



Volunteerism and the Post-2015 Agenda



“Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

Introduction

“Despite the overwhelming evidence of the contribution of volunteers to development, they often remain at the margins of development debate.”ⁱ

Helen Clark, United Nations Development Programme administrator

Since the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were first introduced, the international development landscape has become more complex and there is recognition that the development process involves many more partners, not just governments. Within this landscape, volunteer groups are now cited in a range of resolutions as one such important partner. UN Resolution 67/290, for example, which sets up the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), names volunteer groups as an official stakeholder whom member states should involve in their discussion on and monitoring of sustainable development goals.ⁱⁱ

Why? The experience of the MDGs has taught us that, in order to be sustainable, international development cooperation must look beyond technical and financial assistance to people-centred approaches and solutions that are devised from the ground up. It also highlighted the weakness of focusing on the ends while being silent on the means by which development should happen. The act of volunteering is a demonstration of this bottom up approach to development in which civil engagement and accountability to citizens is strengthened. Additionally, volunteering is an important means by which many development goals will be implemented and extended to some of the hardest-to-reach groups.

Volunteers are not a cost-free delivery mechanism but rather are best utilised alongside a well-trained and well-resourced workforce to extend the reach of services and ensure their relevance to the communities they seek to assist. To best leverage the unique contribution that volunteer groups provide in achieving poverty eradication and sustainable development, the Post-2015 framework must recognise and support volunteer groups as a development partner and protect against volunteers' misuse.



Manju Karki studying with her brother Anup Magendranagar, Nepal

What is volunteering?

Volunteering is a basic expression of human relationships. It is about people's desire to participate in their societies and to feel that they matter to others. Volunteering is infused with the values of solidarity, reciprocity, mutual trust, belonging and empowerment, all of which contribute significantly to the wellbeing of individuals, their communities and societies.ⁱⁱⁱ

Volunteers are not a homogeneous group, they are people of all ages and diverse backgrounds with a range of experiences and skills. They can be involved in sharing their skills and time internationally, within their own country or within their own community. They perform a wide range of functions and tasks, from providing information and awareness on HIV/AIDS in the community or hospitals, to overseeing and holding to account service delivery as part of school support committees, health centre committees or village health support groups. They perform 'befriending' roles and provide day-to-day support for older or disabled people, reducing their isolation. They are the backbone of many national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations and social and political movements. These are just a few examples of tasks that volunteers carry out on a daily basis which have a direct impact on many, if not all, development goals, targets and indicators that will form part of the Post-2015 framework.

It is helpful to define a few key elements of volunteering. VSO understands volunteering as a formal as well as informal activity comprising the following key elements:

- It is done out of individuals' free will.
- It is conducted outside the household for the benefit of the wider community.
- It is driven by motives other than financial gain.
- It is not a substitute for paid work.

Increasingly, the role of South to South volunteering, diaspora volunteering, corporate international and national volunteering is being seen as a powerful 21st Century approach that puts local volunteers, particularly women, at the heart of the development of their communities. As Pascal Canfin, the French Minister for Development, put it, "The expansion of South–South and South–North volunteering is a key element to enable mutual enrichment for all countries."^{iv}

The value of volunteering and its contribution to development

Volunteering provides a people-centred and relationship-based development approach. The act of volunteering creates a partnership between the volunteer and the people they are serving, often promoting peace and stability through a process of social inclusion. Additionally volunteers make up a significant proportion of the civil society workforce in many countries and therefore are an essential ingredient in a vibrant and responsive civil society.

Volunteering is helping to the bridge between 'hard' development outcomes, such as increased numbers of children in secondary schools, and the softer development outcomes such as increased community buy-in to solutions, and greater participation and influence of individuals in decision-making processes. It is these softer outcomes that can make development more sustainable.^{ix}

Within the context of a Post-2015 development framework, volunteers support two important and related functions:

- 1. Implementation:** Volunteers are an essential, but often unrecognised, component by which any development framework will be sustainably implemented and extended to some of the most marginalised communities.
- 2. Accountability:** The act of volunteering is often the first route through which individuals begin to actively engage in their community and become empowered to realise their rights.^x Volunteers are also often a catalyst for others to become more active citizens. Volunteers build relationships based on trust with members of their communities and in turn help those communities establish ways of participating in and guiding their own development. This includes helping implement ways in which communities can hold their governments and community leaders to account.

