

United Nations Volunteers

The UNV programme and its Special Voluntary Fund (SVF)

1996

The United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) was established in 1970 through General Assembly Resolution 2659 to serve as the volunteer arm of the UN system. UNV, which is administered under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It is one of the foremost suppliers of experienced professional personnel in support of the initiatives of governments, non-governmental and community-based organisations, and of the UN system itself. In addition to technical co-operation and community-focused development work, UN Volunteers work in promotion of private and public enterprise, humanitarian relief and rehabilitation, and within peace-building and electoral operations of the UN.

The Special Voluntary Fund (SVF) was established in 1970 to support the activities of the newly founded United Nations Volunteers programme and in particular to meet the external costs (international travel, insurance, settling-in-grants) of volunteers.

Since the 1992 UNDP Governing Council decision (GC 92/35) to apply general purpose contributions to the Special Voluntary Fund, the SVF has acted as the principal catalyst for UNV to explore new thematic areas, partnerships and execution modalities.

Pilot and experimental projects cover:

- grassroot development initiatives, support to community, women and youth groups, emergency relief preparedness and thematic areas such as HIV/AIDS, the environment and the urban sector;
- the briefing of UNV Specialists and the training of Domestic Development Service country specialists and fieldworkers, and government officials and representatives from non-governmental organisations;
- special recruitment campaigns aimed at enhancing the universality and quality of candidates.

A selection of examples of volunteer-based initiatives which the SVF is supporting is provided below.

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Bringing People's Voices to Istanbul: The SVF and HABITAT II ...

UNV Support to "Bringing People's Voices to HABITAT II"

Recognising the important role of civil society in bringing about change, HABITAT II seeks to guarantee maximum input from the NGO community in establishing and implementing the HABITAT Agenda centered on "Sustainable Human Settlements in an Urbanising World" and "Adequate Shelter for All".

Many of the most innovative and effective solutions to urban problems have resulted from volunteer-based action taken at the local level, often through the action of community-based organisations (CBOs) supported by NGOs. Volunteer contributions in the shelter sector include: efforts aimed at improving environmental/living conditions, by upgrading shelter and associated infrastructure; obtaining the right to settle on a piece of land; arranging for waste disposal; assisting street children; organising security measures; and attempting to establish access to utilities such as water supply and electricity. At present, much of the innovative local volunteer response to the problems of achieving adequate shelter and sustainable human settlements goes unnoticed and does not impact on the policy level. Since the power of volunteer work is not always fully appreciated, important lessons and experiences are often lost.

"Bringing Peoples Voices to HABITAT II" is a campaign to ensure that community-based organisations and peoples organisations within urban poor communities provide inputs to the conference and take back to their communities the HABITAT Agenda. An important dimension of the BPVH campaign is awareness-raising at the community level about the implications of HABITAT II on human settlement problems both at field and policy levels. The campaign is based on the existing organisational structure provided by the regional, sub-regional and national network linkages of NGOs and will be conducted through selected focal points/NGOs in countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It includes a strong gender dimension as a result of lobbying from the HABITAT II NGO Women's caucus and the involvement of strong networks such as the Asian Women and Shelter Network and gender focused NGOs such as the Women's Advancement Trust.

The SVF in Burundi: Volunteers building confidence...

UNV assistance to humanitarian relief and confidence building in Burundi

This SVF initiative supports the efforts of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative (SRSG) in Burundi to achieve national reconciliation and to create a climate of confidence for community-based reconstruction and peace-building. The project seeks to demonstrate that inter-communal peace-building efforts by the United Nations can be enhanced effectively through the use of experienced UN volunteers as conflict resolution facilitators. The objectives

of the project are to promote peace-building efforts in Burundi by supporting an enabling environment for the fostering of inter-group dialogue and helping to initiate a nucleus of national capacity for conflict resolution mediation and facilitation; and (iii) identifying and promoting confidence-building measures at community-level.

UNV provided three short-term advisors to facilitate a major Seminar on Democracy and Governance which was organised by the SRSG with support from USAID and the European Union in late January 1994. Some 200 participants attended the Seminar from various segments of Burundi's government, civil, business, and military society as well as leaders of political groups and the diplomatic community. This Seminar provided the opportunity to assemble and identify information on the root causes of the conflict. The Seminar contributed to building co-operative relationships and to generate agreement of previously conflicting parties to a common agenda leading to conflict management and community reconciliation.

