

Youth Volunteers

**Engaging
Communities,
Changing
Lives**



VolunteerActionCounts



UN

Volunteers

inspiration in action

About us

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the United Nations organization that contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide.

Volunteerism is a powerful means of engaging people in tackling development challenges, and it can transform the pace and nature of development. Volunteerism benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation.

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Engaging people in the post-2015 agenda

UNV fully supports the United Nations system's efforts towards realising a post-2015 sustainable development framework. As the world accelerates towards the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, consultative processes are underway, engaging development partners and grassroots stakeholders, particularly youth, in defining what comes next.

To ensure an equitable and accountable post-2015 framework, UNV calls on governments and United Nations entities to promote mechanisms that meaningfully engage civil society in the formulation and implementation of internationally agreed goals. Volunteerism is one of the most vital delivery mechanisms for social, environmental and economic transformation, ensuring a lasting impact with its ability to change people's mindsets, attitudes and behaviours.

www.volunteeractioncounts.org

Acknowledgements

Our special thanks to the UN Volunteers who reached out to community volunteer organizations in their daily work and helped us collect stories for this publication.

Cover image: *Karina Garcia, a volunteer with the Investigation, Development and Integral Education Association, during a bilingual education activity in Totonicapán, Guatemala. Karina teaches children about the culture of their indigenous community through bilingual and intercultural education (Jose M. Yac/Asociación IDEI, 2013).*

Youth Volunteers

Engaging Communities, Changing Lives

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world;
indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

Margaret Mead
(American anthropologist, 1901–1978)

INTRODUCTION

A quarter of the world's population today is made up of 1.8 billion adolescents and youth.¹ Young people represent promise and potential. In this age of globalisation and technological innovation, they are driving social change, connecting across geographical, social, and economic barriers. At the same time, young people face complex challenges. The prolonged employment crisis shows no abatement as over 70 million youth worldwide seek employment, according to 2013 data.² Social marginalisation and exclusion, lack of access to training and opportunities, and political instabilities are other challenges which pose a risk to the constructive channeling of the creative energies that youth represent.

The question of how to sustainably promote and nurture youth engagement is therefore an important consideration in the global development discourse. As the 2015 deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals approaches, and preparations for a framework that will replace it progress,

governments, UN entities, youth and youth-led organizations are rightly promoting the importance of youth as important stakeholders. *Young people must be subjects, not objects, of the post-2015 development agenda...they must also be active participants in decision-making, and be treated as the vital asset for society that they are*, says the Report of the High Level Panel on the post-2015 agenda.³

This publication aims to highlight volunteerism as one of the important universal strategies, which can promote the engagement of youth as valued participants in achieving sustainable development in a post-2015 world. Volunteerism engages communities and individuals from the bottom up, and has the power to create transformational impacts on both the volunteers themselves and on the communities where they engage. As the UN General Assembly recognises, volunteerism offers valuable opportunities for youth engagement and leadership to contribute to peaceful and inclusive societies (UNGA Resolution A/RES 67/138).

1. *High Level Panel (HLP). 2013. A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development.* <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>

2. *International Labour Organization. 2013. Youth Employment.* <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/youth-employment/lang-en/index.htm>

3. *High Level Panel (HLP). 2013. A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development.* <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>

This publication consists of stories collected by UN Volunteers from different parts of the world. They capture the journeys of young people transforming themselves and their development realities in remarkable ways through volunteerism. When properly facilitated, volunteerism opens opportunities for young people to address problems that affect them, and participate innovatively in shaping a world they inherit. The volunteer initiatives in this publication highlight how volunteerism can be particularly effective in facilitating youth engagement in community life. They also underline how peer-to-peer exchange amongst those with shared concerns and experiences can be catalytic for joint action.

The examples of *Tena Kebena* in Ethiopia, *Ruwasunchis* in Peru, and *Jege Otho* in Bangladesh, all youth-led volunteer organizations, show how youth can become a force for change when delivery systems are inefficient. Bukola who started a reproductive health club for young people in Liberia, or Osvaldo in Mozambique who has created a shelter for abandoned children, are drivers of initiatives which will resonate into the future.

Volunteerism elicits a sense of responsibility towards others, giving young people a feeling of self-worth and belonging to their communities. The stories of

Dmytro in Ukraine and Mohammed in Yemen who, in different ways, are advocating for health issues that affect their communities are such examples. Volunteerism is reciprocal, and its far-reaching impacts on the person volunteering is shown in Karina's story, where volunteering for indigenous children's rights in Guatemala transforms her into a person that believes that there are always solutions.

