THIS WORK CAN'T BE MEASURED BY A FINANCIAL RULER:

VOLUNTEERISM

AS A RENEWABLE RESOURCE

“This work can’t be measured by a financial ruler. We know what we are doing; we value ourselves.”

—Local volunteer, Myanmar, SWVR field research
Like other forms of civic participation, volunteerism is both a means and an end of development. Previous chapters have emphasized volunteerism as a mainstay of resilience, enabling communities to cope with shocks and stresses in a variety of ways. However, the characteristics that the field research participants associated with voluntary work indicate that volunteerism is also a property of resilient communities, contributing to individual and community well-being through self-realization, shared values and common purpose.\(^{221}\) This may explain the duality inherent in many characteristics of volunteerism. Voluntary action can be a renewable resource and a positive force for inclusive and equitable development.\(^{222}\) However, it can also squander the resources of the most vulnerable people or be exploited by external actors to fill gaps in services that governments and other formal organizations are responsible for providing. Each characteristic of volunteerism is potentially positive or negative, depending on the context and conditions for action. Ultimately, the positive contributions of volunteerism are only maximized when its distinctive characteristics are valued and nurtured (figure 4.1).

Although many of the interventions needed to build community resilience happen at the individual, household and community levels, lasting resilience depends on how these efforts are helped or hindered by the wider context. Strengthening resilience therefore requires the
promotion of social, political and economic structures and policies that protect people’s fundamental human rights, provide access to basic services and support local community action. This chapter draws on implications from the field research to mobilize support for practices and policies that create an enabling environment for volunteering in times of protracted strain on economic and social well-being or acute crises and conflict.

The first part of the chapter focuses on how all stakeholders can foster the human-centred connections and self-organization of volunteerism as a strategic foundation for resilience. Building on the findings from chapter 2, it outlines how public and private support can construct a nationally owned ecosystem for resilient volunteering. The scale of the challenges facing many communities means that a strategic and coordinated approach by all stakeholders is required to foster local ownership and connectivity through policy, investments, recognition and support for inclusive and egalitarian forms of volunteerism. Such efforts should prioritize the concerns of marginalized and disenfranchised groups who stand to benefit least from development gains.

The second part of the chapter draws on implications from chapter 3 to identify how collaborations between communities and external actors can optimize the significant contributions of ordinary people to resilience. A new compact for community resilience would provide the framework for volunteers to join community gatekeepers in partnership development and decision-making. It would ensure that collaborations with external actors are based on the self-determined priorities of those who are already taking action. It would
form a more equitable basis for cooperation and linkages to subnational and national resilience systems. Community compacts can support greater flexibility, plurality and diversity of relationships between community members and external actors, strengthening ties beyond existing power structures while allowing coordination and the avoidance of competition. By balancing that risk more effectively across and between actors, they also maximize the potential for volunteerism as a pathway to the empowerment of women and marginalized groups.

Finally, what brings these two features together (a national infrastructure on volunteerism and community compacts or agreements) is volunteers. Volunteers can act as a bridge between “official” and “unofficial” actors and between formal processes and informal, people-led initiatives. In resilience thinking, if how you connect is as important as what you connect to, volunteer-led structures have the potential to create the trust, flexibility and responsive ties that can evolve to reflect emerging needs.

How to maximize volunteerism for resilience?

Developing an ecosystem for resilient volunteerism

While local and informal voluntary efforts can enhance community resilience, these efforts must be matched with adequate resources, capacities and incentives to be sustainable. Volunteerism must provide more than public goods under a human rights framework; it should also be a platform for greater innovation, experimentation and co-creation of responses to risk. Although volunteering is cost-effective, it is not free of cost. Furthermore, the distribution of costs and benefits among individuals, groups, organizations and institutions can ultimately either counter or reinforce inequalities. Governments and other external actors need to consider the full benefits and costs of drawing on voluntary action to strengthen community resilience and allocate resources to volunteering as a means of implementation for the SDGs.

The starting point for building an ecosystem for resilient volunteering should be improved research and analysis of the diverse forms and benefits of volunteerism at national and subnational levels. Such analysis requires multi-stakeholder cooperation among volunteers, public authorities, the private sector and civil society actors. Objectives for investment and support should align with development strategies, priorities and plans, and thus will be context-specific. At the same time, this report demonstrates that several components are likely to be valid across all contexts, since they all to some degree foster the distinctive characteristics prioritized by the diverse communities covered in this report.
This section outlines three key ways that governments, United Nations entities and other peace and development actors can ensure that volunteers are not treated as cheap labour but are cultivated as a core attribute of resilient communities (figure 4.3).

As highlighted throughout this report, examples of each of these approaches can be found across many countries and cities around the world. Many governments and their partners continue to invest in aspects of volunteer infrastructure, policy and programming in support of national development priorities and capacities. For example, in 2017 in the Russian Federation a new standard for volunteering was piloted to promote coordination and investment among stakeholders (figure 4.4).

