

# **Volunteering and Social Development**

**A Background Paper for Discussion at an Expert Group Meeting  
New York, November 29-30, 1999**

**United Nations Volunteers**

## **Introduction**

1. At the Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development in 1995 some 117 countries pledged to implement ten commitments to alleviate poverty, promote full-employment and secure social integration. The General Assembly Special Session to be held in Geneva from 26 to 30 June 2000 will evaluate progress in the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and recommend further action to help achieve these goals.

2. Although volunteering was not specifically mentioned in Copenhagen reference was made to the important role played by voluntary and community organizations in social and economic advance. At the first Preparatory Committee of the General Assembly Special Session held in May 1999 the Government of Japan proposed that the importance of volunteering for social development be addressed in Geneva. United Nations Volunteers (UNV) was called upon to report on this matter and to make proposals on how governments could best support volunteering.

3. To help with this task, UNV commissioned the Institute for Volunteering Research, a specialist research and consultancy agency in the UK, to prepare a background paper and facilitate an expert group meeting in New York with a view to producing a final paper for submission to the United Nations Secretariat for the Geneva Special Session in January 2000.

4. This paper is divided into the following sections. Section 1 sets out the parameters for the discussion by looking at the meaning and definition of volunteering. Section 2 examines the different ways in which volunteering manifests itself in different regional and national contexts - from self-help and participation to more formal forms of service provision. Section 3 examines the benefits of volunteering, both for the volunteer and for society at large, drawing in particular on the concept of social capital. The fourth section focuses on some current issues in volunteering, including the role of the state and the business sector in promoting its development and the impact of globalization; while the fifth and final section assesses what action governments can take to encourage volunteering.

5. As requested by the Preparatory Committee the report focuses on the role of volunteering in promoting social integration. However, in line with the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action which recognized the inter-relationship between the three priority areas, the paper also addresses the impact of volunteering on poverty alleviation and full employment.

6. The paper has been written by the Director of the Institute for Volunteering Research, Dr Justin Davis Smith. It is based on a thorough review of the literature and discussions with experts at the United Nations, the World Bank, and various voluntary and community organizations in different parts of the world. The author is grateful for the many helpful ideas, references and contacts freely given, although responsibility for the paper rests with him alone.

## **Section 1: Meanings and Definitions**

7. Volunteering means different things to different people. A recent study (Cnaan et al, 1998) found widespread differences between countries in public perceptions of what constitutes a voluntary activity. In some countries giving blood was seen as volunteering, in others being involved in a political party or trade union was counted. For some people the defining characteristic of volunteering was the absence of financial reward; for others lack of coercion was the main identifier. Volunteering takes on different forms and meanings in different settings. It is strongly influenced by the history, politics, religion and culture of a region. What may be seen as volunteering in one country may be dismissed as low paid or labour intensive work (or even forced labour) in another. And yet despite the wide variety of understandings it is possible to identify some core characteristics of what constitutes a voluntary activity. In fact it is essential that we do so. Without some shared understanding of the common elements of volunteering the term would be meaningless and would make redundant attempts by government to promote it. Although it is clearly not possible to come up with a hard and fast definition of volunteering that will take into account the variety of contexts in which it operates, we can construct a broad conceptual framework which will allow for significant differences in interpretation within clearly delineated boundaries.

8. There are five key elements to this framework. First the notion of reward. Some definitions argue that only purely altruistic behavior should be counted as volunteering. Others contend that there is no such thing as pure altruism and that all volunteering contains an element of exchange and reciprocity. Thus some definitions would allow for volunteers to be rewarded in some way, either non-materially through the provision of training or accreditation, or materially through the reimbursement of expenses or the payment of an honorarium. The key cut-off point in drawing the distinction between volunteering and paid employment is that the volunteer should not be undertaking the activity primarily for financial gain and that any financial reimbursement should be less than the value of the work provided.

9. The second element concerns the notion of free-will. Most definitions concede that volunteering and compulsion are incompatible. Thus schemes which run counter to the ILO Conventions on forced labour would clearly not qualify as volunteering. But as with the notion of reward there are Grey areas. How should we view school community service schemes which encourage, and sometimes require, students to get involved in voluntary work?; Food for Work programmes, where there is an explicit exchange between community involvement and food assistance?; or citizen service schemes which offer people a community service alternative to military service? The broad conceptual framework accepts that it may be difficult to uphold the pure notion of free will in any volunteering interaction - people's motivation to volunteer will perhaps always include a mix of reasons including peer pressure and social obligation - but it would draw the boundary around any overt attempt by government to force people to participate.

