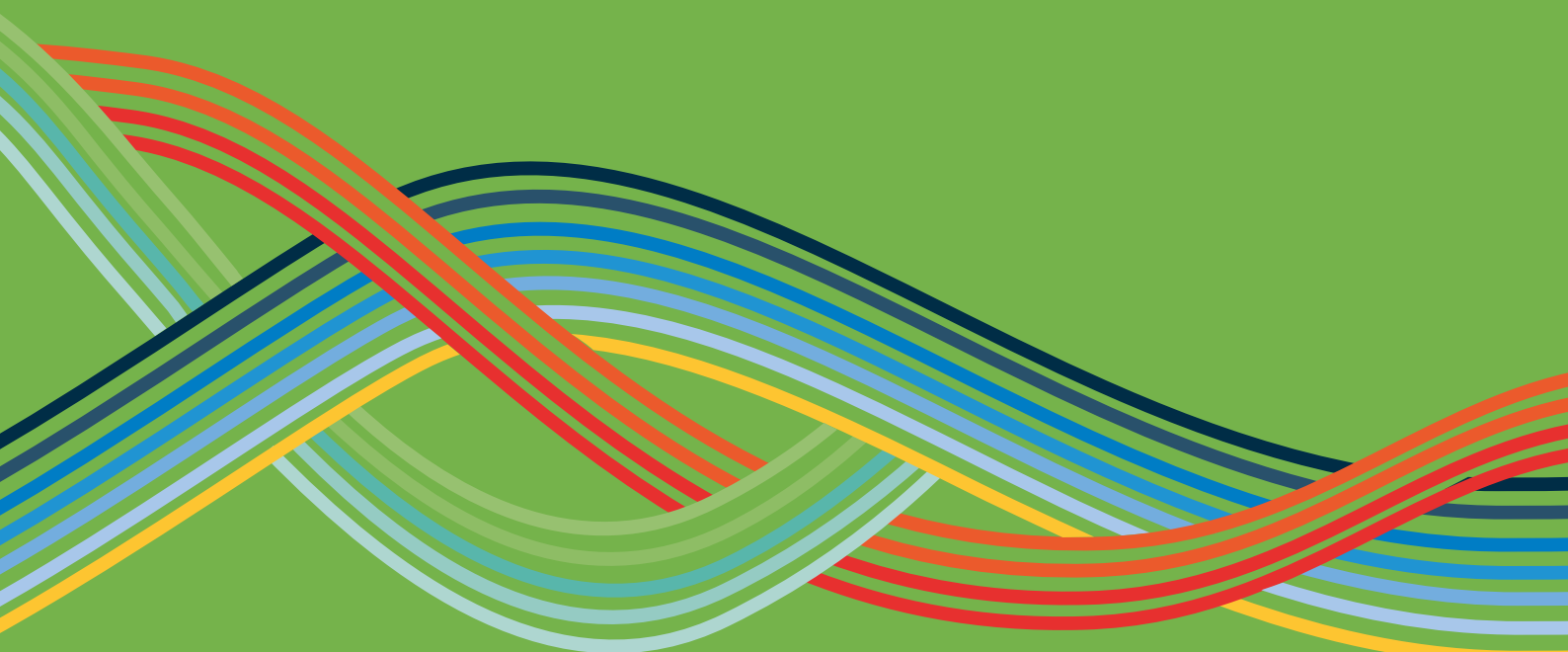
WE SEE THE LIMITS OF WHAT WE DO:

COLLABORATIONS

WITH LOCAL VOLUNTEERISM FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

"As volunteers, we can easily see the limits of what we do. We cannot respond to the demanding issues as we should; it is not in our hands to act in place of the government or the international NGOs. We lack the needed resources; we really need external assistance in case of crisis."

– **Focus group participant**, Burundi, SWVR field research



Techo youth volunteers work with urban communities to improve housing in Peru (Techo, 2017).

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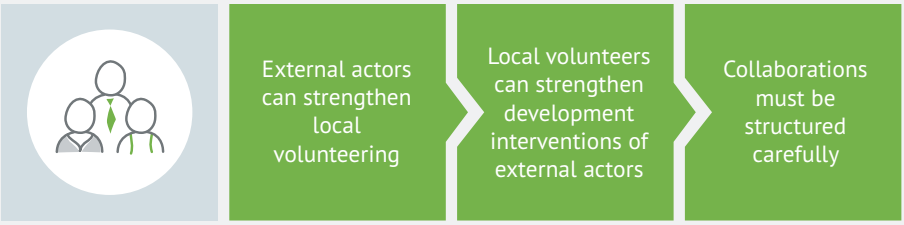
To build on the distinctive contributions of local volunteering and overcome some of its limitations, this chapter investigates how connections and collaborations between local volunteers and development and humanitarian stakeholders can enhance community resilience. It also explores how top-down and externally driven actions can unintentionally undermine communities' own capacities to cope. Understanding the relative strengths of diverse actors and how they fit together helps position local volunteerism as a more effective part of a wider ecosystem for resilience.

Contemporary theory on strengthening community resilience recognizes the importance of complex systems and diverse actors working together in times of stress, conflict and crises.[174,175] It sees "institutional multiplicity"[176] and "nested institutions" as enabling action by different sets of actors to address problems at multiple levels.[177] Each institution and actor brings distinctive strengths and perspectives to the task. Supporting these theoretical underpinnings, the findings in this chapter suggest that greater responsibility can be shared through the co-generation of knowledge and action during crises and conflict.[178] This shared responsibility emerges from a systemic perspective that respects and values the complex and overlapping roles and responsibilities of civil society, governments, NGOs and other stakeholders in coping with change and transforming vulnerable communities.[179]

Figure **3.1**

Scope of chapter 3

Who can collaborate with local volunteerism to strengthen community resilience?



