Measuring Volunteerism
UNV Side event to the 46th Session of the UN Statistical Commission

The UN Volunteer programme’s side event to the 46th session of the UN Statistical Commission (2015) took place on 5 March 2015 in New York. The event was a panel discussion titled “Data at the Lowest Possible Level: Measuring Volunteerism”. The panel consisted of Rafael Diez de Medina (Chief Statistician and Director of the Department of Statistics, ILO), Milorad Kovacevic (Chief of Statistics, HDRO), Lester Salamon (– Director, Center for Civil Society Studies, Johns Hopkins University), Jacqueline Butcher (Director, Centro de Investigación y Estudios sobre Sociedad Civil, A.C.) and Muna K.C. (Youth Task Team member of Restless Development from Nepal). The session was moderated by Mae Chao (UNV Volunteer Policy Adviser). This document presents the key insights from the discussion in terms of (i) framework; (ii) insights from measurement; and (iii) statistics for advocacy.

The importance of volunteer work in promoting sustainable development, peace and social inclusion is increasingly recognized within the development and humanitarian communities as well as national governments. However, measurement of volunteer work to inform systematic mobilization, engagement and effective integration is still inadequate. While volunteerism has massive potential for economic, environmental and social problem solving, research is needed to inform volunteer-driven programming for sustainable development. Such research to must be founded on adequate, reliable and internationally comparable data, which is not available.

Absence of internationally known and accepted standards results in a wide divergence in reported extent of volunteer work even in countries like the UK which has well-established structures for both volunteering and data collection. Such divergence and instability of estimates from year to year detracts from the credibility of the statistics and render them difficult to use for policy or research. For data on volunteer work to adequately inform research and practice, they must be (i) internationally comparable; (ii) timely and regular; (iii) disaggregated; (iv) inexpensive; (v) based on large enough samples to enable extrapolation into populations; and (vi) reliable.

Framework
One of the outcomes of the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 2013 was a resolution on the Statistics of Work, Employment and Labour Underutilization. The resolution was approved by ILO in March 2014. This resolution provides the first internationally agreed on basis for a framework for measurement of volunteer work.
This resolution has important implications for international recognition of volunteer work for several reasons. The resolution has introduced a comprehensive framework for measurement of all work, paid and unpaid. Critically, it recognizes volunteer work as one specific form of work. For the first time the labour statistics community has recognized the importance of volunteer work and thus for the first time this will be statistically visible globally.

The new framework goes beyond the prior standards and recognizes services provided by household members and by volunteers as work. It marks a shift in understanding of the importance of all kinds of work not just for macroeconomic development but also for social cohesion and social development at the household, community and national levels. This indicates that the shift in our understanding that development requires a focus on both its economic and social dimensions has percolated into labour statistics.

By virtue of this Resolution we now have in the body of an international standard an agreed concept and definition of volunteer work as well as some guidelines for their regular measurement. It also means that countries have recognized the importance of measuring volunteer work to inform policies.

The concept and definition of volunteer work in the new standards is closely aligned with and builds on the Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work (2011). The Resolution counts as volunteer work, any unpaid work that benefits any person other than members of the immediate family regardless of whether such family members live in one or multiple households. The Resolution thus excludes work done for family even if members of the family are not living in the same household. Recognizing the fact that what counts as family is influenced by culture and convention, the definition of family for these purposes is left to the individual countries.

ILO envisions undertaking further methodological work on measurement of volunteer work in the coming years. These include distinguishing unpaid trainee work (e.g., Internship) from volunteer work in the implementation of surveys, distinguishing support provided to volunteers to facilitate their work from payment, and promoting compilation of statistics on volunteers through organizations.

**Insights from measurement**

Some 10 countries have adopted the ILO manual. More work is needed to ensure the adoption of international standards by countries to ensure that the data they collect are based on common definitions and methods and are thus comparable.
Insights from measurement emerging from two different measurement projects were presented. These are the Volunteer Measurement Project of Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies and the National Solidarity and Voluntary Action Survey in Mexico.

The Volunteer Measurement Project (VMP) of Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies in USA seeks to assess the true extent and scope of volunteerism by improving its measurement in official economic statistics through the implementation of the ILO Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work. Estimates undertaken on the basis of 37 countries studied indicate that the world of volunteerism is huge, with some 140 million people engaging in volunteer work in a year on average. While the economic value of volunteer work captures only a fraction of the contribution of such work to society, the VMP database contains highly disaggregated social and demographic data on volunteers. This provides the resources to enhance our understanding of who the volunteers are and the correlates of different kinds of volunteer work they do.