10. The third element relates to the nature of the benefit. To differentiate volunteering from a purely voluntary leisure activity requires there to be a beneficiary other than (or

in addition to) the volunteer. But where the line should be drawn is open to question. Some would argue that the beneficiary has to be a stranger to the volunteer; others would allow for neighbors to be included, and even friends and extended relations. Still others would include the notion of self-help or mutual aid where the dividing line between personal and third party benefit is especially blurred. Whilst allowing for a variety of interpretations the broad conceptual framework demands that there be an identifiable beneficiary or group of beneficiaries (which might include such abstract notions as the environment or society itself) other than (or in addition to) the volunteer's immediate family or friends. This would allow for self-help and mutual aid to be included but would rule out caring for dependent relatives.

11. Fourthly the issue of organizational setting. Some definitions insist that volunteering be carried out through a formal, non-profit or voluntary organization of some sort. Others keep to the organizational requirement but include activity undertaken within the public or corporate sector. Others relax the organizational requirement and accept activities carried out informally, either on a one-to-one basis such as helping out a neighbor, or in isolation through such civic minded activities as picking up litter. The broad framework put forward here allows for both formal (organized) and informal (one-to-one) volunteering to be included and for volunteering carried out in the public and corporate sectors.

12. The final element is the level of commitment. Some definitions allow for one-off voluntary activities to be included; others demand a certain level of commitment and exclude occasional acts. The broad conceptual framework enables us to encompass a range of different levels of activity from high commitment to sporadic involvement, although it seems fair to assume that most volunteering would carry with it some degree of sustained commitment.

13. Given the differing interpretations of what constitutes a voluntary activity it is not surprising that there is disagreement over terms. Some people favor the term volunteering, others voluntary activity, voluntary work or voluntary action. In some countries distinctions are drawn between more traditional forms of charitable activity and more modern forms of citizen involvement and participation. Whilst recognizing that different terms often have very different meanings in different settings this paper will use volunteering and voluntary activity as interchangeable terms to describe the broad range of activities which fall within the broad conceptual framework outlined above. Similar terminological difficulties arise in relation to the organizations through which most volunteering takes place. Voluntary organizations, community groups, civil society organizations, third sector associations, non-governmental and non-profit organizations - are all terms which are used to describe the rich variety of organizational structures which occupy the space outside the state and the market. As with the terms to describe individual voluntary activity all have subtle (or not so subtle) differences of meaning. But for the purpose of this paper we will choose the term voluntary and community organizations to encompass this wide variety of organizational form.

## **Section 2: A Typology of Volunteering**

14. Having developed a framework which allows us to make sense of the vast array of different types of activities which cluster under the banner of volunteering, it is necessary to give some concrete examples of how such activity manifests itself in practice. It is possible to identify at least four different types of volunteer activity, delineated according to a final outcome or final purpose criterion - mutual aid or self-help; philanthropy or service to others; participation; and advocacy or campaigning. Each of these types occurs in all parts of the world. However, the form each type takes and the balance or mix between different types differs markedly from country to country. Factors influencing the nature of volunteering will include the economic, social and political make up of the country and its stage of development. As a broad rule of thumb the less economically developed the country the less formal its volunteering structures are likely to be, and the greater the emphasis on informal support systems and networks of mutual aid and self-help. In contrast industrialized countries typically will exhibit more formal volunteering structures with a greater emphasis on philanthropic forms of activity. This is not to imply that the developed world is richer in volunteering than the developing world. Rather that the form volunteering takes is conditioned by the society in which it is based. Of course there are parts of the world where volunteering is stronger than others - in certain countries the political system works against the free association and participation of its citizens. But even in countries most hostile to its development volunteering can be found. The four categories of volunteering are not mutually exclusive. There is clear overlap between them. So, for example, volunteers involved with a philanthropic or service delivery agency may also very well be involved in advocacy and campaigning. Likewise, mutual aid may benefit others apart from members.

15. Religion would appear to have a particular influence on volunteering. In a study encompassing Brazil, Ghana, Egypt, India and Thailand, chosen to represent the great religions of Christianity, African religions, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, Salomon and Anheier (1999) have argued that the size and shape of the voluntary and community sector and the practice of volunteering in each country has been greatly influenced by the dominant religion. Whilst all the religions have charity as a main tenet of their faith differing attitudes towards the state, individualism and institutions has led to very different patterns of voluntary action. Those countries with a Judeo-Christian tradition would appear to be most associated with the development of voluntary associations and formal philanthropic voluntary activity, whilst those with a Buddhist and Islamic tradition are more associated with informal forms of voluntary action.

