Celebrating International Volunteer Day 2016 – Youth Volunteering for SDGs

5th December 2016
UNDP, 55-Lodhi Estate, New Delhi
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International Volunteer Day 2016 – Youth Volunteering for SDGs

Background

International Volunteer Day (IVD), on December 5th, was designated by the United Nations in 1985 as an international observance day to celebrate the power and potential of volunteerism. It is an opportunity for volunteers, and volunteer organizations, to raise awareness of, and gain recognition for, the contribution they make to their communities.

The theme for IVD 2016 “GlobalApplause – Give volunteers a hand”, recognizes volunteers worldwide and their efforts in making peace and sustainable development a reality.

Just after the launch of Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) in 2015, UNV India along with the youth volunteering organizations - Pravah, Commutiny-the Youth Collective and Restless Development - has been conducting “Youth Addas” (discussion on social issues amongst youth) with about 80-90 youth volunteers on the first Saturday of the month, every two months to sensitize youth volunteers on SDGs. Each Youth Adda focuses on a specific Goal with support of resource persons having expertise in relevant SDG thematic area.

Objective of International Volunteer Day 2016

The Youth Adda initiative has completed one year. Coinciding with IVD 2016 focusing on global applause for volunteers, UNV India in collaboration with the partner youth volunteering organizations has decided to devote the IVD 2016 on December 5th for celebrating efforts toward “Youth Volunteering and SDGs”.

IVD 2016 is designed to be an extension of the Youth Adda series, since the focus will continue to remain on engagement of youth for sensitization on SDGs.
## IVD 2016 – Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:30 – 2:00</td>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>Registration of youth volunteers and participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00 – 2:30</td>
<td>Brief introduction of SDGs by Mr. Yuri Afanasiev, UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) / UNDP Resident Representative in India</td>
<td>A brief introduction to SDGs with focus on how Volunteers have been contributing and can further contribute to SDGs</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:30 – 3:15</td>
<td>Showcasing what has worked and celebration</td>
<td>An interactive presentation by youth volunteering organizations showcasing one innovative action undertaken by youth volunteers towards SDGs in India. The SDGs covered by youth volunteering organizations are: 1. SDG 5, 4 and 10 by PRAVAH 2. SDG 3, 5, 8 and 10 by Restless Development 3. SDG 13, 14 and 15 by Swechha 4. SDG 10 and 17 by Commutiny the youth collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 – 3:45</td>
<td>Nukkad Naatak (street play) + Discussion by Mehak</td>
<td>Youth and SDGs</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:45 – 4:00</td>
<td>Tea Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00 – 5:30</td>
<td>World Cafe on “Youth volunteering and SDGs”</td>
<td>All the participants will be organized into four groups as per SDGs mentioned above and the lead youth volunteering organizations will have discussions with youth volunteers on their contributions and also their views on creating more spaces for youth volunteer interactions and contribution to SDGs in India.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:30 – 6:00</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>Thematic leads will make presentations of discussions and results</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:00 – 6:15</td>
<td>Nukkad Naatak (street play) + Discussion by Aagaz</td>
<td>Gender discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:15 – 6:30</td>
<td>Closing Session Remarks by Mr. Diego Palacios, Representative, UNFPA</td>
<td>Closure of the event</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:30 – 7:30</td>
<td>Performance by Swarathma</td>
<td>A youth music band performance to end the day</td>
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The International Volunteer Day (IVD) 2016 kicked off with the registration of staff members and youth volunteers associated with the four partner organizations, Pravah, Community – The Youth Collective, Swechha and Restless Development. There was a palpable sense of excitement among the young people as they set up their tables and reviewed their presentations one last time. Representatives of the Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) were also present on the occasion.

