

# FINAL REPORT

International Conference on Volunteerism  
& the Millennium Development Goals

Islamabad, 5-7 December, 2004

Organized by the National Commission for Human Development,  
United Nations Volunteers and the UN System in Pakistan

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## **Introduction**

From 5-7 December 2004, the first International Conference on Volunteerism and the Millennium Development Goals was held in Islamabad, Pakistan. The Conference was organised jointly by the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) of Pakistan, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme.

The Conference brought together over 250 participants from 33 countries from all regions of the world and included government leaders, representatives from civil society and from volunteer-involving organisations in both the public and private sectors, media and religious leaders, grass-roots activists and volunteers themselves. They gathered with the objective of exploring and highlighting the role of volunteerism in helping achieve the aims of the Millennium Declaration adopted at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 and outlining the actions needed to enhance the environment for meaningful cooperative, collective and individual volunteer interventions in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Volunteering is a development asset, which is often overlooked in discussions on the MDGs. Yet, as the UN Secretary General has pointed out, it will take the voluntary effort of countless millions of ordinary citizens to accompany the actions of governments, the UN system, civil society organisations and the private sector to make the Goals a reality. Identifying volunteer potential in communities, understanding the conditions under which this resource thrives, and building it up with the involvement of external volunteers, were questions that the conference set out to address in two days of plenary and working group discussions.

A range of interventions were identified including public awareness campaigns; training and recognition measures; putting in place enabling fiscal and legislative frameworks; improving the knowledge base of volunteering trends in national contexts; ensuring access of the population to information on volunteer opportunities; addressing the possible impact of general social and economic policy measures on citizens' opportunities and willingness to volunteer; and integrating volunteerism into national development planning. Running through the discussions were two core notions: first, while volunteerism can be cost-effective, it can never be cost-free and, second, that harnessing the power of volunteerism to help achieving the MDGs in no way diminishes or dilutes the responsibilities of governments and others from meeting their obligations.

## Process

The 57<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 57/106 which, inter alia, requested the UN Secretary General to factor volunteerism into his reports on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. Consistent with its commitment to volunteerism as a strategy for promoting national social and economic development, Pakistan was one of the 142 Member States to co-sponsor this resolution.

In Pakistan itself, one concrete manifestation of this commitment has been the establishment of a 100,000-strong National Volunteer Corps (NVC) as part of the Volunteerism Programme of the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) to meet development objectives in the fields of education, health and poverty alleviation. Recognising volunteerism as an untapped potential in Pakistan, the NCHD has taken the initiative to encourage volunteerism towards achieving the MDGs, and volunteerism is a core strategy of the organisation. The NVC provides a successful example of how organised volunteerism can be involved in social mobilisation.

At the UNDP Executive Board Meeting in Geneva in June 2004, the Government of Pakistan officially offered to host an International Conference on Volunteerism and the Millennium Development Goals. In addition to contributing to advancing knowledge and understanding of how volunteerism can contribute to the MDGs, the Conference was also intended to support ongoing efforts in Pakistan by both government and civil society to facilitate and promote the participation of all citizens in development.

A Conference Steering Committee was created in Islamabad with representatives from government, volunteer-involving civil society organisations, and United Nations agencies present in Pakistan. The Steering Committee was assisted by several sub-committees.

The Conference was officially opened on 5<sup>th</sup> December in the presence of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, the Executive Director of UNICEF, and the Executive Coordinator of the UNV. Apart from the opening and closing plenary sessions, the Conference deliberations were structured around five working groups in which participants had the opportunity to share experiences and discuss specific issues related to the first seven MDG Goals.

- Group A. MDG 1: Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
- Group B. MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education, and  
MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Group C. MDG 4: Reduce child mortality, and  
MDG 5: Improve maternal health
- Group D. MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Group E: MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Within each working group, three to four discussion papers were presented by international and Pakistani resource persons on different aspects of volunteerism. In addition, several volunteer-involving organisations in Pakistan also prepared case studies; UN agencies in

Pakistan prepared discussion papers on different aspects of volunteerism in Pakistan. These included:

- volunteerism in rural support programmes in Pakistan,
- the role of madrassahs and universal primary education
- a survey of the contribution of volunteerism to polio eradication campaigns in Pakistan
- the contribution of volunteers to environmental sustainability in Pakistan.

The highlights of the working group discussions were presented in a plenary session on the final day. This was followed by a plenary debate on MDG 8 "Develop a Global Partnership for Development". In the closing session, the Chairman of the National Commission for Human Development of Pakistan, Dr Nasim Ashraf, shared with the conference his reflections on the discussions.

## **Working Group Discussions**

### **Group A: MDG 1 -- Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger**

Over one billion people live in extreme poverty on an income of less than one dollar a day. While the percentage of the poor has decreased since 1990, the absolute numbers have remained about the same with women constituting the majority of the poor. MDG 1 targets to halve the proportion of people in extreme poverty and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015.

In the presentations and discussions, it was repeatedly reiterated that poverty cannot be defined only in terms of income level. Poor people also suffer from a lack of the minimum security in many aspects of their lives (food, housing, land) and limited access to basic economic and social services (education, health, transport, water and sanitation). More often than not they suffer from social exclusion and deprivation, and have neither voice nor power.

While the primary responsibility for addressing poverty lies with governments, there is also a need to provide leadership in managing the complexity of strategies aimed at poverty eradication. However, it was recognised that genuine working partnerships between all stakeholders at the community level are essential if these poverty reduction strategies are to succeed. Volunteers, from both within and outside communities, can make a significant contribution through social mobilisation and community empowerment.

As an example, the Rural Support Programmes in Pakistan involve more than 300,000 volunteer activists who work in local rural communities, providing advice on innovative technologies, often functioning as intermediaries between rural communities and external organisations, assisting communities in planning and implementing development and welfare-related activities, introducing new methods of agriculture and husbandry. Central to the programme's success is capacity-building. Social activists are trained in effective communication, participatory methods and community management skills. They, in turn, build capacity in their communities by training villagers in such areas as leadership and management skills, water purification, hygiene and maintenance. Evaluations show that the single most important factor in provoking social and economic change is the ability of activists to assist communities to establish links with government line agencies and thus provide access to government resources and allow the voices of poor people to be heard beyond their immediate locality.

The role of volunteerism in enabling dialogue between people living in poverty and policymakers was further highlighted through an example of ATD Fourth World's work in Haiti. ATD has no paid staff but relies on full-time volunteers who receive a stipend equivalent to the minimum wage. Recognising that it takes time to build constructive partnerships with people who have remained outside mainstream development, volunteers commit to serve full-time for several years with ATD, living in or near poor communities. In Haiti, ATD volunteers placed in peri-urban areas have committed, with slum families, to organising a range of

learning projects such as street libraries for children and pre-school centres for children and mothers. A "gathering and events committee" has provided opportunities for adults and youth to meet regularly to exchange information and knowledge which, in turn, they share with their community. Participants acquire new interpersonal, social and organisational skills and become empowered. Instead of being paralysed by poverty and political events over which they have no control, they are empowered to employ their energy in positive ways, making their voices heard, sometimes for the first time.