Valuing Volunteerism

If volunteers were a country it would be the 9th largest*



Volunteers extending the reach of services

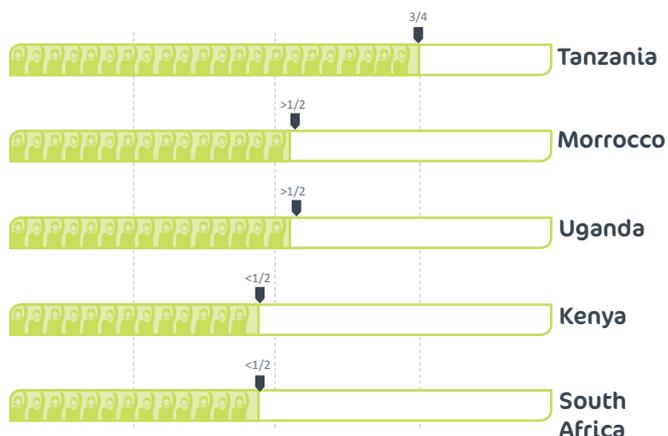


In sub-Saharan Africa, the Red Cross and Red Crescent have 327 volunteers for every paid member of staff.*

*JHCNS, Kings Fund v. vi, vii, viii

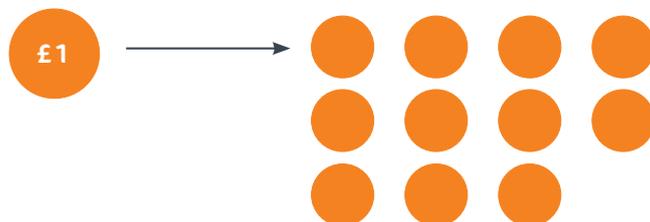
** Amy Galea, Chris Naylor, David Buck, Lisa Weaks. Volunteering in Acute Trusts in England: understanding the scale and impact. Kings Fund, 21 November 2013.

Proportion of volunteers in civil society workforce



How much does volunteering reap financially?

A recent study by the Kings Fund found volunteers contribute more than 13 million hours per year to England's National Health Service (NHS) and every **£1** invested in volunteering service yields **£11** in return



Volunteerism linked to:

1. Extending reach of services
2. Facilitating ownership of development solutions
3. Providing a pathway to active citizenship

The value of volunteering in implementation and accountability structures for Post-2015

1. Volunteering can facilitate the implementation of development targets and strategies in a sustainable and inclusive way by extending the reach of services to the poorest and most marginalised

They do this by strengthening the capacity of the existing workforce and extending the reach of services beyond the capability of the formal systems. For example, the Red Cross Red Crescent network of volunteers extends the Red Cross's reach by a ratio of 1 to 327 in sub-Saharan Africa – meaning that for every paid member of staff, there are 327 volunteers. Globally, they average 20 volunteers to every paid member of staff.^{xi}

Education is a case in point. Between 2000 and 2011, net enrolment in primary education globally increased from 83% to 90%, and the number of children out of school declined by almost half, from 102 million to 57 million. Whilst these are significant milestones, the inequality gap between those accessing education and those out of school remains significant, with children and adolescents from the poorest households at least three times as likely to be out of school.^{xii} The increase in numbers of children attending has also increased class sizes in many countries but without an equivalent rise in the number of trained and qualified teachers.^{xiii} Much is now being written about the 'learning crisis' that plagues education.