Despite the relational strengths, self-organizing capacities, quick response and flexibility of local volunteerism, it is difficult for self-organizing communities to be optimally resilient without complementary support and direction from external stakeholders.[180,181] For the purposes of this report, external stakeholders are taken to be those originating from outside the community boundary, be it from neighbouring communities, subnational or national authorities, or any other private or public actor. Local volunteers sometimes lack the technical capacity, skills or access to the information, knowledge and resources needed to produce transformative solutions. They may lack the political space to assemble and organize, or they may be confronted by situations that are dangerous or inappropriate for voluntary interventions. Furthermore, many issues that local communities are dealing with have their origins outside the local system and so cannot be effectively resolved at the community level (figure 3.2).

Figure **3.2**

Thresholds and limitations of local volunteerism

"As volunteers, we can easily see the limits of what we do. We cannot respond to the demanding issues as we should; it is not in our hands to act in place of the government or the international NGOs. We lack the needed resources; we really need external assistance in case of crisis. For instance, during the famine, we lacked resources to address the massive influx of needs. People asked but our response was very limited; we hadn't enough food for every person in need.

▶ Focus group participant, Burundi, SWVR field research

Peace and development actors can effectively partner with volunteers on activities that extend beyond local capacities. This chapter explores two ways to link these external actors and community systems to strengthen community resilience. One is through collaborations that strengthen locally led resilience-building at the community level. The other is bolstering the ability of volunteers to manage risks by connecting volunteers with wider risk-sharing systems (figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3

The complementarity of efforts of local and external actors can strengthen volunteerism for community resilience

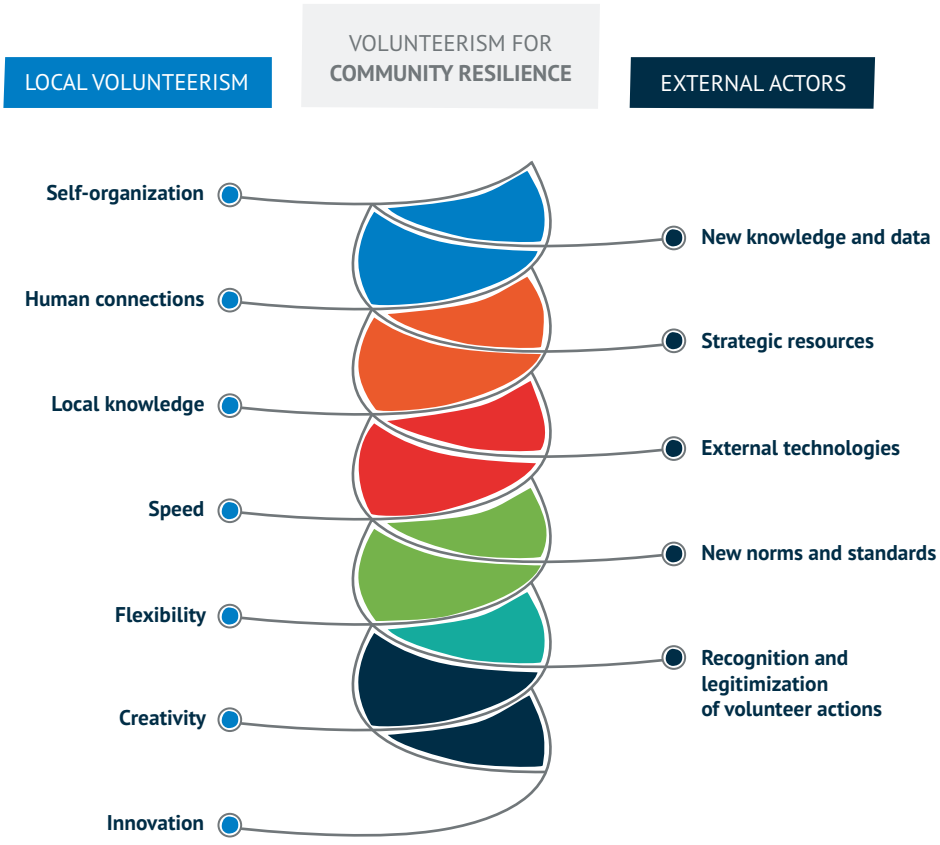
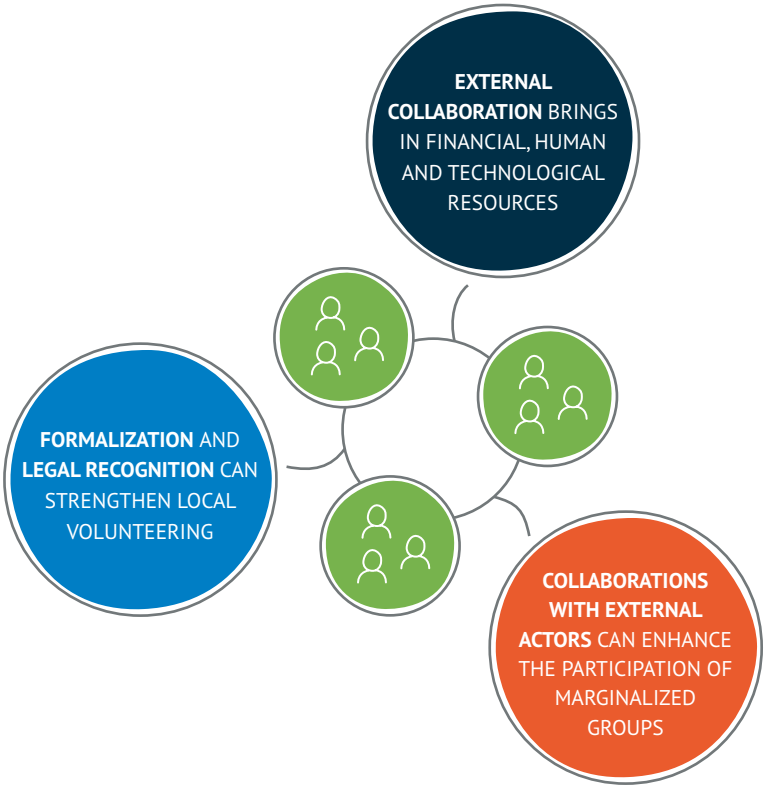


