Marking the Tenth Anniversary of International Year of Volunteers (IYV+10)

United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and its IYV+10 partners engaged in a number of activities in 2011 towards achieving the objectives of IYV+10. These include campaigns, seminars and workshops, awards, competitions, campaigns and other promotional activities. The scale and outreach of these joint efforts have received recognition at both the national and international levels.

Applauding the crucial role of volunteers, Patrice Coeur-Bizot, UN Resident Coordinator & United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative in his message said, “The celebrations for IYV+10 this year have strengthened the spirit of volunteerism. Our volunteers play a critical role within the UN system in India in raising awareness on development challenges.”

A glimpse into the IYV+10 celebrations in India

People's Institute for Development and Training (PIDT) played an active and leading role in celebrating the IYV+10 by organizing a Regional Seminar for rural institutes in eastern India during March. The aim of the seminar was to encourage the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to involve volunteers in development activities. It was organized by PIDT with the support of the National Council of Rural Institutes, Ministry of Human Resource Development – Government of India (GOI). About 60 NGOs from the eastern states of India participated in the seminar. A project on environment consciousness and education was also launched on the occasion. PIDT also organized drama and discussions on the role of volunteers, involving more than four hundred children from Anandalaya Public School and a few other neighbouring government schools in Deoghar district, Jharkhand. A waterway was also built to collect the scarce rainwater in the village pond with the help of youth from villages.

This was followed by a workshop in New Delhi in April, on the theme ‘Volunteer Voices’ organized by PIDT, UNV and others, attended by more than a hundred volunteers and about 50 Volunteer Involving Organizations (VIOs). Voices, experiences and aspirations of young volunteers from across the country on ‘Changing the World’ were also encapsulated in short videos.

In May, a Consultative Meeting on Volunteerism was held in Manila for the Asia, Pacific and the Caribbean region. About 60 delegates from 21 countries attended the meeting to deliberate on advocacy, campaigning, effective legal frameworks and voluntary actions for impact and outcomes on the national and global volunteerism agenda. The Indian delegation was represented by the UNV country office team and Mr. A.K. Upadhyay, Secretary, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MoYAS), whose invaluable inputs during a panel discussion on Volunteerism, Human Development and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) helped generate positive momentum for the IYV+10 campaign.

To understand the corporate social responsibility (CSR) perspective on volunteerism, a webinar was organized by Chitrakaar and UNV on the theme ‘Spirit of Volunteerism’ in June. It connected people from over five locations in India who came online to interact with the UNV team and Mr. Daya Prakash, the Chief Information Officer of LG Electronics. Mr. Prakash shared his views on his volunteer experiences, volunteer activities undertaken by LG Electronics, and on how volunteerism represents the cause of being socially responsible.

‘Volunteering for a better World’ was the theme of the workshop organized by Yuvsatta, Peace Club of Dev Samaj College of Education, Oxfam-India, UNV, and Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation (GRTF) in July. It was attended by over 25 prominent schools and colleges of Chandigarh. The aim of the workshop was to encourage youth to volunteer to contribute in areas such as peace and harmony, sustainable development, community health, and education of children thriving on social margins etc. The new edition of children’s monthly newspaper ‘Jhunu’ at Yuvsatta’s children’s centre was also launched. It was the first lesson in participation, self-expression and grassroots democracy for all the children involved.
From June-August, Peace Gong Painting competitions were held at the national level organized by GRTF, UNV and others. Thousands of children across India participated to highlight the contribution of volunteers in nation building. The first competition in the series was organized in June by The Belgaum Integrated Rural Development (BIRD), Karnataka. More than a hundred children— representing different schools of the area and Shishu Panchayats (SP) took part in the painting competition on the theme ‘Volunteering for a Better World: Role of Shishu Panchayats’. Members of the SP Gokak, Belgaum shared the activities undertaken by them on soil conservation, school kitchen gardens and plantation. It was followed by a discussion on children’s role in protecting the environment. The students echoed that by protecting the environment, a culture of peace can be promoted.