It was stressed that volunteerism is as old as mankind, existing in all cultures and religions. In its simplest expression, it is the notion of solidarity and reciprocity. Although, the form of volunteerism varies from one culture to another, it can be characterised as an act undertaken freely, without coercion, for reasons other than financial gain, and for the benefit of others as well as volunteers themselves. People from a very broad range of backgrounds – grassroots activists, teachers, social workers, business people, and parliamentarians – engage in voluntary actions which help create space for poor people and build linkages between micro and macro levels.

Examples were provided of volunteerism generating new networks of social interaction and providing the impulse for the creation of local organisations. The Grameen Bank, now a well-established institution, came into existence through a voluntary initiative to provide micro-credit to address extreme poverty and indebtedness of villagers in rural Bangladesh. The concept has been replicated in 35 other countries reaching one hundred million poor families.

Volunteer activism and its role in democratic processes were also debated. In Mongolia, following the publication of the first MDG progress report, volunteer-involving organisations including the Association of Mongolian Scouts and the Mongolian Youth Organisation collaborated with the government in a series of advocacy events on the MDGs. A national strategy for involving the private sector was elaborated. Company volunteers, for example, have been engaged in cleaning up the riverbanks that run through the capital, Ulan Bator.

An example of powerful advocacy and policy dialogue by volunteers is the work undertaken by women in some African countries to bring about changes in legislation in order to improve access to land for poor women. In Nigeria, community-based volunteers have been working with local communities to establish dialogue with oil companies in order to influence policies and effect relationship changes between oil companies and communities.

The challenges faced by poor people to harness, through volunteerism, their knowledge and experience of local conditions, and their social networks of solidarity and support for poverty eradication, were considered. These included low self-esteem in terms of having something to offer; a distrust of politics; financial and logistic obstacles related, for example, to transportation and child-care; lack of time, information and knowledge; language and cultural barriers vis-à-vis outsiders, even from within the same country; and the stereotyping of poor people by outside providers of assistance

These factors need to be taken into account when planning actions designed to promote more broad-based participation in volunteering. Such actions need to be planned with a sharp focus on the MDGs and an identification of clear and tangible activities where different stakeholders, including potential volunteers, can make a positive contribution.

The design of initiatives should be participatory with the involvement of the different stakeholders such as those engaged by NCHD volunteers, where a collaborative effort between government line departments, the community and volunteers provides ownership and sustainability and has assisted in increasing enrolment in UPE and health coverage in remote areas.

There is also a need of creating an awareness that successful volunteer initiatives require investments of time, building mutual trust and confidence among all stakeholders. Volunteers working with communities must have sufficient time to establish a capital of trust and understanding with community members. If volunteer actions at the micro-level are to impact at the macro-level, volunteers and other stakeholders also need to be given the opportunity to learn how to become intermediaries and to establish a rapport with officials outside the community who can influence policy directions. Investment in training and capacity-building is thus essential, both for volunteers and other stakeholders. As one participant indicated, "training is a way of taking people seriously, poor and non-poor". Training and evaluation are indispensable components of any poverty eradication initiative.

Cohesion and continuity must be built into the design of volunteer-involving poverty eradication schemes. Because of the time factor, ideally volunteers should commit on a long-term basis; however, in practical terms this is not always feasible. Thus, while volunteers may come and go, there should be local institutional mechanisms to ensure continuity and sustainability. Finally, the contribution of volunteerism needs to be recognised and appropriately acknowledged. Their voluntary work needs to be appreciated through local initiatives, such as NCHD's volunteer appreciation events where commendation certificates and badges are awarded to volunteers by local leaders. In many instances, national legislation is needed to facilitate increased and broad-based volunteerism.

## **Group B: MDG 2 -- Achieve Universal Primary Education**

The right to education is a basic human right. Education not only helps individuals to lift themselves out of poverty, but investment in basic education has long-term benefits for society. Indeed, failure to achieve universal primary education will impact negatively on the achievement of other MDGs. Girls' education in particular is a key factor. It was emphasised that educating a girl is the best way to ensure that, later, her children will go to school and will enjoy better health and nutrition, thus breaking the inter-generational transmission of poverty. Evidence shows that children born to mothers with no formal education are most likely to suffer from malnutrition or die before the age of five.

Although it is a fundamental role of government to ensure that all children, boys and girls alike, are given the opportunity to receive a quality primary education, it is clear that in many countries the targets of achieving universal primary education and gender equality in education continue to pose a challenge. Even where there is total government commitment, providing quality primary education to all children can only be attained with the full partnership of all stakeholders, and at all levels.

Because the factors affecting primary education enrolment and attendance vary greatly from one culture to another, a mix of specific strategies in accordance with local conditions is needed if out-of-school children are to enrol in school and complete the primary school cycle. Strategies to improve the school infrastructure to make the school environment more effective and more attractive to parents and students alike may require building new classrooms, hiring and training teachers, abolishing school fees, and providing incentives such as school meals to promote school attendance of the most disadvantaged. Addressing the gender gap also requires specific strategies. These include making schools safe for girls – not too far from the home, with sufficient trained teachers, functioning school infrastructure (separate toilets for girls, boundary walls, etc.). It involves eliminating gender bias in curricula. The community environment needs to be supportive and helping to overcome social, economic and cultural factors that keep children out-of-school can be a critical factors in reaching education targets.

In most of these strategies there is an important role for volunteerism. Where action is taken to promote universal primary education, and girls' education in particular, there already exists an environment in communities that places a value on education. Examples provided from around the world drove home the simple truth that informing, negotiating and convincing parents to enrol and keep their children in school, and to follow them throughout their schooling, is far more effective when there are volunteers to help raise awareness and support the attitudinal shift locally. At macro levels, volunteer activists make a valuable contribution by monitoring and advocacy with governments to keep their promises on education.

In some countries, existing institutional mechanisms facilitate the voluntary involvement of

parents and the local community in the running of schools. This can be in the form of traditional parent-teacher associations, or school councils. In other cases, community involvement in schools has been taken a notch higher and parents and the community have quite an important say in the actual management of schools. All indications are that, when properly encouraged and supported, voluntary parental and community involvement generally contributes to improving the effectiveness, accountability and functioning of schools. However, many public education systems do not encourage the active involvement of outsiders in the daily life of schools and, in such instances, community involvement suffers. The working group discussions highlighted the value of governments taking measures to encourage the active involvement of parents and communities in the education of their children.

Two volunteer-involving movements in India were examined more closely. Both have made considerable headway in addressing some of the factors resulting in low enrolment and high dropout rates in primary education, particularly of girls. Getting girls into education is a hurdle in Rajasthan because of perceptions about the role of girls and women in society. The Lok Jumbush (People's Movement), a community-based volunteering organisation mainly composed of women volunteers and using a mix of interventions, has succeeded over a relatively short time to increase primary school enrolment by about 5% each year. It has also contributed in edging up girls' enrolment to 80% - almost at the level for boys which stands at 85%. Lok Jumbush women's collectives work directly with girls and their families; they accompany girls to school, allaying the safety-related fears of parents, and provide follow-up support to children, particularly girls, who are at risk of dropping out, during their primary school cycle. Negative social and religious attitudes towards girl child education have been dealt with by engaging with local religious leaders including imams so that they in turn encourage parents to send their girls to school.

