

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Volunteer Groups' thematic position paper to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) 2019

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Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality

- 1) **Volunteers, and support for their efforts, are essential to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda).** According to the *State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2018 (SWVR 2018)* produced by the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV), an estimated one billion volunteers are freely giving their time to make a difference on the issues that affect them and their communities, often in the most difficult of circumstances.¹ As recognised by the synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, the ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be realised without the 'contributions of millions of properly supported and enabled volunteers'² and volunteer driven organisations in both developing and developed countries.
- 2) Volunteering is a universal phenomenon, but it does not occur at uniform rates, nor is it uniformly effective. It is strongest when it is recognised and supported. National and local governments, the United Nations (UN) system, the private sector, civil society, volunteer groups, and volunteers themselves have a role to play in **creating and sustaining an enabling environment for volunteering**. When this succeeds, we unlock the power of volunteering and enable volunteers to make the greatest possible contribution to eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity.

Promoting active citizenship and strengthening people's ownership of the SDGs

- 3) Volunteering is often the first step towards active citizenship and can help strengthen people's ownership of their community's development. Some governments recognise the value of systematic legislation, policies, structures and programs for volunteer engagement and have structures to enable more people to volunteer. Where governments have created a conducive environment for civic engagement and more particularly for volunteers to participate – or where they have been responsive

1 UNV (2018), *The thread that binds – Volunteerism and community resilience, State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2018*, available at: https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/UNV_SWVR_2018_English_WEB.pdf

2 United Nations (2014), *The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet, Synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda*, available at: <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/publications/files/2015/01/SynthesisReportENG.pdf>

to volunteer-led community initiatives – volunteers are more effective in SDG implementation. Volunteers, too, are important for holding member states accountable for their commitment to the SDGs.

- 4) The social, legal, and political context in which volunteers operate matters greatly for what they can or cannot contribute to eradicating poverty. The political bargain between states and citizens, the constitution and legal framework, the social fabric in different countries, the interaction between local, national and global governance, and the diversity of governance actors working at various levels are all elements that affect who can and cannot enter spaces, whose voices are heard, and who influences decision-making.

Promoting inclusion

- 5) Embedded in communities, volunteers can often get to places that others cannot, forging links with local communities and forming a bridge between formal and informal provision of public services. Volunteers are at the forefront of responding to disasters, as evidenced in the recent Cyclone Idai in Madagascar, Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. They extend support to the most vulnerable and also empower marginalised people to take an active role in addressing the challenges they face.

The stakeholder group representing volunteering offers the following recommendations to Member States:

- 1) **Formally recognise the contribution of volunteering to the implementation of the SDGs in Member States' Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the HLPF 2019.**
- 2) **Ensure that volunteer groups are fully recognised and supported in national plans and strategies for implementing the Agenda.**
- 3) **Follow the lead of Member States by affirming their full support for the implementation of A/RES/67/290, which supports the participation of non-governmental actors.**
- 4) **Ensure that the accountability, transparency and review framework for the SDGs involves community consultation at all levels, including representation of the most marginalised voices, as well as the volunteers who work most closely with them.**