lines represent more students, thinner lines represent fewer students. As this figure shows, many students from certain majors ended up finding jobs in careers that might have been expected (biology to healthcare, for example). But this crosswalk also shows quite clearly and simply, the diversity of career outcomes that might result from any field of study. This visual could be replaced with volunteering activities on the left, and the SDGs on the right to make the same point. This graphic is also interactive, allowing the user to learn more information by clicking on each line, college major, or career outcome to dive more deeply into the available information. Something similar could be developed for volunteer groups.

Figure 4: Visual Representation of a Crosswalk – Example of College Majors and Career Outcomes<sup>13</sup>



## Step 2: Assess the effectiveness of activities/programs

The next natural step is to pull together the evidence they have on whether the programs volunteer groups have carried out have made a difference. Clearly, while current volunteer group programming has not been designed to articulate progress in achieving the SDGs in particular, most volunteer groups will have already identified their own set of development objectives against which to gauge progress (e. g. in areas like health, education, livelihoods, jobs, climate change adaptation). The task, then, is to map where these align with the goals and targets defined by the SDGs *and* to note any important institutional activities/objectives that don't fit under the SDGs, as these may need to be highlighted separately (as will be discussed later).

Identifying specific methods for carrying out evaluations and assessments at program level is beyond the scope of this paper. However, considerable thought and work has been done to provide guidance on how to assess the impact of individual

13 Carleton College, Career Pathways, Northfield, Minnesota, USA: <https://apps.carleton.edu/career/visualize/>

programs and projects, including the publication *Assessing the Contribution of Volunteering to Development* (UNV 2011) with piloting work done by a number of Forum members and the IVCO discussion paper *Assessing the Impact of International Volunteer Cooperation: Guiding Questions and Canadian Experiences* by Daniel Buckles and Jacques Chevalier (Buckles and Chevalier 2012). It might be expected that as time goes on, program objectives might explicitly articulate the SDG goals and targets so that program evaluations might be more easily aligned at an international level, and thus be more likely to attract more recognition, support and partnerships.

### Step 3: Document the contributions these activities make to the goals and/or targets

Once the goals and targets the volunteer work supports have been identified, and available evidence of its impact or effectiveness compiled, the next step is to provide a mechanism for volunteer groups to document these contributions and report them against the SDGs in particular. The assumption here is that volunteer groups have already made the effort to evaluate these programs at a basic level, and that any tool developed here is designed to allow groups to simply report against the SDGs in a manner that facilitates the collective aggregation of information from several organisations.

Reporting against the SDGs would include the typical measures that many groups are likely already familiar with, usefully illustrated in a logic model featured in the UNV manual *Assessing the Contribution of Volunteering to Development*. Here the volunteer contribution is systematically tracked by detailing inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes or impacts, and mapping them against the SDG goals and targets.

TABLE 2: A GENERIC LOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR VOLUNTEERING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT<sup>14</sup>

	LEVEL	OBJECTIVES
This is the higher level impact to which all development workers hope to contribute to but which they do not have control over	GOAL	e.g. Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals in selected sectors or across sectors (e.g. gender equality, governance)
This is the longer-term contribution of the country program – cumulative impact of volunteering	PURPOSE	e.g. Contribution to National Sustainable Development Goals in selected sectors or across sectors (e.g. gender equality, governance)

