

UNV IN ACTION



UN

Volunteers

inspiration in action

Disaster Response

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that promotes volunteerism to support peace and development and its benefits to both society at large and the individual volunteer. UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for volunteerism globally, encouraging partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing volunteers. These beliefs inform the concept of **volunteerism for peace and development**, which is at the core of UNV's mission.

The difference UNV makes is by demonstrating peace and development results and impact through volunteerism. UNV's comparative advantage is the ability and knowledge to bring about transformational change through volunteerism, community voluntary action and civic engagement through active partnerships with civil society, volunteer involving organizations, UN agencies and Governments. This is inspiration in action.

Front Cover: UNV and UNDP Global Environment Facility (GEF) joined forces to rehabilitate and restore socio-economic activities of communities devastated by tsunamis in Sri Lanka. Here, a UN Volunteer is assisting an inland fishing beneficiary. (UNV, 2007).



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GENERAL BACKGROUND

In disaster response, the role and contribution of volunteerism is well recognized. UN General Assembly resolution (A/RES/56/38) identifies disaster response as one of the leading areas in which volunteers contribute to society and development. In fact, when a disaster happens, volunteers are normally the first to act. The impact of volunteers in times of crisis can be tremendous; as the extent of damage – in terms of economic and human loss – is greatly influenced by the initial response. It was the massive voluntary response of citizens to the Hanshin earthquake in Japan in 1985 that led to the International Year of Volunteers being held in 2001. In turn, this fostered a greater

understanding of the role of volunteers in the humanitarian field and in disaster risk reduction.

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At the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, it was acknowledged that “disaster risk reduction and increasing resilience to all types of natural hazard...in developing countries... can have multiplier effects and accelerate achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.”

UNV has significant experience in disaster prevention and risk reduction. The Hyogo Framework for Action explicitly recognized the added value and contribution of volunteerism to disaster risk management, particularly volunteerism’s role in strengthening community capacities to respond to and prevent disasters. The 2011-2013 UNV Programme Strategy identifies Crisis Prevention Recovery as one of the organization’s strategic focus areas. UNV’s involvement in this area focuses on supporting countries and situations where there is an identified risk and high vulnerability to disaster.

INDONESIA: Tsunami Response



National UN Volunteers in front of a regional office for disaster risk reduction in Indonesia (UNV,2007).

In December 2004, the destruction caused by the Indian Ocean tsunami was tremendous. India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Thailand were among the hardest hit countries. UNV developed a UNV Tsunami Framework with an outlay of 7.8 million USD to assist the Governments of India, Indonesia, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

In Indonesia, UNV together with UNDP and the Government embarked on a project called UNV

Support to Tsunami Rehabilitation and Recovery in Aceh and Northern Sumatra. A total of 132 UN Volunteers served under this project working with two Government agencies, nongovernmental organizations and a number of UN agencies.

Sixteen national and international UN Volunteers supported UN-Habitat and served in various positions ranging from Urban Planner/Site Designer to Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist. They contributed, through a combination of sound technical skills, a high degree of motivation and the spirit of volunteerism, to relief, recovery and reconstruction/rehabilitation initiatives.

Twenty-nine national UN Volunteers were deployed to six regional offices of the country's rehabilitation and reconstruction agency. The volunteers were instrumental in strengthening the capacity of district offices in reaching the communities and reporting on their needs.

Another successful element of the project was the establishment of Village Recovery Committees (VRC). The VRCs promoted a community-led approach to community development and disaster risk reduction.

VRC members, who were elected volunteers from the communities, received training on VRC roles and disaster risk reduction. They mobilized rural communities to participate in the planning and implementation of livelihood and income diversification activities, psychosocial initiatives and support to extremely vulnerable individuals.

Using effective communication tools, community leaders, local government officials and beneficiaries themselves were integrated into an effective community-participation planning and implementation process. Target communities were encouraged to share experiences and skills with neighbour communities.

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This community-based approach empowered communities and developed organizational skills, social and developmental attitudes, and knowledge.