A volunteer-involving organisation in Hyderabad, Emery Foundation, has set up a cadre of around 36,000 young volunteers who fan out into communities to identify out-of-school children and convince parents to send them to school. In many cases the volunteers have to negotiate with employers to release working children to allow them to attend school. Here too, the volunteers continue to support children after they have enrolled in school.

In a similar way, the NCHD volunteers living and working in local communities in Pakistan are managing to convince parents to send their children to school; to prevent dropouts from schools, they work closely with teachers, parents, volunteers and local influential people as well as with officials of the Education Department in monitoring enrolment and keeping records of school-age children in the community. NCHD volunteers also monitor the quality of education and teacher absenteeism; they follow-up on children at risk of dropping out, and, in certain cases, they step in as substitute teachers if the regular teacher is temporarily absent. Through volunteerism and community participation, NCHD is spearheading a mass movement for socio-economic development. Training and advocacy are crucial for sustainability at the grass-roots level. NCHD is also providing support for district Education, Health and Community Development departments as well as for NGOs. The result of this tripartite

partnerships has been the enrolment of one million out-of-school children, through the support of 40,000 trained volunteers at the grass roots level.

In many of the examples from across the world, volunteers have been largely young people and women. In the case of youth, they are often young graduates, fresh out of school or college and frequently unemployed. There is an important element of desire to improve their community, a sense of seeking fulfilment, and an awareness of the benefits to be gained from the act, since it is often their first experience of the work place. A word of caution however from one participant referred to the need to exercise care when using untrained volunteers as teachers, as this could lead to a dilution of teaching standards.

In some countries where governments are falling far short of delivering on commitments of primary education for all, the gaps are filled by the private and non-government sectors and by religious bodies. In Pakistan, for example, madrassahs provide a basic education, either part-time or full-time, to over a million children. The schools are often located in very poor and/or remote areas without access to the state education system. Run on a purely voluntary basis with support from local communities, there is a strong sense of community ownership. Madrassahs do not charge fees and they provide food, clothing and shelter to needy children. The teachers are usually volunteers. It was pointed out that in many countries tapping the potential of the madrassah system has enabled the expansion of access to primary education. More research and analysis of the institution is needed as well as a willingness on the part of national authorities to provide support for weak areas such as teacher training, curriculum, and teaching materials. A system of coordination and "quality control" is also required to ensure recognised equivalence with the public education system. In the case of Indonesia, international volunteers, mainly from Australia, have been working in the madrassah school system to improve teaching methodology and teacher training. Evaluations show this has been successful in terms of providing the poorest with access to primary education as well as helping to increase understanding between different cultures.

Again, in the case of Pakistan, the Feeder school concept is one example of how to bridge the education gap in areas where there is either no government school, or where the schools are overcrowded and there is a shortage qualified teachers. Feeder schools are part of the formal education system, as the students are on the roll of the nearest government school. The volunteer acts as substitute teacher and provides support for the infrastructure and selection of site of the such schools.

The issue of how to make volunteerism sustainable without some sort of legal and institutional framework was raised. Poverty and unemployment make it difficult for many people to undertake regular volunteering in their communities but, nonetheless, many do commit time to volunteer, demonstrating the extent of solidarity capital and goodwill in communities. A central question is how spontaneous expressions of volunteerism can be strengthened and channelled to support universal primary education and the other MDGs in ways that are culturally appropriate.

There was full agreement that infrastructure is needed to support a call for greater volunteerism. In addition to material support such as stipends to defray transport and other expenses, volunteers also need to be exposed to capacity development training. Much work is needed to encourage girls and women to volunteer outside the immediate family.

In a volunteer initiative in Pakistan, some 32,000 Boys Scouts volunteers in rural Balochistan were trained as volunteers to promote girls' education. In addition to persuading parents to enrol their girl children in school, the volunteers themselves benefited through skills training which helped them understand the issue of discrimination against girls. They also learnt to communicate effectively with adults, which gave them a sense of empowerment in a traditional setting where young people are excluded from decision-making processes.

Legislation also needs to become more "volunteer-friendly". One participant contrasted the free movement of goods and services across borders with the increasing restrictions on the mobility of people both within and across countries which poses an obstacle, especially to cross-border volunteering. Despite restrictions on movement of people, large volunteering organisations such as NCHD, do welcome volunteers with professional expertise not only nationally but also from the diaspora.

Recognition of the contribution of volunteerism, and of individual volunteers, is an area where much more work is needed. Measuring volunteer action is one way forward. In this connection, nationwide surveys such as the household survey sponsored by the NCHD of Pakistan in October 2004 to measure the extent and nature of volunteering in Pakistan, provide valuable information for policymakers in both government and non-government organisations on which they can make informed decisions about supporting volunteering when formulating economic and social development plans. It also contributes to improving local volunteer practices. According to this survey, over three-quarters of all Pakistani households engage in some form of volunteer activity, which are, to a large extent, unorganised.

Examples from Latin America of volunteering by young people provoked considerable interest, especially the innovative concept of "service learning" as a complement to more traditional volunteering through faith-based or government programmes. Students participating in "service learning" with a recognised volunteer-involving organisation can earn credits towards a bachelor or masters degree. In the case of the Dominican Republic, for example, service learning is common at the university level and is supported by legislation. Much service learning focuses on helping students avoid repeating class or dropping out of school. Major volunteer activities include: supporting literacy programmes for children, after-school homework classes especially for children with learning difficulties, running children's mobile libraries, and special programmes such as school gardens, art classes and HIV/AIDS preventive education which is now becoming a priority.

A similar scheme is running in China through the China Young Volunteers Association. This encourages college students to undertake teaching assignments in isolated parts of China's western provinces. In addition to providing students with a monthly allowance to cover living

expenses, the government makes specific provisions for them to continue their studies at the end of their placements.

Service learning initiatives can make important contributions to promoting universal primary education but it also encourages volunteerism among youth and gives public recognition to the impact young people can make through volunteerism.

As is the case for other MDGs, expressions of volunteerism in education extend beyond the traditional role of delivery of services at the community level. In Ecuador, for example, a diverse group of concerned citizens have established a volunteer advocacy group for a "Social Contract for Education in Ecuador", with members from indigenous movements, universities, schools, labour movements, and community organisations. The Social Contract for Education aims to act as a channel for citizen dialogue with government to ensure that education is kept firmly on the political agenda as a national priority, and that sufficient resources are allocated for all children to receive ten years of quality basic education. The group has organised a campaign to publicise the social contract for education and succeeded in keep education firmly on the agenda during recent presidential elections. It also successfully advocated for a national debate on proposed legislation on education, which took place between citizens and government.