### **Mutual Aid or Self-Help**

16. The first type of volunteering in this four-fold typology is mutual aid or self-help. Anthropologists have noted the existence of mutual associations (or sodalities from the Latin word *sodalis* meaning close friend) as far back as the neolithic period and the role of mutual aid associations in primitive cultures has been well documented. In many parts of the world today mutual aid provides the main system of social and economic support for a majority of the population. From the small informal kinship and clan groupings to the more formal rotating credit associations and welfare groups, volunteering as an expression of self-help or mutual aid plays a primary role in the welfare of communities. In Kenya, for example, the tradition of Harambee plays a vital

role in the provision of health, water and educational facilities. In Senegal mutual aid is organized around Mbootaay groups (meaning to nurture), while in Java such activity goes under the name of Arisan. In Mexico there is a thriving mutual aid tradition of Confianza and in the Gulf States the practice of Murfazaa is long-established. Self-help also plays an important role in countries of the industrialized North, particularly in the health and social welfare field, where numerous organizations have been established to provide support and assistance to those in need, often organized around a particular disease or illness.

*In West and Central Africa there is a tradition of Tontine. This is a self-help group of citizens established to provide a rotating credit system for members. Each member makes a regular financial contribution and each has a turn in drawing from the funds. Women take a leading role as members and fund-managers.*

*In Slovakia the Multiple Sclerosis Slovak Union is a voluntary self-help organization which developed out of a grassroots initiative in 1990. It brings together citizens affected with multiple sclerosis and their families, as well as other people willing to provide assistance. In addition to providing a range of practical support to members, the Union campaigns and advocates on behalf of people with multiple sclerosis. It receives some state funding and is one of the most active and visible expressions of self-help in Slovakia.*

### **Philanthropy or Service to Others**

17. The second type of volunteering is philanthropy or service to others. Perhaps more a feature of developed societies (especially in its organized form), philanthropic volunteering can nevertheless be found in all regions of the world. It is distinguished from self-help activity in that the primary recipient of the volunteering is not the member of the group him or herself, but an external third party, although most people would acknowledge that there is an element of self-interest in such philanthropic activity. Much of this type of volunteering takes place within voluntary or community organizations, although in certain countries there is a strong tradition of volunteering within the public sector and a growing interest in volunteering in the corporate sector. In some countries sophisticated networks have been established to recruit and place volunteers with the most appropriate organization. These include both national and local volunteer centers, which have been established with support from government. There is also a long-standing tradition of volunteers being sent from one country to another to offer developmental and humanitarian assistance, both North to South and South to South and, to a far lesser extent, South to North.

*Over the past five years more than 3,500 United Nations Volunteers have been involved in critical regions of the world in democratization, peace-building, human rights, rehabilitation and humanitarian relief. For example, in Guatemala, 114 UN Volunteers, originating from more than 25 countries and including volunteers of indigenous origin, have been helping verify respect for the Peace Accords signed in*

*December 1996; while in Peru, 11 National UN Volunteers have been assisting the process of decentralization of the Ombud's office to five regional areas so that these vital services can be within the reach of more people throughout the country.*

### **Participation**

18. The third type of volunteering can perhaps best be described as participation. It refers to the role played by individuals in the governance process, from representation on government consultation bodies to user-involvement in local development projects. As a form of volunteering it is found in all countries, although it is most developed in advanced democracies and those countries with a strong tradition of civic society. Participation was recognized as an essential component of good governance at the Copenhagen Summit and has become the watchword of development in recent years, although there is a forceful critique which argues that much of what has passed for participation has been little more than token involvement and a means of legitimizing outsiders decisions.

### **Advocacy or Campaigning**

19. The fourth type of volunteering is advocacy or campaigning, be it lobbying government for a change in legislation affecting the rights of disabled people or pushing for a worldwide ban on landmines. Volunteers have paved the way for the introduction of new welfare services in the field of HIV and AIDS, have raised public consciousness about abuses of human rights and environmental destruction, and have been active in the women's movement and in democracy campaigns in many parts of the world. Some campaigns are very localized others are global in their reach. The anti-landmine campaign, for example, is estimated to have involved more than 300 million volunteers from over 100 countries. By its very nature such campaigning activity has the capacity to bring volunteers into conflict with the state. Some governments have sought to clamp down on these activities. Others have accepted that volunteering has a legitimate role to play in campaigning for change and acting as a check on the executive.