Since August 1994, two international UNV "Peace Advisers" established networks and strengthened contacts with international NGOs, local groups and civil society associations as well as national and provincial government institutions, with view to rebuild confidence and trust and to promote awareness and respect of human rights and inter-communal partnership. While one UNV has focused on diplomatic intervention support to the SRSG, the other concentrated on work with social activities and grass-roots projects with small self-help groups. Both UNV Specialists have assisted in the implementation of a number of peace projects and organisation of social, cultural and sports events. A significant achievement of one of the UNV Peace Advisers, who was later offered the Project Manager's position with the SRSG's Office, was the launching of the multimedia information and education campaign - including radio and TV spots, programs, seminars, films, journals, etc. - under the theme "Peace, Tolerance, and Reconciliation" with extended coverage in the country. This activity, accomplished in co-operation with local NGOs and the Ministry of Communication, involves resource mobilisation efforts for small projects in the media field. A third UNV Specialist joined the team early November 1995 to provide assistance to the Communication (multimedia campaign) Project Manager.

Building on the positive experience and the good image the project has gained in Burundi, a second phase is envisaged to continue and extend the activities which for security reasons have been concentrated in Bujumbura area to reach other regions in the country.

Eco-Volunteers: The SVF goes global...

Eco-Volunteers and community-based environmental programmes

The Eco-volunteer concept was developed in the follow-up to the UNCED Conference in Rio. The "Eco-vol" programme, one of the first and very experimental SVF initiatives, was launched in 1992 in partnership with two NGO networks: the International Secretariat for Water (ISW) and the Environmental Liaison Centre (ELCI). The underlying idea was to identify a new type of volunteer working in environment and development at the grass roots level:

eco-volunteers, individuals who have distinguished themselves within their communities for their leadership in resolving local-based environmental problems. Emerging from this idea, the programme aims at supporting innovative approaches to sustainable development. The strategy is to revitalise indigenous technical knowledge and promote active exchange

between community-based groups.

In 1993, the programme received additional funding through UNDP Special Programme Resources (SPR). Present operations are carried out in thirteen countries: Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Egypt, India, Philippines, Poland, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uruguay, Uganda, Zimbabwe.

National volunteers are working on the ground with ELCI-member NGOs in various countries: Canada (Falls Brook Centre) Costa Rica (Arbofilia), Philippines (Lingkod Tao Kalikasan), Poland (Polski Club Ecologia) and Zimbabwe (Glen Forest) . In these countries, Eco-volunteers are involved in activities such as water conservation, creation of green areas within urban environments and promotion of aboriginal knowledge. Programme activities were recently launched in South Africa. At a workshop held in March 1995 which brought together the national volunteers working together on the Eco-volunteer programme, participants unanimously agreed on the importance of continuing the Eco-volunteer approach as a means to stimulating local leadership capacity.

As the programme nears operational completion, activities have focused on monitoring evaluation and strategies for replication, fund-raising and scaling-up of activity. A participatory evaluation of the overall programme is currently underway.

Living with HIV/AIDS: A new SVF partnership initiative...

UNV support to people living with HIV and AIDS

In its continuing endeavours to support community efforts to respond to the pandemic and strengthen networking among people living with HIV and AIDS, UNV has embarked on a new scheme - supporting people living with HIV and AIDS. The project is a pilot initiative designed to involve people living with HIV and AIDS in an active and effective manner in all aspects of AIDS prevention, care and support. It has been designed on the premises that people living with HIV/AIDS are potentially the most effective AIDS educators, counsellors, campaigners and care-givers if given the opportunity.

The objective of the project is based on the Paris Summit on AIDS of December 1994 where over fifty countries participated, inter alia, governments called for increased support for people living with HIV and AIDS. Participants at the Paris Summit resolved to step up efforts to more effectively involve people living with HIV/AIDS in the response to the epidemic and agreed to: "Support greater involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS through initiatives to strengthen the capacity and co-ordination of networks of people living with HIV/AIDS and, by ensuring their full involvement in our common response to the epidemic at a national, regional and global levels and to stimulate and support the creation of supportive political, legal and social environments".

The Paris Summit further agreed that national policies should reflect the full involvement of non-governmental and community-based organizations and people living with HIV and AIDS in the formulation and implementation of public policies and programmes.

Based on the GC decision 92/35, UNV seeks to implement a pilot programme to strengthen

the capacity of communities to respond to the epidemic through the ideas initiated and needs identified by people living with HIV and AIDS.