Through volunteerism, everyone, irrespective of their economic, social or health status, can contribute meaningfully to society in their own way. Dung's story from Viet Nam and Celal's story from Turkey powerfully demonstrate how volunteering activates this capacity, breaking down societal prejudices against those traditionally marginalised by society.

When well facilitated, the values that underpin youth volunteerism — reciprocity, responsibility and engagement — can be powerful strategic development levers. Societies need to be capable of turning the potential of their youth into action, leveraging their capacities, skills and creativity in order to envisage a sustainable future. For change to be sustainable, it needs to be embedded in the mindsets, attitudes and behaviours of individuals starting at an early age. Volunteerism generates a conducive environment for such lasting change, one person at a time. ■



JEGE OTHO in Bangladesh

AWAKENING MINDS, CREATING CHANGE

A group of young people started the *Jege Otho* Foundation to address socio-economic concerns of their community, opening avenues for youth in the community to project themselves into new roles and life choices. *Jege Otho* exemplifies what can be achieved when youth take the initiative to contribute to change in society.

Young people possess the energy, creativity and determination to drive progress. In 2007, a group of college and university students in Jessore district in southwestern Bangladesh founded the non-governmental organization *Jege Otho*, in the face of widening gaps between the rich and the poor in their towns and communities. *Jege Otho*, which translates as ‘awaken your mind’ in Bangla, was born out of their motivation to educate marginalised youth in their communities who were excluded by formal service delivery systems. It relies on a corps of 73 youth volunteers for the implementation of its activities in education, health and social learning. In 2011 *Jege Otho* established a youth centre where its volunteers provide weekly English and Mathematics tutoring to children from economically disadvantaged families. It has also set up a pre-school, renovated and painted by volunteers, to provide a head start in pre-formal education to children aged three to six. The pre-school is free to pupils whose parents are mainly rickshaw pullers and day labourers.¹

1. *The school is open every day for 4 hours and is run completely by volunteers, who receive a three-month training on early child development. Many of the volunteers are studying to become teachers.*

Joyanta Kumar Sarker (26), a student who has been a *Jege Otho* volunteer for five years, teaches in the pre-school for a few hours every day. “We have a small vegetable garden, many puzzles and games – the children have the opportunity to learn with all their senses,” he says. Joyanta’s commitment is not without reciprocity. Since his volunteering experiences, he has become more self-confident, and more aware of problems in his community. His network of social contacts has also increased.

Nelufar Yeasmin Hera (24), a volunteer with *Jege Otho* since 2009, says that her most important volunteering experience occurred while she was conducting a health workshop in a local school. “After the workshop a young girl came to me. She wanted to share her worries with me and cried while thanking us for our help and information,” says Nelufar. “To me it showed how important it is that we volunteers are young, because this girl came to me because I am myself a young woman.”

Jege Otho’s vision of creating an “enabling environment” for youth includes operating an IT



Nelufar Yeasmin, Jege Otho volunteer, conducts an adolescent health workshop in a girls' school in Jessore. Initiating health awareness campaigns in schools and colleges are a key activity of Jege Otho youth volunteers (UNV, 2012).

centre, equipped with 12 computers, which runs a six-month IT course for interested youth to enhance their employment skills. Participants pay a minimal fee and receive a certificate at the end of course, which is recognised by the Government of Bangladesh. In addition, awareness-raising on drugs, HIV, and adolescent health forms an important component of *Jege*

Otho's work. Volunteers conduct workshops in schools and public spaces to promote youth-specific health issues, especially through peer-to-peer exchange.

In 2012 *Jege Otho* was awarded the “Volunteer Recognition Award” for its voluntary service in teaching female school dropouts in Jessore. ■



VUONG THI DUNG in Viet Nam

THE GIFT OF GIVING

Volunteering breaks down stereotypes and prejudices which exclude individuals and groups from participating fully in society. Dung's story highlights volunteerism's inherent value that everyone has something meaningfully to contribute to society, no matter their economic, social or health status.

Every day, children of varying ages troop into the house of Voung Thi Dung (22) in Binh Tinh village, Viet Nam. Dung, as she is known, is a "community volunteer" who has been tutoring children since 2008. As they learn Mathematics, Vietnamese and English from her, Dung teaches either sitting or lying down in a bed to which she has been confined since 2007. Dung's story is a remarkable example of how volunteering, with what one can offer, has brought meaning into a life that could otherwise be buried under despair.