*In the 1990s in Brazil the Citizens' Action Against Hunger and For Life campaign was launched by leaders of various civic groups. There was a massive public response and within three months over 3,000 volunteer committees had been set up across the country to look for ways of combating hunger and poverty. It is estimated that an astonishing 38% of the Brazilian population participated directly in the campaign, either through making a donation or by volunteering.*

*In Maharashtra in India in 1998 a group of concerned citizens came together to form an action campaign to save children's lives in Melghat. The group called itself Melghat Mitra (Friends of Melghat) determined to prevent the death of children in seven villages caused by malnourishment during the monsoon period. A number of daily newspapers published the appeal, resulting in a response from over 3,000 people, who made*

*donations of money and time. Two hundred volunteers agreed to give 10 days of their time to the project over a period of 92 days. Having achieved these goals Melghat Mitra are now tackling the long-term development needs of the villages.*

### **Section 3: The Benefits of Volunteering**

20. Why should governments be interested in promoting volunteering? Especially when some voluntary activity can be seen as a challenge to the authority of the state. There are two major benefits of volunteering. First, an economic one: volunteering makes an important economic contribution to society. Activities undertaken by volunteers would otherwise have to be funded by the state or by private capital. Volunteering adds to the overall economic output of a country and reduces the burden on government spending. But volunteering has a second and perhaps more important benefit. Volunteering helps in the building of strong and cohesive communities. It fosters trust between citizens and helps develop norms of solidarity and reciprocity which are essential to stable communities. Moreover, by helping to build this 'social capital' volunteering also plays a role in economic regeneration.

#### *The Economic Benefits of Volunteering*

21. Although volunteering undoubtedly makes an important economic contribution we know very little about the scale of its impact. Volunteering is excluded from the United Nations System of National Accounts and few governments have attempted to collect systematic data on either the extent of voluntary activity or its economic value. The few studies which have been carried out point to the magnitude of its contribution. For example, a survey of volunteering in the UK in 1997 suggested that half the adult population took part in voluntary work, contributing a notional £40 billion to the economy (Davis Smith, 1998); while a recent survey in Canada suggested that over five million adults volunteered, adding some \$16 billion to Gross Domestic Product. Two large cross-national surveys in recent years also point to the importance of volunteering. A survey in eight European countries in 1994 found an average participation rate in volunteering across the continent of 23% (Gaskin and Davis Smith, 1995); while the 22-nation study reported on by the Johns Hopkins Institute in 1998 found volunteer involvement running at an average of 28%, equivalent to almost 10.5 million full-time employees (Salamon and Anheier, 1998).

22. The failure of governments to measure the contribution of volunteering to the Gross Domestic Product is a sign of the low status in which it is held. Volunteering remains a marginal and invisible activity. In this respect it has a good deal in common with household work. The women's movement has long argued for a value to be placed on the contribution made (mainly by women) in the domestic economy as an important first step in the legitimization of such work. So long as women's household work remains invisible in economic terms, it is argued, governments will continue to ignore it. The same is surely true of volunteering. In the absence of regular, reliable information on its extent and contribution, governments will continue to overlook its importance and fail to take account of the volunteering dimension when developing policy.

23. Attempts are being made to fill this information void. A joint study between the Johns Hopkins University and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is developing a framework for measuring the economic contribution of voluntary and community organizations (including the value of volunteering) for use in Satellite accounting; while the UNDP aims to include measures of governance and participation in its 2001 Human Development Report. CIVICUS, the world alliance for citizen participation, is meanwhile developing its own civil society index, which includes a measure of the level of involvement in the making and implementing of public policy.

### *Social Capital*

24. Participation has long been seen as an essential element of good governance and effective development. Numerous studies have attested to the link between user involvement and the success of water, sanitation and environmental projects in many different parts of the world (See, for example, Kahkonen, 1999). The UNDP Poverty Report for 1998 concluded that: 'UNDP's experience suggests that community anti-poverty programmes should be firmly based on "social mobilization" (UNDP, 1998). Poor people may be relatively powerless as individuals, but not when they mobilize themselves together in communities'.