Figure **3.4**

Collaborations with external actors can strengthen local volunteering



As highlighted in the introduction to this report, a renewed emphasis on national ownership and leadership seeks to align external assistance with national frameworks, policies and plans and thus to situate development processes and accountabilities within a wider social contract. Development partners are transforming in line with this focus – for example, through the United Nations reform process. Yet while localization discussions often focus on national ownership, local or community-level ownership has received less attention.

The external partners discussed in this chapter include a wide array of actors, both domestic and international. The majority of external assistance to communities is domestic, coming from other communities and from wider systems and structures at district, regional or national level, but some also comes through international cooperation.

➔ Collaborations with external actors can complement local volunteering

New waves of migration and displacement and evolving work and family norms have implications for who can bear added strain in times of crisis. When local capacity to cope with stresses and hazards is weak or when problems are particularly complex, collaborating with actors from outside the local community can help communities safeguard their assets and livelihoods.[182] This section illustrates the advantages of external collaboration, from boosting available resources to influencing social norms and conferring legitimacy and legal recognition on local voluntary efforts. In addition, it explores the distinct place occupied by volunteerism in peacebuilding, development and humanitarian strategies as the link between community-based knowledge and the technical knowledge and skills of external partners.

EXTERNAL COLLABORATION BRINGS IN FINANCIAL, HUMAN AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES TO SUSTAIN LOCAL ACTION

While local volunteerism creates relationships and networks within the community, it also needs connections outside the community to optimize community resilience. Some of the few constructive outcomes of crises are new linkages between local and wider actors[183] and the connection of local groups to larger institutions.[184,185] However, most of the volunteering examined in the field research communities occurred during intense cycles of persistent stresses, such as conflict, food and water insecurity and chronic poverty, rather than during preparation for or recovery from major acute shocks. The reality is that communities facing ongoing persistent stresses often fly under the radar, largely unrecognized by external actors.

When dealing with persistent vulnerabilities, local volunteers have little ability to take new risks or adapt their response if external resources are not available. To move from responding to acute crises to addressing longer-term drivers of vulnerability, local volunteers emphasized the need to tap into financial, human and technological resources from outside the local system.

> "If there was more funding given to organizations or volunteer workers who help refugees or people with a migrant background to become integrated and to deal with the problems they face, they could do much more and reach many more than otherwise is possible.

▶ Local volunteer, Netherlands, SWVR field research

Financial resources

Decision-makers often underestimate the costs, time and expertise needed to encourage and sustain local volunteerism. After all, as evidenced in the field research, local volunteers need comparatively few resources to incentivize and coordinate participation in self-organizing groups. However, the field research also illustrates the limits of local voluntary action when not well supported. Investments are needed to develop and sustain the adaptive capacity of communities. In most instances, informal volunteers in the field research communities did not expect to be paid for volunteering, but they did expect to receive the resources to allow them to work effectively. As a volunteer in Burundi explained: "Our main need to strengthen and develop volunteerism is not remuneration, nor time, nor recognition. It is only resources to enable the work. We do our best, but it is not enough."

> "Volunteers work for the construction of the road, but it is not really efficient. Just the minimum; it does not result in a beautiful road but just a road that is usable. It is temporary work, quickly done, that does not really sort the road problem. We only work with local materials and our own strength…we repair the road and the bridge, but once the rainy season comes it's back to the same. We need external aid.

▶ Women's focus group participant, Madagascar, SWVR field research

Examples from the field research suggest that financial resources were one of the most requested external inputs. Together, local voluntary action and external resources can co-produce more efficient solutions. For instance, using external financial support, local volunteers in Bolivia provided their labour to construct a shelter and renovate a football field for youth, and local volunteers in the Philippines built water storage tanks using financial support from the National Economic and Development Authority. Local volunteers in the field research communities who self-organized consistently stressed how difficult it was to sustain voluntary effort over the long term without ongoing financial support (box 3.1). Cases in which volunteers continued their work despite an absence of external support were uncommon and generally entailed considerable individual sacrifice.

Human resources

Discussions about external support to local volunteering typically reference the complementary contributions of national, international and online volunteers. By complementing expressions of local volunteerism, volunteers from other national and international communities can fill some of the gaps, particularly those related to technical knowledge. The distinctive collaboration arrangements under which volunteerism takes place mean that such external volunteers are often embedded in the communities they are supporting, enabling them to develop relationships of trust. As one government official participating in a field visit in Tanzania acknowledged: "The community trusts (the international volunteers) more than me because they live in the village. I live in (the city)".

Capacity development has been a key contribution of external actors. In a number of cases where capacity-building by local volunteers was mentioned, the local volunteer trainers had first been trained by external volunteers, civil society organizations or national governments. Beyond capacity-building, external volunteers also brought in new ideas and technical inputs. For example, in the field research community in Sri Lanka international volunteers working alongside local volunteers provided information on cultivation practices to improve productivity and profitability. A villager in China also described the benefits of external input:

> "When I first talked to the external volunteers, I initially thought that they were amateurs, but through their work the community got to know a lot of experts who came to the village and deliver some guidance, which enabled the community to learn some professional knowledge.
>
> ▶ Community member, China, SWVR field research

Despite these benefits, the picture of human resource contributions that emerges from the field research reveals a primarily top-down model, with limited horizontal (or local–local) capacity-building among volunteers. Although this pattern is consistent with much of the literature on volunteerism and capacity-building,[186] examples can be found of diverse forms of human resource contributions. For instance, as reported in the 2015 SWVR, the Government of Togo created a volunteer programme that brought together volunteers from the north and south of the country to strengthen community capacities.