One fateful morning in 2007 Dung, then 16, her head spinning and limbs trembling, fell to the ground. The diagnosis at the hospital revealed that she had transverse myelitis in the cervical cord. Her family, who survives on her father's fisherman salary, took Dung to various hospitals for treatment but the condition was incurable. Dung began exercising with the support of her mother despite

the incredible pain. While her arms gained some mobility after five years, her confinement remained.

The choice before Dung was either to live in grief, or rise above it. She chose the latter. Wanting to live her life with purpose, the idea of teaching came to her when she realised that poor children in her village, particularly from families impacted by the Chanchu typhoon¹, could not afford to go to school. Dung, who has studied up to 10th grade, started her tuition classes with three children. In a span of three years Dung's students, ranging from first to ninth graders, has increased to 50.

Many of Dung's students also work in food processing units to support their impoverished families. Dung has been able to convince parents in the community to support their children's education instead of sending them off to work. Truong Thi Bao Khuong (15), whose parents Dung had to convince, is now scoring good marks in ninth grade. Tuan Anh (14) says his math scores have improved from "a 6 to a 9" after tuitions. Teachers in the villages report that their students markedly improve after a few months of tutoring by

1. *The typhoon Chanchu was a tropical cyclone in 2006 off the coast of Viet Nam which sank eleven Vietnamese ships. Nearly 250 people, mostly those from Quang Nam and Da Nang provinces, were reported missing.*



A tutoring class in progress in Vuong Thi Dung's house in Binh Tinh village, Viet Nam, as Dung teaches lying in bed. She is surrounded by students whose ages range from 7 to 15 years (Le Trung, 2013).

Dung. "With my ability to help others, I don't feel like I am a disabled person. Every day, my life is so meaningful," says Dung. "When I am so confident in myself, nobody thinks of me as a person with a disability. They think of me as a person who can make their children study better."

Although she is still in pain every day, volunteering has given Dung new meaning and direction. She says she has more "pleasure and love" for her life and for her community, and feels that her purpose is preparing children for their futures. ■



MOHAMMED in Yemen

BORN TO VOLUNTEER

Volunteerism stresses active involvement in society. A volunteer since the age of 15, Mohammed has been a pioneer in the area of health advocacy for youth in his country, reaching out to his peers in diverse ways to raise awareness on issues such as HIV/AIDS and adolescent reproductive health.

Volunteerism is embedded in the lineage of Mohammed Gaber (24). "Volunteerism is a family habit," he says. "My whole family is engaged in volunteering." By the age of 15, Mohammed from Sana'a, Yemen, was volunteering as a youth worker at the Life Makers Foundation, a voluntary organization that aims to enhance youth capabilities through advocacy, networking and volunteerism.

Within his first year at Life Makers Mohammed became the coordinator of its health forum. The forum, which was made up of 15 members, was the first of its kind in Yemen to raise awareness, especially directed at youth, on reproductive and sexual health issues. Healthcare is a priority development issue in Yemen, in part due to the scarcity of qualified health workers and adequate medical infrastructure. These gaps complicate awareness-raising which require qualified health workers that can train and develop local capacity.

Mohammed's volunteering at Life Makers involved organizing school trainings, dissemination events and workshops on issues such as malaria and

tuberculosis. As a youth himself it was easier for Mohammed to approach his peers on subjects such as reproductive and sexual health which were not openly discussed in his community. Young people could identify with him, and therefore ask more questions and be encouraged to get involved with Life Makers' volunteering work. Mohammed travelled to different parts of the world representing Yemen as a health activist. His travels provided him with plenty of ideas to improve healthcare advocacy in his community, which he implemented at Life Makers and also came to be adopted by other volunteer-involving organizations in Sana'a.

When he started volunteering in 2004, Mohammed and his young colleagues at Life Makers were the only ones working on healthcare advocacy. As a result of their accomplishments however, many non-governmental organizations in Sana'a are now focusing on healthcare. Life Makers's health forum membership has also increased to around 100 members of different ages and genders.

Mohammed says that "Yemen's big health issue is the lack of knowledge regarding certain diseases and practices often due to shyness and lack of

information. Raising the veil on health issues that face Yemeni youth is crucial.”