In August, a Seminar on Youth Volunteerism was held in New Delhi, organized by the Commonwealth Youth Programme Asia Center supported by MoYAS, and UNV to mark the conclusion of International Year of Youth, and observance of IYV+10. The aim of the seminar was to sensitize all stakeholders, including young people themselves, about their role in fostering an environment of dialogue, understanding and a spirit of volunteerism; to create an enabling environment for young people to address their issues, needs and concerns; and involving young people for meaningful engagement in decision making and the nation building process. The participants included policy makers, non-governmental organizations working for young people, and active youth leaders from Brunei, India, Maldives, Malaysia and Singapore.

“The willingness and ability of citizens to give freely their time out of a sense of solidarity will have a major influence on the extent to which the MDGs are attained and sustained,” remarked Ms Alexandra Solovieva, Deputy Country Director (Programme), UNDP, while delivering the keynote address. Mr. Rakesh Mohan, Joint Secretary, MoYAS, GOI, during the inaugural address said, “Youth, the most vibrant and dynamic segment of India’s population constitutes potentially its most valuable human resource. We, at the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, continue to strive to optimally tap the constructive and creative energies of Youth, by involving them in various nation-building activities through volunteerism.” Five technical sessions on volunteerism were also organized. The seminar concluded with sharing of exemplary volunteer work and experiences by the volunteers themselves.

Exposing urban youth to the realities of rural development is a promising way to promote their understanding and involvement in social development initiatives at the grassroots level. The interaction with rural communities exposes the students to new challenges, experiences and skills to face different situations. These exposures not only help sensitize the students, but also prepare them to become future leaders who will use their knowledge to make rational and conscious decisions in their professional careers.

These volunteer engagements with the rural communities, supported by educational institutions, can help create an enabling environment for supporting development work. One such initiative was launched by Anant Vikas Project (AVP), Social Service league of Stephen's College Delhi, and UNV to mark the IYV+10, and to encourage educational institutions to adopt communities/villages to support development. The initiative was launched in the Gomla village of Haryana to support its development. Impressed by the commitment of the students, the college has now adopted the village supported by AVP, for its overall development.

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1 The Shishu Panchayats are perceived to be vehicles for promoting child participation, urge/ guide them to take up volunteer initiatives, and involve them in the decision making process at grassroots levels, besides empowering them to contribute in the process of community building. To fulfill the overarching goal of the initiative, Shishu Panchayats will be linked to institutions and programmes at the grassroots level. They are becoming very active in Karnataka, Assam, Delhi and other states.

2 The Social Service League is the oldest social service organization in Delhi. Student members of the SSL of St Stephens College have been involved in educating marginalized children in Delhi, and now also in the development activities of Gomla.

3 Gomla, a village in Haryana is situated 125 kms from Delhi. For the past one year the villagers are making efforts to turn it into a model village. The village has wide roads, high cleanliness standards with urinals and dustbins installed throughout the village, efficient drainage system and two parks (funded by Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)).
During the first visit to the village in August 2011, the urban volunteers established a volley ball and a badminton court with the help of youth from the village. Later, a friendly match was organized and career counselling was provided to village youth by the students. Follow ups were carried out to make sure that children in Gomla were availing these facilities. The second visit of the volunteers was organized in January 2012 during which a computer centre was set up with support from AVP. The volunteers are also working on the need assessment of the development work to be carried out in the future.

Another initiative in this regard that needs mention is launching SPs in rural areas in Haryana by GRTF and UNV, with the aim to bring together the rural children and youth to work for the development of their communities. Mewat\(^4\) was chosen in consultations and with the support of Mr. Mehmood Khan\(^5\). Three villages— Nainagla, Agon and Doha— were visited by the UNV and GRTF team to interact with the villagers and take their views on the matter. Nainagla was chosen based on the inputs from all concerned. Ms Shivani Rathee, a student of Delhi University was trained by GRTF to set up a SP in the village. She was later joined by another college student Shelly Singh. Both of them now travel to Nainagla every week to strengthen the SP and also to empower the children, especially the girls. Encouraged by Shivani’s commitment, GRTF has announced two annual Volunteer Fellowships to encourage urban youth to volunteer in rural areas.

