

**UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTEERS**

**Contribution to the Review  
Of  
The Achievements of the WSC Plan of Action**

September 2001

## **GLOBAL AND SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS**

1. As the volunteer arm of the United Nations system, UNV has contributed to the achievements of the WSC Plan of Action during the 1990's. This was done not only in the context of its specific mandate as a service provider to and through other UN agencies and programmes, but also through partnership with government institutions and civil society. During the 1990's, UNV placed each year an average number of 3,500 volunteer professionals in more than 130 countries, 60% of which were LDC's.

The most significant volunteer involvement in development activities was in support of initiatives aimed at sustainable human development in general, and poverty reduction in particular. Reduction of poverty is a key factor in addressing the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups in society. Within these groups, children are among the weakest and the hardest hit by the effects of grinding poverty. Therefore, poverty reduction is a must for any other child-targeting effort to be sustainably meaningful. UNV's involvement in poverty alleviation programmes having been mainly at the community level, using through participatory processes; the effects of these efforts have had an impact on the situation of many children.

During the period under review, UNV was involved in a wide range of thematic activities of direct importance to children. UNV volunteers have supported programmes aimed at improving:

- health and nutrition of children and their mothers;
- family life/planning and family support to children;
- education of children through both formal and informal approaches;
- the situation of children in special development situation including in conflict and war zones.

2. Most of UNV volunteers involved in poverty alleviation programmes during the 1990's operated under the framework of UNDP assistance, usually building on peoples' own survival strategies. In Central African Republic, for example, volunteers through partnership with indigenous NGOs in different regions of the country, helped more than 130 communities develop over 170 micro-enterprises in agriculture and crafts activities. To facilitate these income-generating initiatives, a functional literacy programme completed in 48 days benefited about 300 adults – the majority of whom were women.

In Bangladesh, UNV volunteers living directly with the people in rural areas, developed the tradition of consulting local community groups on their priority development needs and on how they can address these needs, relying first on their own available skills and resources. This practice has helped local populations find ways to generate income through raising dairy cows, pulling rickshaws, or keeping bees. Focusing on women, the volunteers provided bookkeeping training to help manage small businesses and promote family planning.

In Mongolia, serving under difficult living conditions in the remote areas of the country, international and national UNV volunteers teaming up with local community workers in supporting efforts to stimulate self-help development initiatives. They helped to develop microcredit facilities to support local microenterprises, to raise awareness on gender issues, and to organize skills training in practical initiatives that enabled a wide range of income-generating activities. The volunteers' presence in the isolated areas was also vital in establishing Mongolia's first National Human Development Report which highlighted the contrasts in development amongst various localities and social groups in the country.

3. UNV volunteers were also very engaged in activities aimed at improving community health especially through non-formal education about nutrition and sanitation measures. In many cases, the positive impact on children of these activities was visible in a fairly short periods of time. These activities were promoted through the UNV/DDS (Domestic Development Service) initiatives in poor Asian and anglophone/francophone African countries – including e.g. Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka; Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Togo; Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia. The UNV/DDS field workers, using credibility and trust acquired through sharing the living conditions of the local communities, advocated the importance of nutrition for their families (children in particular) among poor women. They advised women on ways of improving nutrition through the use of highly nutritive local products traditionally neglected or through encouraging family gardening of more nutritive crops such as vegetables.

UNV volunteers also were very involved in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic during the 1990's. In this activity, UNV focused primarily on community-oriented approaches. Mixed teams of international and national UNVs supported national AIDS programmes in a number of LDC's. This new scourge worsened a situation of already-untenable-poverty particularly affecting children resulting in AIDS-generated orphans a child-headed households. Through appropriate information/education/communication activities, the volunteers provided training and counseling for home-based care, the promotion of self-help groups and the creation of community support networks– especially in support of decimated families left with small children.

As a follow-up to the Paris AIDS Summit in 1994, UNV took up the challenge of promoting the greater involvement of people themselves living with and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. These people living with AIDS were recruited as UNV volunteers in their own countries to serve as peer educators, counselors and trainers. Based on the premise that the needs and problems of people living with HIV/AIDS are best understood by those affected, these volunteers helped to increase public awareness of the pandemic and to strengthen the capacity of self-help groups in dealing with its social and economic impact at the community level. This joint UNV and UNAIDS initiative has now been launched in Africa, the Caribbean and key countries in Asia.

The services of UNV doctors also benefited many countries in the 1990's including African LDC's, isolated Pacific Islands and within many humanitarian relief programmes where UNV doctors often constituted part of the first civilian contingent of assistance.

4. UNV volunteers supported several programmes aimed at providing special assistance to children in various regions. In seven countries in Central America and the Caribbean, they helped to address concerns about sexual exploitation and child labour. Since 1992, UNV volunteers, through a regional project, have been helping to draft laws, train judges, lawyers and government officials on how to apply the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In other locations, UNV volunteers assisted in addressing country-specific problems of children: for example in Nicaragua, they promoted a national registration system for newborn children; in Panama and El Salvador, they helped to address the effects on children of the neglect due to the absence of national children's codes. In Ethiopia, Ecuador, Brazil and Vietnam, UNV volunteers helped street children to get back on track by providing them with practical skills training and/or by guiding teenagers to potential employers.