In 2009, 18 national UN Volunteers were recruited to assist local government with disaster risk reduction activities. They contributed to the development of a national regulation on disaster management volunteers – an essential project, given Indonesia’s vulnerability to disaster and the extent of volunteer involvement in disaster management.

Where there are no local agencies for disaster risk reduction, UN Volunteers have been trained to provide technical assistance to the communities for a better understanding of disaster risk reduction.

SRI LANKA: Tsunami Response



National UN Volunteer working with local Government officials in Ratnapura, Sri Lanka (UNV,2005).

In Sri Lanka, the UNV tsunami response programme channelled its efforts through the project Strengthening Local Capacities for Disaster Risk Reduction.

UN Volunteers focused on rehabilitation, recovery and preparedness activities through the mobilization of local communities and capacity building of Government institutions and local NGOs. The project was implemented by the

Disaster Risk Management Centre, with the support of UNDP.

A total of 40 national UN Volunteers worked with the Disaster Risk Management Centre in close contact with communities. This helped bridge the gap between the national Government and local communities, allowing better coordination among stakeholders.

Key disaster risk reduction activities that UN Volunteers assisted included:

- Development of community and district level disaster plans, mock assessments with communities, and development of a vulnerability atlas for Sri Lanka.
- The project's participatory approach, that actively involved the community in rolling out disaster plans, aided in preparedness and capacity building at the community level.

INDIA: Disaster Mitigation

India is one of the most disaster prone countries in the world. Around 80% of its geographical area is prone to hazards ranging from earthquakes to flooding to cyclones. Rural poverty, lack of awareness of disaster issues within communities, inadequate institutional structures and the increasing frequency of natural disasters leave India vulnerable.



In 2002, the Indian Government in partnership with UNDP launched a disaster risk reduction programme. One key aspect of the programme was vulnerability reduction and environmental sustainability. Community capacities to plan and implement gender-equitable disaster mitigation strategies were boosted. Post-disaster reconstruction recovery included disaster prevention through environmental action, such as rainwater harvesting and water conservation.

Approximately 170 national UN Volunteers served to mobilize communities through voluntary action. Their role as District Project Officers proved extremely valuable in developing disaster risk reduction teams and disaster task forces at the village level. The main emphasis of their work was to build on traditional coping mechanisms through transferring skills and knowledge.

This large-scale 'reaching out' policy led to a basic understanding of disaster risk reduction in thousands of Indian villages.

Local women updating village disaster mitigation plans in India (UNV, 2007).

The project helped raise awareness in communities through organizing meetings and mass rallies, and using media, street plays, competitions, etc. to spread information and messages.

It built the capacity of community stakeholders through organizing training programmes. The project linked with local volunteer organizations (youth clubs, the Scouts movement and local women's self-help groups) for the preparation and updating of village disaster mitigation plans and disaster mitigation training. In fact, women's self-help groups have become valuable ambassadors for raising

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The disaster risk reduction work of the UN Volunteers in India was predominantly aimed at establishing local groups of volunteers to take local leadership roles in the prevention and reduction of natural disasters. The main emphasis of this work was to build on traditional coping mechanisms through transferring skills and knowledge.

KENYA: Quelling Post-Election Violence

Following violence that erupted in Kenya after a 2007 presidential election, UNDP and UNV initiated a peace building, reconciliation and early recovery emergency scheme. The scheme engaged community-based youth volunteers to contribute to the reconciliation and healing of affected populations in Nairobi and other locations.

UNDP in Kenya raised over 900,000 USD for a Neighborhood Volunteer Scheme (NVS). Under the guidance and oversight of UNV, the scheme mobilized and trained more than 900 volunteers.

Both male and female volunteers were selected in their neighborhoods from among youth leaders, retired professionals and community opinion leaders. Through training and sensitization, the Neighborhood Volunteers were empowered with skills and tools to initiate counselling, peace building, reconciliation and recovery in their affected neighborhoods.

Twelve training modules covered topics such as volunteerism, nation building, small arms and light weapons, self-awareness and emotional intelligence, understanding conflict, early warning and early response, humanitarian services, facilitation skills, trauma and healing, group dynamics, youth issues, gender mainstreaming and human rights.