Narendra Mishra, Program Officer, UN Volunteers welcomed the volunteers and reiterated the significance of the International Volunteer Day vis-à-vis the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Yuri Afanasiev, UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative in India lauded the efforts of the volunteers and briefed the gathering on the SDGs and how these have evolved from the Millennium Development Goals. “This is the first time in human history that these goals have been defined in agreement with everyone. The people, the youth have crafted the agenda. The agenda cannot be implemented without the efforts of community-level activists and volunteers. With technology permeating every sphere of our lives, even semi-literate people can hold the government accountable through a low-end smartphone by clicking a picture and sharing it widely.” He encouraged more youth to join the movement and volunteer for a day or even an hour in their neighbourhood. He said, “The world is witnessing a new wave of volunteering movement today since all over people are grappling with the issues of unemployment, inequality, social injustice and gender imbalance. People have to step up and be counted. In India, there is an incredible energy in the people around addressing these issues. This is a good time for the volunteering movement in India. The future is about communities engaging with the government on the kind of future they want. More than 5 million people have contributed to SDGs from NGOs in India alone.”
Highlighting India’s demographic dividend as a remarkable advantage, Yuri reiterated the significance of this opportunity for the youth of the country to be part of and kickstart the movement, with the solid support of the UN. “Two key issues facing India are equal access to quality education and women empowerment. Addressing these issues is critical in order for the nation to truly progress. The power of the collective voice needs to be channelled in a positive direction to ensure accountability from the government and decision-makers. The next decade is India’s”, he added.

SHOWCASING INNOVATIVE ACTION UNDER SDGs

The opening segment was followed by interactive presentations by the four youth volunteering organizations, showcasing innovative actions undertaken by youth volunteers towards SDGs in India. This was an interactive session aimed at facilitating cross-learning among the civil society organization (CSO) partners and youth volunteers.

1. **Pravah**

   **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4**
   Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

   **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 5**
   Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

   **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 10**
   Reduce inequality within and among countries

Pravah uses the 5th space approach, i.e. creating a completely non-judgemental space for young people, apart from the four conventional spheres of family, career, friends and leisure. Pravah uses direct and distance education programmes to build capacity of partner organizations. The immediate focus is on developing the potential of the youth and forging partnerships with them through Youth Addas. Pravah is part of the core team of CSOs working on the SDGs, making key recommendations toward solutions for equality and zero discrimination. Pravah’s three key programmes are International Citizenship Service, SMILE and Change Looms.

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**Suruchi Baruah, Pravah**

“Through this partnership with the other CSOs and UNV, we’re living Goal 17 (SDG 17 – Global Partnership for Sustainable Development) while working on the other SDGs. The impact of exposure to SDG efforts is powerful at a young age. It changes mindsets and broadens horizons and paves the way for a generation that is aware and socially responsible. Investing in youth pays off in not just addressing the symptoms but finding an underlying solution. All the organizations in this project are working toward the same end.”

**Nida Ansari, Pravah**

“Volunteering for the youth can be an experiential journey, one that takes them beyond bookish concepts and acquaints them with the ground realities. Development of young people should be an outcome – sustainable development is foregrounded in youth development. Change youth, change society. Momentum is picking up in youth volunteering. Partnership with civil society organizations is stronger than before in the SDG global agenda. The world is in flux right now and we have no idea what the future holds. Now more than ever, the youth need to engage with stakeholders to ensure a secure tomorrow for our next generations.”
2. **Restless Development**

Restless Development aims to channelize the energy of youth in a positive way to change the world through its tested models of peer education, technology, volunteerism and policy influence.

- **Peer education** - A video on ‘Making Periods Normal’ is screened by young male volunteers to their peers to help increase awareness and sensitize them on the topic of menstruation.
- **Technology** – A mobile application, mSaathi, has been designed and rolled out to facilitate comprehensive sexuality education using gamification. The organization is also working toward ensuring basic digital literacy of communities through its digital literacy centres.
- **Volunteerism** – The volunteer-driven organization has around 250 volunteers at any given point of time. Volunteerism can influence policy as in the case of the earthquake in Nepal in 2015, when school students wrote to the President of Nepal regarding rescue and rehabilitation efforts.