Community volunteers are playing a crucial role in addressing the inequality gap. Their work, in all corners of the world, often focuses on extending the reach of education services to those most at risk of being out of school and on strengthening the capacity of schools to provide accessible and inclusive education. In Pakistan, children who had attended after-school reading camps coordinated by community volunteers showed greater learning gains in reading fluency and accuracy than classmates.^{xiv} In the case of the Balsakhi programme in India, which provides targeted support for children in government schools lagging behind their peers, community volunteers are helping to build a more inclusive learning environment both inside and

outside the school. There the volunteers, who come from the same communities as the pupils, use their relationships and networks within the community to gain access to additional resources for the school and encourage collective support for attendance.

Similarly a World Health Organization study on MDG delivery in 2010 confirmed that Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) provide a critical link between the communities and health and social care systems.^{xv} CHVs are often the first to be alerted to a request for medical assistance, or an incident where an individual needs to access or has had difficulty accessing formal healthcare services. These volunteers can then help by highlighting available options for medical care, helping people to access particular services or bringing medication to homes.

It is critical that the work of volunteers should be seen as complementing, not substituting for, strong public service delivery. A United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution of 2001 stated that support for voluntary activities did not imply support for government downsizing or for replacing paid employment.^{xvi} CHVs, like volunteers in education and other sectors, are best utilised alongside a well-trained and well-resourced workforce which in turn can provide some supervision to community health volunteers.

Volunteerism is resource-efficient, not cost-free. In order to tap into the enormous resource that volunteerism represents, the Post-2015 framework must include explicit reference to the role that volunteers play and the parameters within which their work adds value. Doing so will help make the 'leave no one behind' concept a reality because it is volunteers who can help reach the poorest and most marginalised.

Case study

Zimbabwe – extending services to most marginalised people

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 volunteers 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 may not have been issued because of poor access to a centralised registration system. On a study tour to Zambia, however, New Dawn saw how their 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 by small grants, learning exchanges were conducted to Mozambique and Malawi, and the Regional AIDS

Initiative of Southern Africa (RAISA) provided training workshops. 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 twelve 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 others away because of lack of space. The children's daily attendance is testament to their enthusiasm to learn.

Moving forward it is hoped that a new three-tier corporate partnership with 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.



School students put on a play at Mbaem community school, Ghana.

2. Promoting accountability by facilitating shared ownership of development solutions

Volunteering is not just an important vehicle for development, but specifically for participatory development. The way that volunteers work with organisations to support change makes their contribution unique. The volunteer, often a member of the local community or someone embedded within that community, can build relationships based on trust and establish a genuine understanding of need which can take time to develop. Within this context they can then identify and help develop locally appropriate solutions and use their networks with the community to spread awareness or access to public services.

In so doing, volunteering opens up the space for greater ownership by the people of the design and implementation of the policies and programmes that are set up for them. For example, individuals volunteering on local School Management Committees come together to act as a collective force. They begin to represent a link between the community, the school management and the local District Education Office, providing community members with an opportunity to have a greater say in how local education programmes are designed and delivered.

In another example from Mozambique, Kubatsirana, a Christian ecumenical association, takes a holistic approach to reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and mitigating the socio-economic effects of the disease by mobilising 700 local volunteers through their churches to support people living with HIV/AIDS. The volunteers are trained by a government-licensed, home-based care trainer in three main areas – understanding HIV/AIDS; primary healthcare; and providing emotional support – before they can engage in any support work. One of the ways in which Kubatsirana involves local people and fights the stigma surrounding people living with HIV/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/AIDS.^{xvii}

The unique position of such volunteers as people from within the community means that they genuinely understand its needs. However, this can be a potential risk in that volunteers can themselves be some of the poorest and most marginalised people and, in performing their volunteering tasks, are often drawing on their own scarce financial and physical resources. In the case above, Kubatsirana attempts to support its volunteers with agricultural seeds, equipment, and ongoing support and training. However, more needs to be done to ensure that these volunteers are adequately resourced and supported. This includes better policies at the local and national level which embed support for volunteers into donor agreements or country development plans.

Speaking about the importance of the involvement of citizens in development processes, the executive coordinator of the United Nations Volunteering (UNV) programme, Richard Dictus, said, "Lessons from the MDGs have shown that some of the world's leading MDG achievers have recently had to face serious issues related to social cohesion and political instability. In an increasingly connected world, people, and especially young people, are demanding opportunities to shape their lives and engage in the decisions that affect them. If development challenges are to be addressed to benefit the entire society, civic engagement is critical: volunteerism is a way to constructively engage all people, including the marginalized, in enhancing development outcomes and strengthening the overall accountability of the framework."^{xviii}

Case study

Sauti women volunteers devising the solutions

Sauti Ya Wananawake – Pwani, supported by ActionAid, is a grassroots women’s movement which is challenging a patriarchal society and creating social change. With over 6,000 volunteer members working throughout the Coast region of Kenya, Sauti is building a critical mass of marginalised women and girls demanding to be both heard and involved whilst also accessing their full rights and determining their own futures.

Caren Hongo talks about the origins of her volunteer work with the Kisuani branch of Sauti “There were days when I would be woken up three times in the night to go and help a woman who had been battered by her husband or help solve a conflict. All this started being done in my house because we did not have an office. During one of our meetings we discussed and we all agreed that we needed an office in the village and so we approached the local Community-Based Organisation called Bombolulu Self Help Group who have since been housing us at a very low fee of Kshs 1,500 (\$17US) per month. It is here that we meet and also provide counselling services for women in need.” Since all the women are volunteers, the office opens three days a week, and on each of those three days two women sit to receive cases and provide support. This is a rotational task since 30 women have now been trained in counselling, women’s rights, child abuse and paralegal and can therefore deal with most cases. Similar offices are running in other villages where Sauti ya Wanawake is working.^{xx}

However, running this volunteer-driven service is not without its challenges. One of Sauti’s founding members, Binti Ali Kiza, says, “I believe in volunteerism and have been a volunteer here for over 13 years but it is a challenge to us women at the grassroots. For example, I stay all day in the office and have even had times where I have been left with no money to feed my own family... but we carry on. The good thing is that my family, including my husband, support me 100% in what I am doing. When they hear me on the radio, they are so proud. Our work supporting the victims of gender based violence is another challenge. We take girls to the police and to hospitals. Most times, the family have no money and we help out of our own pockets. Many other times when the women have nowhere to go... they have stayed in my house.

“Despite all this, things have really changed for women in Kenya in my lifetime. When I was in primary school, there was only one woman in parliament but now there are so many more and next time we pray there will be more again. Many women from Sauti are now involved with the new county governments and we are represented on development boards. We even have a woman Chief in Mtongwe. These are huge achievements. These days, women in our area can stand and speak in front of men. They can stand and they can be heard.”^{xxi}



The headteacher (R) at one of the schools supported by Mtongwe Community Initiatives. VSO volunteer Juny Abela works as a fundraiser with the NGO which has broad remit to improve access to/awareness of primary healthcare, education, HIV & AIDS, water sanitation and income generation activities. The NGO works with severely disadvantaged women, children and youth in the Mombassa area, Kenya

3. Promoting accountability by creating a pathway and catalyst to active citizenship and participation in decision-making – key aspects of good governance

Volunteering is often one of the first ways in which individuals start to take a more active role within their community, be it the local or global community. It is often through the process of volunteering that they become aware of their rights and ability to lead their own development.^{xxii} Volunteering increases an individual's agency and social capital by allowing them to take on new roles and responsibilities within a community and in so doing prompt their social inclusion.^{xxiii} This is particularly important for people who are often shut out from more formal decision-making processes, such as women and young people. Becoming part of a group gives them the opportunity to identify their collective strengths and the confidence to challenge the social norms that can discourage them from taking an active role in community development.

At the same time, volunteers can act as a catalyst, prompting and helping others to take actions in numerous ways. By helping to organise collective voice, and identifying and seeking out spaces for that voice to be channelled, they increase the average citizen's ability to have a say over services within their community or to hold decision-makers to account. By working closely with community members to amplify their voices and by strengthening civic engagement, they help bolster

a community's 'co-production' with the state or active involvement with public institutions to produce and negotiate the delivery of public goods and services.

