



National
Volunteering

National Volunteering

Since 2003, VSO has been developing the concept of National Volunteering (NV), encouraging people to understand, influence and own the development of their countries and communities. Through NV, we bring our many years of experience in international volunteering to a local level by supporting people to contribute to their own communities.

We know it is important to involve local people directly in development. NV is a powerful 21st century approach that puts local volunteers, particularly women, at the heart of the development of their communities by increasing their voice and participation in decision making. This builds a greater capacity among local people to influence decision making and change.



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How does National Volunteering work?

VSO uses its expertise to help partner organisations run their own volunteering schemes. We don't recruit our own local volunteers but support more than 200 National Volunteering (NV) partners in more than 35 countries worldwide, helping them to create and coordinate their programmes.

VSO helps its partners to develop high quality schemes that value volunteers, training them and including them in decision making and advocacy. We provide intensive training on volunteer programme development and management to ensure that local volunteers are well supported and managed so that they can bring sustainable change to their communities. VSO programme managers and international volunteers offer technical support and advice to partners as they develop their programmes.

NV programmes are tailored to fit our partner organisations and a broad range of interventions are used. Many NV partners are supported by our international volunteers. We give people in our partner organisations the opportunity to enhance their learning through training opportunities, study tours, network membership, work placement opportunities in the UK and becoming involved in Global Xchange.

We also provide small grants and seed funding to help organisations test their volunteering ideas and get development programmes off the ground.

Benefits of National Volunteering

Because National Volunteering (NV) is not a stand-alone approach to development but works in conjunction with international volunteering and other VSO interventions, it has an even greater impact in alleviating poverty. It also helps VSO to tackle gender inequality and the exclusion of marginalised people through volunteer projects.

Through NV, VSO has been able to sustain strong partnerships and continue to make an impact in areas where international volunteering was no longer possible, for example, in the Balkans, Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

NV has enabled us to develop exciting work with young people, who have so much to offer to the development of their communities. It extends our global reach through networks and partnerships, and helps us to increase our influence in debates around the contribution of volunteerism to development.

Our experience shows us that NV is a cost-effective and creative way to deliver programmes that have a major impact on alleviating poverty. The following pages show examples of VSO-supported NV programmes in action.

Bangladesh

VSO Bangladesh's work with partner organisations focuses on helping to empower and organise local people to participate more in decision making. It also promotes National Volunteering (NV) as a way to achieve broader development goals.

Specifically, VSO Bangladesh and its partners have strengthened community volunteering through the formation of 23 citizens' committees that identify the needs of local people and represent these to 24 Union Parishads (UPs), the administrative districts into which the country is divided. In the past UPs had provided few opportunities for people to have a say in how their communities were run; many communities were unaware of their rights and ill-equipped to participate in the planning and functioning of UPs.

In 2003 VSO carried out a Good Governance (GG) programme aimed at increasing the capacity of UP members and empowering communities to exercise their rights. At the same time, VSO and its partners set up citizens' committees to enable people to develop their community through volunteering. Today these committees are a vital resource representing the majority of indigenous people and minorities who live below the poverty line.

A key aim of the citizens' committees is to develop active citizenship: active citizens are a valuable resource at local and national level, improving the quality of life for the vast majority of people because they embody the shared responsibilities of government and citizens.

Each committee has 17 members who are chosen for their leadership qualities and belief in volunteerism, and they are democratically elected. All members are volunteers and come from different walks of life, including professional people and students, as well as women and those from marginalised groups. To begin with, VSO's partners provided members with training on negotiation, communication and development to improve their leadership capacity.

The committees are a vital link between local government and citizens. They are responsible for instigating development plans for their community and taking these to the UP so that the community's needs are reflected in

budget plans. They play a key role in ensuring that UP planning committees deliver in areas such as education and health. But committee members are also engaged in other aspects of developing their community, such as tree planting and maintaining the environment. One recent example of this co-operation came when a UP asked committee members to draw up a list of local people who had been affected by a cyclone.