Yet this report shows that the scale of engagement and the approach taken by governments and other stakeholders to incorporate volunteerism into their programming are often insufficient. Legislation, policies and investments need to be relevant to all types of volunteering in the context, including informal volunteerism. Policy directions and associated resourcing should be integrated across sector plans and prioritized in strategies for gender equality and inclusion. Since volunteerism is a foundational property of all communities, a piecemeal “project-by-project” approach to engaging with community-level volunteers lacks relevance. As many actors seek to localize development processes, there is the potential for competition and co-optation of the efforts of the most vulnerable. Therefore, a universal, strategic and coordinated approach led by governments, embedded in mutual accountabilities between states and citizens and supported by all peace and development partners is required to sustainably support volunteering communities in a world of heightened fragility.
‘Volunteerism Support Standard’, Russian Federation

In the Russian Federation, a new ‘Volunteerism Support Standard’ was developed by the Agency for Strategic Initiatives in 2017. The Standard outlines nine steps to promote interaction between public authorities and volunteer organizations, broader awareness for volunteer activities and stronger training, infrastructure and funding support for volunteering. By the end of 2017, more than 40 regions (out of 85) had started implementing the Standard.

SUPPORTING THE SELF-ORGANIZATION OF COMMUNITIES

When self-organization is recognized as a key survival strategy for communities at risk, external engagement with volunteers can nurture that distinctive characteristic of volunteerism and bring greater visibility to the people-centred processes of development. In vulnerable communities, voluntary action is not only commendable but essential. Consequently, it should be viewed as more than a second-tier gap-filling option for the most marginalized community members. Rather, stakeholders can take full advantage of volunteerism’s self-organizing properties by making it a central component of resilience-strengthening strategies and plans.

Public recognition is important in motivating people who voluntarily contribute their time for the public good and in enabling volunteers to gain the trust and respect of people in the community. It can also reduce the stigmatization of volunteers in contexts where their motives may be questioned. Appreciation can range from small community-based events, to large public affairs promoted by media partners, to formal legal recognition. Legal and social recognition confers legitimacy on volunteers, strengthening their sense of ownership, responsibility and duty. Public acknowledgement of the distribution of the costs of voluntary...
A local volunteer speaks with young women in Rangapani village, Bangladesh, about their rights (UNV, 2015).
action, particularly in contexts where women take on the bulk of low-value and informal volunteerism, is a starting point for changes in norms as well as policy and investment decisions that can better distribute the benefits and opportunities.

For resilient volunteering that does more than fill gaps, the fundamental freedoms of association and self-organization must be protected. As the 2015 SWVR argued, social action through volunteerism is likely to be most effective in societies where all people can participate in informing public policy. Self-organization is stifled in countries where people’s freedom of expression and association are restricted. It is important that national and local governments and their development partners recognize the value of local voluntary action and make every effort to secure people’s freedom and rights to assemble and associate, including working with customary structures to address traditional practices that infringe upon these freedoms.

Voluntary organizations can also work with other actors to create spaces for informal volunteers to come together to organize, connect and develop actions towards shared goals. The ability to convene in person or online enables different groups of people to engage with the public institutions that affect their lives and to connect across diverse social groups. As this report has shown, such opportunities are particularly important for women and youth and other vulnerable and marginalized groups to be able to come together and organize on issues that can help communities cope with adversity. Creating opportunities for people to act on their own priorities was one of the most frequently cited needs in the field research. When such opportunities are lacking, people are less connected and communities become segmented and isolated.

To self-organize, volunteers need improved access to information, such as data collected through early warning systems or from service provider performance tracking. Participatory monitoring systems involve communities in data collection and enable them to craft their own responses. Volunteers can bring crowdsourced data to communities and groups as a basis for joint action through citizen journalism or more direct means.

Done well, external support for local volunteerism can result in highly productive collaborations. Done poorly, by exercising too much control over voluntary action or by introducing competition as multiple actors move into local spaces, external support can undermine the positive contributions of volunteerism’s distinctive characteristics. Overregulation can narrow diversity and access to volunteering, in effect shrinking civic space. Volunteers need to be able to respond flexibly and adapt to changing circumstances. With all this in mind, a delicate balancing act is required to draw on the scale and availability of volunteer action.227

NURTURING THE HUMAN CONNECTIONS CHARACTERISTIC OF LOCAL VOLUNTARY ACTION

Policies that limit people’s participation in actions that affect their lives tend to reinforce social norms that sustain discrimination against underprivileged groups. Recognizing that collective voluntary action can exclude some groups, stakeholders can nurture the trust and social cohesion embedded in communities by creating more equitable standards, opportunities and incentives for inclusive local voluntary action. External actors also need to understand local power dynamics and relationships to avoid exacerbating local tensions and conflict.