3. **Swechha**

Swechha is a volunteer-driven organization, focusing on the three SDGs relating to sustainable ecosystems. The immediate focus of the organization’s efforts are towards getting the butterflies and jungles back and reviving the dead Yamuna river. With the help of its volunteers, the organization has set up the first food forest (growing fruits and herbs) in Gurugram. As part of its Monsoon Wooding initiative, the organization has set up an urban forest in Faridabad. In 2014, UNV and Swechha collaborated to clean up the Yamuna with the help of 3,000 youth volunteers.
4. Commutiny the Youth Collective

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 10
Reduce inequality within and among countries

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 17
Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Commutiny is a network/collective of 30 youth-led and youth-engaging organizations and 50 partner organizations that aims to strengthen the ecosystem of youth in India. As part of the Youth Adda series, the organization works to help youth understand the SDGs and how they can contribute to the Goals. In collaboration with Pravah (also part of the Collective), the organization has drafted a curriculum which is to be launched. The organization focuses on the imperative need for citizens to know their rights and duties so as to be able to truly contribute to achieving the SDGs.

An individual needs to know not just about his/her own rights but also needs to be aware of the rights of others and collectively support each other. This is a prerequisite for responsible and active citizenship. Ownership of common spaces is the need of the hour. Towards this end, the organization has initiated Samvidhan Live, an experiential learning journey aimed at creating jagriks – jagruk nagrik – a socially aware and responsible citizen.

After the presentations, a representative of Thinkthrough Consulting briefed the gathering on the organization’s action research on youth volunteering and the launch of a youth perception survey through social media that aims to study the factors that drive volunteerism among the youth. A case study compilation will also be created to capture best practices among CSOs.
The participants were also excited to get their photo taken at the photo booth where they could be clicked holding the SDG flashcards of their choice, the cause they are passionate about or want to contribute to.

An engaging nukkad natak/street play by professional theatre group, Mehak, portrayed three SDG Heroes, ordinary people who made a difference within their communities. The play highlighted the significance of collective will and volunteerism in making the world a better place.
WORLD CAFÉ ON YOUTH VOLUNTEERING AND SDGS

The session involved breakout sessions with all participants organized into four groups. In each group, the lead organization (Pravah/Restless Development/Swechha/Commutiny) initiated a discussion on contribution of youth volunteers as well as views on creating more spaces for youth volunteer interactions specifically with respect to their SDGs. Each group had to brainstorm and collate their thoughts and insights within the framework of the following questions:

1. What are the spaces available for young people to bring about a change?
2. What spaces should be made available for young people to bring about a change?
3. What can the youth do to create spaces so as to witness a positive change?
4. What does the youth believe the civil society, UN and the government should do for the youth to bring about a change?
Youth Volunteer Recommendations

Swechha - SDG 13, 14 and 15

What can youth do to bring about positive change?

The key focus areas are communication, collaboration, awareness and sensitivity.

- The youth need to first focus on changing behaviours and attitudes at home and then move on to creating change within their community.
- The youth need to be reflective, sensitive and aware of the world around them in daily life.
- Change is only possible through collective initiatives, with the youth working together in collaboration.
- There is a significant amount of ownership of youth in change, since they are the future of a nation.
- Adequate media coverage and appreciation from stakeholders will sustain the youth’s commitment to bringing about change in their society.
- Youth can be trained as master trainers in relevant areas to create a sustainable model of learning and skill development.
- The government, NGOs, CSOs and the UN agencies must focus on creating and nurturing young leaders.
- Community-based research initiatives should be led by youth for greater reach and can help increase their involvement in development activities.
- The youth should support social enterprises within their local community.

Taking ownership is important for sustainable development. The youth need to work in communication with the authorities. For a greener tomorrow, we need to promote industries that are eco-friendly and levy penalties on polluting units to bring in real change. There is a need to sensitize and train educators (e.g., government school teachers) since they are role models for young people. Leaders need to be trained first to be able to lead.