In Bangladesh, NV has proven an effective way to provide a community-owned solution to development challenges. National volunteers do not replace paid staff or substitute for a lack of local expertise: instead, they help to develop local know-how and increase capacity for rights-based development and sustainable growth.



Zimbabwe

In an area of Zimbabwe, where high levels of poverty and the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS prevent many enrolling in state schools, a community school supported by VSO is offering children their first chance of an education.

The New Dawn of Hope community organisation was set up in 2003 by people living with HIV and AIDS in the Mufakose district of Harare. With a focus on supporting orphans and vulnerable children, particularly those affected by HIV and AIDS, it was a natural step for the community to open its own school.

One of the problems for many children wishing to enrol in state schools in Zimbabwe is that they require birth certificates, but these might not have been issued because of poor access to a centralised registration system. On a VSO-backed study tour to Zambia, volunteers saw how counterparts provided an education for orphans and other vulnerable children by setting up their own schools staffed by volunteers.

In April 2009, the New Dawn of Hope Community School opened its doors. Desks, chairs, textbooks and other equipment for two small classrooms were provided for with a grant from VSO. A valued volunteer, Mr Muziri, a qualified teacher, offered his services every day at the school educating children not just in reading and writing but in essential life skills such as gardening, nutrition and health. Mr Muziri recently became a paid member of staff and two new volunteer teachers have since been recruited.



Local volunteers identified children between seven and 12 who would benefit most from the new initiative, and the first 30 places were quickly filled. The school has since accepted more pupils but has had to turn away others because of a lack of space. The children's daily attendance is testament to their enthusiasm to learn.

Mr Muziri talks proudly about how attending the school has had a positive effect on one of his pupils, 12-year-old Anna. An orphan living with her grandmother, Anna was too shy and embarrassed to write her name when she started at the school. With her confidence growing daily, she now happily accepts extra homework and is one of the school's most enthusiastic students.

It is hoped that a new three-tier corporate partnership with VSO and a local business enterprise will assist with the school's development. The specific goals include mobilising resources to enable it to grow, and organising sports events and fun days to mitigate any stigma or discrimination suffered by the children. New Dawn of Hope is keen to encourage registration into state schools and aims to emulate the timetable and curriculum of mainstream schools.

However, funding remains a challenge. Teaching resources are limited to a few textbooks. With no toys or audio-visual equipment, Mr Muziri and the volunteers rely on their creativity with simple materials like crayons and paper that often need replacing. Increasing the school's capacity and replicating the initiative elsewhere will be far from easy.



Pakistan

When Ali Hassan asked young people in Sultanpur Hammar, near Multan, what they wanted to do for their village, their response confirmed his belief in the importance of youth volunteer work. They wanted to do something meaningful to overcome poverty and address key problems in health, hygiene and education.

With the help of seven other volunteers and local VSO partner organisation, Awaz, Ali set up the Sahara Youth Forum. Its mission is to improve conditions for a community of some 200 households that lack access to basic rights and services, adequate sanitation and educational facilities.

Ali's experience as a youth participant on a Global Xchange (GX) programme in 2009 proved invaluable to the forum's work. He worked with UK volunteers in Manchester and Mombasa, Kenya, before arriving in Sultanpur Hammar with others from GX. Whilst there he carried out a rapid participatory community needs assessment based on a technique he had learned in the UK. Ali's involvement with GX built on his experience in development issues as a volunteer for the Pakistan Social Welfare Society in Sindh province.

Since the departure of the GX volunteers, the youth forum has grown to 50 volunteers. With the support of Awaz and a continuing commitment from Ali – he has visited the village several times and still mentors the forum from a distance. He has also carried out several training events on project management, gender and budgeting – the forum has achieved significant improvements in a short space of time.

They have secured funding to pave a road which makes it easier for villagers to get around and access markets to sell their products; they have installed dustbins around the village and raised awareness among children and older villagers about health and hygiene; absenteeism at the local girls' primary school has been reduced after money was raised to pay for teachers' transport, and their transport problems were brought to the attention of the district education officer and have now been resolved.