*South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) Pilot programme started in 1996 supporting the poverty reduction efforts of 6 countries: Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Since the start of the programme around 80,000 households have formed themselves into 3,500 community organizations which have helped launch thousands of individual and family income-earning activities and built up numerous community assets from irrigation systems to roads.*

25. Volunteering also has a contribution to make as part of the development of social capital. By building trust and reciprocity between citizens volunteering contributes both to a more cohesive, stable society and to a more economically prosperous one. In his classic study of regional government in Italy Robert Putnam (1993) concludes that differences in performance between regions can be accounted for largely by differences in levels of social capital. This he defined as 'features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions'. One of Putnam's key measures of social capital was participation in voluntary associations, or horizontal 'networks of civic engagement'.

26. Several recent studies have pointed to a link between social capital and economic advance in developing countries. Anirudh Krishna and Norman Uphoff (1999), for example, found a positive relationship between levels of social capital (as measured by informal networks and mutual support) and village performance with a watershed conservation and development programme in India; while Deepa Narayan (1997) found a link between involvement in voluntary associations and household welfare in Tanzania. Just how social capital performs this function is not clear from the literature

but three main ways have been suggested: by facilitating the sharing of information among members of groups; by increasing cooperation; and by facilitating collective decision making.

*In her study in Tanzania Narayan looked for evidence of social capital by measuring involvement in associations and trust in institutions amongst 750 households. The village chosen for the study was found to be rich in voluntary and community groups, ranging from rotating credit associations and burial societies to clubs for youth and elders. Involvement was high, with over 70% of the population belonging to at least one group and an average membership of 1.5 groups per person. By matching up data on associational involvement and household income the study concluded that there is a positive link between social capital and household welfare.*

27. Social capital also appears to have a role to play in building social cohesion. In a separate study Narayan (1999) draws a distinction between 'bonding' social capital developed within groups and 'bridging' social capital arising from the interaction between groups. For social capital to contribute to social integration there needs to be not only high levels of associational activity but a dense network of cross-cutting ties among groups. The point is powerfully illustrated by Ashutosh Varshney (1998) in a study of communal riots in India. In seeking to explain why some towns with a mix of Hindu and Muslim populations remain free from conflict while others with a similar population profile erupt into ethnic violence, Varshney looks at the role played by voluntary associations and informal community networks in building social capital. He concludes that those areas with low levels of communal strife are characterized not simply by high levels of associational activity but by high levels of cross-cutting engagement between the Hindu and Muslim populations.

28. Governments have a role to play in investing in social capital, in supporting the voluntary and community organizations which nurture it. As Christiaan Grootaert (1999) has concluded in a paper looking at the link between social capital and household welfare in Indonesia: 'The promotion of social interaction among poor farmers may need to complement the provision of seeds and fertilizer. A well functioning parent-teacher association may be a necessary complement to building schools and training teachers'. Or as Robert Putnam (1993) has put it: 'For political stability, for government effectiveness, and even for economic progress social capital may be even more important than physical or human capital'.

### *Benefits to the Volunteer*

29. Volunteering also brings benefits to the volunteer. In parts of the world mutual support provides the essentials of life - food, clean water, health care, education. Volunteering is bound into the very fabric of life and is indivisible from the struggle for survival. In other parts of the world volunteering serves a very different function. Here volunteering is much more a life-style choice. People can choose whether or not to spend part of their free-time in a voluntary activity. Many millions do so and attest to the benefits of participation. Volunteering enables people to meet new friends; learn new

skills; gain in confidence and self-respect. Perhaps above all, volunteering brings personal satisfaction. In one study in the UK volunteering was identified as the second greatest source of joy behind dancing (Argyle, 1996).

30. Volunteering brings particular benefits to those suffering from social exclusion. For people with disabilities participating in volunteering can aid social integration and challenge negative stereotypes of disabled people as passive recipients of care. For unemployed people volunteering can improve employability by providing essential work-experience and opportunities for skills development and training. For young people volunteering offers opportunities for self-development and risk-taking and provides a valuable grounding in the practice of citizenship. For older people volunteering has a positive contribution to make to the process of 'active ageing' by helping the newly retired adjust to life without the structure of the workplace, by providing opportunities for life-long learning and by improving physical and mental well-being. In addition to age specific benefits, volunteering can help to ease tensions between age groups and foster notions of intergenerational solidarity through such mentoring initiatives as Foster Grandparent schemes.