14 Adaptation of UNV Table 1.1 in UNV (2011).

<p>These are the wider changes that come about through activities in partnership with others</p>	<p>OUTCOMES</p>	<p>Changes might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in people's lives e. g. economic, cultural, spiritual, personal, social, psychological, wellbeing</li> <li>• Shifts in gender and power relations</li> <li>• Changes in attitudes, ideas, awareness or behaviour</li> <li>• Group, community, organisational or institutional change, e.g. changes in practice, behaviours, priorities, resources or systems</li> <li>• Ongoing participation, commitment and support of a wide range of stakeholders</li> <li>• Strengthening of self-sufficiency/self-reliance/resilience among primary beneficiaries both communities and natural ecosystems</li> <li>• Development of open dialogue and trust between civil society and government</li> <li>• Changes in attitude about the value of volunteering</li> <li>• Empowerment of women and recognition of women's contributions</li> <li>• Organisations strengthened</li> <li>• New systems embedded (e.g. in government programs)</li> <li>• Pilot projects scaled up</li> <li>• Awareness raised about social and economic issues and pro-poor policies</li> </ul> <p>Reduction of conflict</p>
<p>These are the direct concrete results of what you do</p>	<p>OUTPUTS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of women/men/youths etc. trained</li> <li>• Systems strengthened and/or set up</li> <li>• No. of partnerships developed</li> <li>• No. of schools built</li> <li>• No. of documents published</li> </ul>
<p>This is what you do</p>	<p>ACTIVITIES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity building</li> <li>• Technical advice</li> <li>• Mobilisation</li> <li>• Networking</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> <li>• Research</li> </ul>
<p>These are the resources put into the activity</p>	<p>INPUTS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of national and international volunteers</li> <li>• Number of hours/days/months dedicated</li> <li>• Financial/in-kind resources provided</li> <li>• Collaborative planning and work by diverse stakeholders</li> </ul>

Another way that these elements have been collected in user-friendly qualitative ways is to use a so-called “results-tree-tool” (shown in Figure 5 of United Nations Volunteers, 2011, p. 48) which can be easily applied in a field workshop. Volunteers or community members draw a tree that represents their experience working as a volunteer or with a volunteer. The tree has: roots: the experiences and skills the volunteer brings; the trunk: institutions and organisations the volunteer is working with; branches: key activities that the volunteer is directly involved in; buds: the key successes of the volunteering; fruits: the results of the volunteer engagement, e.g. changes in peoples’ lives, changes in the effectiveness of the institutions the volunteer is working with and/or other significant changes.

Figure 5: Results Tree (source: UNV 2011)

## HOW ONE INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE IS VISUALLY DISPLAYED THROUGH A ‘RESULTS TREE’

Thushan Kapurusinghe worked with the Turtle Conservation Project (TCP) in Sri Lanka in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. His tree diagram shows us ways in which he helped to change people's lives – the ‘fruits’ of improved community skills, the establishment of volunteer youth groups etc. – based on the ‘branches’ of community capacity development, training, mobilization, monitoring and evaluation activities.

It also notes how partnership with GEF and UNV was the basis of his endeavours – the trunk of the tree – and how the ‘roots’ of his personal experience fed into creating the results. And he is not shy to bring to our attention the challenges he faced, such as the ‘broken branch’ of unsatisfactory administration.

Effectively, the ‘tree’ distils a four-page report into one simple and easy-to-absorb image.



Thushan Kapurusinghe's 'results tree' portrays many complex ideas at a glance. (UNV)

The critical elements are the identification of ‘outputs’ leading to the ‘outcomes’. Here, ‘outputs’ are the number of people, households or territorial units directly served by volunteer activities. The ‘outcomes’ are defined by the SDG goals or targets, which allows us to make some assumptions about the activities.

For example, consider the following hypothetical volunteer group activity: *provide advocacy strategies and political engagement training for women*. Among the many possible outcomes and impacts of this activity, evidence would need to be found that some proportion of the women trained applied a skill that they learned in the training to politically engage, and this allows us to make the claim that the program supported progress towards the established SDG goal or target.

The organization would need to show how many women were trained, how many countries/communities were served by this training, how many volunteers were deployed to carry out the training, and how many local volunteers were leveraged in the process. With an evaluation, they should then have an idea of whether, and how much, the activity achieved the goal. This information might be available in quantitative and/or qualitative form. Quantitative data are more easily aggregated and compared, and the value of bringing the case for volunteers to the attention of policy makers in terms that they are familiar with should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, the proper qualitative information, rightly used, can have a powerful impact, particularly as part of rigorous mixed methods. For an inspiring example, see the experience of Hill Women in Rural Uttarakhand, India described by Sharma and Sudarshan (2010) and mentioned in the 2015 State of the World's Volunteerism Report (Wallace et al. 2015).

In many cases, narratives, case studies and evaluations that convey the quality of volunteer engagements and the perceptions of community members, local partners and service recipients on the ground can convey the important contributions volunteers make to the SDGs. Any reporting of the quantitative value of volunteers would not be useful without complementary qualitative information to provide a context for the figures.

The next task, then, is to map this information – the inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts – to the SDGs. Table 3 below provides an example of how two hypothetical volunteer activities might be reported against Goal 16.