5. Education – both formal and non-formal – was an important area of direct support for children by UNV volunteers. UNV teachers have assisted many countries (for example, CAR, Mongolia, Namibia, Niger) in their respective schooling systems at different levels (secondary, vocational or higher education), especially building up the capacity of national teachers. In Hanoi, Vietnam, UNV volunteers supported the Hoa Soa Vocational Training school. As a non-profit entity managed by a group of committed Vietnamese women, this school offers courses in catering, industrialized sewing, small business management and foreign languages. With an annual in-take of about 300 students, over 90% of the graduates from this school – of whom more than 50% are women - have so far secured full-time employment as a result of the reputation for quality training.

6. The assistance provided by UNV volunteers in countries in special circumstances was particularly important during the 1990's. From Iraq to Cambodia, the Great Lakes region, the former Yugoslavia, the Caribbean, Central America and East Timor, UNV volunteers in massive numbers engaged in all aspects of refugee assistance, from establishing and managing camps to distributing food and providing health care which enabled the survival of the most vulnerable especially children, to participating in repatriation operations, including monitoring and protection of refugees, again in particular the weakest ones like the children.

In natural or man-made crises situations, the services of UNV volunteers were continuously present throughout the 1990's. In Cambodia in the early 1990's and more recently in East Timor, volunteers have helped to restore a peaceful environment which is so indispensable for the human development process. In Central America in response to the hurricane Mitch emergency, UNV volunteers assisted in the provision of critical primary health care and contributed to the immediate needs assessments in remote provinces,

enabling international agencies and national authorities to target more accurately emergency supplies of food, water and other basic needs.

During the 1990's, UNV volunteers also contributed in many countries to the major challenge of post-crisis rebuilding and rehabilitation. In Georgia, for example, they were instrumental in building national capacity for conflict resolution through the training of representatives of civil society groups. They also promoted peace-building processes at the community level through inter-communal partnerships and joint projects. They also supported local NGO's in establishing links and dialogue among groups from the conflict zones.

In Guatemala, UNV volunteers met with tens of thousands of indigenous populations in their remote villages to inform them, for the first time, of the progress in peace negotiations and to explain their human rights. Specially assigned to verify the implementation of the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Groups of Guatemalans, the team of UNV volunteers was perceived as neutral and provided a forum where Guatemalans could confidently go to recount the abuses they had suffered.

In post-war Mozambique, mixed teams of international and national UNV volunteers were assigned in rural areas of Gaza, Inhambane, Manica, Maputo, Sofala and Tete. They supported local efforts to improve community organizations, rural product market, clean water access and health services.

In Kosovo, UNV volunteers played a key role in re-establishing social services and rebuilding local administrative capacity, thereby providing support to crisis- affected populations, including refugees and displaced persons.

7. It should be noted that a significant proportion of UNV's contributions was achieved in direct partnership with UNICEF. From 54 volunteers in 1991, the number of UNV volunteers involved in UNICEF-supported programmes increased continuously from year to year reaching 116 in 1999. These volunteers have been active in UNICEF-hosted programmes both in normal development as well as crisis situations, working in child health and nutrition, safe motherhood initiatives, household food security, support to street children, sexual abuse of children, child labour, protection of children in landmine areas and promotion of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION**

1. Further advancement in the implementation of the WSC Plan of Action will primarily depend on two things:

- additional ratifications and actual application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- programme responses adapted to country-specific issues on children.

The overall goal of the child survival, protection and development should systematically permeate development plans at all levels. It should become one test of the validity of such plans.

2. At the country level, efforts should be made to ensure that an inter-agency thematic group on children survival/protection/development exists in all UN member countries. This could be an important instrument for proper sensitization, as well as a regular reminder to and capacity building of national institutions on the subject.

Accordingly, the CCA report and subsequent plans and programmes could be usefully assessed against “child-friendly” criteria. This would ensure that related resource allocations are fully attuned to the goals on children.

3. Particular attention needs to be devoted to strengthening local voluntary actions – mostly by women’s groups - to ensure child survival, protection and development. Their specific initiatives and growing networks should be built upon. Such an approach would help ensure the relevance of actions, cost-effectiveness and sustainability. It is, therefore, fortunate that the review of the achievements of the WSC Plan of Action coincides with 2001, the International Year of Volunteers. The attention of the UN General Assembly should be drawn to the promising potential of volunteer movements in support of child survival, protection and development in almost all member countries. Volunteerism brings benefits to both the society at large and to the individual volunteer. UNV, as the volunteer arm of the UN, is committed to the goals of the WSC and will work in support of UNICEF’s important efforts on behalf of the World’s children.