Restless Development - SDG 3, 5, 8 and 10

What are the spaces available for young people to bring about a change?

Some of the available spaces/forums for youth to initiate change include:

- Home is a good place to start with; youth can engage with friends and family (especially mothers) to introduce change at the household level.
- Educational institutions such as schools and colleges can be great spaces for generating awareness and mobilizing youth.
- Social media channels can be used by the youth for launching campaigns and generating awareness about events.
- Youth can join/volunteer/intern with local NGOs to take part in community development activities.
- Functional Anganwadi centres can be utilized to connect with the community regularly.
International Volunteer Day 2016 - Youth Volunteering for SDGs

- Youth clubs can serve as channels for both recreation as well as community development activities.
- The youth could explore linkages with programmes under National Children’s Fund which are targeted at welfare and development of children across India.
- Urban and rural ambassador programme for students (campus)
- The National Service Scheme (NSS) which aims at holistic development of students through community service is active in rural areas across India; students can join their local NSS unit to serve their community.

**What spaces should be made available for young people to bring about a change?**

- College/university campuses should serve as enabling spaces for young women and men to discuss current affairs and initiate collective action.
- The youth should engage with urban Panchayats, and ensure these forums have representatives from rural migrant groups and marginalized communities, especially conflicted groups.
- Anganwadi centres should be available for youth to speak about and educate the community on sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Specific rural women empowerment programmes should be included under corporate social responsibility
- There should be urban and rural exchange programmes with healthy representation of rural youth – this will increase understanding on both sides and create empathy.
- Gramya Manthan should be part of the curriculum for students in urban areas, as these rural immersion programmes can help these students get a first hand experience of and empathize with the challenges faced by rural communities.
- Volunteering opportunities should be made available to youth to increase their participation in community-building activities as well as to prepare them for potential careers in the development space.
- Youth-led community-based research could increase the reach and efficacy of such studies.
- Photo exhibitions can be organized for youth to showcase their photodocumentation of prevalent issues.
- Youth concerns should find space and voice in the mainstream media.

**What can the youth do to create spaces so as to witness a positive change?**

- Youth groups on financial literacy can be created in rural areas where accessibility to information is limited.
- Youth should make a conscious effort to link with grassroots level organizations.
- Awareness around government schemes such as Startup India and NREGA can be generated by youth to educate and inform the community.
- Youth can play a great role in creating awareness in urban areas about being socially responsible citizens.
- The youth can organize themselves into unions to collectively address education or work-related problems.
- Weekend clubs, summer camps, and campaigns like recycling drives can be owned/led by young people in urban areas to inform, educate and mobilize the community toward social change.
What does the youth believe the civil society, UN and the government should do for the youth to bring about a change?

- Vocational training courses can be designed as per interests of young people e.g. hair styling, tattoo artistry, makeup artistry etc. This will ensure the relevance, appeal and uptake of such courses among the youth.
- The government should design financial literacy programmes targeted at youth.
- The youth can be trained and prepared for meaningful participation in development activities.
- Youth can be involved in fundraising activities around development programmes.
- The government, civil society and UN agencies should hold regular interactive programmes to connect better with the youth.
- Youth can be engaged with and utilized for participatory rural appraisal so as to help design more effective and efficient development programmes and projects.
- Voluntourism could be promoted to get more youth to participate in meaningful volunteer work while they are travelling as tourists within India.

The group emphasized the need for youth to be at the heart of policy making and for them to be heard. Youth-centric policies should be updated regularly. Youth organizations should be strengthened and young people should be engaged in campaigning and community mobilization. The government should set up a policy boot camp to educate the youth since no one knows these policies at ground level. Youth should be involved in advocacy. Government programmes should allow for youth participation at grassroots level. There should be national and global funds earmarked to facilitate the above recommendations.