Table 3 differentiates between activities carried out by international volunteers directly, and those carried out by local/national level volunteers or in partnership with local institutions. It also suggests a reporting of the rate of success of a program. Where detail is available, this would allow volunteer groups to identify where successes are, and not simply where time and energy is being spent.<sup>15</sup> The table also identifies the links between the activities reported here and their contributions to other SDG targets.

Volunteer groups need not let the established targets and indicators limit the scope of development reporting, and they might identify additional or alternative targets and indicators they think better reflect the volunteer added-value of their work in

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15 To illustrate this, there was, for example, much more evidence of what was done than what was actually achieved in the IVCOS' input to the 2014 UNV/Forum paper on International Volunteers and Governance by Lough and Mathews. The Valuing Volunteerism research done by VSO and IDS is a constructive example of what is demonstrable, perhaps enhanced significantly in this case by the VSO-IDS partnership on the project, which brought IDS's academic rigour together with VSO's long-term field experience in volunteer programming and management (IDS-VSO, 2015).

achieving the SDGs. As noted above, volunteer groups make key contributions that include:

- identifying emerging issues
- facilitating grassroots voice
- building bridges to link diverse stakeholders
- amplifying the public visibility and importance of issues
- monitoring problem-solving performance
- reciprocal benefit
- local accountability and North-South partnership

The framework presented here can accommodate reporting of these achievements towards these complementary goals, and a placeholder column has been added to Table 3 to make the point. If this idea were taken on board, these complementary/alternative goals or targets should be identified in a collective way to ensure that they represent a substantial contribution to sustainable development that would otherwise go unnoticed.

A final column would provide the opportunity to report on partnerships established (thus linking the activities to Goal 17), and similar columns could be added to identify contributions to other specific goals (such as Goal 16). UNV and the Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group (P2015VWG) have identified SDG Goals 16 and 17 as particularly relevant. Goal 16 promotes peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; Goal 17 aims to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development. These goals provide an opportunity to demonstrate the strong value-adding that volunteerism brings as an integrating mechanism that helps people and institutions better connect in partnerships of mutual benefit and allowing synergies or complementarity towards common goals/targets and indicators. Additionally, SDG Goal 10 to reduce inequality is particularly pertinent to many volunteer groups and might be considered a priority in addition to Goals 16 and 17. Categorising this type of qualitative information into various groupings makes it possible to aggregate this information and report it in at least a rudimentary way.

As the Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group stated in its submission to the HLPF, “Volunteer groups can play a critical role in mobilizing community participation and engagement, and in monitoring and evaluating the successes and addressing the SDGs at a global, national and local level. To this end, volunteer

groups have submitted recommended indicators<sup>16</sup> to the UN Statistical Commission as a means of measuring the contribution of volunteerism to achieving targets under Goals 16 and 17” (Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group 2015).

A table of the kind shown below could be produced at the broad goal level, or further refined at the target level. It could be completed by an individual organisation to map their own achievements, or it could be aggregated to reflect the contributions of many groups. And finally, this table could be produced at the global level, or produced at national or regional levels, taking account of local policy objectives and indicators against which the achievements of volunteer groups would be assessed.

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16 To read the proposed indicators, see Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group (September 2015).

Table 3: Aggregating the Contributions of Volunteerism to the SDGs

Logic model element	Inputs	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact	Links to other goals	Distinctive contributions made	Partnerships established
<b>IMPACT: SDG GOAL 16 – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels</b>								
Volunteerism Contribution: Community mediation services	2 volunteers 200 hours \$5,000 in costs	50 local volunteers 500 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>800 people served</li> <li>Facilitated 300 mediation cases</li> <li>25 communities</li> <li>4 developing countries (list)</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peaceful resolution of problem achieved in 250 cases.</li> <li>Skills, capacity and confidence of volunteers developed such that they take on new roles</li> <li>Returned volunteers help partners apply for resources and lobby for policy change</li> </ol>	<p>83% more people given access to peaceful resolutions of conflict</p> <p>Returned vols mobilise \$20K in funds</p> <p>Policy change achieved</p>	<p>Goal 5: Gender</p> <p>Goal 10: Inequality</p>	<p>Building bridges to link diverse stakeholders and monitoring problem-solving performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With non-profit</li> <li>With private business</li> </ul>
Volunteerism Contribution: Advocacy strategies and political engagement training for women	6 volunteers 100 hours \$1,500 in costs	10 local volunteers 150 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5,000 poor women trained</li> <li>50 communities</li> <li>7 countries (list)</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3,000 women reported using a skill learned in the training</li> <li>Lessons women learned in using skill shared with others</li> </ol>	<p>60% more women engaged in public affairs</p> <p>Policy makers show increased concern for role of women</p>	<p>Goal 1: Poverty</p> <p>Goal 5: Gender Equality</p> <p>Goal 4: Education</p>	<p>Facilitating grassroots voice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With non-profit</li> <li>With private business</li> </ul>