An example of cross-border volunteerism came from West Africa. Following the destruction of the education system during the civil war in Sierra Leone, volunteer activists from the Forum of African Women Educationists contributed to the provision of education for girls and advocated at the policy level on questions of access and quality.

The group acknowledged the tremendous work done on a voluntary basis by people to support children's education, in their local communities and also at national and international levels.

Yet much more needs to be done by government and volunteer-involving organisations to encourage and strengthen volunteerism, including providing the necessary infrastructure support. More effective strategies are needed to strengthen networks and build linkages so that the knowledge, understanding, skills and experiences of volunteering at the local level can be taken into account in the strategies for economic and social development that are being developed nationally.

At the international level, cross-sectoral coordination is fundamental for a global strategy of volunteerism in the service of humanity – not only in education but in all areas covered by the MDGs. It was felt that UNV has the authority to undertake this task and the Group recommended that UNV be properly resourced to take on the challenge.

### **Group B: MDG 3 – Gender equality and Empowerment of Women**

While gender equality and the empowerment of women was dealt with alongside universal primary education, it was made clear from the outset that gender is not only a question of education but that there is a vital relationship between gender considerations and all other MDGs. Nonetheless, many of the examples of active volunteerism with regard to education in South Asia, for example, focused specifically on girls' education, particularly given the low levels of enrolment and of completion of primary education by girls.

There is a recognition that gender parity in education can only be achieved by empowering women through their increased participation in decision-making, economic emancipation and protection from violence. As women struggle to overcome economic and political discrimination, violence continues to inhibit their ability to participate in the development process. In Pakistan, voluntary Citizen Action Committees (CACs) have been established at the district level to support empowerment of women and, specifically, to deal with violence against women and honour killings. Activities have also included improving the economic situation of women through skills' development and micro-credit schemes. Most importantly, the CACs have helped women acquire identity papers, register as voters and take part in local government elections. In 2001, CAC campaigned actively for women's participation in the local government elections. For the first time in the history of Pakistan, more than 40,000 women were elected as members of local government councils. CAC members, men as well as women, volunteer their time in the face of considerable social pressures. If they are to continue to be effective, it was argued that they need to be granted official recognition and more training, especially on human rights' issues.

Progress in the past decades towards the empowerment of women in general, and for the universal acceptance of women's rights in particular, is in large measure a direct outcome of volunteer activism, mainly organised by women. Various examples cited from around the world indicate how socially advantaged women have often immersed themselves in causes to advance the cause of women. The struggle for the emancipation of women dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while campaigning by family planning associations for the right to contraception and reproductive health is more recent. Such efforts have resulted in enhanced political participation, economic empowerment and protection from violence and action against other forms of violence and discrimination. Volunteer groups have also been instrumental in repealing and amending discriminatory laws, which impact negatively on women.

In Burkina Faso the COA/FEB, an umbrella organisation for women's NGOs and CBOs, has successfully led a civil society campaign to have the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan reviewed with a view to giving gender greater prominence in the plan. The volunteers of COA/FEB monitor gender equality and women's empowerment despite the difficulties associated with the lack of gender disaggregated indicators and data.

Globally, women's political participation has been increasing. Women have also been active in organizing themselves for economic literacy and access to resources through various means including micro-credit and other forms of poverty reduction initiatives. Examples of initiatives were provided where women have succeeded professionally and have gone on to help build women's organisations and promote leadership, particularly in rural areas.

According to the NCHD Survey on volunteerism in Pakistan, one-fifth of volunteer effort is directed towards persuading parents to enrol their girl children in primary school. This is especially true in the NCHD's operational districts where volunteers receive specific training and awareness-raising on girls' education.

In Sri Lanka, although literacy rates are around 90% for men and women, poverty among women is considerably greater. Women have less access to resources and unemployment rates are higher. Several pro-poor initiatives have been launched by women for women. The Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka has launched a programme "Vanitha Samithi" for the social and economic empowerment of women. This includes entrepreneurship training, credit facilities for women, skills development and micro-enterprise development. Another initiative is the Hambantota Women's Bank, managed by the Women's Development Federation, a district level NGO of more than 27,000 women volunteers. In addition to micro-credit schemes, the Women's Development Federation also provides nutrition and care for the elderly, reproductive health care for migrant women.

Overall, there was clear recognition of women as leaders and agents of change, opinion-makers and role models – and not only for women's issues. Some serious challenges were also recognised. One was the lack of awareness on gender issues amongst service delivery oriented volunteers due in part to attitudes and behaviour on the part of men. A contributory factor of this is the fact that men are rarely engaged in the women's' movement. Another challenge is the lack of time that women have to devote to volunteerism since work outside of the home plus domestic work leaves little or no time for communal voluntary action. There is frequently a range of socio-cultural constraints on women's mobility and on their involvement in areas where women have been traditionally excluded. There is also physical, psychological and institutional violence against girls and women; gender-biased adult illiteracy; and, overall, societal attitudes against women's empowerment that participating in voluntary action can engender.

In considering specific measures that need to be taken, the starting point was that gender equality and empowerment of women through volunteerism should not be restricted to education but applied to all the MDGs. Women's contribution through volunteerism, both formal and informal, must be recognised and valued. Training of volunteers on gender issues, sensitisation, and communication for attitudinal change would assist in this effort. In particular, recognition should be given to men who contribute to gender equality. More analysis is needed into the causes of gender discrimination and feminised poverty and plans should be developed in the light of this analysis.

It was also agreed that more networking among volunteer-involving groups would help in the exchange of best practices and generally raise awareness about the issue.

**Group C:           MDG 4 -- Reduce Child Mortality**  
**MDG 5 -- Improve Maternal Health**

Many children in the developing world die from preventable diseases. High mortality rates are due in part to illnesses caused by poor water quality and lack of sanitation and in part to poor formal health services that are often unable to provide timely medical attention in the poorest regions of the world. Even when the child does survive, the mother often may not. Added to the above factors affecting children, poor women also have to contend with cultural practices, which may be inimical to their well-being such as lack of access to reproductive and sexual health education.

Much of the discussion in the working group focussed on the dynamics of the relationship between volunteerism, often at the community level, and the public health systems. In the final analysis, governments are responsible for accelerating achievement of MDG 4 and 5 and therefore volunteerism should supplement and complement government effort but not replace it. To enable this, it was commonly felt that generic frameworks are needed that align volunteerism to public health goals. Volunteerism also needs to be structured within country-specific social and cultural milieus. It was emphasised however that policy-makers need to look at the pioneering role of volunteerism in developing new services and approaches, which may or may not be incorporated into government strategy. In this connection, the spread of information and knowledge through international volunteering is valuable. It was recommended that governments should be encouraged to strengthen existing volunteer placement programmes.