The implementing and co-operating partners for this 2-year pilot programme initiative are: UNAIDS, UNDP, UNOPS, NAP+, AFRICASO, other CBOs and NGOs National HIV/AIDS Programmes. The programme is designed to assist in involving people living with HIV and AIDS in an active manner, engaging them as National United Nations Volunteers (NUNVs) to work in their own countries and communities thereby increasing the volunteer roles and contributions in the response to the HIV epidemic. This will be done through two separate but related strategies, i. e. by ensuring the representation of people living with HIV and AIDS in organizations and institutions responding to the HIV epidemic; and by supporting people living with HIV and AIDS to contribute as agents of change of community values, norms and practices and ensuring that the experience and insight of those directly affected contribute to national HIV/AIDS programme and policy development. The term "people living with HIV and AIDS" means both those infected with the virus and those close to them, their families and care givers. The term "people affected by the epidemic" has the same meaning. This pilot initiative will also assist in strengthening and consolidating the national network of people living with HIV and AIDS (NAP+) with which it will work in close partnership in each of the countries where pilot activities will be initiated.

It will initially be implemented in 2 English speaking African countries with the aim of extending it to other countries, including French-speaking countries. The pilot countries will be selected on the basis of established networks of people living with HIV/AIDS and those with a conducive and supportive environment to work with. It is anticipated that the project will attract sufficient interest and resources to expand to additional countries.

This section was last updated on October 1, 1996

Reaching out from South Asia: The SVF supporting Artisans...

Programme for Artisan Development in South Asia (PADSA)

In 1994 UNV embarked on an SVF-funded 16-month experimental programme in South Asia, focusing on Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. The programme aimed at providing volunteer support to the artisan sector in South Asia through exchange and mutual support among rural artisan groups, CBOs, NGOs working with them, training and other relevant institutions and individuals. It concentrated on three sectors, bamboo, weaving (by women) and leather. The areas of intervention were marketing, finance, organization of producer groups, design, materials, technology, legal rights and occupational health.

Major achievements of the programme are the strengthening of production and marketing of artisanal products, self-organization of artisans, and exchange of artisans on a national and international scale. New volunteer roles have been tested out and tapped, such as "barefoot artisans specialists", who have expertise in areas requested by artisan communities, national UNVs as main facilitators in and between artisan communities, and patrons for the artisan sector. The approach developed under this project will perhaps be taken up by UNDP Delhi for an artisan support project in Eastern India. An outline proposal has been submitted to the UNDP country office.

Inter-regional Volunteers Programme for Artisan Support (IVPAS)

Building on the lessons and experiences from the South-Asia based initiative described above, the Inter-Regional Volunteer Programme for Artisan Support puts emphasis on information exchange, attracting public attention and advocacy work. It is designed to tackle the general decline in knowledge of indigenous systems and traditional skills that could be the basis for a viable and ecologically sustainable alternative development model, which will contribute towards the improvement of the livelihoods of artisan communities. It aims at building linkages and support mechanisms at the inter-regional level to develop solidarity among artisan crafts people so that a united voice can be articulated at the policy-level. In addition, the programme aims at creating and strengthening patronage and support for artisans both, in the South and the North, to help ensure that policies at national, regional or international levels do not impact negatively on the sector.

The programme started in April 1995 and is managed from Delhi, with a strong regionalization: NGOs and individuals in selected countries for example take over implementation of a whole sequence of activities by sub-contracting arrangements. The programme manager has been selecting partners and programme countries, organising activities and monitoring partner organization's involvement in the project.

Latin American national focal points/organisations were identified late 1995 to function as partners to the programme and supervise, through national UNVs, national activities such as compiling status reports and exchanges and build up cross-country links among participating organizations. A mission report covering experiences from Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, and Mexico was received early 1996. Currently five national UNVs are serving in this programme in Asia. Additional NUNVs in Latin America are presently under recruitment.

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The SVF in Arab Rural Areas: Joining hands to alleviate poverty...

Local community development in Arab rural areas

In partnership with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND), the Local Community Development project attempts to contribute to poverty alleviation at the grassroots by enhancing rural development through involvement of all relevant domestic actors in innovative self-help abilities to improve living conditions. Solutions to promote these issues will be achieved through the diversification of rural activities; introduction of small-scale enterprises; promotion of rural women participation to management activities; and development of the agricultural sector performance.