Table 3 achieves the following:

- A. Provides flexibility for a variety of volunteer groups to report the contributions of organisations individually and in aggregate to the SDGs;
- B. Allows for reporting at the national and international level;
- C. Provides options for reporting at the goal or target level;
- D. Provides flexibility for volunteer groups to report at various levels of detail, which permits them to use existing levels of information rather than asking them to report at greater levels of detail than may be feasible;
- E. Provides a mechanism for collecting qualitative and quantitative information;
- F. Provides a vehicle not just for reporting, but also for learning and empowerment of community stakeholders and accountability to them;
- G. Allows recognition of joint achievements of international and national and local partners and partnerships.

Ideally, this table would be completed using an online tool that would automatically link the activities to the other targets and thus self-complete the table. This kind of tool would also usefully provide a drop-down menu of suggested activities against which to report. Users could report against a standard set of activities, or insert their own under an ‘other’ option. Additional technology would allow the user to link particular qualitative inputs to related Internet links that could offer further detail, photos or video. This detail would need to be further developed and is not presented here.<sup>17</sup>

### Options for Volunteer Groups

1. Volunteer groups could develop a crosswalk identifying the links between their activities and the SDGs at the goal or target levels.
2. Volunteer groups could produce some version of Table 3 (above) at various levels of detail, including:
  - a. Track some or all of the SDGs at the goal level (identify two to three priorities)
  - b. Track some or all of the SDGs at the target level

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17 Research software NVIVO might provide a useful tool for some of this analysis.

- c. Track an additional or completely different set of ‘distinctive’ contributions that more explicitly reflect the contributions volunteer groups want to highlight
- d. Track additional features and links to other goals/targets, such as Goals 16 and 17

## 8. Methods for reporting Information

The collection of data is only useful when they are reported, promoted and used by those with a stake in the potential outcomes of these efforts. In this sense, it would be ideal that the data collection and reporting be mainstreamed into everyday practice of volunteer groups. Therefore, it is important that the method of collecting and reporting be discussed in advance of the production of the data, because it will ultimately drive the approach taken for the collection of the information itself. Further discussion is therefore needed to address the following questions: Will the reporting be physical productions? Or will it be available via an interactive website that allows users to manipulate the data or dig deeper into qualitative narratives? Is a periodic or international-level report envisioned? Or are national- or regional-level reports expected?

Further, who will be responsible for collecting, cleaning, mapping, aggregating and drafting the reports? Possibilities for housing or coordinating the project, and the prospective costs and resources required, need careful consideration by Forum members.

In thinking about reporting this information, at least at a collective level, the following considerations should be made:

- A. The method of reporting should be informed by the target audiences and outcomes volunteer groups seek to engage with this information.
- B. Varied versions of the reporting might be considered, depending on the weighting given to both international- and national-level objectives and in order to highlight common ground.
- C. One objective of collective reporting can be to raise awareness among volunteers and volunteer groups themselves about the importance of the work they are doing, and the options for more collaborative interaction.
- D. Thought should be given to how and when this information might be conveyed to the High-level Political Forum on behalf of volunteer groups. We are aware that there are ongoing discussions about the future of the P2015VWG. If this group is maintained, then reporting procedures should be coordinated with this body. Further, efforts by other groups to report on the contributions

of volunteers to the HLPF (UNV, IAVE, ILO/JHU, etc.) should also be coordinated by the P2015VWG.