The training was conducted by consultants, together with staff from UNDP, UNV, and the Steering Committee on Peace and Development and Conflict Management.

The Neighbourhood Volunteers were an invaluable additional human resource for relief agencies by helping with distribution of emergency relief food and non-food items.

The volunteers helped identify the needs of communities and created secure environments for the distribution of food and non-food relief materials.



In Kenya, Youth Neighbourhood Volunteers meeting with the communities in their affected neighbourhoods (UNV, 2007).

Using their influence and knowledge of the community, the volunteers supported interventions for containing potential flare-ups in tense areas. They mediated peaceful coexistence between tenants and landlords and conducted dialogues to lay the groundwork for the successful return of Internally Displaced Persons. As many of the

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Skills passed on to communities by the Neighborhood Volunteers led to the establishment of women and youth groups for small scale enterprises, some of which have been registered with the Ministry of Social Service for access to finance and other support programmes.

HAITI: Earthquake Response

Haiti suffered a catastrophic category 7.0 earthquake in January 2010. The quake caused major damage in the capital city Port-au-Prince and other areas. Some 230,000 people were killed, 300,000 injured and more than 1.5 million people were left homeless.

Since April 2010, international UN Volunteers have been supporting UN-Habitat and UNDP activities to strengthen technical and institutional capacities, to improve the coordination of international and national Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) actors, to reinforce the risk identification and early warning system as well as to strengthen knowledge, education and information management, and to reduce the vulnerability of the population.

Thanks to the recruitment of DRR experts, through which three international UN Volunteers and 25 national UN Volunteers were deployed across the 10 Departments of Haïti, UNDP has strengthened its strategic support to the national DRR system. The international UN Volunteers are providing technical support in terms of donor advocacy, external communication and inter-institutional coordination. The national UN Volunteers play a key role in supporting government institutions at community and local levels in terms of coordination, information sharing and population sensitization.



A national UN Volunteer involved in relief activities in Haiti. (UNV, 2010).

UN Volunteers also gave technical advice for house repairs, debris management and improved building standards. Volunteers facilitated dialogue between communities, civil society and international organizations about plans for the creation of community support centres.

In case of a disaster, all key staff members including UN Volunteers whenever necessary are deployed to assist the emergency operations centres at national and department levels.

Through UNV, 10 other national and international UN Volunteers with UN-OCHA (4), UNFPA (4) and UNHCR (2), helped build the national capacities and provide technical support to health, housing and shelter initiatives.

What UNV can do

To mitigate the effects of crisis and address the root causes, UNV works at both national and community levels to encourage and support inclusive and coherent national disaster prevention and risk reduction strategies.

At the national level, UN Volunteers can:

Strengthen the capacity of the Governments at the local level in preparing, coordinating and implementing crisis-sensitive development and recovery plans, including reaching the communities and reporting on their needs;

Facilitate the development of institutional capacities of national and/or local authorities to strategically plan and develop national regulation on disaster management volunteers, constructively negotiate, coordinate, mobilize, support and monitor local volunteers and civil society organizations;

Provide coordination and technical support to district administrations, non-governmental organizations and volunteer involving organizations in the implementation of disaster response assessment and plans;

Support common awareness and understanding of crises among key stakeholders, including local authorities and local communities.

At the community level, UN Volunteers can:

Raise awareness, promote preparedness and conduct community level hazard, risk, vulnerability and capacity assessments to develop local disaster plans, which feed into district and national disaster plans;

Mobilize communities to participate in the planning and implementation of local disaster risk management plans;

Facilitate the inclusion and participation of affected communities, especially women and youth by partnering with local women's committees or creating local women and youth associations for the planning and implementation of disaster risk management plans and tools;

Mobilize extended volunteer support to other districts and regions hard-hit by disasters; and revitalize voluntary and/or mutual support practices through the establishment of local groups of volunteers to take local leadership roles in the prevention of natural disasters;

Identify the needs of communities and create secure environments for the distribution of food and non-food relief.

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