A tripartite evaluation mission, continuous follow-up visits and the review of reports submitted by the UNV Specialists and field workers working on the project have shown substantive progress, the main project objectives are about to be achieved. The awareness of local communities' and peoples' attitudes towards the project are noticeable, as is the degree of community participation in carrying out a field survey. A clear example is the massive local

participation in the Syrian Arab Republic, where the community provided all sorts of assistance and support to the UNV team. In Egypt the "Rapid Rural Appraisal" methods were found more suitable to the Egyptian community. The change in attitudes and awareness can be observed by comparing the initial activities proposed by the communities, which focused on quick profit and lacked economic and social justifications, with the activities proposed later, when the focus was on social economic, health and environmental aspects in line with communities' priorities and needs. In addition, a plan of action was formulated with the help of community members under the direction of local committees, its finalization is based on the economic and social survey's findings.

Financial contributions to the Special Voluntary Fund

The Special Voluntary Fund consists of voluntary contributions from a range of member states. Pledges are made at the United Nations Pledging Conference for Development Activities, usually held in October/November each year. Since 1992 more than thirty countries have made financial contributions to the SVF. In 1995 and 1996, the main contributors to the SVF have been the Netherlands, Belgium, Japan, and Germany.

The review of the Special Voluntary Fund in the context of UNV's recent assessments

In the process of formulating its strategic approach towards the year 2000, UNV undertook a series of reviews and assessments in order to draw lessons from the past and make recommendations for the overall future direction of UNV. One of these reviews was a study of the capacity of UNV to plan and manage projects and programmes. This review of the design and implementation of SVF projects is one component of the foregoing.

1. a desk study of SVF project documents and other UNV documents relevant to the review.
2. interviews with UNV headquarters staff and a country visit to Kenya and Burundi, where the mission interviewed Government officials, NGO/CBO representatives, UNDP staff, UNV Programme Officers and other UN agency personnel.

Purpose & Objectives of the SVF review

Since 1992 three types of SVF projects have emerged. The first type comprises experimental and exploratory projects with regard to both the spectrum of volunteers and management procedures, and the expected results. Examples of this type of SVF projects are UNV's Sub-Regional Programmes (UNV SRPs) with volunteer managers, the Eco-Volunteer programme, Southlinks, based on the volunteer raconteur concept, and the Programme for Artisan Development in South Asia which includes "barefoot volunteer experts". The second type of SVF projects could be described as more country-focused, aimed at testing new innovative ways and modalities in promoting volunteerism. The newest type of SVF projects is primarily based on cost-sharing arrangements with a wide range of partners and comprises UNV projects integrated into larger UN programmes.

Thus, the review of the design and implementation of Special Voluntary Fund (SVF) projects

took stock of UNV's experiences and achievements in the utilization of the Special Voluntary Fund.

Special Voluntary Fund - Achievements

The 1992 Governing Council decision to utilize the Special Voluntary Fund almost entirely for pilot and experimental projects has given UNV a unique modality to explore innovative volunteer contributions to respond flexibly to "nationally and locally felt and articulated needs". Through their emphasis on "base up" participation, SVF projects reinforce the UNV focus on supporting the most disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of society including certain categories of youth and women, artisans, street children and displaced persons. Many SVF projects are providing a neutral go-between for local communities, both formally and informally, in their relationships with national governments and their institutions.

UNV has gained much experience through the implementation of experimental projects funded by the SVF modality. This includes areas such as community-based environmental programmes (eco-volunteers), artisan development (barefoot artisan specialists), peace-building and conflict resolution (peace advisors), sustainable human development and empowerment of disadvantaged and displaced women. UNV has forged a wide range of partnerships and alliances with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), supporting volunteer efforts at the grassroots community level. Volunteers in SVF projects have, inter alia, addressed poverty alleviation by building self-reliance, stimulating micro-enterprise and the income-generating capacity of local communities. SVF funded Sub-Regional Programmes in East Africa, Central and Latin America, South Asia and Southeast Asia support community-based initiatives (CBIs) and participatory development work at the grassroots in their respective regions. Another SVF project dimension has been to incorporate, where feasible, replication strategies, enabling the sharing and exchange of new approaches, techniques and traditional knowledge and information inter-regionally and intra-regionally. Many projects have pioneered the use of national volunteers (NUNVs) in local capacity building. Perhaps most important of all has been the recruitment and placement of international and national UN Volunteers in partnership with local community volunteers.

SVF training and workshop related activities have also added a distinct dimension to UNV's work. For example, SVF contributed to the preparation of women's groups in Asia, Africa and Latin America for the 1995 World Conference on Women held in Beijing. Workshops and training activities were closely tied to local grassroots community development agendas.

In addition, the Special Voluntary Fund strengthened UNV's capacity to undertake special recruitment drives for volunteers from countries under-represented on the roster, and specific thematic areas in demand. The SVF made it possible to launch recruitment campaigns for hard to find categories of volunteer specialists.

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