Before intervening to manage risks, national and subnational governments together with development partners would be well advised to take the time to understand the DNA of a community and its volunteerism – its cultural habits and local norms for civic or social
action – so as not to undermine local cohesion. Collaborating with community mediators is one way for decision-makers to deepen their sensitivities without stirring up animosity and discord in communities wary of interventions that may alter the status quo.228

In addition to strengthening their own sensitivities, governments and other external actors can help to co-create equitable standards for all, fostering social cohesion and trust by proactively reducing the exclusions that can accompany voluntary action. Together with local community groups, government authorities can create standards that articulate commitments to mutual respect and inclusive practices. While volunteer organizations and movements cannot be forced to be inclusive, the principles inherent in agreed standards can guide volunteer action that first does no harm.229,230

In providing the space for groups to come together and self-organize, governments and others can attract and convene people from different communities to build knowledge, awareness and empathy across groups. As the case of Shughel Shabab (box 4.1) shows, volunteerism can forge new connections through positive networks and relationships that provide important off-ramps from violence.

Finally, state and non-state actors need to establish better systems for managing spontaneous volunteering in crises, which is essentially a reflection of the human need to connect and support fellow citizens. National and subnational governments would do well to anticipate spontaneous volunteers joining efforts to help in a crisis, even in circumstances where they may be unwanted, and plan for their complementary participation and integration into response efforts.231,232 When such participation is planned for and coordinated, self-organized volunteerism can strengthen community resilience in unique ways. Furthermore, the experiences of self-organized volunteers during crises can determine whether or not they remain engaged over the long term.233

CREATING EMPOWERING OPPORTUNITIES FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

Marginalized groups in isolated and rural communities having comparatively closed social systems would benefit from more equitable opportunities to engage in voluntary action. External actors can facilitate new forms of social relationships across community groups through inclusive norms and policies that extend the benefits of volunteerism to all. Legislation and organizational protocols and standards can open up opportunities

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**Box 4.1**

**Youth volunteers as peacebuilders**

Young volunteers can be positive role models and advocates for promoting peacebuilding and social cohesion within fragile communities. Young volunteers can also play a role in discussing and addressing factors such as social exclusion and cultural norms that can contribute to extremism.

In 2017, UNDP and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization launched a regional youth-led advocacy campaign known as “Shughel Shabab” in response to a United Nations Security Council resolution on youth, peace and security. It aimed to highlight youth-led initiatives, transform perceptions about young people and support them as change-makers and peacebuilders. Young volunteers from countries across the Arab States region worked together to showcase the many positive ways in which young people, many of whom are volunteers, reduce social tension and violence and repair the social fabric of communities. In 2018, the campaign will focus on developing an enabling environment for sustained youth participation.

**Source:** UNDP 2017
Kenyan communities have always voluntarily organized themselves, whether formally or informally, to help each other in times of need and in times of celebration. At independence, this volunteering spirit was adopted by the government of the day as “harambee”, loosely translated as “pooling resources for community development”. This spirit of harambee is the backbone of today’s volunteerism in Kenya.

Due to a lack of legal framework and investment, volunteerism in Kenya has been inadequately documented, making it difficult to establish its contribution to society and the economy. Research on volunteerism has always focused on the social, cultural, financial and philosophical dimensions, with no known body of research covering the economic dimension.

This changed in 2015 when the Government of Kenya, in collaboration with the volunteer community, developed and adopted a National Volunteerism Policy. The policy provides guidelines on efficient and effective coordination, management and sustenance of volunteerism in Kenya. In addition, it seeks to ensure that volunteerism is embedded within national economic policies. This policy enabled groundbreaking research to be undertaken, attaching economic value to volunteerism in Kenya for the first time.

In 2017, research commissioned by the State Department for Social Protection was carried out to determine the contributions of volunteer work in Kenya. The results showed that Kenyan volunteers contributed a total of 669,630,288 hours to the economy in 2016. Based on average wages in each job category where the volunteers worked, their contribution translated to approximately USD2,362,778,900 or 3.66 per cent of gross domestic product.

Improved understanding and appreciation of the economic value of volunteerism has provided momentum to further integrating voluntary efforts into national plans and policy and to the strengthening of national infrastructure. The government has set up a National Standing Committee on Volunteerism, bringing together government departments, volunteer-involving organizations and the private sector for collective action and impact. The high-level committee is co-chaired by the Principal Secretary, State Department for Social Protection, and includes representatives from volunteer-involving organizations and the private sector. The body is tasked with fast-tracking the development and implementation of a volunteer support infrastructure and a legal framework for volunteerism in Kenya.
for all people to contribute to helping their communities cope with adversity (box 4.2). Such frameworks can minimize the risk that more vulnerable community members will be excluded from the benefits of voluntary action or, equally, that they will be overburdened by demands to participate in less fulfilling roles. For example, some Canadian volunteer organizations use a recently developed guidebook and fact sheets on engaging people with disabilities in volunteering.