Members of the forum continue to receive VSO training in active citizenship, communication and leadership. A particular challenge has been mobilising girls to join the forum but progress has been made in this area. VSO supported Ali and his team to support Sahara in celebrating International Women's Day which raised awareness of the issues faced by women. Ali's dream now is to set up more groups to build a youth movement in Pakistan.



Kenya

Youth volunteer Sally Ndinya Kesa was working as a field officer when she met a 21-year-old woman working as house help whose life had been devastated by a diagnosis that she was HIV-positive. She recalled the immense satisfaction it gave her to help the woman accept her new situation and move on with her life.

“The diagnosis was like a death sentence to her,” Sally said. “She could not imagine having to go on anti-retroviral treatment and she was worried that she’d be fired.”

Fortunately, Sally, a volunteer with Dream Achievers, part of the National Youth Volunteer Scheme set up by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports (MOYAS), with the support of VSO Jitolee, could counsel her on what to do next. The woman accepted her diagnosis, received treatment and joined a support group. Her employer not only kept her on but offered her financial assistance to access medicine and good nutrition.

Sally said: “Nothing gives me more satisfaction than to watch a person collect the pieces of a broken dream, mend it, and resolve to set out on new ventures. To know I have made a difference with a simple word of encouragement is so rewarding.”

With the help of VSO Jitolee, MOYAS has placed 100 Kenyan local youth volunteers in 11 districts, with a focus on HIV and health. VSO Jitolee has provided technical support, training for volunteers and support in the monitoring and evaluation process. As on other VSO National Volunteering programmes, young Kenyans have gained invaluable skills and experience by volunteering to take a proactive role in their community.



Philippines

In Mindanao, one of the poorest regions of the Philippines that has experienced many years of conflict, VSO has supported a group that promotes peace through development. Volunteers for Kapamagogopa Incorporated (KI) work with grassroots organisations on the issues that are most important to them.

VSO has been involved from the start, helping activists to formulate their ideas and develop an organisation with a unique approach to development. Its young Muslim volunteers undergo training to become “peace weavers” and community leaders among people who have suffered the devastation of war, poverty and natural disasters.

The volunteers help local people to generate income so their children can go to school, deliver sanitation projects to provide clean water, develop livestock projects that enable villagers to maintain working farm animals, increase the amount of food they grow themselves, and deliver voter education programmes that encourage people to use their vote. They have been supported in this by VSO through technical expertise brought by international volunteers, financial assistance supplied through grants and seed funding, and by training and experiential learning opportunities.

KI’s work means the young volunteers are not just contributing to a positive image of Muslims locally and nationally, but are learning and developing into active leaders in their



community, and possibly becoming lifelong volunteers. One volunteer, Norah, summed up the satisfaction of working on a water project “I experienced that water is so significant. It seems people’s lives are saved by the [water] pumps, since they lessen the danger of fetching water from the lake. For me, the root satisfaction in volunteering is the feeling that what you do is important, that you helped them in a way that makes a significant change in their lives.”



Zambia

The Siavonga Nutrition Group (SNG) is helping to improve nutrition and health in villages in Zambia through a range of initiatives that have been supported by VSO.

SNG established their volunteering programme in 2008, recruiting young people who undergo intensive training to develop a strong sense of volunteerism, leadership and a commitment to development.

Before the volunteering programme started the coordinator and an international VSO volunteer were trying to cover all the work, but today SNG has 18 young volunteers who collaborate with 15 women led groups in an area of 17,000 people. This has increased the reach and impact of SNG considerably.

The groups lead a variety of activities aimed at reducing malnutrition. One technique is to find new ways to use locally-grown food in new recipes. Another is to develop income generation activities, where women make food, clothes or household items to sell. All profits from the sales go towards improving the livelihoods of the womens' families and local orphans. With the support of SNG volunteers, the women also put on cooking demonstrations to educate entire villages about different ways to improve their nutrition.

"We accept that things don't change overnight," said one volunteer. "But people are very enthusiastic to see and learn new things, as long as they see that we are willing to do it with them."