Volunteerism is understood differently in different country and cultural contexts. It is, therefore, important to include in surveys specific questions about the various activities that are undertaken but not considered as volunteering by people in a country. For instance, in Mexico, volunteerism is understood by respondents to surveys as activities carried out within or through a group or an organization.

In Mexico, the National Solidarity and Voluntary Action Survey (ENSAV) is one of the benchmarks in the measurement of solidarity activity, viz. activities that individuals undertake for the benefit of their communities. ENSAV aligns with the ILO Manual (2011). To get around the cultural understanding of volunteerism, ENSAV includes the concept of solidary participation, viz. the non-permanent unpaid help an individual provides to a person outside his family. 23 activities by respondents 15 years and above are surveys to capture solidary action, volunteer work and donations.

ENSAV (2012) found that 76% of Mexican had engaged in some form of volunteerism (compared to 66% in 2005), each contributing on average 283 hours of volunteer work. 53% of volunteers are women and they usually work in the areas of maternal care and health. Men volunteer in sports and community activities. The economic value of volunteer work in Mexico was estimated to be around US $9 billion.

Because of its sound theory and methodology (ILO), Mexico’s Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) has used ENSAV to measure volunteer action in religious and political contexts. INEGI’s national survey on Occupation and Employment does not currently capture data on volunteer work. But INEGI is in the process of adopting ILO’s resolution on the Statistics of Work, Employment and Labour Underutilization to broaden the scope of its survey. This will lead to better capture of information on volunteer work.
Statistics for advocacy

Greater push and funding for measurement of volunteer work is contingent on effective advocacy by the volunteer community, academia, governments and UN institutions such as UNV about its value. One part of this will involve escalated advocacy on the value of volunteer work for human development in general and specifically for achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The second part of it will be presenting the statistics in a way that generates interest, debate and research.

Given that volunteer work is now statistically situated within ILO’s framework for the statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization, discussions on work, particularly on decent work, can serve as entry points for discussions on the value of volunteering. The forthcoming 2015 Human Development Report titled Rethinking Work for Human Development presents one such opportunity for creating the momentum for countries to measure volunteer work.

It is not enough to measure volunteer work. How statistics on volunteer work are presented can influence its uptake in discussions on development and public debate. Statistics on volunteer work can be presented as a dashboard of measures or a single composite index. Each one comes with its pros and cons.

Volunteer work is varied and spans many different sectors and activities. The diversity of volunteer work, together with the fact that the entirety of its value is extremely difficult to quantify, makes it difficult to combine various measures into a single index. Creating a single composite index will require imposing restrictive assumptions and limiting the scope of coverage.

For the purposes of analysis and research, the dashboard approach may offer the best way to present the data. However, a dashboard of measures may not be the most convenient for advocacy purposes.

A composite measure like a single index is easy to understand and compare across countries. This makes composite indices very useful as advocacy tools. A case in point is the Human Development Index which has had enormous success in drawing attention to issues of social policy and expansion of human choices despite its limited and restrictive form. These are tradeoffs that the volunteerism community will have to consider.

The most fundamental and crucial element in the measurement of volunteer work is the volunteer. In the context of the SDGs volunteers will play a key role not just in assisting governments with delivery of development initiatives but more critically in monitoring and reporting on these initiatives. There are some key synergies in the advocacy work for measurement of volunteering, the advocacy needed for recognizing volunteers who often
work outside the limelight, and making the case for greater participation and inclusion in the SDG discussions. The three agenda are related and will need to place the volunteer at the centre as a participant, not merely as a subject.
DATA AT THE LOWEST POSSIBLE LEVEL:
MEASURING VOLUNTEERISM
(Side event to the 46th UN Statistical Commission)
United Nations Headquarters, New York
Conference Room 1 (CB)
Thursday 5 March, 2015 - 1:15pm to 2:30pm

This side event will discuss how measuring Volunteerism can be a means to:
- Integrate measurements of economic and social well-being;
- Obtain locally disaggregated data; and
- Monitor both participation and progress on the SDGs.

Speakers
- Rafael Diez de Medina – Chief Statistician and Director of the Department of Statistics, International Labour Organization (ILO)
- Lester Salamon – Professor and Director, Center for Civil Society Studies, Johns Hopkins University
- Muna K C – Youth Task Team Member from Nepal, Restless Development
- Jacqueline Butcher Garcia-Colin – Director, Centro de Investigación y Estudios sobre Sociedad Civil, A.C., Mexico
- Milorad Kovacevic – Chief of Statistics, Human Development Report Office

Moderator
- Mae Chao, Senior Volunteerism Policy Advisor, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme