

## 4 Making the Connection: Volunteering and the Millennium Development Goals

### plaatsbepaling

Marijke Steenbergen,  
Raad van Bestuur CIVIQ

In 2000 zijn de leden van de Verenigde Naties (VN) overeengekomen om de zogenoemde 'Millennium Ontwikkeling Doelen' (MDG's) gerealiseerd te hebben in 2015. Deze hebben betrekking op het terugdringen van armoede, honger, ziekte en vervuiling, het stimuleren van onderwijs, gelijkheid tussen de seksen en dergelijke<sup>1</sup>. Ambitieuze doelen die - indien daadwerkelijk gerealiseerd - van de wereld een betere plek maken.

In het artikel van Brewis en Ellis wordt onderzocht wat de bijdrage van vrijwilligers is met betrekking tot het realiseren van de MDG's. Het artikel is geschreven op basis van literatuuronderzoek en een enquête.

In algemene zin concluderen beide onderzoekers dat de bijdrage van vrijwilligers aan ontwikkeling vaak niet voldoende erkenning krijgt en ondergeëerd wordt door overheden en veel ontwikkelingsorganisaties. Dit blijkt onder andere uit het feit dat vrijwilligers niet meegenomen zijn in de nationale campagnes voor de realisatie van de MDG's. Dit zou onder meer het gevolg zijn van: gebrek aan kennis over vrijwillige inzet en weerstand bij ontwikkelingsorganisaties om met vrijwilligers te werken omdat deze te weinig expertise of ervaring hebben om met lokale gemeenschappen te werken. Feiten en hardnekkige vooroordelen die - zoals wij weten - ook op andere terreinen rond vrijwillige inzet spelen.

Vervolgens gaat het artikel verder met het schetsen van gebieden, gekoppeld aan de MDG's waarop vrijwilligers actief zijn en/of kunnen zijn. Ook benoemen de auteurs stappen die genomen moeten worden om de banden tussen vrijwillige inzet en ontwikkeling beter te begrijpen en uit te bouwen.

Dit artikel focust op een belangrijk mondiaal onderwerp en ambitie. Een ambitie die mij persoonlijk sterk aanspreekt. De MDG's zullen nooit werkelijkheid worden zonder de inzet en betrokkenheid van grote groepen burgers. Het artikel mist op onderdelen diepgang en onderbouwing, maar maakt helder hoe stevig er nog ingezet moet worden op het zichtbaar maken van de bijdrage van vrijwillige inzet.

<sup>1</sup> Via Google is veel informatie beschikbaar over de MDG's of desgewenst over de Millennium Ontwikkeling Doelen.

# Making the Connection: Volunteering and the Millennium Development Goals

*“Achieving the Millennium Development Goals will require the ingenuity, solidarity and creativity of millions of ordinary people through voluntary action” (UN Volunteers, 2005a)*



*Georgina Brewis and Angela Ellis  
Institute for Volunteering Research*

## Introduction

In July 2005, more than one million people squeezed into ten venues across four continents for Live 8, a 24-hour music extravaganza designed to lobby the world's most powerful leaders on issues of poverty reduction and debt cancellation. In the same week 200,000 people marched on Edinburgh, UK, to add their voices to the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (G-CAP). Meanwhile, across the globe hundreds of thousands of others were, and continue to be, engaged on international volunteering projects; and millions were volunteering closer to home, on projects in their own countries and communities.

Although they may not have known it, many of these volunteers were in one way or another contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Through attending the concerts, for example, individuals from a number of different countries showed solidarity with the people of Africa, who face many of the challenges that the MDGs seek to tackle. The marchers were helping to raise public awareness of the MDGs, and at the same time were increasing the pressure on governments to achieve them. International volunteers around the globe engage in development projects that help to meet the MDGs in different ways, such as increasing access to education, improving health care and sanitation, and tackling the spread of HIV/AIDS. Each day in their own communities, many millions of volunteers give time to community development projects, work together on micro-finance initiatives and take part in peer education campaigns on HIV/AIDS, to give just a few examples. Not only are many of the volunteers unaware of the wider impact of their actions, more critically many policy makers, it seems, are also failing to make the connection.