Volunteering from such a young age left an indelible mark on Mohammed. According to him, “these opportunities structured my personality and my way of thinking. They created a person who opens his hand to others.” By the time he had finished high

school, they had also impacted his choice of life path and profession: medical college. Mohammed is today a laboratory doctor, having graduated from Sana’a University, Medical Laboratories College in 2013. He has launched “Reaction”, a local volunteer initiative to mobilise medical students’ involvement and training for improved community healthcare services in Sana’a. ■



Mohammed Gaber helps a school boy fill out a health questionnaire in the rural area of Dola'a Hamdan in Yemen (Suhail Al-Emam/ Life Makers, 2011).



KARINA in Guatemala

BEING THE CHANGE

The transformational power of volunteerism is illustrated by Karina's journey as a rights activist for children and adolescents from her indigenous community. Her volunteering experiences have given Karina the strength to continue fighting for a better world, while helping her become a person who believes that there are always solutions.

"As an indigenous female child I am discriminated three times over — for being indigenous, young, and a woman," says Karina Garcia (18) from Totonicapán, Guatemala. Karina belongs to a rural indigenous community where the majority of the population is affected by economic, social and political problems. Guatemala's indigenous inhabitants make up 60 per cent of its population but lag behind the non-indigenous population in several areas of socio-economic development.

Karina's journey as a volunteer began at the age of 13 when she joined the Guatemalan Parliament for Children and Adolescents (Parlamento Guatemalteco para la Niñez y Adolescencia), as part of a group that was fighting for the rights of indigenous children and adolescents. The Parliament is a platform for children from 14 departments of Guatemala to share ideas and contribute to community development. Karina represented young people from her community, highlighting problems they faced such as teenage pregnancy, intra-familial violence, and gender discrimination.

In her early days as a Parliamentarian, Karina had difficulty believing that there were "solutions to all the problems faced by children in my community." However, as she immersed herself in volunteering activities, they steadily helped shape her identity as a youth activist, "fighting for children and youth to have a life free from violence, to be heard and become an integral part of society." In 2009, at the age of 15, Karina attended the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the United Nations in New York to highlight problems particular to youth of indigenous communities in Guatemala. Karina's experiences strengthened her skills in analysing problems faced by her community, and in creatively proposing solutions to local authorities. Now she believes "there are always solutions."

Karina's activism has moved beyond the Parliament. In 2012, Karina and 20 youth volunteers from Totonicapán and Quetzaltenango initiated a project to encourage community dialogue, through local radio and television channels, on taboo social topics, such as sex education, parents beating children, and teenagers using violence amongst peers. The project's objective is to reach out to



Karina Garcia participating in a programme called Encuentro de Expresiones on local television cable, where children discuss topics such as children and adolescent rights (Jose M. Yac/ Asociación IDEI, 2013).

both parents and children to promote peaceful co-existence. Karina and her peers have also launched a school and college campaign to invite young people to become “agents of peace” in their homes. So far they have visited 30 schools, reaching 200–250 school children per visit, where they facilitate interactive dialogues on social issues and play games that highlight their importance.

Karina, whose advocacy activities met with initial resistance from some, sees changes in how others in the community view her work. “Parents who used to hit their children are transforming their manner of parenting into a more peaceful one. What gives me the strength to continue are the changes I see in the neighbourhoods,” she says. ■



DMYTRO in Ukraine

FROM ONE TO A HUNDRED DEEDS

Hope, while a non-market commodity, is an asset essential for peace and societal well-being. Dmytro's story illustrates how volunteering can give renewed direction and purpose to those marginalised in society, and facilitate their engagement in community life.

Dmytro Say (28) has worked for three years as an English teacher in a village school in Mykolaiv Oblast (administrative unit), Ukraine. He understands the challenges facing this community in a way an outsider cannot. Ukraine has the highest rates of new cases of HIV infection in Europe, with the majority of HIV positive people being under the age of 30. The Kherson and Mykolaiv Oblasts and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea are particularly affected by the pandemic. Its young people also face high levels of unemployment and severe social exclusion.

In 2012, when an opportunity arose for Dmytro to become a United Nations Volunteer in a project that aims to confront these challenges, he was motivated simply by a desire to do “something meaningful” to help children in the community. The *Young Football Volunteers: Sport and Volunteering for MDG* (YFV) project targets young people aged 12–20 in the two oblasts and Crimea. Dmytro, as part of a team of UN Volunteers, trains local school teachers and football coaches on the “Fair Play” methodology, which involves introducing a set of skills aimed

at educating young people on issues such as HIV prevention, gender equality, and promoting greater civic participation. The instructors, in turn, innovatively implement it in their schools during football and training exercises.