Increasingly, international volunteering opportunities are no longer limited to individuals from high-income countries seeking to volunteer. As well-resourced and experienced formal volunteering organizations have emerged in low- and middle-income countries, many national and international volunteers now come from these countries[187] (for example, 83 per

Box **3.1**

The critical role of voluntary community health promotion workers

Health promotion volunteers were active in nearly every low-income field research community, particularly in remote and vulnerable areas beyond the reach of state services. These volunteers transmit information about nutrition, maternal and child health, reproductive health and other areas of primary health care and disease prevention. They are often perceived as having a better understanding of the needs and problems of the community than medical professionals from the state health service.

Despite these benefits, the health promotion volunteers struggled to do their work. Most received initial training and support from the government or development agencies, but they commonly reported having to end their health promotion activities soon after due to a lack of support. Volunteers who managed to continue often did so at considerable personal cost. As one of the many volunteers from the field research community in Guatemala described their situation:

Why doesn't the government give us more support? Imagine that we're doing this job, saving lives, yet there is no incentive. I pay for my transportation myself. When I started, I bought my scissors, a gabacha *[apron], a pot for boiling water and an umbrella because sometimes we have to go out in the rain, a backpack, a pair of boots. We just pay for it ourselves. But what can we do when the mothers themselves come and look for us?*

Source: SWVR field research

One of the volunteer midwives shows her tools for assisting the delivery and care of newborns in El Eden, Guatemala (UNV/Mariano Salazar, 2018).

cent of UN Volunteers were from the global South in 2016).[188] Although volunteering across low- and middle-income countries offers no guarantee of inclusive access or protection from top-down, donor–recipient power dynamics,[189] it does create additional options for sharing knowledge and skills internationally through people-to-people cooperation.

Technological resources

Online ("digital", "cyber" or "virtual") volunteerism has opened up possibilities for innovative collaborations with local community volunteers. Mobile phones, crowdsourcing, open-source software, social media, participatory geographic information systems and online volunteerism all offer new opportunities for enhanced communication and information-sharing among communities. With access to digital technologies, online volunteers anywhere in the world can support community efforts, an increasingly important way of connecting local volunteers across the globe as they respond to stresses, disasters and crises (box 3.2).

COLLABORATIONS WITH EXTERNAL ACTORS CAN ENHANCE THE PARTICIPATION OF MARGINALIZED GROUPS

Building effective institutions requires the participation and engagement of the people that these institutions are intended to serve.[190] Inclusive participation in civic and governance processes is vital to community resilience.[191,192] For transformational changes to occur in communities, local social and cultural values and norms need to co-evolve with wider changes in the institutional architecture. Examples provided in chapter 2 illustrate that informal local volunteers, even when best positioned to identify vulnerable groups, may choose not to prioritize them, preferring to serve friends, family and others in their immediate circles before reaching out to people in more vulnerable circumstances.

Several examples from the field research highlight how the presence of formal and external organizations can influence decisions around the inclusion of women and other marginalized groups. For example, to enhance community resilience international volunteers in several communities promoted women's empowerment and worked to change attitudes that circumscribed women's actions within traditional gender roles. Likewise,

Box **3.2**

Linking diverse skills and knowledge through online volunteering

The United Nations Volunteers programme manages the UN Online Volunteering service (www.onlinevolunteering.org), a dedicated platform that mobilizes more than 12,000 online volunteers every year. Online volunteering is a simple, universal and effective way for organizations and volunteers to work together to address sustainable development challenges anywhere in the world from any device.

Since June 2014, UN Online Volunteers have been providing technical support to Cameroon's Agriculteurs Professionels du Cameroun, a rural development project in Tayap village in the Congo Basin, an area that has suffered widespread habitat and biodiversity loss. The project aims to promote sustainable livelihoods and community resilience. The UN Online Volunteers include: an information technology expert from Burkina Faso who is creating maps of the village; an agricultural engineer from Togo who analyses satellite images of forest coverage; and a renewable energy expert from France who is developing a solar energy project for the village. The sustained multidisciplinary support provided by these international online volunteers has been critical to the success of the project, which has won several awards and grants.

Source: UNV 2015b

several interventions designed to empower women and increase their participation were initiated by volunteers in line with the policies of formal organizations. As women in these communities took volunteer positions in local management and development committees, their engagement in community activities and decision-making increased. This is consistent with research documenting how participating in crisis mitigation and recovery efforts has strengthened women's leadership capacity, altered perceptions about women's roles in society and challenged men's dominance of decision-making and planning functions in disasters.[193]

As women in these communities took volunteer positions in local management and development committees, their engagement in community activities and decision-making increased

FORMALIZATION AND LEGAL RECOGNITION CAN STRENGTHEN LOCAL VOLUNTEERING

In addition to the resources, connections and standards that can accompany external collaboration, there are non-tangible benefits, such as greater legitimacy and recognition. Local volunteers expressed an understanding of both the value of external validation from formal actors and the need for greater recognition by all stakeholders of the worth of communities' own efforts (see chapter 4). Community collaborations with external groups were instrumental in transforming self-organized efforts that emerged during times of crisis into more formal associations and committees. When capacitated with resources, legitimacy and the political space to assemble and organize, volunteers who began working together to solve acute and persistent challenges in their communities were able to continue their activities after the crisis passed.