SNG illustrates how partner organisations use a range of VSO interventions with lasting results. Local volunteers have worked with international VSO volunteers, who've helped develop their volunteering programme, and provided technical expertise around nutrition, fundraising and organisational development. This partnership involved the short-term participation of a volunteer from VSO's partnership with the Welsh Assembly, who has since gone on to help develop the Siavonga Swansea Partnership.

SNG staff have attended training on volunteerism and volunteer management, and the co-ordinator of SNG recently spent three months in the UK on a work placement through the Commonwealth Professional Fellowship scheme. One young SNG volunteer has taken part in Global Xchange, VSO's youth programme, where her confidence grew tremendously and she was able to share her expertise in community participation approaches with a community in the UK.

India

Banamali Kalsai has first-hand experience of what it means to be marginalised. Growing up in the Harriman or “untouchable” caste in remote Budhipadar, Orissa, he suffered polio as a child and had to overcome the barriers of caste and disability to complete his education and train as a primary school teacher.

Today, Banamali, 28, helps others who are marginalised to access justice and services through his work as a volunteer with the Bolangir Disability Network, the product of a partnership between a local support organisation, ADHAR, and VSO India. This partnership aims to foster the inclusion of marginalised people in development processes. It is one example of how VSO is engaging national volunteers to improve the lives of the poorest people in India.

After the Right to Information Act was introduced in 2005, ADHAR began to mobilise local volunteers to manage Right to Information (RTI) clinics in Bolangir Panchayat, a remote district chosen for the programme because it is prone to drought and has higher levels of poverty than areas of sub-Saharan Africa.

For the past two years Banamali has been one of 36 volunteers who disseminate information about the Act and help others use it to access justice and services. For example, by helping the community to identify local development issues and assisting people to write and submit applications to the information officer.

By helping local people to file RTI applications and access such things as food entitlement programmes, disability certificates and social pensions, as well as get information about legislation such as the National Rural Employment Act, National Volunteers like Banamali are getting positive results.

Many marginalised people have asked for Banamali’s help to file RTI applications about the non-availability of the most basic services. That was the case recently, when locals sought the repair of a hand pump that was supposed to deliver all the local water supply but which had been out of order for two years. Within days of Banamali submitting an RTI application, the pump was fixed and local women no longer had to walk such long distances to collect water.

To do this, Banamali has been equipped with skills and knowledge at training events backed by VSO. Amongst other things he learned about advocacy and disability rights. By supporting Banamali and others to represent the community with local government officials through RTI clinics, VSO has helped to make the local government more responsive to the needs of local marginalised people.



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China

On a recent outing to Tang Paradise, a historical theme park in the city of Xi'an in northwest China, 18 wheelchair users and their volunteer "buddies" from a local university listened to the stories behind the magnificent buildings and interacted with performers during a memorable day out.

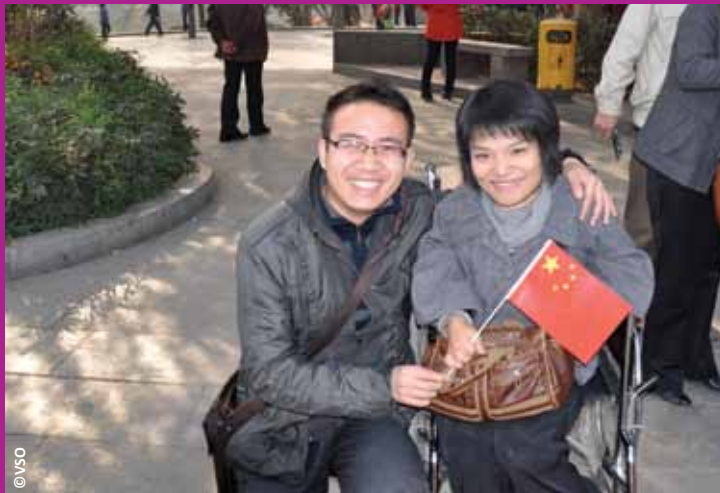
"This is the first time I have come out with a group of other disabled people and I enjoyed it physically and mentally" one young wheelchair user commented. "What touched me most was the enthusiasm and care of the young volunteers."