As a coordinator, Dmytro travels to remote villages to communicate about the project to various potential participants. This aspect of volunteering has not only been the most rewarding, but also challenging. “I am not talking about physical difficulties of getting to places without roads or during a heavy snowfall. I am talking about interacting with people there. Sometimes there are places I visit where people do not have any hope. These are the most difficult places to visit,” he says. But even in such places “youth is different. They always have hope and dreams.”

More than 1,900 students have been reached and 200 teachers trained through Fair Play. Eleven youth-led initiatives in diverse development areas, including sustainable ecology, HIV awareness and volunteerism have



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also been implemented under the project, which involved over 600 youth volunteers. “One of the most important things we do is teach youth the skills to make their ideas come true. We teach them to challenge circumstances. This brings confidence to their actions,” he says. After one of Dmytro’s training seminars in a remote Mykolaiv village, school students began restoring a 20-year defunct community park. As the young people took charge of the renovations, creating a small volleyball field, football ground, and benches for social gatherings, other villagers joined in the process with zeal. What started out as one single action became “a river of a hundred deeds”. ■

Dmytro Say trains school football coaches and physical education teachers on Fair Play methods in the Mykolaiv and Kherson regions and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in Ukraine (Andrey Selivanov, 2013).



RUWASUNCHIS in Peru

WORKING TOGETHER

Through the spirit of mutual support and empowerment, a group of young volunteers in Peru aims to rebuild the social and emotional fabric of a community which has been affected by terrorism and conflict.

Ruwasunchis, a non-profit organization, was started in 2005 in the San Pablo Mirador community of Manchay in Lima, Peru by a group of young professionals from different backgrounds. Run completely by youth volunteers, *Ruwasunchis* is based on the objective of strengthening the social and human capital of the Manchay community, to empower its members to become increasingly active in their own development. The majority of Manchay's population lives below the poverty line and the community faces widespread health and socio-economic challenges, including malnutrition, low literacy levels and high mortality rates. Many families have been displaced by terrorism in the 1980s¹ which still deeply impacts their social attitudes, awareness of self and others, ambitions and hope for the future.

Around 90 volunteers work with *Ruwasunchis* at any given time, engaging in diverse projects that

promote a process of mutual learning among children, adolescents, youth and women. Some of the initiatives include the "Cultural Platform", theatre and music workshops for children, and the "Urban Weavers", art, handcrafts and knitting workshops aimed at enhancing the self-esteem and entrepreneurial spirit of community women. The "Comprehensive Development" project aims to ensure community well-being through one-to-one counseling sessions and other support activities.

Mutual support is a common tradition in Manchay, known by the term *minka* in Quechua. To re-ignite its spirit, *Ruwasunchis* volunteers initiate activities between community members and volunteers: *Ruwasunchis* after all means "let's do it all together!" in Quechua. Such initiatives include planting vegetable patches, cleaning classrooms and laying the foundations of a psychologist's office that supports the "Comprehensive Development" project.

Diego Graña (30), from Lima, who coordinates a team of psychologists for the project, began volunteering with *Ruwasunchis* in 2011. As a counsellor, Diego sees the extent of the suffering

1. Sendero Luminoso ("Shining Path") was a terrorist group that attacked Peruvian rural areas in the 1980s. The cities of Huancaavelica and Cusco, from which most families in Manchay come, were included in the areas attacked by the group.



Diego, along with other volunteers, explains the projects of Ruwasunchis to the local community in Alto Manchay (Julie Escudero/Ruwasunchis, 2012).

this community has lived through, particularly the personal experiences of the women with terrorism, death, and violation of human rights. His personal growth and learning has been profound. At first, he thought it would be difficult for him to connect with the people from Manchay because he was an outsider. “However, to everyone’s surprise, there was a huge demand, especially from women, to share their issues,” says Diego. His age played a role in this, according to Diego. “Because I am young,

it was easier for the women of Manchay to trust me. They rapidly took me in as part of their families, sharing their meals, inviting me to participate in Andean rituals, and we worked together.”