One group active in volunteering but often excluded from decision-making is young people. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on the inclusive representation of youth noted that a lack of leadership opportunities, protections and support for young people leave them open to a wide range of undesirable influences, including antisocial forms of engagement. Conditions of conflict and poverty that leave communities desperate and vulnerable allow opportunistic criminal or extremist groups to gain a foothold among youth. United Nations agencies and development organizations can address this by partnering with national and local governments to enhance youth involvement in volunteering (box 4.3). Partnerships between faith-based organizations, governments and young people can explore more constructive value-based volunteering. By helping to prevent conflict and future stresses, such efforts can go a long way towards strengthening the long-term resilience of communities.

Women, too, can benefit from taking on more leadership and decision-making roles in their voluntary work. Promoting women’s participation in community action committees and engaging with community leaders to address discriminatory gender norms can advance the more equitable representation of women. Also valuable are: policies and frameworks that emphasize women’s leadership and meaningful participation; training and resources for women’s groups and for people who work in partnership with men to enhance gender equity; and public education and awareness-raising on women’s rights. External agencies can also model the value of leadership positions for women. By explicitly creating leadership opportunities for women to engage in crisis mitigation and recovery efforts, external actors can change local norms and perceptions of women’s roles and challenge men’s dominant role in decision-making.

Laws and policies on volunteering should promote inclusivity and equal access. Two recent examples of this can be seen in Montenegro and Spain. In 2010 Montenegro adopted a law on volunteering that prohibits discrimination based on such characteristics as nationality, health conditions and ethnicity. Charged with implementing the Law, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare produced a strategy document on the development of volunteering in Montenegro which has a chapter on policies supporting vulnerable groups in voluntary action.

In 2015 Spain passed a new law on volunteering in recognition of the fact that volunteering had changed considerably since the previous law was passed in 1996. The new law commits to “open, participatory and intergenerational” volunteering and affirms that non-discrimination (based on origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or other personal characteristics) is a fundamental principle of voluntary action.

Sources: Government of Montenegro, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare 2011; Government of Spain, Ministry of the Presidency and Territorial Administration 2015
Facilitating a community compact for resilience

The post-2015 development consensus emphasizes the need to bring development processes down to the local level if goals and targets are to be met. Evidence increasingly shows that cities and communities are critical levels of organization and building blocks for sustainable peace and development. International actors, including the United Nations through the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review reforms, are reconfiguring themselves to support national ownership of development agendas and increase domestic capacities for peace and development. Accordingly, structures and processes from the national level to the local level need revision.

How can communities be fairly positioned within this wider system? As this report has shown, communities are acting with or without a formal acknowledgement of roles and responsibilities. Local volunteers are already self-organizing to cope with a range of shocks and stresses that are environmental, economic, social and conflict related. Communities, through their voluntary efforts, have much to bring to the table. External actors need to ask how they can build on the work that is already taking place in communities and work out how they can connect to volunteers’ distinctive strengths for co-productive and synergistic solutions to risk.

Moving from a top-down approach to truly valuing community contributions requires a change in relationships at the boundaries of community. The scale and scope of local volunteerism suggest that community contribution and ownership need to be valued more highly. Resilience interventions can embed more collaborative governance and partnership models that enable “official actors” and citizens to work together more productively. Furthermore, power relationships within the community are a microcosm of national and international relationships. If those external relationships with communities are more equitable, people who have not traditionally benefited from development processes will become more empowered as greater value is placed on their capacities and agency to act.

One way to do this is to enter into a community compact for resilience, developed and implemented together by national, subnational and local actors (figure 4.5). Such a compact can form the basis for more equal and transparent partnerships between local volunteers and government, civil society and private sector actors, many of whom already draw on local volunteerism. A community compact for resilience empowers community volunteers by having agreement on roles and priorities with wider actors, including local governments, and it more equitably shares and manages risks. All parties can articulate
their commitments to maintaining agreed standards, being accountable and meeting expectations. In return, communities can be required to adopt inclusive practices where needed. Community compacts can also articulate the commitments that local governance bodies and other higher authorities make, including providing resources, technical assistance and other incentives to participate in the compact.

Given the range of different national, subnational and community contexts, this report does not provide a detailed blueprint for community compacts, as each one would be influenced by the existing governance and administrative arrangements within and beyond communities. Rather, research for this report points to some key principles for consideration in the development of such agreements or partnerships.