- E. Reporting language should be simple, free of jargon, text-minimal and figure/chart-heavy to ensure its accessibility to multiple stakeholders.
- F. Video and mixed-media methods and multiple languages for accessible reporting of information should be used in conjunction with formal reporting, to encourage interaction with and use of data collected by volunteers and organisations from high levels to the grassroots.

## 9. Collective Research and Action Possibilities

Ambitious as the development of a measurement and reporting framework is, this represents just the start of numerous research and other activities that volunteer groups could collectively pursue in support of volunteering for development. A number of possible action items for volunteer groups are outlined in detail in the UNSG's recent report on *Integrating volunteering in the next decade*, which explains why further action is necessary, saying that “the momentum built through recognition of how volunteerism contributes to peace and development and the promotion of the inclusion of more people, especially the marginalized, can only be maintained through supportive volunteerism policies, structures and capacities for effective volunteer engagement and management, including adequate resources. Facilitation of different volunteering schemes catering to varying needs of groups of people expands the range of opportunities for engagement and inclusion” (UNGA 2015a, para. 24).

This discussion has also continued in the development and evolution of a global research agenda on volunteering for sustainable development, recently discussed in Bonn (UNV, Forum, CSD 2015) and prior to that in Nairobi (UNV and IFRC 2015) and Washington (UNV and Peace Corps 2015)<sup>18</sup>. Five research priorities were described in the report of the research symposium held in Bonn:

- A. Useful theoretical frameworks to understand and explain the relationships between volunteering and development;
- B. Locally-informed methods, tools and processes to understand the scale, scope and contribution of volunteering to global sustainable development goals;
- C. Conditions for an enabling environment under which volunteering for development can thrive at all levels;

18 For a report on the workshop in Washington, see also the report by Ulla Eberhard in Voluntaris 2/2015.

- D. Contextual factors that should be considered when researching volunteering for development;
- E. The need for an inclusive process to implement and evolve the global research agenda on volunteering for development.

In light of the above, this section highlights a series of collective research and action possibilities that volunteer groups could consider to contribute to the three broad objectives outlined in the UNSG's plan of action to integrate volunteering in the next decade and align with the priorities outlined in the global research agenda.

1. ***Strengthen calls by volunteer groups to be included in national development planning and help them achieve pro-volunteering legislative and policy goals for an enabling environment.*** As countries align their development plans to the post-2015 development agenda, volunteer groups can carry out activities that encourage the support of volunteerism by governments, civil society and the private sector, and improve the ability of volunteers to contribute to the achievement of development aims. One possibility would be to support a toolkit the Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group has been discussing developing, to help organisations at the local level advocate with their governments to include volunteers in their national implementation plans and help improve conditions for an enabling environment under which volunteering for development (V4D) can thrive.
2. ***Action research, reflective practice and developing resources for encouraging the integration of volunteering with the SDGs.*** Volunteering for development draws on a long tradition of experiential learning where both volunteers and those they work with learn from their work and their contexts, bringing together, for example, cultural and technical aspects as well as indigenous knowledge and wisdom (Devereux 2008; Australian Volunteers International 2011). This has been in a sense the precursor to more recent forms of action research like the VSO Valuing Volunteering endeavour (IDS and VSO 2015). The VSO Valuing Volunteering research has been a rare and explicit effort to both do this rigorously and document it carefully.

Unlike other sectors or interest groups, volunteer groups have rarely tried to produce evidence-based guidelines to guide those seeking to integrate volunteering and development or volunteering and sustainable development in practical ways. There are now many excellent examples of how practitioners can integrate environment and development together while also documenting and improving practice (UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative 2015; Raworth 2012; UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative 2011).

A volunteering for the SDGs manual could use the data collected (and encourage more parallel data collection through action research) to produce practical guidelines for how to better use volunteerism as a means of implementation for the SDGs at local, national and global levels. This resource manual could be formulated as a specific project for volunteer groups or a donor to support. The ‘child friendly’ version of the SDGs could be an inspiring example of a user friendly publication that, in an accessible and attractive manner, helps people apply and measure volunteering for development or sustainable development (Global Movement for Children of Latin America and Caribbean 2014).