In Iran, the significant involvement of volunteers in the field of maternal health has contributed to a fall in maternal mortality to the current rate of 37.4 deaths per 100,000 live births. Women health volunteers have served as a bridge between health service providers, who are more often than not men, and women themselves. The volunteers are able to communicate with women in a way that is culturally or socially not possible for male health staff. Volunteers have been able to increase awareness of both men and women by providing information and convincing them of good practices while refuting hearsay and old wives' tales. In remote areas, the Ministry of Health staff have trained rural women as midwives, capable of providing pre- and post-natal care and conducting birth deliveries. Since 1994, the volunteers of the Family Planning Association of Iran have also been active in promoting the right to sexual and reproductive health, especially for young people and vulnerable groups, and in advocating for this right with policy-makers and decision-makers.

Several participants referred to the importance of accountability between government policy and programmes, the health care provider and the end beneficiary. Volunteerism must reinforce that accountability, not undermine it. Each actor, it was stressed, needs to understand her/his role and accountability, since there have been examples where paid public servants hand over some of their responsibilities to volunteers, inadvertently or deliberately.

It was agreed that there are proven high-impact interventions for MDG 4 and MDG 5 where volunteerism can make a definite contribution through preventive interventions outreach services and community-based care.

It was recognised that health systems are often under stress and delays arise at the family level in addressing anaemia and malnutrition among women and children and in transporting women in labour for appropriate clinical attention; the quality of care in clinical facilities was also questioned. The contribution of volunteers, working with governments to supplement and complement official programmes aimed at informing and educating all stakeholders at all levels, was considered essential to reach the targets of MDG 4 and MDG 5.

Indeed, all public health programmes in developing countries have the equivalent of community health workers to generate awareness and deliver primary health care services at the grassroots level. Volunteers from the community should be encouraged to act as a portal to further strengthen backward and forward linkages. One example was the role of volunteers in reducing diarrhoea-related deaths, one of the major causes of infant mortality in developing countries. Social mobilisation campaigns to reduce diarrhoeal illnesses among infants and young children are typical of the actions where volunteerism complements the public health system.

In Pakistan, under the oral rehydration salts (ORS) campaign, more than 6,000 female volunteers have been trained by NCHD to educate mothers in the preparation and importance of ORS that prevent dehydration among children suffering from diarrhoea. It is estimated that 650,000 mothers have been reached in six districts of Pakistan through the first NCHD campaign in intervention of NCHD during the first campaign in 2004. One of the key factors of the success of this campaign was that the local health authorities took ownership of the project and actively facilitated the work of women volunteers. The campaign succeeded in creating a network of female volunteers in the targeted districts. The campaign also build awareness on child health issues (immunisation, birth spacing) among community opinion-makers including Imams and elected representatives.

In Peru, volunteer involving organisations regrouped under CENAVOL - the National Centre of Volunteerism – have established partnerships with the public and private sectors to deliver a wide range of health education and health promotion activities in the country. One such organisation is Vida y Experiencia which works with pregnant women and mothers on a range of child nutrition and health issues and also provides psychological and material support to vulnerable women, especially victims of physical and sexual violence. CENAVOL, with sixty registered member organisations, has a convention with health clinics and hospitals clearly demarcating respective roles of volunteers and health workers.

One of the clearest demonstrations of the value of volunteerism has been the polio eradication campaigns. The wild poliovirus has disabled nearly 20 million people living today. Since its creation in 1988, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative has helped cut the global toll

of polio paralysis from an estimated 350,000 in 1998 to fewer than 700 in 2003. In 2000, some 10 million people volunteered at the community level to support the immunisation of 550 million children as part of the Initiative. It is estimated that the total value of this support in one year was the equivalent of US \$10 billion, more than 3 times the entire budget of the campaign since its initiation. This reinforces the strongest argument in favour of volunteerism, which is its sheer scale and cost-effectiveness.

Pakistan is one of the seven remaining countries in the world where the wild poliovirus is still found. Community participation is vital to reach the 33 million children vaccinated in every National Immunisation Day. To ensure the total eradication of polio, additional efforts are needed to mobilise, among the civil society and grass root communities, a committed core of volunteers able to scale up the required social mobilisation to reach all children. To this end, the Ministry of Health, with UNICEF and WHO support, has undertaken a survey in 17 districts to evaluate the role of volunteerism and how its contribution could be enhanced. The findings will help public health authorities improve the support they provide volunteers and eventually help to expand volunteer contributions to the polio eradication campaign. The survey shows that men and women of all ages have been active at every stage of polio campaigns and in many ways -- in advocacy amongst local stakeholders; community mobilisation; helping design, organise and publicise each campaign; following up on refusals; and, providing food and transport to the vaccinator teams.

Governments are increasingly recognizing and valuing the contribution of volunteerism towards reducing maternal and child mortality. In Brazil, the National and Maternal Mortality Reduction Pact brings together government, civil society and volunteer-involving organisations in a formal partnership as a strategy to achieve MDGs 4 and 5 over the next ten years. Partners include major professional bodies such as the Federal Councils of Medicine and of Nursing as well as women's groups such as the Feminist Network of health and sexual rights and child rights groups. A major component is the training of volunteers -- women, community leaders and NGO activists -- for the prevention of sexually transmitted illnesses and HIV/AIDS. Volunteers are also active in providing services for women and teenage victims of sexual and domestic violence. Volunteer representatives are members of health councils at all levels of government -- municipal, state and federal.

The group concluded that, in recognition of the fact that volunteerism strengthens civil society and encourages pro-active citizenship, it should be built into curricula for young people and also included in formal and non-formal training imparted to adults.

**Group D: MDG 6 -- Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases**

Between 30 and 40 million people are affected by HIV/AIDS today. Already a pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS poses a serious threat in other developing regions. More than 10 million children are orphans due to the death of one or both parents from HIV/AIDS. In countries where the epidemic has been most severe, countries, already struggling to meet the MDGs on education and health, are finding their efforts undermined by high HIV/AIDS-related mortality rates of qualified educational and health personnel.

The incidence of TB remains high around the world and is an opportunistic infection associated with HIV/AIDS. Malaria remains a major killer, especially of children. Each year there are over 300 million reported cases and it is estimated that around one million people die of malaria each year. Some 20% of malaria deaths are children under the age of five.

Many of the examples of successful volunteerism to combat HIV/AIDS and malaria focused on community-based interventions.

Most malaria deaths occur at home and thus interventions at the community level can be crucial in saving lives. The role of volunteers in malaria control has been essential in complementing the formal health system by improving recognition of malarial illness, in ensuring the treatment of febrile cases within 24 hours of onset; and assisting in reporting and recording mortalities and illnesses. They also make possible the implementation at scale of social mobilisation and advocacy campaigns to help bring about behavioural change in the health practices as well as the increased use of insecticide-treated bed nets (ITNs).

Volunteers also have an important role to play in supporting environmental control including, wherever feasible, vector control. Three successful Roll Back Malaria initiatives in which volunteers are key actors, were presented. All are from Africa where 90% of all cases of malaria are recorded:

The first case was a community-based control programme in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia. Some 960 community health workers treated 71% of all malaria-related fevers and the number of malaria deaths among under-fives was reduced by 40% in the project areas. Community health workers were also instrumental in increasing the community's health seeking behaviour and using insecticide-treated bed nets. Because of its success in Tigray, other regions of Ethiopia are seeking to introduce similar initiatives.