Being a *Ruwasunchis* volunteer has enabled Diago to reconnect with his own Peruvian history and roots. “Witnessing the strength of Manchayan women has particularly reinforced my hope in humankind and human potential,” he says. ■



BUKOLA
in Liberia

GOING THE DISTANCE

Youth participation in developmental processes can be a powerful driver for change. Bukola's initiative to train local youth peer educators on reproductive health aims to ultimately inspire behavioral change across the whole country.

When Bukola Ayanwale (27) arrived in Liberia as a regional volunteer for the ECOWAS Volunteers Programme¹ in 2011, she was eager to make “a positive impact”. Having actively engaged in volunteering in the past, she considered the ECOWAS opportunity as a rare privilege.

Bukola, from Nigeria, was deployed as an English teacher at the Paynesville Community High School in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. Upon her arrival, however, she was taken aback by the high number of pregnant teenage girls she saw in Monrovia: “I saw lots of girls between the ages of 12 and 14 with a big belly, and out of school. I kept wondering, what is happening?” Bukola further learned that 90 per cent of her students, between the ages of 15 and 24, were already parents of one or more children. She also observed that many students dropped out

due to early pregnancies. “I heard stories of how girls lost their lives or suffered severe complications during childbirth, due to the immaturity of their reproductive organs,” she says. “I became motivated to do something to address this issue and educate my students and community members.”

Thus, the idea of starting a community health club to train young peer educators on reproductive health was born. Bukola sought and received financial and technical assistance from the school administration, and organizations such as Save the Children International and the National AIDS Control Programme. In 2012, Bukola’s “Adolescent Reproductive Health Club” was set up at the Paynesville School. Its objective is to train students through a six-month training course, implemented by Save the Children, to become volunteer peer educators in various aspects of reproductive health.

There are currently 56 members in the Club, of whom 35 have successfully qualified to become peer educators. The educators use theatre, role-play, songs and poems to sensitise fellow students and disseminate their messages. They have so far

1. *The ECOWAS Volunteers Programme recruits young professionals from the 15 member states of ECOWAS to promote volunteerism for development, peace and regional integration. Its volunteers are deployed to Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, where they work to strengthen local capacities in a number of development sectors, establish and support partnerships among communities, and promote a culture of peace and gender equality.*



Bukola Ayanwale, ECOWAS Volunteer prepares for a clean-up campaign in Monrovia on International Volunteer Day (Eric Opoku/UNV, 2012).

reached out to 200 youth in different communities in Monrovia. The Club's long-term objective is to enable its educators to become trainer-of-trainers on reproductive health for the whole country. Bukola says there is a growing awareness of the dangers of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases in the communities where the peer educators have been active.

Her experiences in Liberia have provided valuable lessons for Bukola. "I have learned how to work and achieve results in circumstances where resources are limited," she says. "My knowledge of tolerance and acceptance of cultural differences have greatly broadened. I feel so grateful for having this opportunity to impact other people's lives in whichever small way." ■



TENA KEBENA in Ethiopia

EVERY ACTION COUNTS

Long-term development often requires a shift in mindset. The *Tena Kebena* organization, started by two young men, engages young community members in diverse activities on environmental sustainability, fostering a sense of responsibility and reciprocity towards community well-being from an early age.

In 2001 two friends, Alemayehu Akalu and Desalegn Firew, then aged 18 and 17, joined hands to take action against growing pollution and garbage problems in their neighbourhood in the heart of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. With the spirit of *if no one will, we will*, they started the *Tena Kebena* & Ginfle Cleaning Association (or simply *Tena Kebena*), naming their organization after the Kebena and Ginfle rivers that flow through the centre of the capital. *Tena Kebena*'s initial goals were to clean up the two rivers and to plant trees along their banks. The local government provided them with seeds and a piece of land, where they could establish a resource centre.

Since its humble beginnings, *Tena Kebena* has played a remarkable role in creating cleaner and greener neighbourhoods in Addis Ababa, and mobilising community action on sustainable urban development. Supported by around 130 members between the ages of 5 and 30, including 7 staff and 10 volunteers, *Tena Kebena* has implemented activities on environmental protection and urban agriculture,

as well as capacity-building for youth and children. It has organized numerous clean-up campaigns, tree planting, and transforming public spaces into urban commons which the public can enjoy. This includes installing benches under trees along the river banks, and constructing a football field.