In the year 2000, world leaders signed up to the Millennium Declaration, agreeing to work towards a set of objectives for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and environmental degradation and promoting access to education and gender equality (see box on page 40). Enshrined in the Declaration, all 189 UN member states have pledged to meet the MDGs by 2015. This year has seen the first major review of the world's advancement towards the achievement of these goals at a UN summit in September, with numerous national and supra-national reports being published (see for example, HMG, 2005; European Commission, 2005). 2005 has also seen the publication of a new development plan to achieve the goals (UN Millennium Project, 2005), and, more generally, a growing call from around the world to step up the fight against poverty. Indeed, 2005 has been dubbed 'The Year of Development' (Sachs, 2005).

The latest reports show progress has been made towards achieving the MDGs, with some countries making notable progress in meeting targets. The UN summit in September showed that there is still a long way to go, however, and many of the poorest countries are still judged to be way off track (Sachs, 2005). Yet commentators argue that the MDGs are still achievable, and that what is required is a scaling up of investment in targeted sectors and regions.

Few of these reports and reviews, however, make any reference either to the ongoing contribution of volunteers to achieving the MDGs, or to their potential to act as a significant force for change. Within this article, we argue that with ten years left to go to achieve the MDGs, the time is ripe for the volunteering movement to pick up the pace, get its voice heard, get the contri-

bution of volunteers recognised, and get their role enhanced.

### Survey Methodology

Commissioned by United Nations Volunteers (UN Volunteers) as a review of global developments in volunteering since International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001, the Institute for Volunteering Research's (IVR) study involved a survey of civil society organisations, governments, UN system agencies and international volunteer involving organisations alongside a literature review. Questionnaires were distributed through a snowballing technique, via UN Volunteers staff and networks of volunteer organisations. One hundred and sixteen completed responses were received from civil society organisations from 87 countries and a Latin American booster sample provided a further 205 responses from 16 countries. There was a lower response rate to the surveys of governments and international organisations, rendering quantitative data from these surveys unreliable; they do, however, provide interesting case study information. In addition 12 UN different agencies responded to the survey. This paper does not report directly on the detail of the findings of this (unpublished) survey, but it does draw more broadly on the themes and lessons emerging from undertaking the review, many of which were incorporated into the UN's report on the follow-up of the implementation of the International Year of Volunteers (see UN, 2005).

### Volunteering: A global phenomenon

Voluntary action takes many forms across the globe and has different meanings in different parts of the world. Davis Smith (2000) has developed a four-part framework for understanding this vast spectrum of volunteering. He argues that volunteering can take the form of self-help or mutual aid; philanthropy or service to others; participation; advocacy or campaigning. All these different forms of volunteering are central to the global campaign to achieve the MDGs.

Evidence suggests that volunteering across the world is on the increase. The recent review of developments in volunteering since IYV found that levels of awareness of volunteering are increasing around the world and in many cases this is leading to an increase in the number of people taking action (UN, 2005). Similarly, a recent review of global civil society found a massive upsurge of organised voluntary action in virtually

### The Millennium Development Goals in Summary

1. Halve extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce under-five mortality by two-thirds
5. Reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters
6. Reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development, with targets for aid, trade and debt relief

every region of the world; a growth which the authors dubbed a 'global associational revolution' (Salamon, Sokolowski and List, 2003:1). There have also been developments in international volunteering, with recent trends pointing to an overall growth in the number of people volunteering across borders and the emergence of new, more mutually beneficial forms of international volunteering including exchanges of volunteers between developing countries (Davis Smith, Ellis and Brewis, 2004).

Our review suggested that IYV 2001 had acted as a catalyst to the development of voluntary action in many countries. The human and physical infrastructure for volunteering has been strengthened in many countries over the past five years, with, for example, the creation of networks of volunteer centres and online databases of volunteering opportunities. Governments, the media and the private sector are becoming more interested in volunteering, and attempts have also been made to create supportive fiscal and legal frameworks for volunteering. Inevitably perhaps, this growth in activity and support has not been consistent around the world: for instance only half of respondents to the survey felt that their government had actively tried to create a favourable environment for volunteering, but it does add up to a considerable expansion of activity (UN, 2005).

### Reviewing the Contribution of Volunteering to the MDGs

Volunteers have for a long time played an important role in development, yet their contribution often goes unrecognised and under-valued by governments and,

indeed, by some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). This lack of recognition has been true for their contribution to the achievement of the MDGs. IVR's volunteering review, for example, found that despite growing support for volunteering generally since IYV 2001, there was still a common lack of understanding of the importance of volunteers in development among governments in both the North and the South. Very few governments, for example, were reported to be taking volunteering into account when planning for development (UN, 2005). Even fewer were linking volunteering to their national campaigns to meet the MDGs.

A number of factors can be identified that prevent volunteering being mainstreamed into development planning to achieve the MDGs. Firstly, as is made clear by the findings of our survey, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the contribution volunteers can make, reinforced by a lack of research data on the scale and nature of volunteering in many countries. Traditions of centralised planning, remote from people and communities, and lack of experience of partnering with civil society organisations or volunteer networks in planning for development can foster suspicion and a lack of trust on both sides. Volunteers are not always organised into identifiable partners for governments to work with and local volunteer organisations can suffer from limited technical knowledge, financial capital and links to policy makers. In some countries, weak civil society and restrictions on political activities such as campaigning or lobbying reduce opportunities for volunteering. Furthermore, some professional development NGOs may be reluctant to engage with volunteers (especially young and low skilled volunteers), who they perceive to be as lacking technical expertise or experience of working in local communities. This can be exacerbated for international volunteers who may be seen to have difficulties adjusting to a new language or culture. See for example the opposition of some NGOs to the proposed creation of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aids Corps (VOICE, 2003).

A number of key players are, however, fighting to get volunteering recognised. UN Volunteers has been calling for volunteering to be placed higher on the development agenda within the UN, and have repeatedly sought to emphasise the role of volunteers in achieving the MDGs (see for example UNDP, 2003; UN Volun-

teers, 2005b). Global volunteer networks such as the International Association of Volunteer Efforts (IAVE) and the World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS) have also advocated for an enhanced role for volunteers. Writing in a joint publication they argued:

*"The MDGs are owned by the people. The role of volunteers as MDG campaigners is essential in connecting the global community and its people around the goals"* (UNV, CIVICUS, IAVE, 2003: 21)

The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, has himself given recognition to the role of volunteers:

*"If the world is to make progress in implementing the Millennium Declaration and move decisively towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, it will need people everywhere to be involved. Volunteerism continues to be a powerful and productive channel for that engagement"* (UN, 2004)

Indeed, General Assembly resolution 57/106 on the follow up to IYV 2001 recognised that volunteer contributions will help achieve the MDGs. These contributions are currently being made in a number of ways across the eight MDGs. Below we outline just a few illustrative examples, drawn from secondary data sources, under five headings that reflect the whole spectrum of voluntary action. In many cases, each form of action and subsequent impacts, have implications for more than one MDG.

#### *Empowering individuals and communities*

Volunteering can help reduce dependency and promote empowerment. Too often development 'solutions' leave local people out of the equation, but active participation in development by individuals and communities is important in finding workable solutions. Volunteering is therefore a crucial empowerment tool, building skills and confidence and enabling self-help.

For example, the YES Campaign is a grassroots movement operating in 70 countries that seeks to promote youth employment (see YES Campaign, 2004). It has evolved as a mechanism to achieve the MDGs through the infrastructure being built at the local level. YES country networks are led by youth leaders and involve young people as members and volunteers in multi-stakeholder partnerships with governments, NGOs,

the private sector, and training institutions. The YES networks build the capacity of young people to see development challenges as opportunities for employment and serve as a platform for addressing many of the MDGs. For example, many of the networks have developed anti-poverty initiatives such as micro credit schemes. Others have launched HIV/AIDS initiatives in response to the local situation, helping to address MDG 6.

#### *Providing services*

Harnessing the skills, experience and enthusiasm of volunteers is essential in the campaign to meet the MDGs. Millions of volunteers across the globe deliver services and work on projects that already directly contribute to achieving the MDGs. In Uzbekistan, for example, national volunteers are helping to achieve MDG 6 by volunteering at Trust Points around the country. Trust Points provide vulnerable groups with counselling and information on HIV/AIDS as well as practical help such as syringe and condom distribution. Volunteer involvement has greatly improved the efficiency of the services (UN Volunteers, undated).

A major contribution of volunteers in many countries is to immunisation campaigns. In Togo recently, 7,000 volunteers were involved in the distribution of 700,000 insecticide treated mosquito nets and the vaccination of 900,000 children. The added value of volunteering is often in the communities' ownership of services through participation in their delivery. In Albania, for example, micro-credit groups help combat poverty and hunger (and so contributing to MDG 1) by strengthening the capacity of the local population to improve basic needs and nutrition (SEDA, 2004).

#### *Raising awareness*

Volunteers play a key role in raising awareness of development issues in general and of the Millennium Declaration in particular. People in Brazil, for example, had a very low level of knowledge and understanding of the MDGs until the launch in 2004 of the National Citizenship and Solidarity Week, backed by politicians of all parties (Alliance, 2005). Volunteers working in cross-national partnerships create innovative ways to promote local and international development issues. For example, the Sister Cities Initiative linked three pairs of communities across the world to raise awareness of the MDGs. Three US cities were linked with

cities in Morocco, Ghana and Tajikistan to raise awareness about specific roles local governments and citizen groups can play in reaching MDG targets they have identified as priorities. In Tamale, Ghana, for example, this was to raise awareness about sanitation and related health issues.

International volunteers also make an important contribution to development awareness on their return to their home countries. Volunteering, especially for a prolonged period in another country, has a significant impact on individuals' lives and can influence attitudes, behaviour and career choices (DfID, 2003). Moreover, returned volunteers constitute a pool of people with first hand international development experience. For example, returned VSO volunteers have been found to make significant voluntary contributions to fair trade campaigns, international solidarity campaigns and to play a role in increasing understanding of development issues among the public (*ibid*).

#### *Campaigning for change*

Volunteers across the world are involved in campaigns on a wide range of issues related to the MDGs: poverty reduction, human rights and promoting gender equality to name a few. Such campaigns can be global in scope, like those of the environmental organisations Greenpeace and the US-based Environmental Defense Fund, which harness the power of volunteers in campaign work to achieve MDG 7. Another example of global campaign work is the Micah Challenge, launched in 2004 by the Archbishop of Cape Town to encourage Christians across the globe to lobby, campaign, and pray for governments to achieve the MDGs. It runs through a number of national campaigns, so far established in a number of countries including Australia, India, the UK and Zambia and as a first step people are being asked to sign an on-line commitment and petition.

Campaigning is also done at the local and regional levels, for instance the recently inaugurated African Women's Millennium Initiative on Poverty and Human Rights (AWOMI) calls for a 'meeting of the minds and efforts between grassroots women, activists and intellectuals in the continent' on gender quality and social justice (see [www.globalfundforwomen.org](http://www.globalfundforwomen.org)). Hundreds of thousands of local campaigns spearheaded by volunteers also contribute to achievement of the



MDGs, from adult schooling campaigns in Delhi and Calcutta to citizen action environmental campaigns in rural Ohio.

#### *Partnerships and global solidarity*

By becoming partners in global alliances volunteers can promote global solidarity. Solidarity can be expressed in a variety of ways from signing petitions to online volunteering to participation in campaigns. The 'Send My Friend to School' campaign, for example, organised by the Global Campaign for Education, involved children from one hundred countries making three million paper 'buddies' which were sent to the embassies of G8 countries to raise awareness of the one million children not able to attend school (see [www.sendmyfriend.org](http://www.sendmyfriend.org)). Using the internet to build cross-national partnerships is an increasingly used development tool; UN Volunteers, for instance, runs an online volunteering programme that has more than 12,000 individuals registered to work on the development issues that are at the core of the MDGs.