A home management of malaria initiative was launched in Uganda in 2003. Community volunteers were trained as drug distributors in their respective communities. The training included recognition and provision of prompt treatment, keeping of records on children treated and/or referred (records are forwarded regularly to the Ministry of Health for

compilation). In its first two years of operation the project has resulted in a 10% reduction in malaria prevalence in intervention areas, as well as a decline in severe anaemia.

In both interventions the main constraints have been high drop out rates of volunteers and inadequate logistical support.

One of the more spectacular contributions of volunteerism has been the work in immunisation and ITN distribution. For example, in Zambia in 2003 some 1800 volunteers distributed 77,000 ITNs and immunised 37,819 children in a joint measles immunisation /ITN distribution campaign. ITN coverage, which was 4.4% before the campaign, jumped to more than 80%. In Togo, a similar campaign was conducted with the involvement of 7,063 volunteers. More than 700,000 bed nets were distributed and 900,000 children vaccinated against measles. Here again ITN coverage jumped from 22% pre-campaign to 60-80% post-campaign.

In the HIV/AIDS field, the groups discussed several HIV/AIDS initiatives of volunteers working in communities in social mobilisation for behavioural change:

In rural communities in Ethiopia, a holistic approach focuses on health, womanhood and the environment. Volunteers have been able to work with traditional communities leaders on taboo issues such as HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and human rights. The fact that the volunteers live in the communities themselves helps create an environment of trust and mutual learning. Contrary to large-scale development projects, low-key local self-help initiatives empower communities to take responsibility for their lives.

Two examples (Uganda and Pakistan, where it is estimated that 90% of the volunteers have spent on average 1-2 hours daily towards the activities in this category) were cited of how religious leaders can contribute to preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. In Uganda, the Islamic Medical Association has helped Imams to incorporate accurate information about HIV/AIDS prevention into their spiritual teachings. An education campaign combining HIV/AIDS prevention messages linked to spiritual teachings was launched. Teams of community volunteers (3 per mosque) were trained as Family AIDS Workers and assistants to the Imams. The role of these volunteers was to provide education, basic counselling and motivation for behavioural change. Each Imam was given a bicycle for supervision of the activities. The assistants were given some form of support (in money or in kind) for income-generating activities (such as rearing a few chickens or goats).

In Zimbabwe, People Living with HIV/AIDS are working with hospital staff to help overcome the stigma and discrimination prevalent among nurses and doctors in the public health system.

In Botswana, a comprehensive nation-wide multi-sectoral programme has been introduced for all aspects of HIV/AIDS, replacing the initial piecemeal and patchwork response to the epidemic. Skilled human resources are being eroded by HIV/AIDS and since the pandemic

started, the government has been increasingly factoring major volunteer-involving organisations into its strategic planning. For example, a national home-based care programme has been implemented in every clinic using community home-based volunteers who serve the terminally ill and the caregivers. Close to 6000 volunteers, often retired nurses or social workers, deliver a range of material and psychosocial services to people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and their families. PLWHA themselves are volunteers, forming support groups to help families and especially children cope with the stress of living with the disease. BONEPWA (Botswana Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS) is a network organisation of 60 support groups, each with approximately 25 volunteers, who provide counselling and support as well as education on HIV/AIDS prevention and care. TCM (Total Community Mobilisation) is a volunteer-involving organisation working with communities since 2001 to provide care and counselling to the sick. It is increasingly involved in helping children who are orphans or in need of care. Botswana is one of the countries most devastated by the pandemic and is facing serious shortages of skilled human resources. The country has recognised the value of volunteers but lack of overall coordination hampers their effectiveness. For this reason, under the Southern African Capacity Initiative, the UNV programme is supporting the establishment of a national volunteer scheme, which will engage a broad range of citizens.

In Zambia, the Society for Women and AIDS is a volunteer-involving organisation working to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS among women and children and to provide care to orphans and other vulnerable children. Founded in 1989, the society now has 183 branches throughout the country and a network of more than 10,000 women members. In addition to community care and prevention and home-based care, the Society provides support and care to over 7,000 orphans and other vulnerable children.

Volunteerism in the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases has produced positive results due to the qualities that volunteers bring to their actions, particularly their passion and commitment, humility and sensitivity to the socio-cultural dynamics of the community. They also have an appreciation that change is an on-going process and, while giving guidance, they place themselves as facilitators and not teachers or experts. For this reason, the different peer-to-peer volunteer interventions have been positive.

However, volunteering efforts rarely meet their full potential, held back by resource gaps, both human and financial, and the absence of an enabling environment. Individual volunteers can become discouraged by the lack of recognition. In the case of HIV/AIDS in particular they suffer from stigma and discrimination against target groups and volunteers. Extreme poverty also prevents citizens from becoming active volunteers.

Recommendations that emerged from the discussions were firstly of a more general nature. Volunteer's empowerment could be achieved when they have all the tools required to perform effectively, including communication skills. Their actions need to be better documented with a good coverage of good and bad practices on the part of all stakeholders. Good coordination and support are necessary among all stakeholders at the policy-making, organisational and

community levels. Recognition is essential through the provision of incentives such as awards and certificates.

As far as dealing with HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases is concerned, a holistic approach is needed that takes into account gender dimensions, poverty, and fundamental human rights such as the right to life, education, health, etc. The contribution of volunteers themselves should be incorporated into strategic planning exercises with special attention given to women and children, especially orphans and other vulnerable children, through economic empowerment, general reproductive health, and access to information and treatment. Volunteers, especially women, who work in the field of HIV/AIDS often face burn-out, stigma and discrimination and therefore require psychosocial support. At the same time, volunteers working on HIV/AIDS initiatives must involve males in the community.

#### **Group E: MDG 7 --Ensure environmental sustainability**

Ensuring environmental sustainability requires actions on different fronts to achieve sustainable development patterns and preserve natural eco systems for future generations. On the one hand, it is necessary to reverse environmental damage resulting from unsustainable production and consumption patterns, particularly in rich countries, and on the other the needs of the millions of people who do not have access to improved water and sanitation and/or are living in urban slums must be addressed.

MDG 7 is intertwined with other MDGs, particularly MDG 1, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. A number of examples were given as to how grass-roots' initiatives had not only contributed to ensuring environmental sustainability but also improved the living conditions of the local people, especially women and girls in the case of improved water supplies.

If MDG 7 is to be achieved, it was agreed that a genuine partnership at all levels of society will be required - from the supranational to the village level. Governments have a responsibility to create the enabling environment by elaborating policies, passing laws and putting in place systems and procedures in which other stakeholders including NGOs, the private sector, and communities, can operate.

Several participants stressed the role of volunteers and their organisations both in raising environmental awareness among their communities as well as, through their networks, influence policy on the sustainable use of environmental resources. Typically, volunteers have been very effective in providing hands-on training to municipalities in natural resources' management, strengthening local capacity to ensure access to natural resources, encouraging the participation of volunteer-involving organisations and local user associations in environmental management, and stimulating exchanges of experiences, knowledge and skills among environmental organisations at local, national and international levels.