STRENGTHEN KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL VOLUNTEERISM TO IMPROVE COMPLEMENTARITY

When volunteering is valued for its distinctive contributions beyond gap filling, a community’s resilience ecosystem is greatly enhanced and volunteerism is integrated appropriately into wider systems and programmes. However, real integration that achieves the full potential of local volunteerism as a renewable resource requires that volunteers work productively alongside other resilience partners, and not just in ad-hoc projects and programmes. As previously noted, in reality, support and capacity-building for truly locally led efforts are rarely included in resilience planning. Research for this report suggests that “official” actors at all levels, from government to civil society and the private sector, have limited understanding of the DNA of community-led efforts and that volunteering is not yet widely recognized as a core strategy for strengthening peace and development initiatives.
These hindrances to effective partnerships with communities could be improved by gathering information on volunteers’ distinctive contributions, by asking communities themselves and by using this as the starting point for collaboration. Improving complementarity requires a multi-level approach to building knowledge and intelligence on local volunteerism, its limits and thresholds and its support requirements in the face of shocks and stresses.

In the first instance, communities and partners need to share information and enter into dialogue that recognizes local efforts and explores avenues for support and partnership. This report proposes a methodology based on an approach used by the IFRC for community learning and dialogue after disasters (box 4.4). Authorities and communities can use such a methodology to improve systems for resilience by adopting recommendations informed by the unique weaknesses revealed by crises. Based on improved data, partnerships with communities would be co-created, building on local capacities and priorities rather than adversely incorporating the labour of local volunteers or simply working in parallel with local efforts.

Given the resources required to undertake such dialogue and collaboration between actors as a basis for partnerships, volunteer-led structures can play a critical and cost-effective facilitation role. In the context of resilience-building, structures often need to expand, contract or change shape over time to address new and emerging risks. The flexibility inherent in volunteer-led configurations allows them to evolve more easily in line with emerging needs. Acting as intermediaries, volunteers can build bridges of trust to relay when volunteering is valued for its distinctive contributions beyond gap filling, a community’s resilience ecosystem is greatly enhanced.
Field research for this report yielded multiple examples of community-based and national and international volunteers acting as key connectors, conveying information between community groups and higher-level NGOs and government agencies. Governments and their partners have the potential to support, and benefit from, the scaling up of such structures and mechanisms rooted in the leadership capacities of volunteers.

Beyond gathering community-specific knowledge, researchers and statistical agencies also need to systematically collect data on volunteering from the community level up to the international level. Governments and United Nations agencies can foster cooperation and exchange between research institutions, data centres and universities by creating incentives and opportunities to build the evidence base on volunteering, especially in fragile countries and vulnerable communities. Governments can also highlight the contributions of volunteers by recording their activities in their Voluntary National Reviews on development progress (figure 4.6). Publicly recognizing the work of volunteers can help fill knowledge gaps on volunteering for resilience-building in low- and middle-income countries by promoting learning and sharing examples across national actors.
Furthermore, to build on national experiences and to accelerate the sharing of knowledge and practice on volunteerism between United Nations Member States and development partners, UNV, IFRC and others are consolidating learning and experiences from Member States and development partners to expand the menu of options for engaging with volunteerism through the plan of action (box 4.5).

BUILD MULTIPLE AND DIVERSE CONNECTIONS WITH COMMUNITIES BASED ON PRINCIPLES OF EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Under the 2030 Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement on climate change, development, peacebuilding and humanitarian actors are encouraged to form more meaningful relationships with local communities that link priorities on the ground to wider systemic efforts. True engagement and collaboration require a deeper commitment to participatory approaches than merely shifting activities down to the local level.
**Box 4.5**

**Integrating volunteering into peace and development: the plan of action for the next decade and beyond, 2016–2030**

United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/129, adopted in November 2015, presents a plan of action for United Nations Member States to integrate volunteerism into their peace and development agendas over the next decade and beyond. It forms the basis for governments, volunteer organizations, academia and the private sector to create volunteer-involving solutions under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The three main areas of engagement are:

- strengthening people's ownership of the development agenda through enhanced civic engagement;
- integrating volunteerism into national and global strategies and plans; and
- measuring volunteerism and its impact for a holistic understanding of people and their well-being.

Stakeholders will come together under the plan of action to share evidence and experience through regional meetings in 2019 and at a global technical meeting on volunteerism in 2020. As a first step, countries are undertaking national situational analyses on volunteerism for development that will be shared in the next Secretary-General's report on volunteerism in December 2018.