31. And yet in many countries there is an inverse relationship between volunteering and social exclusion. The most marginalized groups in society are the least likely to participate. The barriers to participation are well documented: poverty, unemployment, youth alienation; poor organizational practice. One should be wary of trying to foist volunteering on those at the margins of society. For many people the search for paid employment and the daily struggle for survival leaves little time or energy for voluntary work. There is a forceful critique of volunteering, particularly in the developing world, which dismisses volunteering as a 'tax' on the poor, in particular on poor women, already shouldering much of the burden of family care and (increasingly) of economic survival. But there is an alternative viewpoint. By shifting the focus away from service to others and emphasizing the personal benefits of involvement – broadening of networks, acquiring of skills and experience, help with finding paid employment - volunteering can be seen as a powerful *resource acquisition strategy* for those suffering from economic and social disadvantage. For volunteering to contribute most effectively to social integration it is essential that opportunities for greater involvement are opened up to people from excluded groups.

#### **Section 4: Issues and Challenges for Volunteering**

##### *Globalization*

32. Volunteering is coming under pressure from the forces of globalization. In the countries of the industrialized North there is concern that volunteering is in decline, fuelled by a reduction in religious attachment, the break-up of traditional communities, and an increase in individualism. In the developing world concern has been expressed that economic retrenchment and cuts in public services are placing an intolerable burden on volunteers in community groups and mutual aid associations. In many countries the entry of more women into the paid labour market threatens to reduce the availability of volunteers, particularly in the care field (although most studies suggest

men and women volunteer at roughly equal levels); while a decline in civic involvement among young people has raised fears for the future of volunteering and focused attention on the need to educate young people in the values of citizenship.

33. Not all trends, however, are working against volunteering. The ageing of the population common to many parts of the world is increasing the burden on volunteer care services but it is also opening up new opportunities for voluntary work among the new and increasingly active Third Age. Although developments in communication technology run the risk of reducing social interaction still further, they also open up new opportunities for voluntary activity. The Internet has proved to be a powerful resource for community and campaigning groups in the spread of ideas and the mobilization of recruits. As the 1999 Human Development Report commented: 'Socially excluded and minority groups have created cybercommunities to find strength in on-line unity and fight the silence on abuses of their rights' (UNDP, 1999). And the spread of global information technology opens up new opportunities for home-based involvement in volunteering for groups such as the disabled who were previously excluded from participation.

34. Other new forms of volunteering are taking shape. One of the most interesting is service credit, or time-dollar schemes, in which people who take part in voluntary activity are 'paid' in time donated by other volunteers. There are now over 200 such schemes in the United States and the idea is attracting attention in many other countries, including Japan, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Germany. Many of the schemes are highly sophisticated with a central computer system registering every 'time dollar' earned and spent and providing participants with regular accounts. Advocates for such schemes point to their value in building social capital and in challenging traditional stereotypes of volunteering as charity by the explicit emphasis on exchange and reciprocity. Governments can support the development of such schemes by exempting them from taxation and by enabling participants to use their 'time credits' to purchase services such as health care or continuing education. The AmeriCorps programme of voluntary service in the United States already allows for the use of 'time dollars' to pay off student loans.

*In Washington DC the law firm Holland and Knight developed a time dollar project under its pro bono programme. Legal services were provided to a local community on a range of issues, from unfreezing grant money and closing crack houses to keeping open the neighborhood school. In total they had billed the equivalent of \$230,000 in time dollars. The bill was paid off by the voluntary work of the local residents who took part in a range of activities including providing a night escort service for older people and tutoring for school children.*

#### *Relations with the State*

35. Theories of market or government failure suggest that volunteers will step in to fill any gaps left by the withdrawal of business or the state. This has raised the concern that governments might be tempted to cut back on public spending in the knowledge that volunteers will pick up the pieces. Volunteers have long played a role in developing

new services in response to human need - the hospice movement and the development of services for those with HIV and AIDS - being two recent examples. But there is little evidence to support the notion that volunteering will thrive in the absence of the state. Indeed the opposite appears to be the case. Volunteering benefits from a healthy public sector. Rather than substituting for public services volunteering complements and feeds off them. As Robert Putnam has concluded: 'Social capital works through and with State's and markets, not in place of them'.

36. Volunteering is a cost effective way of providing a range of social and welfare services. But it is not cost free. To flourish it requires an effective infrastructure, both at national and local level, to help mobilize support and match volunteers to appropriate organizations and tasks. Governments have a role to play in funding this infrastructure. Following the Great Hanshin/Awaji Earthquake in Japan in 1995, when over one million volunteers flocked to the Kobe region to help with the relief operation, the Japanese Government embarked upon a series of measures to build on the explosion of public interest in volunteering, including a strengthening of the infrastructure and a new legislative framework.