The excursion was just one example of how a partnership between VSO, Lianhu District Disabled Persons' Federation, and the Shaanxi Western Development Federation is helping local disabled people to socialise as part of wider efforts to promote awareness of their needs.

After research showed many disabled people in Xi'an felt isolated in their homes, and revealed a deep-seated stigma about disability, the three

organisations set up Xi'an's first volunteering centre. Volunteers received training on working with wheelchair users in preparation for the outing.

The partnership has benefited from the mentoring skills of Glen Patrick, a VSO international volunteer with a business background. It has also called on the technical expertise of OKC, a VSO partner organisation that has set up volunteer centres in the Balkans. The aim now is that a Global Xchange programme, organised by VSO, will link the project to similar ones in Beijing and the UK so that young volunteers can learn from each other throughout China and internationally.



Mozambique

Kubatsirana's approach to its volunteers has ensured a steady stream of new recruits for its projects aimed at reducing the spread of HIV and AIDS among vulnerable people, in communities around the city of Chimoio in central Mozambique.

Kubatsirana is a Christian ecumenical association that takes a holistic approach to reducing the spread of HIV and AIDS and mitigating the socio-economic effects of the disease. In local dialect, its name means "to help one another". Christian values are at the core of Kubatsirana and impact both on the motivation of volunteers and their approach to work.

More than 700 volunteers are mobilised through their churches to support people living with HIV and AIDS. The volunteers are trained by a government-licensed, home-based care trainer before they can engage in any support work. The training covers three main areas: understanding HIV and AIDS; primary health care, and providing emotional support.

The organisation, which is backed by VSO, supports volunteers with agricultural seeds, equipment, and income generating skills training. It also provides uniforms and first aid kits, as well as offering ongoing support and training. It is an approach that has ensured continued engagement from the community, with a surplus of people wanting to volunteer.

One of the ways in which Kubatsirana gets local people involved and fights the stigma surrounding people living with HIV and AIDS is to organise family sports events. This includes a girls' football team that regularly attracts young women and orphans. Gardens tended by the volunteers also provide food and even medicinal plants for people living with HIV and AIDS.



Cameroon

In Cameroon a VSO-backed education programme is changing deep-seated attitudes towards the value of education for girls, with the result that many more girls are regularly attending school and continuing their education for longer.

In collaboration with its partner, Réseau des animateurs pour l'éducation des communautés (RESAEC), VSO's education programme aims to widen access to high quality education, especially among girls, in the far north region. The programme recruits, trains and supports national volunteers working alongside international volunteers to deliver the Participatory School Development Plan process.

A key priority and focus for the volunteers is the education of girls, many of whom cease their education at an early age. VSO Cameroon hopes to widen the access to schools for girls and increase their retention within the school education system, as well as to enhance the value of education within the community.

To do this, volunteers are working to create Mothers and Teachers Associations (MTA) which go from village to village addressing barriers to girls' education within the community. Once an MTA is formed, volunteers undertake a range of activities to build capacity within the association. These include providing training in women's and children's rights and leadership; helping MTAs to create income generating activities, and organising literacy classes.

The training provided by volunteers has several tangible results: communities are able to secure funds to pay school fees, ensure that birth certificates are issued so that girls can take part in tests to qualify for secondary school, and promote advocacy of girls' education within the wider community.

By working together, national and international volunteers share their experiences and learn new skills. This collaborative approach ensures that national volunteers remain in the community and continue the work after their international counterparts have left. National volunteers who take part in the programme are valued by the community.

As a result of the programme, the number of girls enrolling and remaining in school continues to rise. But what's most satisfying is that parents are realising the worth and potential benefits of educating their girls and this change in attitude is evident throughout the communities where VSO is active.





Carlton House, 27A Carlton Drive
Putney, London SW15 2BS, UK

+44 (0)20 8780 7500
www.vsointernational.org

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