Kiya Tsegaye (27), a lawyer, started volunteering with the organization five years ago because he was “fascinated” by the motivation and enthusiasm of its founders. “I was also impressed by the effectiveness of their activities and how I could make a difference,” he says. *Tena Kebena* continues to be a point of reference for the youth. Solomon Girma (26), who had participated in its activities as a child, takes care of the compound and gives presentations to children. “I grew up in this community and I received a lot from it when I was a child. Now that I’m older I want to give something back,” he says.

The garbage-filled plot of land, originally provided to *Tena Kebena* by the government, is now an “urban paradise” that hosts 60 species of plants, including medicinal plants, a vegetable garden



Tena Kebena volunteer Kiya Tsegaye shows his fellow volunteers, Helina Haile and Solomon Girma, that it is possible to grow flowers and vegetables even in old boots. In its green compound, Tena Kebena conducts outdoor activities and eco-solution workshops for the local community (Nicola da Schio / UNV-UNEP, 2013).

and a tree nursery. Projects on sustainable livelihoods, carried out in the compound, including beekeeping and compost-making, generate income for the organization. Members from the larger community are frequently invited to its premises to observe sustainable practices which can be replicated at home. Every year, 200–300 people visit *Tena Kebena's* compound.

In 2009, *Tena Kebena* won the United Nations Environment Programme's *Champions of the Earth Award*. Its staff and volunteers travel around Ethiopia supporting local initiatives on tree planting and clean-ups, and promote the use of medicinal plants and sustainable agriculture. *Tena Kebena's* activities have thus far reached an estimated 10,000 people across Ethiopia. ■



OSVALDO
in
Mozambique

A RUNAWAY'S JOURNEY

Oswaldo, a former street child, found a direction in life through volunteerism as it opened opportunities for him to help others in his community. His volunteer organization today helps many children who are vulnerable to the same fate.

Most of Oswaldo Lourenço's (33) youth was spent on the run. He was just a little boy when a 16-year civil war broke out in his country, Mozambique. At the age of 8 he fled with his family from their village in Zambézia to the safer Sofala province. Living conditions in Sofala were extremely difficult for the whole family. By the age of 10, Oswaldo had dropped out of school, run away from home, and embarked on a life on the streets. Even then, however, in spite of being surrounded by runaways, drugs and juvenile delinquency, Oswaldo nourished "a dream for my future to do something decent and valuable with my life." Oswaldo says he always had a desire to help street children, having suffered the same plight for most of his life.

At the age of 19 he moved to Maputo seeking livelihood opportunities, while attempting to make a living as a traditional musician. It was here that he started voluntarily teaching traditional musical instruments and other forms of art, such as painting, to street children to keep them off the streets. His volunteerism took a turn for the better when he met members of FOMICRES, a volunteer-based organization created by a group

of Mozambican youth. They imparted additional training and guidance to Oswaldo on providing support to street children and orphans, or children from impoverished families. Oswaldo's volunteering with FOMICRES shaped the direction of his life. "My experience as a volunteer showed me that we do not live just for ourselves, but we live to help each other," he says.

In 2005, supported by FOMICRES, Oswaldo and eight of his friends started MUODJO, a volunteer organization for children. MUODJO provides shelter, food and pre-school education for children from impoverished, marginalised families or homeless orphans in Maputo. In order to support their reintegration into the larger community, psychological counselling from psychologist volunteers is also available for the children. Many of the street children are either reintegrated into their families after MUODJO, or leave after learning professional skills.

The implementation of MUODJO's activities is supported by a group of 50 community volunteers, which include doctors, artists and academics that



*Osvaldo interacts with children as they await their meal at the MUODJO Centre. Behind them is the *Escolina Comunitaria MUODJO*, the community school run by MUODJO (Octávio João Manuel Rafael, 2013).*

contribute with their skills and specialisations. Some non-governmental organizations provide MUODJO with food, stationery and clothes. Osvaldo and his team of dedicated volunteers

have helped an estimated 500 children since 2001. At any given time, MUODJO supports 30–40 vulnerable children with food, shelter and pre-school education on a daily basis. ■



CELAL in Turkey

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Volunteerism has opened up the life of Celal, an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. Through his volunteering experiences Celal aims to transform others from being passive recipients of help to living life more fully as active citizens.

All different, all equal is tattooed in Celal Karadoğan's arm, embodying the principle he has tried to live by all his life. Celal (33), from Adana, Turkey, became severely disabled from polio at the age of 11 months, and he grew up wheelchair-bound. Being excluded from community life was the norm for him, including participating in neighbourhood games with his peers.