*Source:* UNGA 2015a (A/70/129)

A community compact would expand decision-making beyond traditional power structures and give those already taking action a role in planning and agreeing partnerships. As this report has shown, volunteers are drivers of action in their communities and have important resources to bring to the table which should not be co-opted by others, including their own community leadership structures. Valuing and recognizing volunteer contributions can help bring less represented voices into debates and decisions, enhancing grassroots decision-making, accountability and ownership. Structuring partnerships and agreements around concrete manifestations of local agency rather than treating communities as passive, homogenous and unified entities means that collaborations can more effectively draw on diverse networks of local knowledge to produce locally appropriate solutions that work in the interests of the most vulnerable. Nurturing horizontal connections between volunteer groups and developing vertical networks between these groups and higher-level actors enables knowledge, skills and resources to flow both up and down as well as laterally to inform interventions in ways that are qualitatively richer than simple administrative linkages.

When these connections are developed and valued through explicitly articulated compacts, stakeholders gain access to dense networks of volunteers to bolster system resilience through monitoring, data collection and analysis activities that feed into larger response systems. Technology offers new opportunities for volunteers to strengthen risk and threat intelligence systems through real-time vertical information flows. Internet connectivity also allows a much wider network of volunteers to address problems and challenges outside of their fixed localities. Increasing community access to the internet, open-source software and social media enables volunteers to use mobile phone technology, crowdsourcing and geolocation to feed information back into wider resilience-strengthening systems. A web of connections is created, strengthening ties while allowing the flexibility and plurality of options needed to deal with shocks and stresses.

**Balance risks through a fair distribution of resources to support local efforts**

The most resilient systems spread risk across an integrated system of nested actors. Research for this report suggests that better alignment across a hierarchical division of
Indorelawan, Indonesia’s first online volunteering platform (www.indorelawan.org), connects volunteers with short- and long-term opportunities to volunteer, usually with local civil society organizations. Launched in 2014, it aims to meet the demand of large numbers of urban residents who want to volunteer but cannot find opportunities. As its director, Marsya Anggia Nashahta, confirmed: “The founders recognized that urban citizens were willing to help those who needed it as long as there was an opportunity to do so.” Indorelawan also advocates for volunteerism to become an integral part of Indonesian life and for the stronger involvement of NGOs and volunteer-involving organizations in national development strategies. Indorelawan offers capacity development training for volunteer-involving organizations and customizes corporate volunteering programmes for private sector companies.

Source: The Jakarta Post, 2014
In May 2015, the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop, launched a strategy known as Development for All 2015–2020: Strategy for Strengthening Disability-Inclusive Development in Australia’s Aid Program, which recognizes that a failure to account for the needs of people with disabilities undermines efforts to drive inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Volunteering can capacitate and empower people with disabilities while unleashing their unique skills to help others. However, people with disabilities, estimated by the World Health Organization to be 15 per cent of the world’s population, face multiple physical, cultural and legal barriers to volunteering. One barrier faced by people with disabilities in Australia is that the Disability Support Pension (DSP) has eligibility requirements that make it difficult for people receiving this support to volunteer internationally, including restrictions on travel outside of Australia for more than 28 days. Scope Global, an Australian specialist project management company, created the Disability Empowerment Skills Exchange to provide overseas volunteering opportunities under the Australian Volunteers for International Development programme that fit within the restrictions of the DSP. This pilot programme has not only allowed people supported by the DSP to volunteer but it has also given important momentum to advocacy efforts to reform the DSP by raising awareness of the impact these restrictions have.

Sources: Scope Global 2016, World Health Organization 2011
Finally, development, peacebuilding and humanitarian actors supporting voluntary action need to look beyond immediate shocks and crises and rebalance their investments and inputs towards more long-term adaptation activities. By strengthening capacities for local voluntary action, the projected time span for a community’s resilience in the face of crisis increases. Agreements with communities that help to predict and plan investments in capacities to prepare for future crises need to recognize that volunteerism is both a mechanism for strengthening resilience and a property of resilient communities, with the added advantage of mitigating volunteer burnout among vulnerable groups. As supporting institutions bolster long-term resilience by investing in preparation, prevention and adaptation efforts, they can also draw on local volunteer capacity to anticipate and prepare for new crises (figure 4.7).

Collaborative governance approaches recognize the need to avoid competition between informal and formal institutions; rather, interventions need to create the conditions under which they can be beneficially linked. Under the 2030 Agenda, the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships is emphasized, incorporating the private sector, faith-based institutions, traditional and cultural mechanisms as well as social movements. Norms and behaviours such as ownership, agency and collaboration are recognized as critical to delivering on the post-2015 consensus, yet national, regional and international policy and investment
have not kept pace with the “harder” components of development infrastructure. The 2030 Agenda requires a transition from a two-dimensional approach to the fully three-dimensional development era in which people are no longer seen as beneficiaries but as active participants in global change.