37. In a number of countries governments have adopted or supported specific programmes and campaigns to promote volunteering. Examples include the Give Five campaign in the United States, the Imagine Campaign in Canada, the Active Community Initiative in the United Kingdom, the MIRA programme in Mexico and the National Volunteer Development Scheme in Nepal.

*In Mexico in 1994 the Centro Mexicano para la Filantropia launched the MIRA programme (translated as 'look out for others') to increase the number of donors and volunteers. A key goal was to increase public awareness about philanthropy and project a more positive image of volunteering and giving. Links were made with the national media and business and a 'Friends of MIRA' group of well-known figures from the world of TV, sport and business was established to champion the cause. Recognition was given to active 'MIRA Citizens' who gave at least one hour of volunteer time per week or 1% of their income.*

38. As well as supporting volunteering governments should give it space to breathe. They should avoid the temptation to try and take it over for their own ends. Volunteering as an essential element of good governance and civic society requires a separation from the state. Whilst volunteering brings significant benefits to society in terms of social integration and economic advance it also serves the vital function of safeguarding citizen liberty from an over-powerful executive. Volunteering can thus come into conflict with the state. But if governments are to reap the benefits from volunteering they must also be prepared to live with the potential for confrontation. In the United Kingdom the Labour Government has recently signed a Compact with voluntary and community organizations which recognizes the essential independence of the sector and of the right of volunteers to advocate for change (Home Office, 1998); while in Canada the government and the voluntary sector has come together in a series of 'Joint Tables' to produce a strategy for developing and strengthening voluntary

agencies and volunteering (Government of Canada/Voluntary Sector Joint Initiative, 1999).

#### *Relations with the Market*

39. Studies have demonstrated a link between volunteering and employability. For those in search of paid employment volunteering can boost self-confidence, provide access to workplace networks and provide an opportunity for the development of specific marketable skills. Volunteering can also lead to the creation of new jobs by developing services which are later taken over by the state and turned into paid jobs. For example, the innovative response from volunteers worldwide to the HIV/AIDS epidemic has led to the creation of thousands of jobs in the public and private health sectors.

40. In recent years the private sector has begun to take an interest in volunteering. Both as part of a broader community investment strategy and as a means of staff development, businesses have been developing schemes to support their staff in voluntary activities in the community. Such schemes take on a variety of forms. Some employers provide time-off with pay for their staff to volunteer; others provide financial support or assistance in kind (for example, transportation or photocopying facilities) to facilitate community involvement. Some employers organize a company volunteering scheme; others prefer to recognize and support existing staff involvement. Whatever the precise model, evidence suggests that employer-supported volunteering increases staff skills and morale and enhances the standing of business within the local community.

*In 1981 the Osaka Gas Company Ltd, the main gas supplier in the Kansai region of Japan, launched an employer-supported volunteering programme under the name of 'Chiisa na Tomoshihi' or 'Tiny lamplight'. The company promoted the scheme through newsletters and posters and new recruits were introduced to the scheme as part of their induction. Two leave systems were devised: one allowing staff to take from one to 12 months off as 'voluntary service leave', and a second allowing for up to 10 days of 'community service leave'. After a slow start, with just 400 staff involved in its first year of operation the scheme expanded rapidly, so that by 1994 a staggering 13,500 employees were involved as volunteers. The scheme has since been expanded to encompass both retired staff and the families of employees.*

#### **Section 5: Government Support for Volunteering**

41. Given the diversity of volunteering it is not possible to put forward universal models for its development. What works in one country may not work in another with very different cultures and traditions. Volunteering is a product of its environment and a government scheme for promoting volunteering in the United Kingdom or United States will probably not be appropriate for Latin America or Southern Africa. This is not,

however, to say that lessons can not be learned and practice exchanged. Countries in the industrial North may well hold lessons for the countries of the South keen to develop more institutionalized forms of volunteering. Similarly, models of mutual aid and community development originating in the developing world may well hold lessons for the developed world. Government support for volunteering can take several forms: recognition; facilitation; promotion; and special measures.