#### **Where next for volunteers and the MDGs?**

The stories above barely scratch the surface of the many different ways in which volunteers contribute to the MDGs, but they do highlight the breadth, depth and value of such activities. It is clear that volunteers have a crucial role to play in development, and their participation will be vital in helping meet the MDGs over the next ten years. In order to ensure that this potential is maximised, however, UN agencies, national governments, and NGOs have a responsibility to first recognise the role and contribution of volunteers and second to help facilitate their participation in the global campaign. Our research shows that the links between volunteering and development are currently not well understood and 2005 presents an important opportunity to review progress and re-emphasise priorities. Here, we outline a number of key steps that we think need to be taken:

#### *Raising the profile of volunteers' existing contributions*

- Volunteer involving organisations and informal associational networks have a role to play in bringing the work of volunteers to the attention of policy makers and planners. Rewarding and recognising volunteers through awards and ceremonies, enhanced positive media coverage, and more formal lobbying of government, can help achieve this.

- Countering negative stereotypes and broadening people's understanding of volunteering is an important step in beginning to recognise and value volunteer contributions. In some developing countries, the most visible development volunteers are international, usually from wealthy countries, yet many locally supported activities, from self-help to campaigning to service provision, fall under the banner of volunteering but are not being fully recognised as such. There is then a need to recognise the contribution of all forms of volunteering and of all volunteers.
- Volunteers themselves have an advocacy role to play in making others aware of their activities, through personal networks, through the media, through lobbying governments and through increasing their employers' understanding of their contributions where relevant.
- Organising events to mark key dates, such as International Volunteer Day on December 5th, is a visible way for the volunteering movement to raise awareness of its potential role in development. Volunteer groups in some countries have already linked celebrations of the event to the MDGs.

#### *Enhancing volunteers' contribution to the achievement of the MDGs*

- Citizens in both North and South have an important role to play in bringing the MDGs to greater prominence among governments, civil society organisations and the private sector as well as the general public. The role of individual citizens in campaigns is important because it legitimises calls on governments for, say, the prioritisation of the MDGs.
- Volunteers have a crucial role to play in developing the global partnership for development that is the aim of Goal 8. Reaching out to form links with volunteer groups in other countries is one way to do so, for example, through twinning initiatives like the Sister Cities initiative described above. Partnerships also provide opportunities to learn from one another and to be able to replicate programmes and projects that work across communities and across national borders.
- Volunteers across the world already play a key role in service provision. This could be enhanced by linking volunteers' work more closely to the achievement of the MDGs. For example, international volunteering projects should bring in volun-

teers to work on the most relevant targets to a particular community, and to plan these projects in partnerships with local volunteer networks.

- Volunteers can hold governments to account on their progress towards achieving goals and in supporting the governments of other countries to meet the targets and monitoring their progress in doing so.
- The role of volunteers needs to be highlighted in national, and supra-national, plans and reviews on the progress towards achieving the MDGs. This could be better achieved through volunteer networks or national volunteer centres lobbying their national governments. Without this top-level recognition of volunteering their contributions will continue to be under-valued and under-used.

#### *Taking the research agenda forward*

- Further research on the role of volunteers in development and their specific contributions to the achievement of the MDGs over the next ten years is needed to help raise the profile of volunteering. Our survey demonstrated a link between the quantity and quality of research on volunteering in a country

and the value accorded to volunteering by policy makers in the government of a country. Increased research on the scale and nature of all forms of voluntary action and the impacts of volunteering, as well as better dissemination of research findings, are therefore important in enhancing policy makers' knowledge and understanding of what volunteers have to offer.

- Creating and strengthening links between researchers between countries, particularly between those in the South and those in the North, will be important in improving and extending research on voluntary action to all parts of the globe. Twinning programmes between agencies or exchange of personnel can facilitate cross-national learning on such key areas as: conducting national surveys on volunteering; comparing different forms of voluntary action across the globe; involving communities in research; developing methods to best assess impacts.
- Other key areas for research include: the role of volunteers within the UN system; the barriers (economic, cultural, political) to volunteering; the long-term and short-term impact of international volunteering programmes on community development.

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