In Pakistan, some initiatives undertaken by civil society organisations at the grass roots level, notably the Orangi water and sanitation project under the Aga Khan Foundation's Rural Support Programme, have proven successful and are being replicated on a national level. The NCHD volunteers have also helped in creating small storage dam, installation of hand pumps and improving access to water in schools, which not only improves sanitation but also help promote girls education, especially in remote areas of Pakistan.

While the role of government is decisive in developing and implementing policies, several examples were given as to how grass roots' initiatives had not only contributed to ensuring environmental sustainability but also improved the living conditions of the local people, especially women and girls, through improved water supplies. Several successful examples of volunteer engagement in awareness campaigns and advocacy as well as community initiatives were provided.

In the Indian state of Rajasthan, a volunteer-based NGO, Tarun Bharat Singh, has been working since 1984 with rural villages. Today, thousands of communities are water-secure with villagers themselves managing their natural resources. Success is due to the fact that villagers have taken ownership of the programme. Their knowledge and experience have been valuable inputs – they have been listened to. At the same time, Tarun Bharat Singh's volunteers do not work in a spirit of charity or benevolence but in a relationship of equals, working towards a common goal.

The importance of combining traditional environmental techniques with modern technologies was highlighted in an example from Ethiopia where volunteers from the Organisation for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA) work with local farmers to encourage them to undertake innovative environmental practices based on indigenous methods and to scale up and replicate them. The farmers volunteer to share their traditional knowledge and ORDA helps in the dissemination, scaling up and replication of best practices.

Traditional resource institutions have been established in Bhutan through the Land Act of 1978 and the Nature Conservation Act of 1995, in keeping with Bhutan's approach to indigenous-centred development. The traditional resource institutions with respect to forest, common grazing land and water are Reesup (traditional volunteerism for managing forest resources) and Chusup (volunteers for managing water for drinking and irrigation). Local volunteers are mobilised through Reesups and Chusups in order to help conserve the environment as well as to promote social cohesion in the face of conflicting demands on resources. These traditional resource institutions provide a forum (Zandu) for the entire community to identify and address issues concerning the harnessing and utilisation of resources. The resource centres also collect and transmit traditional indigenous knowledge of environmental conservation practices. It is important to stress that indigenous knowledge is not a static body of wisdom but is constantly changing as new techniques and methods are tested and tried in response to changing environmental challenges. Volunteers have an important role in this respect.

In both Sudan and Pakistan, volunteer-involving organisations have made important contributions to the adoption and implementation of legislation to protect the environment. The work of the Pakistani chapter of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Sudanese Environmental Conservation Society (SECS) were highlighted in this respect. IUCN-Pakistan provides space for volunteer engagement at different levels. At the community level, volunteers help to create environmental awareness; build capacity; assess resource needs; and to plan, implement and monitor activities for forestry, biodiversity and environmental rehabilitation programmes. At the policy level, IUCN volunteers are also participating in sectoral and thematic groups and in developing conservation and sustainable development strategies.

In Sudan, the founding members of SECS in 1975 were almost entirely university academics committed to raising awareness around environmental issues. By the 1980s, a period of

widespread drought and famine, SECS had expanded, opened branches and recruited some paid staff. Large numbers of volunteers from groups who are normally underrepresented in politics – women, youth, pensioners, farmers and pastoralists – were attracted to SECS. Community-based initiatives, especially afforestation, were taken up in addition to more traditional information, awareness and training activities. From the late 1980s onwards, SECS was increasingly involved in advocacy for peace, environmental sustainability and environmental governance, using a rights-based approach. The enactment of Sudan's Environmental Act in 2000 is in no small measure due to the advocacy by SECS volunteers.

Based on the range of successful examples of volunteerism, it was agreed that governments need to recognise the enormous contribution that volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations make and provide a supportive environment in which volunteerism can thrive. It is also important to share experiences and learn from best practices.. Volunteer activism was especially important in addressing environmental issues given the fact that entrenched interests often make environmental conservation and regeneration challenging. Environmental volunteering should be active in advocating for structural change. On the other hand, volunteer involving organisations need to demonstrate willingness to cooperate with governments even if the political space is restricted. To be credible, these organisations need to be democratic, transparent, competent and accountable to their members and target groups as well as to the public at large.

A key recommendation endorsed by participants is the need for partnership at all levels. It was generally recognised that government needs to involve a wider range of partners – the private sector, NGOs and their networks, and individual volunteers. The private sector has a crucial role to play in ensuring sustainable development and creating a safe environment for future generations. At the same time, government is urged to initiate actions to bring environmental issues to the fore and to build partnerships with all sectors.

Partnership with local communities is likewise a basic requirement for success as this is the only way of ensuring that local knowledge is fully applied to environmental initiatives and that there is full ownership by the people most directly affected. Local stakeholders need to be central to any environmental conservation or development initiatives. Their active engagement and control of environmental projects condition the success of environment initiatives and their sustainability. Indigenous traditional knowledge can make a decisive contribution to environmental sustainability, as was demonstrated by different examples provided. It must be integrated with modern methods. The international community has a responsibility to build partnerships and networks and ensure that best practices and new techniques are widely disseminated.

### **Plenary Session: MDG 8 -- Develop a Global Partnership**

Achieving the first seven MDGs will depend to a large extent on the ability to develop a global partnership to meet the targets of crosscutting goal MDG 8. A plenary panel discussion on MDG 8 was chaired by the Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, H.E. Mr. Nobuaki Tanaka, and included the President of the State Bank of Pakistan, Dr Ishrat Hussain, the High Commissioner of Canada to Pakistan, Ms. Margaret Huber, and the Secretary General of the World Civil Society Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS), Mr. Kumi Naidoo (through a video link).

In his opening remarks, the President of the State Bank of Pakistan, Dr Ishrat Hussain, underscored that progress towards meeting the MDGs has been uneven, both geographically and sectorally. However, with MDG 8 we can see the emergence of a new consensus, built around a partnership of mutual commitment and accountability. Developing countries commit to undertaking social and economic policy reforms and to improving governance and; in return, developed countries increase their support in different ways – by removing trade barriers, reducing debt, increasing aid flows and direct investment. Intense debate continues as to whether governments are meeting their MDG commitments. Although the MDGs should be seen as a historical chance for rich countries to right historical wrongs, there is widespread criticism that donor countries are not meeting the targets in terms of increased aid flows, lowering of trade barriers. Such criticism comes not only from developing countries but also from within developed countries, especially civil society. Civil Society Organisations are key partners for MDG 8. In both North and South they are proving to be effective advocacy and pressure groups to help ensure governments keep their promises. They also have an important watchdog function to ensure governance is improved and social/economic and political reforms implemented.