Indeed, governance cannot be responsive unless citizens are able to influence the decisions being made. In one example Cath Nixon, a VSO international volunteer, working in collaboration with the Women's Empowerment Action Forum, helped rural women in Nepal mobilise, with leadership training sessions, to act collectively and raise their voices within their Village Development Committees. In this instance, women succeeded in changing the budget allocation to go towards resources addressing women's issues, such as stretchers for women in labour and resources to help victims of domestic violence and abuse.^{xxiv}

On a largely informal level, volunteers can help to strengthen governance by building a culture of peace through understanding and collaboration between different groups. This less visible, and sometimes unintentional, contribution is often overlooked, despite its importance to the process of strengthening governance.



Briony Jenkins, VSO THET paediatric Nurse trainer and her student Pearson Makove examine Petro. Mission Hospital, Nkhoma, Malawi.

Case study

Improving citizens' involvement and accountability measures

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, India, 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.

After the Right to Information Act was introduced in India in 2005, ADHAR began to mobilise local volunteers to manage Right to Information (RTI) clinics in Bolangir Panchayat, a remote district chosen 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.

Volunteers help local people to file RTI applications and additionally to access such things as food entitlement programmes, disability certificates and social pensions, as well as obtain information about legislation such as the National Rural Employment Act.

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

In the process of volunteering, Banamali has learnt about advocacy and disability rights and the work of Banamali and other volunteers is helping make the local government more responsive to the needs of local marginalised people.



Hari Singh Bhat and his wife Jayani Magendranagar, Nepal

How should volunteering be reflected in the Post-2015 framework?

“The transformative actions of the Post-2015 development agenda should be supported by multi-stakeholder partnerships... These should include not only governments but also businesses, private philanthropic foundations, international organizations, civil society, volunteer groups, local authorities, parliaments, trade unions, research institutes and academia. Such partnerships can channel commitments and actions from a wider set of actors, and their success depends on assigning roles, responsibilities and clear accountability.”

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, August 2013^{xxv}

The key contribution of volunteering was not specifically measured in the MDG framework, despite being crucial to its achievement. The Post-2015 framework is an opportunity to cement a model of development that moves beyond financial and technical assistance to a more people-centred approach. In recognition of this, volunteer groups were explicitly recognised in July 2013 as official stakeholders with whom member states should interact in their discussions on sustainable development at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). In the text of the UN resolution that defines the architecture of the HLPF, paragraph 16 officially recognises “volunteer groups” as stakeholders, ensuring a space for engagement with the intergovernmental deliberations on sustainable development in the coming decade.