Many of the recommendations in this chapter point to the need for investments that recognize and empower volunteers as a core component of resilient communities (table 4.1). This calls for a fundamental change in the scale and scope of current investment priorities in local communities. Without equitable investments that match the responsibilities assumed by volunteers, the resilience of communities will be eroded over time as resources are depleted. By recognizing and valuing volunteerism as a social behaviour embedded in human relationships, humanitarian, development and peace actors can tailor incentives and programmes to leverage people’s participation, autonomy and ownership. At the same time, new compacts for co-creation between volunteers and wider actors provide an opportunity to reconfigure relationships, empowering local and unofficial actors traditionally positioned at the bottom of the resilience hierarchy. By anchoring local volunteerism within wider systems, it can remain both a renewable resource and an enduring property of resilient communities.
# Recommendations to ensure that volunteerism remains a renewable resource for communities

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<th>Nurturing a renewable resource: an ecosystem for resilient volunteerism</th>
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<td>1. Build context-specific knowledge and evidence about the contribution of local volunteerism to link with national or subnational development strategies and plans for resilience-building.</td>
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<td>2. Reward and recognize contributions by local volunteers to strengthen their motivation and increase their sense of ownership and responsibility.</td>
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<td>3. Create more equitable standards, opportunities and incentives to empower vulnerable groups to become involved in local action.</td>
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<td>4. Expand leadership opportunities through volunteerism, particularly for women, youth and marginalized groups.</td>
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<td>5. Allow voluntary groups sufficient freedom and autonomy to avoid co-opting and undermining volunteerism’s distinctive self-organizing and connective properties.</td>
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<td>6. Create focal points and meeting places for minority and other marginalized groups to coordinate voluntary action on issues and priorities that can help communities to cope.</td>
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<td>7. Provide specific investments to allow people from different backgrounds and groups, particularly in conflict or post-conflict contexts, to volunteer together.</td>
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<th>Building from within: a community compact for resilience</th>
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<td>1. Encourage flexible, volunteer-led structures at subnational and national levels to facilitate dialogue between communities and wider actors on resilience priorities.</td>
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<td>2. Build collaborations on resilience that recognize the substantial self-organizing contributions of communities – for example, community compacts between communities and wider actors.</td>
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<td>3. Decentralize resources to reflect the balance of responsibilities held by local communities.</td>
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<td>4. Embed more equitable relationships and mutual accountabilities between communities and wider actors as they collaborate on resilience-building.</td>
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<td>5. Create predictable and long-term partnerships with communities that help rebalance resource investments towards prevention and adaptation.</td>
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<td>6. Address perceptions of volunteering as substitutive and competitive by ensuring that public services and safety nets are maintained in the face of shocks and stresses.</td>
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**Table 4.1**
CONCLUSION
WEAVING NEW PATTERNS OF RESILIENCE

“People who have money in town may solve problems by paying money, but we solve problems through cooperating because we are not rich.”

– Research participant, Sri Lanka, SWVR field research

“We need more sensitization of people and of administrations about volunteerism and its importance, particularly in times of crisis. With more resources and more results, we could mute our critics.”

– Focus group participants, Burundi, SWVR field research

“Because of the crisis and the multiple problems, Athens has become vulnerable to all these problems but it has also become an empty canvas open to any kind of solutions. And this has led to an increasing number of volunteer initiatives that aim to resolve the problems and start from people that are doing it in an informal, invisible, unexpected and sometimes even unconscious, spontaneous way. So Athens has become an empty canvas where people improvise more often than we think.”

– Research participant, Greece, SWVR field research
Volunteerism is the thread that connects individuals, enabling them to work together for the good of their communities. Experiencing persistent conflict and stresses, inequitable resourcing and underdeveloped capacities, local and informal volunteers on the frontlines are struggling to keep pace with complex risks. Investments in voluntary action by governments and development partners can prevent communities from fraying at the seams. Collaborations that understand and nurture local capacities can help transform volunteerism from a coping strategy to a strategic resource for prevention and adaptation. And new partnerships with communities can strengthen the potential of volunteerism to more meaningfully include vulnerable groups in development processes.

In response to the global consensus on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this report makes the case that vulnerable people are not waiting for outsiders to rush in and save them when times are hard. Under strain, local actors marshal the limited time and resources at their disposal to cope with challenges and risks. But external actors can safeguard this natural human resource as a core property of resilient communities by balancing their external support with the autonomy required for self-organized voluntary action to thrive. Governments, humanitarian organizations and development actors can leverage the distinctive skills, indigenous knowledge and goodwill of volunteers as partners in the “bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path”. This is the potential of volunteering: to contribute to long-term and sustainable solutions to the difficult problems of our time.
Local volunteerism is a fundamental resilience strategy and a core property of resilient communities

By critically appraising the complex channels through which voluntary action strengthens or inhibits community resilience, this report offers further evidence that people-centred solutions are a core element of broader development solutions. The lessons drawn out in this report point to a strong justification for strengthening voluntary action in the context of conflict, unemployment, natural disasters, environmental degradation and other shocks and stresses. The flexibility, availability and speed of voluntary action fortify the capacities needed by communities to bounce back, and even to “bounce back better” by transforming themselves in the process. Resilience is strengthened only when the participation of all people is nurtured and supported.