Although NGOs, United Nations agencies and other development and humanitarian actors can enhance the recognition of local volunteerism under the right circumstances, only governmental actors can provide the legal recognition needed to sustain some local efforts. For example, volunteers in Madagascar formed their own security groups to deal with cattle-rustling through local group conventions (*dina*). However, these efforts were greatly strengthened when a district initiative (*dinabe*, or great *dina*) was established to support the communities' actions. The *dinabe* joined local groups under a wider structure that conferred recognition and legitimacy on the *dina* and may have contributed to their sustainability.

> "The success of the dinabe is not only because it's young people involved; it's because it's a state initiative. But it's not something the state has imposed on the community; the community was involved. So it's the collaboration between the state and the community that has ensured the success of the dinabe. If it had come from the young people only, it wouldn't be effective.
>
> ▶ Group of young men, Madagascar, SWVR field research

In this example, the community received training, equipment and funding through its partnerships with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other agencies. These resources also helped women's associations and community groups endure economic hardships. The partnerships with regional authorities came with very different benefits, particularly legal recognition. Both forms of partnership conferred legitimacy on voluntary action and boosted sentiments of ownership, responsibility and duty. Other initiatives that these community volunteers had wanted to pursue, such as forest stewardship, had been stymied by a lack of legal recognition, without which they were powerless to act.

In a community in Sri Lanka, an organized group of local volunteers was able to apply for development programmes and associated funding after they took steps towards legal

registration. These legal provisions became a gateway for claiming rights and establishing spaces within which action could be taken. It is clear that the tendency of organizational or statutory frameworks to either preclude or incorporate local voluntary action has a marked impact on how effectively local volunteers and local voluntary organizations can contribute to resilience building.

➔ Local volunteers can strengthen interventions by external actors

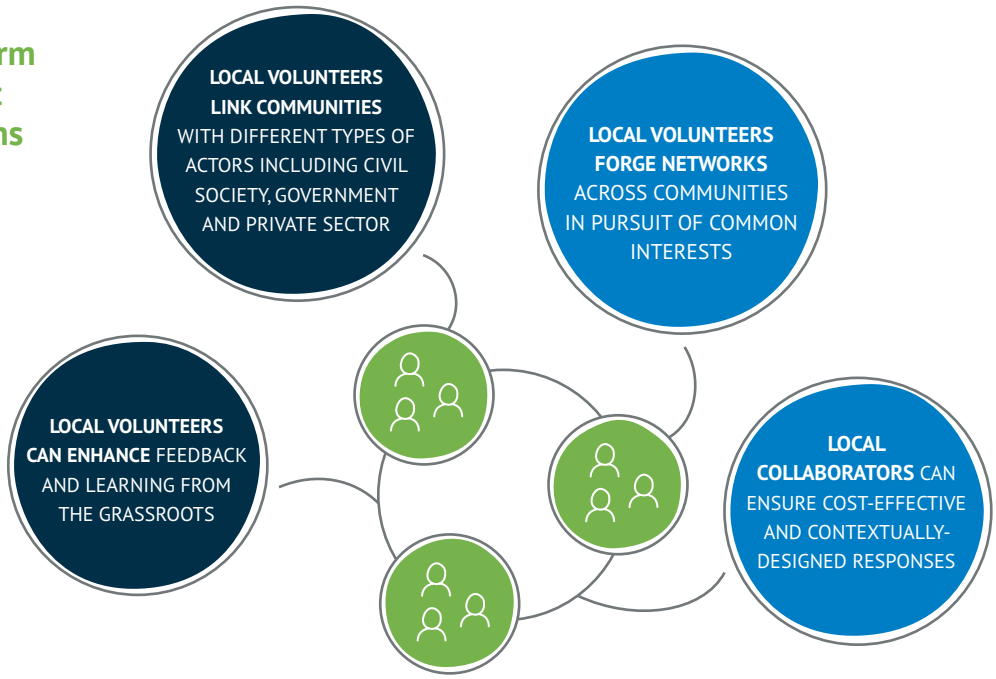
The previous section explored how connections between local volunteers and external actors brought access to resources, networks, standards and status to support and legitimate community volunteers. This section examines how such connections can help communities engage more effectively within wider risk-sharing systems to enhance community resilience. These partnerships can yield synergies by informing external actors about specific community contexts and connecting them to marginalized and hidden groups in local communities that might otherwise be overlooked (figure 3.4).

LOCAL COLLABORATIONS CAN ENSURE MORE COST-EFFECTIVE AND APPROPRIATELY DESIGNED RESPONSES

Perhaps the most visible and recognized value of engaging and integrating local volunteers in efforts to strengthen communities is cost reduction. To be effective, volunteers require investment and support to train and prepare them for service, so while volunteers are not paid, there are costs involved. However, the scale of voluntary labour can provide a significant boost to external interventions and responses at a comparatively low cost. For example, in environmental protection volunteers' knowledge of local materials, weather patterns and soil conditions can contribute value that is unavailable outside of local systems.

Figure **3.5**

Local volunteers inform and support different types of collaborations to enhance resilience



Volunteers conduct water monitoring tests at the Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi (UNV/Gianna Schellenberg, 2018).

> "In a significant proportion of the township, volunteers are primarily responsible for the provision of electricity and road construction and upgrading, a substantial saving for the government.
>
> ▶ High-level township administration official, Myanmar, SWVR field research

While grateful for the participation of external groups, a variety of respondents in the field research communities complained that external actors failed to understand the conditions facing their community. For example, villagers in Tanzania reported that aid partners had dug a number of community wells that were too shallow, based on surveys taken during the rainy season but without local input on dry season conditions. As a result, water was inaccessible for much of the year. This was particularly frustrating because the community was responsible for contributing a portion of the costs and volunteering much of the labour for building the wells.