In August, on the launch of the ‘Cities for Forest Campaign’ of World Wildlife Fund (WWF), volunteers were mobilized by WWF, UNV, and National Service Scheme (NSS), Delhi University. The volunteers held placards and banners for passers-by, tied banners and signage on trees along the road and reached out to thousands who visited these malls over the weekend. The campaign focused on raising awareness about the intrinsic link between forests and human well-being, with a primary focus on changing the perception of youth all over the country with the aim to raise awareness on the city’s green spaces and urban forest cover.

This was followed by an orientation programme for NSS Volunteers from Delhi University at WWF auditorium, New Delhi. Various volunteering opportunities that the students could take up were also discussed. A similar orientation programme was held in Zakir Husain College, Delhi in September. A nature walk was organized in October followed by a cleaning drive on the Delhi Ridge between 21-28 October to sensitise the students of Bio-diversity at Delhi Ridge, which often goes unnoticed by many. In November, an orientation was given to the NSS Volunteers of Delhi University on Disaster Management by the DRM unit facilitated by UNV, with an enthusiastic participation of more than 200 volunteers.

UNDP and UNV lent support to ‘My Earth My Duty’, an environmental awareness campaign launched by Zee News involving more than 50 million volunteers who planted and nurtured ten million saplings across India. Caitlin Wiesen-Antin, Country Director, UNDP, lauding UNV’s efforts said, “The International Year of Volunteers +10 reminds us of the crucial role played by UNV’s and the importance of creating and promoting an enabling environment where volunteerism can flourish. UNDP is focused on building transformational change through strategic systems, capacities and policies that make a difference in the lives of people facing change through strategic systems, capacities and policies that make a difference in the lives of people facing

\(^4\)Though the Mewat district is in NCR (National Capital Region) and just 50 km from Delhi airport, it has remained undeveloped. The Muslim-dominated district is one of the poorest in Haryana: 95% of its 1 million residents live in villages; crop yields are low; debt levels are high; and incomes are minimal. In 2001, the district’s literacy rate was 43.5%, against the state average of 68%; the average family size was an incredible 7.5 persons and the sex ratio, at 899, was well below the national average of 972. Girls and women fared the worst in this conservative society. The Muslim inhabitants of Mewat are called Meos. Mewat has 1200 village communities. The Tenth Anniversary of International Year of Volunteers

\(^5\)Mr. Mehmood Khan hails from Nai Nangla village in Mewat. He attended a village school, where he studied till class 10. Thereafter, he went to an agricultural university, and subsequently to IIM-Ahmedabad. Khan’s career took off when he joined Unilever. He took on different roles at the FMCG giant and crisscrossed the globe. Somewhere along the way, he settled in London with his family. Even as he went from success to success, Khan would be dismayed by the lack of progress in Mewat each time he dropped by for a visit. He realized that something had to be done to check the economic and social slide. In 2006, he set up the Rasuli Kanwar Khan Trust, in his father’s memory, to spearhead his philanthropic efforts in Mewat. The trust’s initiatives are helping the people of Mewat rise out of poverty. In 2009, he quit as Unilever’s global head of innovations, returned to India and now lives on a farm in Mewat.
deprivation and exclusion. In this context the support of UNVs in empowering communities to engage in the development process at grassroots levels will take on increasing importance in the decade to come.”

This campaign was flagged off in Leh in September by the Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Ajay Maken, who also planted saplings symbolizing hope for a better and a greener future in an area ravaged by a cloudburst in 2010. In his address, Mr. Maken stressed on the need to create awareness on green issues amongst the youth and emphasized the necessity to save energy to ensure a brighter future for the country.

In her message Alexandra Solovieva, Deputy Country Director (Programme), UNDP underlined that, “Generating awareness about the environment and sustainable development issues will be crucial to global efforts to combat climate change. Campaigns such as ‘My Earth My Duty’ can play an important role in highlighting the simple choices we can all make in our daily lives that can contribute to building a sustainable future for all.”

A series of ground events such as rallies, seminars, camps, painting competition, street plays, etc. were also organized between June and September 2011. Also, for the first time in India two eco-friendly concerts were organized in November to promote eco-friendly ways of life. US based Solar Punch—that promotes environmental activism— and Parikrama—one of the oldest surviving rock bands of India— performed in these concerts.