Local volunteerism can both boost and diminish community resilience

In situations of stress and crisis, the distinctive characteristics of volunteerism can help communities learn and innovate by self-organizing and by building stronger relationships that enhance trust and cohesiveness. Volunteerism also creates channels for local knowledge feedback; strengthens local ownership, solidarity and inclusive participation; and allows communities to respond swiftly to proximate crises. At the same time, under certain conditions volunteering can be exclusive, burdensome, short-term and of limited effectiveness. This potential duality of volunteering means that the manner in which governments and other actors engage with it is critical in maximizing volunteerism's most positive characteristics.

Volunteerism is important for vulnerable groups, yet it is not always inclusive

People who are struggling the most – for example, those living in poverty, those in isolated and rural areas and disadvantaged groups in urban environments – also bear the heaviest share of the burden in terms of coping with risks. In the absence of other forms of social protection, these cohorts are often obliged to engage in voluntary cooperation as they react to cyclical or recurring shocks and stresses. These inequities in the state of the world's volunteerism in 2018 require nuanced responses, and they have major implications for how national and international actors can help communities strengthen their resilience.

Under the 2030 Agenda there is often an implicit assumption that “going local” will automatically address marginalization and open up pathways to empowerment. Although the potential benefits of localized, voluntary and people-centred approaches to development are abundant, this report calls for a new urgency in ensuring that inclusive standards receive greater prominence in discussions of community resilience. Only in this way can voluntary action become an equitable means of coping with risks to people’s lives and livelihoods.

Local volunteerism must be nurtured by mainstream development strategies

Governments and development partners can learn from communities' own reflections on volunteering as a starting point for people-centred collaborations at the local level. Rooted in systems that have historically engaged volunteers largely as unpaid human labour, development, peacebuilding and humanitarian interventions have not generally placed volunteers at the centre of mainstream development strategies. That approach has failed to support the agency, self-organization, local knowledge and relationship-building capacities of local volunteers as critical actors in building on and nurturing community resilience.
As many peace and development actors work to support localization under the 2030 Agenda, they are encouraged to do so in ways which respect and nurture the most distinctive and valuable contributions of volunteerism, avoiding co-optation and competition with voluntary actors in local spaces. National and local authorities have an essential role in this to ensure the protection of local capacities through the effective coordination of wider actors as they draw on the valuable contributions provided by voluntary groups.

**Volunteerism cannot take the place of public investment in resilience-building**

Voluntary action has its limits in meeting the chronic needs of vulnerable communities, and integrating volunteerism into wider resilience systems calls for more mindful appreciation of its added value in relation to other types of interventions. Volunteerism cannot, and should not, substitute for public investment, particularly in communities that lack access to the core building blocks of resilience: decent jobs, universal services and social safety nets. In times of austerity, there may be a temptation for governments and other institutions to rely on volunteerism far beyond the self-supporting capacities of communities to provide it sustainably. Evidence suggests that engaging volunteers in this way is neither effective nor sustainable and in fact works against community resilience.

**An enabling environment for volunteerism strengthens community resilience**

In fragile states, a patchwork of informal institutions and social networks emerge when formal institutions fail. Collective action is shaped as much by informal processes as by formal ones, and volunteering lies at the heart of such action. A step change in approach is required with new investments and partnerships, ensuring strategic collaboration across diverse actors by:

- **Nurturing a national ecosystem for resilient volunteerism** that aligns with national development priorities and plans and broadens access to the benefits of volunteering for the most marginalized groups. In doing so, the divide between “official” and “unofficial” actors is broken down, allowing the contributions of ordinary people to be maximized through the innovation, flexibility and of course huge time and effort provided by citizens every day to address the development challenges they face.

- **Enabling more equitable partnerships between communities and wider actors** on resilience-building through community compacts or agreements. By formally recognizing the scale and scope of contributions through local volunteerism, such compacts or agreements would see local and national authorities give more weight to the voices of community volunteers in decision-making within resilience planning. This would form the basis for more effective joint initiatives between communities and wider stakeholders and enable the decentralization of resources, with a focus on more predictable investments for prevention and adaptation. A plurality of relationships between local volunteers and other communities, actors and organizations would help weave a more resilient network of relationships that goes beyond the limitations of traditional and top-down power structures. Embedding standards and principles for inclusion would also help foster a more equitable division of responsibilities within and across communities.

Used as a cheap and proximal resource, local volunteerism is unlikely to be sustainable, especially as the burden of community coping is disproportionately borne by those least able to do so. This report provides an alternative vision for governments and their development partners, one in which the contribution of volunteerism as a property of resilient communities is maximized.