By coordinating with local volunteers, development and humanitarian organizations can also improve the effectiveness of their interventions. Communities recounted multiple examples of local volunteers conveying information between community groups and government agencies or external organizations. Because local volunteers live in the area, they are well positioned to help development experts and national and international responders understand the struggles and needs of the most vulnerable and hidden groups within a community, to ensure that they are not left behind.[194] Volunteers in the field research communities also noted many characteristics of volunteerism that governments and technical agencies often lack, including flexibility, rapid response and knowledge of local vulnerabilities.

> "It is obvious that the members of the volunteer group know the community well. As residents who have lived here for decades, they know the community better than any of us...so they are pretty familiar with the residents and the history of this community and have a good relationship with neighbourhoods. It's obvious that they know the best way to launch and run a campaign.
>
> ▶ NGO leader, China, SWVR field research

LOCAL VOLUNTEERS CAN ENHANCE FEEDBACK AND LEARNING

Exercising their local knowledge and role as connectors, local volunteers can tap into diverse networks to expand on information and feedback provided to other communities and stakeholders. This knowledge can inform and prioritize external strategies for sustainable development as well as for disaster mitigation, prevention and response.

Local volunteers can also use new technologies to contribute as "citizen scientists", collecting data for technical analysis to increase the knowledge base about weather patterns, disaster risk or areas affected by acute crises.[195] Just as technology can enable external actors to support local efforts, as in online volunteering, so too can local volunteers use technology to complement the local activities of external actors. Local volunteers across the globe are mobilizing to gather data as part of a participatory approach to managing risk (box 3.3).[196] Research from Haiti found that crowdsourced maps informed by voluntary contributions were "extremely effective", producing "the most complete digital map of Haiti's [services]" compared to other forms of mapping.[197]

Much of the success of volunteer-based crowdsourcing comes from leveraging the local knowledge of volunteers through collaborations with tech-savvy volunteers in other areas. When information comes directly from local volunteers, governments and humanitarian agencies often view it as supplementary only, but when the information has

Box **3.3**

Using open-source software to monitor and report during crises

Open-source mapping software is a powerful tool for volunteers responding to crises. Ushahidi is an open-source platform that has enabled voluntary participation in data mapping for over a decade. Launched in 2007 to track reports of post-election violence in Kenya, Ushahidi has been refined by volunteers and expanded to other uses and contexts. People used the platform to monitor and report on voting during the 2017 general election in Kenya, including reporting on voter suppression, ballot problems and cases of violence.

Building from this model, open-source software is now increasingly employed in emergencies around the world. For example, during the 2017 earthquake in Mexico, thousands of volunteers translated thousands of text messages and social media posts from people needing help. Volunteers were able to geolocate these messages, tag their location and communicate the mapped information to responders on the ground. There are similar accounts of how open-source software has helped communities to cope with and recover from other recent crises such as the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, the 2014–16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, violence in the Syrian civil war and hurricanes Harvey and Irma in 2017.

Sources: Chen and others 2013; Goodchild and Glennon 2010; Hahn, Blazes and Lewis 2016; Haworth and Bruce 2015; Meier 2013

been cross-checked and validated by expert volunteers, the outcomes are more directly meaningful.[198] For example, in the Netherlands data on air quality that were gathered by volunteers were systematically cross-referenced with data from government static monitoring stations to enhance their reliability.[199]

HORIZONTAL COLLABORATIONS WITH OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS CAN ENHANCE LOCAL ACTION

In many contexts, volunteers can connect with other related groups or communities to achieve similar goals or promote mutual interests (box 3.4). Exchanging knowledge about homegrown development solutions with others facing common challenges and constraints can overcome some of the limitations of local voluntary action.[200,201]

Volunteers often develop their own skills and knowledge while contributing to development in their community

Examples from the field research are supported by wider evidence. For example, volunteer women's groups in Central America used their knowledge of community conditions and relationships to mobilize grassroots organizations and to guide government policy and programming on community response to disasters.[202] The women helped develop a methodology to teach mayors and other local authorities how to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015, an international initiative to help countries and communities become more resilient to the hazards that threaten their development. In the Arab States, a movement of women volunteers worked for more than a decade to change nationality laws.[203] Other studies have documented how women's groups and volunteer networks, which often conduct peer training in disaster risk reduction practices, have shared local knowledge and transferred this to local authorities.[204] Volunteers who participate in these efforts often develop their own skills and knowledge while contributing to development in their community. As a volunteer in Egypt acknowledged: "Awareness campaigns added value to me even before adding it to the community".

Box **3.4**

Cross-community volunteering to protect shared natural resources

Many risks that affect resilience cross community boundaries. Effective management of these risks therefore demands cooperation between communities. Volunteering is one way to achieve this.

In Sudan, the Wadi El Ku Catchment Management Project works with several communities surrounding the most important water source in arid North Darfur. Initiated by UN Environment together with the Darfur Regional Authority and the Government of North Darfur State, and funded by the European Union, the project has mobilized strong cultural norms of collaboration in working with volunteers from the different communities to assess water levels, provide basic services and advocate for a holistic and cooperative approach to natural resource management. In this way, volunteers help to link and improve relations between neighbouring communities that share such a key natural resource.

In Myanmar, volunteers from six creek-side villages formed the Creek Network to deal with the problem of pollution from illegal gold mining, which was affecting people's health and livelihoods and the environment. Over two years, the Creek Network worked with local administrations to confront illegal gold miners. With support from non-governmental organizations, volunteers learned how to sample and test creek water, document mining violations and report findings to the authorities. They succeeded in having the illegal mines shut down and subsequently monitored the creek on a regular basis. The Creek Network has now become part of national and regional networks and has shared its experiences with other communities facing similar problems.

