



UN Volunteer Rita de Cassia Dutra, second from left, and teachers of the Salvador Hidalgo Cornejo School in Guadalupe, San Vicente, El Salvador are drawing up the concept of an ideal school. This is part of the activities of a Disaster Risk Reduction workshop held twice a month in the school with teachers and community members. (Etel Matiolo, 2011)

Members of a volunteer committee launched by UN Volunteers in Hamid Malik village in Kashmir district of Sindh province in Pakistan share their concerns with UN Volunteers (centre of photo) Communications Officer Alanna-Jorde, flanked by Survey/Data Collection Officer Rab Nawaz Channa and Disaster Risk Reduction Advocacy Officer Shujaat Raza Soomro. (Hafizullah Kaka, 2012)

Overview

BEYOND 2015

In March 2013, heads of UN agencies, funds and programmes agreed on an action plan that is set to accelerate the integration of disaster risk reduction strategies into all United Nations country level operations in response to rising levels of disruption to millions of lives each year from disasters. The United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience commits to bringing multiple partners together to support the further implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 in “build(ing) the resilience of nations and communities to disasters”.

UNV partners with all agencies in the UN system and adds volunteerism and volunteers to their operational strength. UNV will continue to provide national and international disaster risk reduction specialists and partner with UN Country Teams and Agencies to ensure volunteerism is built into their interventions under the post-2015 Hyogo Framework for Action.

“When the emergency unfolded during the 2012 floods, we could see that the villages where we had set up volunteer committees knew the safest evacuation route, the belongings they should take with them when they fled and the district department they needed to contact. It was gratifying to see that the volunteer committees had resulted in increased awareness of floods, the implementation of disaster risk reduction techniques and the effective coordination of emergency activities to avoid casualties and loss of property.”

Mansoor Ahmed Chachar, a UN Volunteer Livelihood/Entrepreneurship Officer in Pakistan in 2012

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that promotes volunteerism to support peace and development worldwide. Volunteerism can transform the pace and nature of development and it benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer. UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for volunteerism globally, encouraging partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing volunteers.

UNV is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

UNV in action: Disaster Risk Reduction

Sustainable development requires that disaster risks are reduced and communities are better prepared for response and recovery. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme supports global efforts to reduce the impact of disasters by working at national and community level to support disaster prevention and risk reduction strategies.

The role of volunteerism in mobilizing and managing volunteers is an important component of any disaster risk management strategy that aims at fostering community recovery, strength and resilience in vulnerable areas. Governments around the world realize this and UN Volunteers actively support governments and local communities with disaster risk reduction and prevention efforts.

UNV supports countries that have an identified risk and high vulnerability to disaster to mitigate the effects of crisis and address its root causes. In the last five years, UNV has been involved in disaster response and risk

“Volunteers have a critical role to play in creating awareness about the sustainable management of natural resources that can prevent and mitigate the impact of disasters. Likewise, communities with more trust, civic engagement and stronger networks have a better chance of recovering after a disaster.”

2011 State of the World’s Volunteerism Report

reduction activities in a number of countries including Ecuador, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 explicitly recognizes the contribution of volunteerism to disaster risk management, particularly in strengthening the capacity of communities to respond to and prevent disasters. Volunteerism is also highlighted as a way of contributing to community resilience, community engagement and good governance for all stakeholders, particularly those most vulnerable to disasters.



National UN Volunteer Natacha Jeudy, a Social Mobilization Specialist with UN-HABITAT, discusses restoration projects with community members at a UN-HABITAT Community Resources Center in Bristou Bobin, Haiti. (Jose Rendee Torres, 2012)

“In Ecuador, coastal human settlements, floods, droughts, volcanoes or the high seismic vulnerability of the Andean region means frequent loss of life and economic disruption. This, coupled with poverty and lack of information, makes communities highly exposed to disaster risks. It is essential for organizations and institutions to develop prevention and mitigation programmes that strengthen community strategies for disaster risk reduction.”

Patricio Cajas, national UN Volunteer specialist helping to build the capacity of national volunteer organizations for disaster risk reduction in Ecuador in 2012.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

- UN Volunteers ensure that disaster risk reduction planning and activities involve the target communities, as communities are the first to respond when a crisis strikes. Active involvement of the community, national, and local stakeholders in disaster risk reduction, recovery and reconstruction activities helps to build capacity at all levels, raise awareness, increase disaster preparedness and address the needs of the community.
- The deployment of national UN Volunteers who have a sound knowledge of the culture, religion and language of the region helps them to gain the community's trust and, as a result, promotes greater participation and a spirit of volunteerism in the community.
- In countries prone to natural disasters such as Ecuador, Haiti or Pakistan, UNV is involved in projects aimed at building community capacity to respond to disasters. Involving and developing the capacities of volunteer-involving organizations and local volunteers in disaster risk reduction activities, they can pass on this capacity to the communities by transferring the knowledge acquired and therefore contribute to sustainable responses.

INCLUSION OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS

- The most vulnerable – women, children and marginalized groups – are usually the most affected by natural disasters. UN Volunteers work to identify the needs of vulnerable groups and involve them in the process of disaster risk reduction activities and planning.
- UN Volunteers address gender issues by partnering with local women's committees or by creating local women's associations. This significantly increases the level of participation of women and ensures that women's needs are taken into account in disaster risk reduction planning.

- Volunteers also help by providing training, for example, to women, youth and marginalized groups, empowering them to participate and reduce both personal and community risks.
- The recovery and reconstruction efforts that UN Volunteers supported after the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 eventually evolved into disaster preparedness programmes in Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Indonesia. By the end of 2007, 238 UN Volunteers were mobilized in the region. Of these, 166 were national UN Volunteers, and almost 39% were women.

STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

- National and international volunteers contribute – through sound technical skills and a high level of motivation and commitment – to a positive collaboration among stakeholders, governments, UN agencies and NGOs.
- Communities at risk, as well as national and local government authorities, are frontline partners in the development of disaster risk reduction initiatives in order to ensure the sustainability of the project. Likewise, it is essential to involve community-based organizations and local volunteer-involving organizations in prevention and mitigation plans. These organizations can play a key role in strengthening local capacities to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters.
- In 2007 in Sri Lanka, UN Volunteers worked closely with communities and with the Disaster Risk Management Centres carrying out risk and vulnerability assessments, developing community disaster plans, organizing local task forces and technical training for communities. The efficient response of the Sri Lanka government to the 2008 landslides demonstrated the success of these UNV efforts and an enhanced national capacity in disaster risk reduction. While hundreds of thousands of people were displaced, the loss of life was kept to a minimum.

“The community leaders replicate these workshops in their communities, using support materials produced by the national UN Volunteers. A manual on construction techniques explains the potential risks to consider in deciding where and how to build a house, from earthquakes to droughts or landslides.”

UN Volunteer Anne Seppänen (Finland), Project Coordinator with UNDP in Peru in 2009.



UN Volunteer Field Officers with the Sri Lankan Human Right Commission, from left to right, Mohamed Fahmi (Sri Lanka), Jessica Skinner (UK/Australia) and Sivaguru Thanigaseelan (Sri Lanka) prepare a tsunami disaster risk prevention workshop for local community members. (UNV, 2007)