## **Recognition**

42. At the most basic level governments can support volunteering by raising its visibility and recognizing its contribution. Including volunteering in the national accounts would highlight its contribution to the economy and help ensure that a volunteering perspective is built into the policy making process. Understanding more about the level and nature of volunteering is also crucial to the development process. If social capital is vital to economic advance and social integration then it is important that governments know more about the source of this capital - the voluntary and community groups which foster social interaction - so they can invest in its development. Without an up-to-date map of the volunteering terrain it is not possible to target resources effectively.

*Recommendation 1: Governments should collect systematic data on the extent of volunteering and its economic and social impact.*

## **Facilitation**

43. Governments can facilitate volunteering by establishing an enabling legal and fiscal framework for voluntary and community organizations. Governments can also facilitate volunteering by providing direct financial support to help build the capacity of voluntary and community organizations and ensure that volunteers are provided with appropriate training and support. More particularly governments can support volunteering by providing financial support for the development of an effective volunteering infrastructure, especially at local level.

*Recommendation 2: Governments should establish an enabling legislative and fiscal framework to enable voluntary and community organizations to flourish.*

*Recommendation 3: Governments should provide financial support to help build an effective volunteering infrastructure.*

44. Governments should be aware of the impact of broader public policy on volunteering, both positive and negative. Some policies, not specifically focused on volunteering, can enhance the capacity of people to contribute in their communities. Similarly, some policies may unwittingly work against volunteering. For example, in some countries social security legislation works against the involvement of unemployed people in volunteering, despite an otherwise favorable policy climate.

*Recommendation 4: Governments should 'proof' all new legislation with a view to enhancing the positive, and minimizing the negative, impact on volunteering.*

45. Governments can encourage the private sector to support volunteering by developing public/private partnerships and by offering tax incentives for schemes which encourage private sector employees to get involved in the community. Governments as major employers in their own right can take a lead in establishing employer-supported volunteering schemes.

*Recommendation 5: Governments should look for ways of encouraging employer-supported volunteering, both in the private and public sectors.*

46. The media offers opportunities to government to promote a positive image of volunteering and encourage more people to get involved, especially those from socially excluded groups. New technology also offers opportunities to raise awareness of volunteering and improve access routes into volunteering.

*Recommendation 6: Governments should explore the potential of the media and new technology to raise awareness, promote a more positive image, and improve access routes into volunteering.*

## **Promotion**

47. Governments can support volunteering by increasing citizen participation in all aspects of public administration, from planning and policy making to service delivery, monitoring and evaluation. The record to-date has not been good. The 1998 Social Watch report concluded that performance by governments in encouraging participation since Copenhagen had on the whole been 'paltry' (Social Watch, 1998).

*Recommendation 7: Governments should seek to increase citizen participation in all aspects of public administration as an essential element of good governance.*

48. Whilst much volunteering takes place in the voluntary and community sector there is a strong tradition in some countries of public sector volunteering. Governments can support volunteering by looking at ways of involving volunteers in innovative ways in the public sector to complement the work of paid staff. They should avoid the temptation to substitute volunteers for paid staff as this would undermine public support for volunteering.

*Recommendation 8: Governments should look to involve more volunteers in the public sector as a complement to the work of paid staff.*

49. With concern in many parts of the world about declining levels of civic engagement among young people some governments are exploring ways of using schools to teach the values and benefits of volunteering. In a number of countries service learning is

becoming accepted as an important element of the school curriculum; while universities are beginning to look at ways of encouraging and accrediting student voluntary activity.

*Recommendation 9: Governments should explore the potential of working with the education and youth system to teach the values of citizenship and participation to young people.*

### **Special Measures**

50. Governments can be pro-active in promoting volunteering. In some countries volunteers have been given tax exemptions, or some kind of citizen credit, to use to pay off student loans or purchase health care.

*Recommendation 10: Governments should explore ways of offering incentives for people to play an active role in their communities, through ideas such as citizen credits.*

51. In some countries governments have developed an overall strategy for promoting volunteering. Such strategies have been most effective where they have been developed in partnership with key stakeholders from the voluntary and community and business sectors. At the heart of the strategy should be an acceptance of the independence of volunteering and a recognition that while much can be done by the state to promote and encourage increased participation, volunteering should be allowed space to develop in its own unique and varied way.

*Recommendation 11: Governments should consider developing an integrated strategy to promote volunteering in partnership with the voluntary and community and business sectors. Such a strategy, while recognizing the important role to be played by government in support and promotion, should reassert the essential independence of volunteering.*

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Dr Justin Davis Smith  
Director  
Institute for Volunteering Research  
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