Source: SWVR field research

THE RELATIONAL STRENGTHS OF VOLUNTEERISM CAN ENHANCE VERTICAL COLLABORATIONS

Local volunteers' ability to connect, network and build vertical relationships is key to enhancing community resilience.[205,206] Volunteers and voluntary groups can use their relationships to strengthen cooperation and coordination between local civil society, government institutions and external organizations (box 3.5). As intermediaries, volunteers can build bridges of trust to relay important information from technical agencies to community-based groups (top-down), while also raising and representing issues of concern from community groups to technical agencies, governments and other external actors (bottom-up).[207]

In countries where conflict is chronic, often disabling public services for years, international aid agencies may step in to provide basic services. Working through official gatekeepers, these agencies often find it difficult to identify and reach the most vulnerable groups.[208] Volunteers can draw on relationships of trust to connect international actors with marginalized groups whose needs would otherwise remain unknown.[209] As a respondent in a Burundi explained: "We are in the best position to identify vulnerable people. Because we are local, we know people and we meet them every day, but also because we share the same concerns and issues, we know how to identify the most urgent needs and who should benefit first." Another volunteer in Myanmar remarked: "Community volunteers face the same problems at the same intensity at the same time. Therefore, we have much more empathy and sympathy based on the intensity of the problem for our community compared to outsiders."

> "Volunteers who live in [the community] have the advantage of being better integrated in the community and have better access to key people.
>
> ▶ Youth volunteer, Sudan, SWVR field research

Volunteers can complement the work of large-scale external initiatives to increase their effectiveness. Pooling resources across communities to create macro-level social welfare systems or provide universal basic services can bolster efforts to prevent and mitigate shocks and stresses over time. As previously mentioned, Red Cross volunteers in The Hague helped newly arrived refugees overcome language and information barriers to claiming

Box **3.5**

Data collected by volunteers hold polluters to account in China

Across the world, communities face severe environmental challenges that threaten human health and livelihoods. The Chinese environmental NGO Friends of Nature works with local volunteers to map and monitor environmental risks at the community level. Friends of Nature has initiated more than 30 legal cases against polluting factories and industries. These legal challenges have built on evidence collected by volunteers that relies on their local knowledge, connections and flexibility and is coordinated through new mobile and smart technologies. This volunteer-led model has inspired other environmental NGOs and demonstrated to policymakers and local authorities the value of working with volunteers on environmental protection.

Source: Thornhill and others 2017

statutory entitlements. Similarly, volunteers in many countries augment medical services for specific groups. In Australia, for example, best practice guidelines promote the use of volunteer companions in the community care of older adults in order to reduce falls.[210] Where the coverage of services is insufficient and civil and political rights are guaranteed, volunteers can also employ social accountability mechanisms to pressure government agencies and other authorities to improve service provision.

It is important to recognize that certain risks cannot be effectively managed over the long term by volunteers acting alone at the community level. For example, although local volunteers can carry out important frontline roles in the context of conflict, such as sharing information and identifying, monitoring and responding to some types of threats, conflict and the divisions it creates or exacerbates can necessitate external involvement. Ultimately, the state is responsible for the protection of civilians: "Thus, though vital, local agency must never be regarded as a substitute for the protection responsibilities of national authorities or – failing that – relevant international actors".[211]

→ Collaborations must be structured carefully

To yield benefits for all, local–external collaborations must be structured carefully to avoid destroying or co-opting the distinctive relationship-building and self-organizing characteristics of local voluntary action. The field research communities included several examples of partnership arrangements that were not structured effectively. Wider evidence of poorly implemented collaborations has demonstrated problems such as frequent misunderstandings between external organizations and vulnerable communities;[212] culturally incongruous directives that fail to account for local social dynamics;[213] weak political will or capacity to coordinate external assistance;[214] and overall poor reception of external activities, services and directives by local groups.[215,216] Furthermore, while there are demonstrated potential positive effects of collaboration with external actors, as covered earlier in this chapter, it must be recognized that the presence of external actors, even those who are there to protect, can also fundamentally threaten community safety and security.[217,218]

Volunteer Voices: MOHAMMAD

Finding a sense of purpose through listening to others

I used to be an accountant but I was unhappy with my job. In 2015 I got the opportunity to volunteer to support asylum seekers in Cairo. Outside the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office, tired and desperate people would start lining up from 8.00 in the morning. We would receive more than 100 new applications every day, and alongside these existing applicants would also queue up to inquire about resettlement cases, refugee status determination and financial and medical assistance. My volunteering work entailed providing these asylum seekers with information and help to fill out their forms.

I also worked to identify the most vulnerable cases. We had a total of 120,000 registered applicants but we didn't have the capacity or the funds to serve them all.

What I consider most precious about my volunteering was the opportunity to listen to everyone's problems and offer some compassion. For the asylum seekers, I represented someone they could talk to who could try to find solutions or at least some respite from their hardships. This brought me happiness and I hope it did to them as well.

Involvement by external agencies can weaken local self-organization and ownership if the external support provided is too heavy-handed or continues too long. Experience shows that external actors may create dependencies that undermine resilience and weaken key connections and relationships.[219,220] Furthermore, a community's sense of ownership can decline when local volunteers are prevented from articulating their own priorities but are called on to implement the priorities of external agencies. As several examples from the field research illustrate, agencies that incorporate volunteers into their programmes may leave those volunteers with little time to deal with their own livelihood priorities.