Both Ms. Huber and Mr. Tanaka stressed the importance of good governance and the role of civil society in ensuring accountability and transparency in development assistance programmes. As Ms Huber pointed out, donors have a fundamental responsibility in ensuring that development assistance is correctly spent vis-à-vis not only their own people– the taxpayers, but also towards the poor and vulnerable for whom the assistance is intended. Canadian development assistance, which is closely aligned to the MDGs, is provided through both bilateral and multilateral channels and actively seeks partnerships with government and NGOs to facilitate developing country progress in meeting the MDG targets.

Good governance and ensuring the money reaches the grassroots are, according to Mr. Tanaka, priority concerns for the Government of Japan. Some of the mechanisms for delivering aid were described which include a “small grants” facility for local communities to draw on. Japan seeks partnerships with volunteer-based community organisations to help reach most effectively people who are really in need. In 2004, Japanese grant assistance worldwide covered 1500 projects, totalling about a hundred million dollars.

Kumi Naidoo, Secretary General of the World Civil Society Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS), echoed a concern that had emerged in some of the working group discussions, namely that the MDGs are minimalist and a setback to earlier commitments made at the international conferences held in the 1990s. The MDG on gender for example is far weaker than the Beijing Declaration commitments and the right to sexual and reproductive health does not appear in the MDGs. In a statement in 2001, Mr Naidoo had referred to the need

“to bridge the gap between social action and volunteering. While there are growing numbers of citizens increasingly engaged in advocacy and to influence work to tackle the root causes of poverty, injustice and inequity, citizens toil to help bring services to their communities through volunteerism. These two elements of civil society are not exclusive”.

In his presentation, he emphasised that if MDGs are to be achieved there is a need for citizen participation through:

- (i) the delivery of services at community level - this is where many of the effective contributions of volunteering are the most visible. .
- (ii) involvement in policy and engagement with their governments at local and especially at national levels to exert pressure on them and also to ensure transparency and accountability, and to fight corruption.
- (iii) involvement at the international level to influence policy decisions and processes.

The MDGs offer a unique opportunity to break down barriers between North and South and this is beginning to be seen in global campaigns which mobilise citizens from different countries and societies, be they rich or poor, to speak out against poverty or unfair trade practices such as agricultural subsidies. The MDGs are also an opportunity to resolve the dichotomy of civil society worldwide – to reduce the gap between social action and volunteering. On the one hand, there are civil society organisations based on volunteer activism concerned with advocacy and structural change and, on the other, there are organisations based on volunteer service concerned with delivery. The moment should be seized to reconcile these two strands by forging a new form of democracy, which includes people’s participation in delivery as well as in impacting on policy. Volunteers as active agents in public life need to be not only “doers”, but also “changers”.

In the debate following the presentations there was a clear concern for much greater donor investment in volunteerism, particularly those forms of volunteerism that support partnerships between development and developing countries. In the same way that increased investment is sought for other specific MDGs, there should be an expansion of exchange programmes between the North and the South in the area of volunteerism. The value of international volunteer programmes such as the US Peace Corps, the UK’s Voluntary Services Overseas, the German Development Service and the UNV programme was emphasised. It was recommended that volunteerism in its different expressions should be reflected in the UN Secretary General’s Global Compact. Overall, while there is recognition that voluntary action takes place mostly at the local level, there is a need for strategies that take the experiences to the macro level and that ensure the full potential of volunteerism to achieving the MDGs is factored into policy. For this to happen, leadership capable of engaging in policy dialogue at the global level is essential.

“We need to find the way to make the link between from that experience of volunteerism at the local level (where in some senses it is most important) and turn it into something that we can present globally and have it taken into account in the strategies that the governments and the business sector are developing for the future of the world”. ([Liz Burns – President of the International Association for Volunteer Effort)

### Concluding reflections: Dr. Nasim Ashraf

"The first ever international conference on the role of volunteerism in achieving the Millennium Development Goals finally draws to a close. I offer all of you my heart felt gratitude and thanks for taking valuable time to contribute in making this such a worthwhile experience.

We have had a healthy mix of practitioners, academics and policy makers and above all grassroots volunteers who have come forward to give their inputs and present a kaleidoscopic view of what needs to be done at the macro-level to develop a global strategy for volunteerism as well as insights into what works at the micro-level based on "what works". The vital need is to be aware of, and to understand best practices and then to scale them up.

We have heard many illustrations of successful volunteer-based or volunteer stimulated initiatives such as work in Iran in the field of health and population, volunteerism, in Africa contributing significantly to addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic, experiences in health and education in South Asia such as exemplified by Pakistan's NCHD National Volunteer Corps which has over 50,000 registered volunteers in Education and Health sectors, and the role of volunteer led civil society organisations, especially in the Latin America region.

Running through the presentations and discussions has been the passion of volunteers – the power of the human spirit to overcome obstacles and come up with solutions built on solidarity and sense of common goals. The other theme, which kept recurring, was the need to ensure that the matter of gender equity and women's empowerment is kept to the forefront of any discussion on volunteer action.

It was at this conference that the first study of its kind in Pakistan to measure the quantitative and qualitative aspects of volunteerism was shared. It is no surprise to see that the estimated contribution of volunteerism to society is 3.75 % of our GDP.

From our interaction over the past three days we have learned a great deal about the potential, the constraints, and the challenges that lie ahead as we strive to further strengthen the cause of volunteerism.

We have heard emphasis that volunteers must be properly recognised and encouraged to stay motivated. It has also become clear that organised volunteerism is far more effective than sporadic and uncoordinated voluntary acts that arise in situations, for example, of disasters. Achieving the bigger goals of eradicating of poverty, moving towards gender equity, or providing primary universal education, will require putting in place a broad infrastructure for volunteer promotion. When properly supported and managed, volunteerism becomes a truly transformational element in development programmes. At the same time, we have heard that care must be taken not to lose the motivation that drives people to volunteer time. Volunteerism needs structures, but not rigid organisational hierarchies.

The argument for volunteerism to be considered a cross-cutting "asset" or resource to be drawn upon if the MDG targets are to be met came across clearly. The session on MDG 8 brought out the point that there are no exceptions to this observation. Governments in both the North and the

South have responsibilities – to combat corruption, improve governance and provide an enabling environment for gender equity responsibilities. Above all, we have agreed that volunteerism is not a substitute for governments meeting their basic commitments towards their citizens.

On MDG 8, I would also like to align myself with Kumi Naidoo when he stresses that while service delivery is the main focus of many volunteer-involving organisations, they should not focus their energies exclusively on this aspect. There is a larger world of advocacy and fighting for rights. Some may object that this brings politics into the picture but, ultimately, change can only come through the participation of the citizens to whom politicians are accountable.

I believe the major constraint we have identified is the weakness of the enabling environment for volunteerism to flourish. The need of the hour is to press for national legislation to provide an appropriate infrastructure and framework through which the vast resource that volunteerism represents can be channelled to achieve balanced development. Institutional reforms are needed to create an enabling environment to allow volunteerism to be fully tapped in the achievement of the MDGs. There is a political dimension for sure. But without politics there can be no development. It is up to all of us to be involved in politics so that our views are part of public policy – that is where change will come.





**Appendix 3: Acronyms**