More than 45 papers were presented during the two-day ‘National Seminar on Youth and Volunteerism’ organized in September by Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development, Chennai. These papers will be included in a high-quality publication by the institute during 2012. A number of activities were also undertaken to promote community participation in development during the seminar. An important outcome of the seminar was a general agreement on volunteers as a crucial resource to bring about a change, and the necessity of recognizing their potential. The participants also observed that in order to facilitate volunteering, it is necessary to create an enabling environment on Volunteerism at national and global levels, with strong and sustainable partnerships between the Government, civil society, the UN system and organizations at all levels – local, national and international.

Apeejay India Volunteer Awards (AIVA) was launched by Apeejay Surendra Group in May 2011 to recognize the work of volunteers and organizations engaged in volunteering, and to promote volunteerism among Indians. These awards were conferred in September by Shri Salman Khurshid, the hon’ble Union Minister for Law and Justice and Ministry of Minority Affairs, for four categories: Volunteer of the Year, Youth Volunteer of the Year, Volunteer involving NGO of the Year, and Employee Volunteering Programme of the Year. Ms. Flavia Pansieri, Executive Coordinator, UNV, said in a video message, “We at United Nations Volunteers Programme are very pleased to learn that Apeejay SUREN德拉 Group of India has created 2011 Apeejay India Volunteer Awards. We would encourage other partners in the private sector to follow their example. Volunteering is an important expression of our common humanity and empowers change from the grassroots up especially through strong partnerships. It is important to continue to increasing recognition of volunteerism to support networking opportunities, to create the proper institutional arrangement for volunteerism to flourish and to help all people make a difference.”

Chandigarh was vibrant with the excitement and energy from World Tourism Day (27 September) to International Day of Non-Violence on 2 October. More than 1,000 young people from 25 countries and various states of India gathered in Chandigarh to participate in the six International Youth Peace Festival (IYPF-2011) on the theme of ‘Peace and Environmental Security’ – a week packed with workshops, cultural programmes, campaigns, art and discussions on the role of volunteers to lend their support to issues such as gender, environment etc. For the sixth year in a row, Yuvsatta, along with Goswami Ganesh Duttan Sanatan Dharam College, Chandigarh (GGDSD), Oxfam-India, and Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti hosted this mega annual event, which was also supported by the UNV during 2011.

The fest was inaugurated by Mr. Tushar Gandhi, the great grandson of Mahatma Gandhi. He also chaired a session on ‘Volunteering for a better world’ and reinforced that youth volunteers today have the major responsibility of carrying the seed of peace to their respective cultures and traditions as “Peacemaking is not a retirement plan; it is a way of life.” Some of the prominent personalities who participated include speakers like...
Union Cabinet Minister Mr. Pawan Kumar Bansal; Governor of Punjab, Shri Shivraj Patil; Raman Magsaysay award winner Sandeep Pandey; women activist and ‘Manushi’ editor Dr. Madhu Kishwar; Gandhian peace activist Dr S N Subba Rao; Padma Vibhushan Mr. Sunder Lal Bahuguna; and American Gandhi’s Mr. Bernie Meyer & Mr. Donald McAvinchey. During her session on “Volunteering for a barrier free world,” Ms Amita Dahiya, UNV National Coordinator for IYV+10, encouraged the delegates to become change makers to co-create a future equal to their vast potential as the willingness and ability of people to support community development will have a major influence to the extent to which Millennium Development Goals are attained and sustained.

An Inter-School Debate was organized in October by Joining Hands, WWF and UNV on the theme Individual Social Responsibility - a distant dream in achieving the Millennium Development Goals in India. About 30 schools from Delhi were invited to participate. A discussion was also held on the potential role that volunteers could play towards achieving the MDGs.

In November, the UNV Karamveer Chakra Awards were conferred in an endeavour to promote volunteerism and to acknowledge exemplary voluntary actions towards achieving the MDGs. Ms. Flavia Pansieri, Executive Coordinator, UNV, quoted, “It is important to continue to increase recognition of volunteerism, to create the proper institutional arrangements for volunteerism to flourish and to help all people to make a difference through their own volunteering.”