Teacher Dika Bhandar at Bal Mandir School

How to reflect volunteering within the Post-2015 framework

Where	What	Why
The guiding narrative	Include volunteers as a named partner in development cooperation, building on UN Resolution 67/290 which identifies volunteer groups as a partner with which the HLPF should seek to engage in the delivery and accountability processes of the Post-2015 agenda.	While volunteers can and will be captured within general references to civil society, formal channels typically provide voice and influence to established NGOs, excluding more grassroots civil society organisations or groups, a layer characterised by higher levels of volunteerism. For example, national government consultations often stop at the level of NGOs and do not consider how to engage informal community-based or voluntary groups. However, it is important that, in a Post-2015 world, volunteer groups are seen as a key development partner so that they can facilitate the participation and inclusion of others.
Within goal, target and indicator structure	Ensure an effective participation and governance goal which cements citizens', volunteer groups' and civil society's role in open, transparent governance arrangements.	A key learning from the experience of the MDGs is the realisation that rights, voice and participation cannot be left out of future international agreements and approaches to development, hence the need for a strong participation and governance goal. It should include support for freedom of association, transparency in governance, mechanisms to ensure effective participation and influence of all citizens in decision-making processes and clear direction for government to provide a conducive environment for citizens, civil society and voluntary groups to hold governments to account.
	<p>Proposed indicator 1: Extent of monitoring of and support for the work of volunteers in extending the provision and accessibility of education, health and other services.</p> <p>Proposed indicator 2: Mechanisms at national and local government level which recognise and support the work of volunteers in contributing to sustainable and inclusive education, health and other services.</p>	<p>The Post-2015 framework must support governments to address the shortage of well-trained, well-qualified and well-resourced health and education professionals. Alongside this it should acknowledge the complementary role that volunteers play in supporting the delivery of inclusive services and extending the reach of those services to the marginalised groups.^{xvii}</p> <p>These indicators recognise that volunteers play, and will continue to play, a complementary role in supporting the delivery of inclusive services that meet the needs of some of the marginalised groups. These indicators will help governments to measure that contribution and, in the long term, show how and where volunteers can be better integrated into national policies and strategies.</p> <p>Recognition also ensures support, in the form of resources, training, supervision and social protection, that will help volunteers to carry out their roles. There is a risk that if the role of volunteers is not recognised within the Post-2015 framework then an increased burden will be placed on volunteering to complement the delivery of services without being adequately supported to do so.</p>
Means of implementation	We must avoid the pitfalls of the MDGs which focused on the end goal without defining the means.	<p>While capital flows, infrastructure, institutional capacity building and knowledge transfer are fundamental to address poverty and inequality, discussion on the means of implementation of the Post-2015 agenda must go further. Any discussion on Means of Implementation must take into account the role of all partners, including those, like volunteers, who have traditionally been invisible.</p> <p>If supported and structured properly, volunteers can and will support the implementation of the Post-2015 framework in a way that ensures it reaches the the poorest and most marginalized people.</p> <p>They can help to ensure its legitimacy and sustainability by developing bottom-up approaches and supporting citizens, especially some of the most marginalised, to hold all development actors accountable.</p>

Conclusion

The Post-2015 framework will set development focus and ambition for the next 15 years, determining the direction of political will, scarce resources and funding commitments. It is imperative that this framework, and the Means of Implementation and accountability mechanisms created around it, sets out a type of development that is people-centred and that reaches the poorest and most marginalised.

To do this the Post-2015 framework must look beyond the traditional development approaches and actors. In practice, the Post-2015 development framework will have a significant impact on volunteers regardless of whether they are acknowledged within it or not. This is because it will affect government policy and that of NGOs. But in order to maximise the positive contributions that volunteerism can make, and protect against its misuse, it is important that the framework acknowledges and supports this vital resource.

There have been attempts to do this. While volunteer groups were not referenced in the MDGs, they have been cited in various UN declarations for their key role in MDG delivery. However, until now this has largely remained lip service. The challenge now is to include volunteer groups as a meaningful partner in Post-2015 development cooperation. They should be included in any strategies drawn up on how the framework will be implemented at a national and local level, and thought given to what infrastructure is needed to support volunteers to maximise their numerous positive contributions. This will in turn help to contribute to more sustainable and people-centred development solutions.

About VSO

VSO is the world's leading independent international development organisation that works through volunteers to fight poverty in developing countries. We promote volunteering as a powerful and practical way to tackle poverty and inequality because we believe it is only when individuals step forward – either as local, national or global citizens – that meaningful and sustainable change happens.

Between 2013 and 2014 alone, VSO placed 1,454 national volunteers and 1,279 international volunteers across 32 countries. As a result of these volunteer and partner organisation partnerships, more than 3 million people are accessing better-quality HIV/AIDS services, 2 million children are receiving a better education, and more than a million marginalised people are benefiting from VSO-supported secure livelihoods services.

VSO is a member of The International Forum on Development Service (known as Forum), a global network of international volunteer cooperation organisations. VSO is also a strategic partner of United Nations Volunteers (UNV). We also work closely with multilateral organisations worldwide, at programme as well as policy and advocacy level, such as the European Commission (EC), UNICEF and the World Bank.

VSO is currently undertaking a two-year global action research project called 'Valuing Volunteering' in partnership with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to understand how, when and why volunteering affects poverty. The emerging findings from this research have helped to inform the evidence base for this paper.

If you have any queries about VSO's Post-2015 work, please contact post2015@vsoint.org

Endnotes

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