

People the world over engage in volunteerism for a great variety of reasons: to help to eliminate poverty and to improve basic health and education, to tackle environmental issues, to reduce the risk of disasters or to combat social exclusion and violent conflict. In all of these fields, volunteerism makes a specific contribution by generating well-being for people and their communities.

A society which supports and encourages different forms of volunteering is likely to be a society which also promotes the well-being of its citizens.

[More than 1 billion people volunteer globally](#), the majority of them serving in their own countries. Many are in the forefront of efforts to improve the way they and their fellow citizens are governed and engaged. Moreover, volunteers are playing a vital role in making governments worldwide more accountable and responsive to their citizens.

They are working with governments and civil society to hold those in power to account and to represent the voices of those who are often left out of development decisions such as women, youth and marginalized groups. The end result is more inclusive –and ultimately more effective– development.

Volunteerism is a basic expression of human relationships. It is about people's need to participate in their societies and to feel that they matter to others. We strongly believe that the social relationships intrinsic to volunteer work are critical to individual and community well-being.

The ethos of volunteerism is infused with values such as solidarity, reciprocity, mutual trust, belonging and empowerment, all of which contribute significantly to quality of life.

Volunteerism and well-being

People the world over engage in volunteerism for a great variety of reasons: to help to eliminate poverty and to improve basic health and education, to provide safe water supply and adequate sanitation, to tackle environmental issues and climate change, to reduce the risk of disasters or to combat social exclusion and violent conflict. In all of these fields, volunteerism makes a specific contribution by generating well-being for people and their communities.

Volunteerism also forms the backbone of many national and international non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations, as well as social and political movements. It is present in the public sector and is increasingly a feature of the private sector.

There is a widespread view today that gross domestic product (GDP) does not provide an adequate picture of a society because it does not account for the well-being of individuals

and their communities. Nor does it include activities that have an economic value but that fall outside the market and therefore have not, traditionally, been reflected in national accounts.

Where mainstream economics fosters values of self-interest and competition to achieve maximum satisfaction, a focus on well-being finds greater reason to value compassion and cooperation, both core values of volunteerism. The discourse on quality of life and well-being, and its place in the evolving development paradigm, must recognize the solidarity and reciprocal values of volunteerism as part of the dynamics that enhance human wellbeing.

A healthy society is one in which importance is given to formal and informal relationships that facilitate interaction and engagement and thus engender a sense of belonging. It is also one in which there is broad participation by all sections of the population. Communities with these characteristics do better in moving forward to meet common aspirations.

Volunteers are more likely to develop civic skills, to attach more importance to serving the public interest as a personal life goal and to be more politically active. Thus, in going about their voluntary activities, individuals are also cultivating an outlook that contributes to a social environment that nurtures the well-being of all.