To celebrate International Volunteers Day (IVD) on 5 December, four events in three different regions of India were organized. In New Delhi, the first-ever State of the World Volunteerism Report (SWVR) was launched by an impressive panel of dignitaries. The panellists included Patrice Coeur-Bizot, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative; Dr. Syeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission, GOI; Kiran Mehra-Keripelman, Director, United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) for India and Bhutan; Caitlin Wiesen-Antin, Country Director, UNDP India; Alexandra Solovieva, Deputy Country Director (Programme), UNDP India and Indira Dasgupta, Executive Director, Peoples Institute for Development and Training, New Delhi. “The steering committee of the Planning Commission will soon finalize a road map for the voluntary sector,” informed Dr. Syeda Hameed, releasing the SWVR. “Volunteerism is not a new concept in India and has been a fundamental value as early as Mahatma Gandhi’s time,” she further added. Dr. Hameed also recommended engaging the country’s vast population as a potential and powerful resource in tackling all of its problems.

Speaking on the occasion Patrice Coeur-Bizot, applauded the excellent work carried out by volunteers in the area of development, humanitarian assistance, environmental preservation and progress made towards the MDGs and said, “Values of Volunteerism are crucial for human and sustainable development.” “The spirit of volunteerism is present in every culture, country and community and no doubt an expression of humanity’s finest values,” noted Ms. Mehra while addressing the gathering, whereas Ms. Wiesen emphasized that “Volunteerism to build resilient and peaceful societies is the need of the hour.”

In Shimla, more than 650 people participated in ‘Swayam- 2011’, an event organized by the Himachal Pradesh Disaster Management Authority (HPSDMA). A tool kit was developed by HPEDMA with the initiative of Mr. D. C. Rana, State Project Officer- HP and Navneet Yadav, National UN Volunteer. A state-wide database was also launched during the occasion to create a network of volunteers on a state-level. The database will be maintained by HPEDMA to ensure quick response at the time of a disaster. One hundred and thirty six volunteers enrolled during the event. Mr. Tenzin Gyachho, from Lahaul & Spiti, became the first volunteer to register.

In Bhubaneswar, more than 300 participated in IVD celebrations organized by UNDP and other partners in Bhubaneswar. On this occasion, two plays on the theme of volunteerism were staged by VISWASS College of Social Work and the Nasha Mukti Yuva Sankalp. Ten young volunteers, who had done exemplary work for the society in Odisha, were felicitated during the occasion. The participants were also given a sapling each to plant and nurture a greener planet. The event ended on a musical note with the performance by music band, VIGHNANZ.
A two-day national convention on “Promoting a culture of volunteering for community building” was organized from 8-9 December at Gandhi Darshan, New Delhi. More than one hundred NYKS Volunteers from nine states of northern region represented their states during the convention. High profile panellists such as eminent Gandhian Shri Natwar Thakkar, Magsaysay award winner Shri Rajendra Singh Rana, Mr. Rakesh Mohan, Joint Secretary, MoYAS; Dr. Manimala, Director, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti and Mr. Rajiv Chandra, UNIC for India and Bhutan among others participated at this national convention. They addressed issues related to volunteerism such as traditions and contemporary volunteering practices, challenges and opportunities, dialectics of volunteering as active citizenry for good governance; inclusivity and innovation, influences of social, political, academic and cultural leaders in creating volunteering traditions, and future of Volunteering in India. In addition, a discussion on SWVR was also held. A message from UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon released on International Volunteers Day was read out at the convention as well.

For the first time, a large number of students are participating in a Slogan Competition in eight languages in more than 830 schools in Mumbai supported by AVP, UNV and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), being held from November 2011 to February 2012, to encourage youth to volunteer.

A special issue of “The Peace Gong-the children's newspaper” is being published in February 2012 by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation, UNV and Anant Vikas Trust, to capture the voices of children across the world on Volunteering to facilitate efforts by children for a peaceful world.

IYV+10 has served as valuable reminder of the crucial role played by volunteers in development work, humanitarian assistance, environmental preservation and progress towards the MDGs. It is hoped that IYV+10 celebrations would lead to bigger voluntary engagements and a more enabling environment for volunteerism in India. Volunteering Matters.