At the age of 15, however, life changed for Celal when he was asked to resolve a game dispute one day while watching his peers play football. "They needed a third eye and asked for my opinion. I became the referee," Celal explains. From that day, Celal became the unofficial referee for all the neighbourhood games. "This activity gave me self-confidence and made me feel equal to others."

Celal began organizing sports activities in his neighbourhood such as a football league, wheelchair basketball, table tennis, and a summer basketball school for disabled children when he trained 40 children over a 3-month

period. "The most important thing that I learned through my volunteer experiences as a disabled instructor is that I can change the self-perception of children with disabilities in a positive way," he says. He found himself evolving into a volunteer sports instructor for his community, motivated by his determination to open opportunities for participation for other disabled youth.

In 2005, he began campaigning for a Young Disabled Youth and Sports Club in Adana, which initially received little support from both the local municipality and the larger community. Celal persevered, even resorting to a hunger strike so that the municipality would recognise the importance of such an initiative. In the end, he was successful in securing a training slot in the sport facility which serves as a base for his Club. The Club has so far benefitted 1,000 children and young people, with and without disabilities. In 2008 it received funding from the World Bank which enabled Celal to buy equipment necessary to give the Club a head start. It has so far enabled 40 disabled young people to train in athletics, table tennis and swimming.



Celal provides sports training at his summer school for disadvantaged children in Adana (Emrah Davşan, 2013).

Celal volunteers as a facilitator for the Football Awareness League, which he helped initiate, for disabled children aged 10–15. “The happiest moment for disabled volunteers is when they feel they achieve

something. This helps them to be brave in facing other challenges,” says Celal. “Volunteerism opened up my life, and today I am now married with a beautiful wife and child. It has helped me participate in life.” ■

CONNECTING THE DOTS: RIO+20, MDGS AND THE POST-2015 AGENDA

The **2010 MDG Summit** and its related documents, captured through resolution A/RES/65/1, committed to include a broader civil society stakeholder constituency including: “...*non-governmental organizations, **voluntary associations** and foundations, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders at the local, national, regional and global levels, to enhance their role in national development efforts as well as their contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.*”

The tenth anniversary of the **International Year of Volunteers (IYV+10) in 2011** was an opportunity for UNV to convene a wide range of international and national stakeholders and UN partners, governments and civil society.

The **State of the World’s Volunteerism Report (SWVR)** demonstrated the universality, scope and reach of volunteerism along with new trends in the 21st century. It has underlined the diversity, and universality of volunteer actions ranging from social activism to basic service delivery.

In the lead up to the **2012 Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development**, UNV launched the website “**Volunteer Action Counts**” capturing volunteer actions from around the globe. The UN Secretary-General explicitly underlined “*the 64 million individual actions captured by the initiative spearheaded by the United Nations Volunteers.*”

The “**Rio+20**” **Conference** provided the opportunity to develop a more holistic global thinking on sustainable development, integrating the notions of social development, environmental protection and economic growth. The **Rio+20 Outcome document**, through paragraph 43, underscored that sustainable development requires the *meaningful*

involvement and active participation of Major Groups ... as well as other stakeholders including... volunteer groups.

Following the successful recognition of volunteer groups as a relevant stakeholder, volunteer groups were explicitly recognised in July 2013 as official stakeholders with whom member states would interact in their discussions on sustainable development at the **high level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF)**. In the text of the **UNGA Resolution** that defines the architecture of the HLPF, **paragraph 16** officially recognises “volunteer groups” as stakeholders, ensuring a space for engagement with the inter-governmental deliberations on sustainable development in the coming decade.

Finally, the **Report of the Secretary-General** (paragraph 98 of A/68/202) mentions “volunteer groups” as a separate constituency to take into account when implementing the transformative actions of the post-2015 development agenda.

The final UNDG report of the **post-2015 national consultations** conducted in close to a 100 countries also underlines the important contribution of volunteering through numerous country examples.

General Assembly Resolution A/Res/67/138 “*Integrating volunteering in the next decade*” adopted on 20 December 2012, furthermore welcomed “*the creation of momentum in developing common platforms to increase support for volunteerism*” and called upon the integration of volunteering in all relevant issues of the United Nations. It also requested the Secretary-General to “*report to the General Assembly at its seventieth session, on the **plan of action to be developed by UNV to integrate volunteering in peace and development in the next decade and beyond***”. Acting on this resolution will take UNV into a new phase.

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