Commutiny the Youth Collective - SDG 10 and 17

Goal 10

What spaces should be made available for young people to bring about a change?

- Community action groups can be created that discuss SDGs and how these goals apply to the immediate local context.
- The government and national and international development agencies should use social media to raise awareness and reach out to the youth.
- Capacity building workshops can be held to train youth on using social media effectively for discussing SDGs.
- Theatre/dance/street art are some of the mediums that can be employed to engage with communities, targeting all stakeholder groups.
- There should be debates/discussions/action around SDGs with in-school and out-of-school youth in urban and rural areas.
- Media (e.g. short films) could prove effective in initiating a discussion on SDGs with the youth.
- To encourage participation of youth in programme planning and implementation, youth parliaments should be created which can discuss policies targeted at youth as well as source recommendations from youth and share these with government, both in rural and urban areas.
International Volunteer Day 2016 – Youth Volunteering for SDGs

- Youth should be given the space to participate actively in local government bodies to ensure transparent and inclusive governance.
- Panchayats can be expanded to include youth, and thus, facilitate their participation in local governance across the country.
- The format of games and sports could be explored to increase awareness about SDGs among the youth.

What can the youth do to create spaces so as to witness a positive change?

- Self awareness is the first step; the youth need to reflect and change their own attitudes and mindsets to be truly part of the change.
- The youth should read and share stories of social change and impact. Social media and instant messaging technology can be used to share such stories across networks, thereby increasing the reach of the stories.
- The youth should look to develop leadership skills, with the support of existing institutions and agencies.
- To be a part of the global movement for sustainable development, the youth could explore employment opportunities in the social/development sector.

What does the youth believe the civil society, UN and the government should do for the youth to bring about a change?

- There should be community meetup spaces (such as Youth Addas) where young people can interact with and learn from thematic experts in the development sector.
- The youth volunteering initiative should be scaled up across rural areas.
- The voice of the youth should be heard across the spectrum, including in policymaking, rather than just be used for awareness, outreach and information dissemination.
- Youth should be included in politics so as to ensure that all political units focus on real issues that need immediate attention rather than superficial electioneering.
- Space should be created for youth to participate at the grassroots level.
- There is a need to facilitate the youth access to organizations working on SDGs.
- Young adults should be able to volunteer for the UNV and not wait till they are 22 to join (possible now since 18+ is the revised minimum age for UNV).

Pravah - SDG 4, 5 and 10

Gender Equality

- The focus areas for government, civil society and UN agencies should be creating awareness, formulating laws which address gender inequality, changing mindset of society and educating the girl child.
- Youth needs to take responsibility to ensure gender equality is established even in everyday scenarios – in their homes, at schools/colleges/workplaces and in their daily routine.
- Gender sensitization should be included in school curriculum from early childhood.
What can the youth do to create spaces so as to witness a positive change?

- The youth can help design and launch gender sensitization campaigns in formal academic institutions as well as non-formal spaces.
- Large scale festivals like #GlobalCitizenIndia must be diffused to rural India and youth groups can be mobilized for the purpose.
- The youth’s comfort and adeptness with technology and social media can be utilized for information dissemination and outreach on key issues.

What spaces should be made available for young people to bring about a change?

- Vibrant, democratic and inclusive spaces like Youth Adda and Guftagu should be created across the country for youth to connect and ideate.
- Create a hashtag which is accessible to all
- Good work done by individuals and companies in the development space should be rewarded so as to motivate other young people to contribute to sustainable development.

What does the youth believe the civil society, UN and the government should do for the youth to bring about a change?

- Youth-centric events like IYD must be held more often and across the country, including rural areas, for increased impact.
- Government policies should be formulated/promoted to create awareness among rural communities on gender equality, especially among the youth.
- Guidelines from government should be issued toward creation of gender-neutral spaces.
- Policymakers must involve youth in grassroots level programmes.