**3. Encourage implementation of the ILO Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work and facilitate partnerships with government agencies to implement it.** As stated in the report from the Bonn research symposium, “as a starting point, basic descriptive information is needed on the numbers and types of volunteers in different settings. It is not yet clear who these volunteers are, where they are located, and what they are doing” (UNV, Forum, CSD 2015). The UNSG’s report similarly recommends that “National statistical offices should employ existing methods, such as national household surveys, to assess the contribution of volunteerism and at the same time create new tools to monitor progress and new methods to better capture the qualitative contributions of volunteering”, citing the standards outlined in the *ILO Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*. To generate this information, we therefore strongly suggest that volunteer groups encourage the implementation of the ILO Manual as part of their efforts to support local volunteer infrastructures and offer to partner with national statistics agencies in the development of these data. Indeed, ILO Manual implementation efforts have proven to be most successful where civil society groups have partnered with government statistics agencies.

This effort is especially critical in the next few years as the ILO plans to carry out additional testing of the ILO Manual questionnaire and issue global endorsement of the approach for all countries within the next two or three years. This opens the door for volunteer groups to become engaged in the development of the final recommendations and subsequent efforts to encourage national governments to incorporate these guidelines into their national household surveys.

**4. Engaging returned volunteers.** One promising area of work for IVCOs is in working with returned volunteers. It is worth highlighting that many volunteers engaged in volunteering for development have done other forms of volunteering prior to their volunteering for development work/assignment, and may continue this while on assignment or embark on this or return to this after the

volunteering for development assignment.<sup>19</sup> This volunteer effort often goes unnoticed by IVCOs except when it comes up as a demonstration of motivation and commitment in the recruitment process. Most IVCOs also have some sort of returned volunteer program that encourages ‘returned volunteers’ to share their first hand global understanding with family and community or even national legislators.

*There is an opportunity for IVCOs to strengthen their systematic work on the SDGs by tapping into the continuity returned volunteers provide as bridges, often without a conscious thought but an inner drive to volunteer.*<sup>20</sup> The universal focus of the SDGs provides a perfect platform for IVCOs to also measure the contributions of returned international volunteers to development.

## 10. Conclusion

Volunteer groups have made important achievements in gaining recognition by governments and the United Nations for the distinctive contribution volunteers make to sustainable development, including recognition as an official stakeholder in the HLPF, the UN body responsible for the development, monitoring, follow up, and review of the SDGs, with the resolution adopting the SDGs themselves, and in numerous reports and statements by the UN Secretary General and the General Assembly.

Despite this progress, recognition of the role of volunteers in the achievement of the SDGs does not permeate plans at all levels, most notably in the suggested indicators for the measurement of the SDGs currently under consideration, but also in the lack of inclusion of volunteer groups in the national planning processes being developed by UN-members states.

If volunteers are going to achieve the recognition they seek at the national and international levels, they will need to make their case, and collectively develop a measurement and reporting framework for doing so.

19 Note, however, that this reality may show that with a transition from MDGs to universal SDGs that a holistic sense of development in a globalised world would always have seen volunteering for development as happening in volunteers’ domestic context as much as any other place they go (Devereux, 2010). This is obviously part of the civil society and global citizenship angles on IVCO action that Plewes and Stuart (2007) highlighted.

20 Information and evidence in this regard has been developed by Forum members and others, for example a REARK Australian report in 1997, or Institute for Volunteer Research’s 2008 *The Impact of Returned International Volunteers on the UK* or Comhlámh’s excellent ‘curriculum’ developed for IVCOs “to support the learning journey from international volunteering to active citizenship” (Comhlámh, 2015). The Comhlámh resource is particularly interesting in this discussion because it was produced by a group of 7 EU-based organisations working with returned international volunteers across Europe: GVC Italia (Italy), Alianza por la Solidaridad (Spain), INEX-SDA (Czech Republic), Zavod Volontariat (Slovenia), Volonteuroppe (UK/ Europe), Deineta (Lithuania) and Comhlámh (Ireland).

This paper provides an overview of the rationale for the development of a measurement and reporting framework, describes the types of volunteer effort that needs to be captured, the various sources of existing data, and methodologies for gathering additional information. It also provides an initial draft of a series of tools that might be developed to facilitate the reporting of data by organizations. Finally, this paper considers other activities volunteer groups might consider as a collective body to promote and elevate the role of volunteering in the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the SDGs.

It is hoped that this paper will facilitate a discussion among volunteer groups about the best path forward by providing a useful frame for the discussion.

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