In addition to potentially weakening feelings of ownership, governments and external agencies can co-opt the autonomy of local volunteers. Several research participants expressed concern that authorities at different levels were directing volunteer efforts to support their own priorities rather than those of the communities. When external systems co-opt local efforts instead of building on them, using volunteers solely to carry out their own priorities, the distinctive value of volunteering is undermined. Governments and external agencies need to balance the autonomy of self-organized volunteer groups with efforts to integrate them into external systems of support.

A community's sense of ownership can decline when local volunteers are prevented from articulating their own priorities

Across a variety of contexts, field research participants also raised concerns about volunteerism being used as a substitute for key government or humanitarian services. Promoting community resilience through localism and greater reliance on volunteers must not be seen as absolving government and humanitarian aid systems of responsibility for meeting the basic needs of community members.

A final concern emerging from the field research suggests that external interventions can exacerbate local tensions if the ensuing benefits are unequally distributed and reinforce feelings of isolation or marginalization. For instance, respondents on the periphery of communities in Guatemala and Madagascar complained that external interventions reinforced inequalities in terms of opportunities to volunteer. People living away from the centre of the village also believed that they were unfairly disadvantaged by the work of national and international volunteers and had less access to the resources that often accompanied their interventions.

This chapter illustrates how stakeholders can leverage the complementary contributions of local voluntary action to make communities more inclusive and resilient. The field research shows the diverse ways that external stakeholders affect the environment for volunteerism and ultimately help shape the choices and opportunities available to vulnerable people working to manage risk within their communities (table 3.1). Accordingly, there is an important role for governments, private entities and civil society in helping local volunteers to ensure that all people can participate in the decisions that affect their lives. When stakeholders collaborate effectively, volunteerism can realize its potential as an inclusive and empowering force, particularly for people who would otherwise remain isolated and excluded.

Although collaborations with external partners can leverage local voluntary action, especially when communities have exhausted their ability to manage and cope on their own, partnerships must be structured in a spirit of true collaboration that recognizes and values the communal relationships and self-organization strengths of local voluntary action. Development and humanitarian actors need to recognize and invest in complementarity that enables all types of actors to connect and collaborate without undermining the distinctive strengths of local volunteerism.

Observing volunteerism in communities under strain can tell us much about volunteering itself. People's voluntary responses to shocks and stresses show that volunteering is both a property of resilient communities and a mechanism for strengthening resilience through well-informed and properly implemented collaboration. The following chapter investigates how all actors with a stake in creating resilient communities can take actions to maximize the distinctive characteristics of volunteerism that contribute to community resilience.

Table 3.1

The value and limitations of local–external collaborations

Positive contributions	Limits and threats
> **Financial resources:** Temporary supports can sustain local voluntary action when local capacity is exceeded.	> **Hierarchy:** Collaborations between external and local volunteers assume a top-down approach to capacity-building and technology transfer.
> **Technical expertise:** External (national, international and online) volunteers can complement community action with technical expertise unavailable locally.	> **Competition for service provision:** Volunteering must not replace basic government services.
> **Standards of equity:** External actors can confront and influence inequitable gender norms and other forms of exclusion apparent in some informal local volunteering.	> **Undermining the local:** External agencies can weaken local participation and self-organization.
> **Recognition:** Legitimacy and legal recognition can strengthen local volunteering.	> **Dependency:** External supports may create dependencies and diminish the sense of ownership once external supports are removed.
> **Cost reduction:** Volunteerism, while not free, can reduce costs.	> **Cultural insensitivity:** Culturally inappropriate directives that fail to account for local social dynamics can cause interventions to fail, while unequally distributed benefits can exacerbate local tensions.
> **Local knowledge and connections:** Local volunteers can inform and enhance external responses while helping to identify vulnerable people.	> **Co-optation:** The autonomy of volunteering can be co-opted by governments and external agencies that end up directing volunteer efforts to support their own priorities.
> **Shift from coping to resilience:** With combined resources, communities and partners can work toward prevention and adaptation.	

HORIZONTAL CONNECTIONS UNLEASH THE POTENTIAL OF VOLUNTEERING

CHESKA PATOW, REGIONAL DIRECTOR, AND **JONATHAN ROSSI**, SOCIAL DIRECTOR, TECHO

Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the most unequal and most urbanized regions in the world. Poverty affects 30.7 per cent of its population – that is, over 186 million people. Around 80 per cent of the region's population live in cities,[f] and young people in the region no longer need to travel to know what poverty is like. This context sets a path not only for reflection but, most importantly, for taking action.

In response, many youth-led organizations in the region have become platforms for mobilizing the power of young people to push for change. Techo, which was set up in 1997 in Chile and is now present in most Latin American countries, has mobilized over 1 million young Latin American volunteers over the past two decades. These volunteers work mostly in informal settlements to undertake activities such as constructing emergency housing for poor families, building parks and recreation areas, and strengthening leadership within their communities.

For maximum impact, Techo saw the need to work together with other volunteer organizations. In Peru, it joined the SoyVoluntari@ network, an initiative supported by UN Volunteers that brings together different organizations. For example, when El Niño hit Peru last year, the SoyVoluntari@ network delivered a joint response through coordinating volunteer-led contributions both in donation centres and in the field.

By joining hands with other volunteering organizations, Techo's work has been further strengthened. As part of a network, volunteering organizations can more strategically engage and contribute to public policies on a range of issues. Furthermore, these connections increase the value of volunteerism in society by bringing together the voluntary efforts of millions of individuals under a common purpose. Building a sense of constituency provides the opportunity for young Latin American volunteers to meaningfully exercise their citizenship through proactive and impactful actions.

f. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (n.d.). Available at estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/portada.html

Volunteer teaching handicrafts at the Dzaleka Camp in Malawi (UNV/Gianna Schellenberg, 2018).