Quality Education

What does the youth believe the civil society, UN and the government should do for the youth to bring about a change?

- The government should create inclusive spaces to facilitate a discussion around the need and strategy to achieve quality education.
- Volunteer-based organizations implementing existing schemes should create awareness and encourage more people to volunteer for quality education and train these new volunteers.
- Technology-based remote learning should be explored as more than an alternate option to increase coverage of free or subsidized education services.
- Government should make education loans better and more accessible to the underprivileged.
- Primary schools should include life skills-based education for young kids and caretakers along with their regular curriculum.
- Training programmes targeted at market-oriented employment opportunities should be created for the youth, thus, helping prepare them to join the workforce.
- Leadership training for youth should be facilitated through government mechanisms.
- The government should create rural exposure/immersion programmes for youth in collaboration with Panchayats to create awareness and empathy for the lesser privileged among urban youth.
International Volunteer Day 2016 – Youth Volunteering for SDGs

- Designing rural internship programmes for students of leading institutions like Indian Institute of Technology can be a good way to engage the brightest young minds of the country in reflecting and strategizing on development issues facing the country.
- There should be reservation for SC/ST/OBC in education and jobs.

What can the youth do to create spaces so as to witness a positive change?

- Older youth can create focus groups/clubs for 15-20 year olds so as to facilitate discussions on youth-centric issues and expand the young minds to be more reflective and action-oriented.
- There should be peer support for youth interested in higher education, including through group formation and involving friends and family.

Inequality – Economic, caste and gender

What can the youth do to create spaces so as to witness a positive change?

- Youth clubs (focusing on initiating dialogue as well as action around key issues) can facilitate workshops and training in schools to prepare the next generation of youth to be socially responsible citizens.
- Youth need to cultivate leadership skills so as to contribute to the change.
- Social media campaigns can be used by the youth to increase awareness about their role in creating a better and sustainable future.

What does the youth believe the civil society, UN and the government should do for the youth to bring about a change?

- The youth need support from CSOs in terms of opportunities for collaboration, volunteering, internship or jobs.
- The government should ensure economic inclusiveness of scholarships and vocational trainings so that no youth is left behind.
- The stakeholders should work together to create a peaceful and enabling environment and ensure affordable quality education for all.
- Academic curricula should encourage/reward volunteering efforts so as to motivate more youth in community development activities.
- There should be more visibility for youth issues and efforts around them in mainstream media.
Diego Palacios, Representative, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), formally closed the IVD 2016. In his concluding remarks, Diego stated that “all UN agencies, especially UNFPA, keep young people at the centre of their programmes. The UN looks at youth holistically in terms of participatory education, health and engagement in socioeconomic activities. The wealth of discussions and sheer energy of IVD 2016 has been enriching. The recommendations offered by the youth volunteers during the World Café sessions are substantial and doable and merit close observation from the government and UN agencies.” The recommendations sourced from the breakout sessions will be submitted to the UN group on youth and could find place in the next UN Sustainable Framework. Diego also briefed the youth volunteers on “the UN’s Youth 101, which aims to create mechanisms to enable youth participation, not just as consultants or to merely provide recommendations but to be part of the solutions. The youth will be part of the entire programme cycle - design, implementation, evaluation and closing the information loop. Youth 101 understands the critical need to create spaces for meaningful engagement of the youth for policy formulation as well as implementation.”

A powerful nukkad naatak/street play by Aagaz revealed how deeply ingrained gender discrimination is in India. The play used conventional ad jingles that stereotype women and real life situations faced by the two young girls playing the protagonists to drive home the point of gender inequality.
The occasion also witnessed the launch of Habitat for Humanity International’s global village volunteering opportunity, Habitat Young Leaders Build 2017, which works toward decent shelter and decent sanitation and is trying to mobilize two million youth towards the cause.

The IVD 2016 celebrations wrapped up with an invigorating performance by the Indian folk/fusion band, Swarathma.