

Fostering Youth Volunteerism: The collaboration between UNV and UNICEF in Mozambique

Context

On 25 January 2012, the Secretary-General of the United Nations announced his Five-Year Action Agenda. It included an explicit reference to the **importance of youth and volunteering as a theme and priority for sustainable development**, and called on the **United Nations Volunteers (UNV)** to create a Youth Volunteer programme. In response and in order to formalise UNV's long-standing experience in working with youth, in 2013, UNV developed a **Youth Volunteering Strategy (2014-2017)**.

The strategy was based on consultative processes through which UNV gathered inputs from key stakeholders, youth experts, and young people in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the realities of young people.



Key words

UNV/UNICEF/Partnership/YouthVolunteer/Mozambique

The organisation also reviewed best practices, policies and trends with regards to youth volunteerism at global level. In line with agreed international strategies such as the UN World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) and the UN Youth-System Wide Action Plan (SWAP), the **Youth Volunteering Strategy** aims to increase the inclusion and engagement of youth in peace and development fields. It states that youth volunteerism fosters empowerment since young people gain skills, self-confidence and experience. At the same time, the strategy defines young people as engaged actors and agents of change that can generate transformative impacts in the communities where they serve.

In 2013, UNV established the Youth Volunteer Programme as the implementing framework of the strategy. It then became the **Youth Volunteers Global Programme** under the scope of UNV's Strategic Framework (2014-2017). Aligned with the Youth Volunteering Strategy, the overall goal of the Programme is to facilitate the engagement of youth in global peace and sustainable human development through volunteerism, bringing the voice of youth into the development discourse and helping young people to realise their full social, economic and human potential. With regards to the **Strategic Framework**, the Youth Volunteers Global Programme relates to Outcome 1: UN entities are more effective in delivering their results by integrating high quality and well-supported UN Volunteers and volunteerism in their programmes; as well as to Outcome 2: Countries more effectively integrate volunteerism within national frameworks enabling better engagement of people in development processes.

In addition, UNV launched the **UN Youth Volunteer modality** in May 2014. The modality is open to young professionals from 18 to 29 years old with little or no professional experience. The UN Youth Volunteers are given the opportunity to serve for up to two years with UN agencies and they can be either nationals or internationals.

Project overview

In order to implement the Youth Volunteering Strategy and in the context of the Youth

Volunteers Global Programme, UNV looked for **new opportunities to integrate UN Youth Volunteers into UN agencies' programmes**. Taking into consideration UNICEF's focus on youth and its mandate to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential, the agency appeared as a natural fit to collaborate with on Youth Volunteering.

UNICEF agreed to pilot the UN Youth Volunteer modality and UNV and UNICEF worked together to explore the possibility of a UNV Youth group modality; recruiting and supporting the placement of a group of young people at the same time. In 2014, UNICEF Headquarters launched a call to its field offices to take part in the pilot programme. Initially, it was expected to be rolled-out in ten countries with 20 UN Youth Volunteers per country, yet **UNICEF Mozambique** was the first agency to agree to a two-year pilot programme with UNV (2014-2016). The pilot had three key objectives: to increase the direct participation of young people in the work of UNICEF in Mozambique, to support the development of youth volunteerism in Mozambique and to build national capacity especially with young people. Additionally, UNICEF Mozambique and UNV wanted to examine if the recruitment of youth volunteers as a group was a more effective and efficient working model than individual volunteer deployments.

A group of **twelve national youth volunteers (UNYVs)** was deployed, and **one international youth volunteer coordinator** was added to monitor and support the national volunteers. The youth coordinator arrived in September 2014 in Maputo and the national youth volunteers began their assignments in March 2015. Some national volunteers were deployed to the Programme Coordination section while others were spread across UNICEF thematic units: Protection, Education, Health and Communication, Advocacy, Participation, and Partnerships (CAPP). All volunteers were deployed to the UNICEF office in Maputo, except for two volunteers deployed to the UNICEF Protection Section who were based in Tete and Zambezia with local partner organisations (Linha Fala Criança and the Maputo Youth Justice Pilot). In May 2015, following miscommunications between UNV and UNICEF about the original intended length, both organisations decided to shorten the pilot to one year.

Performance

UNICEF Mozambique coordinated the pilot phase with UNV Headquarters and the UNV Mozambique field unit. Both organisations mentioned that the pilot was successful and that **it met its initial objectives**. Furthermore, the collaboration was perceived by the key actors as beneficial for the volunteers themselves and at the same time for UNV and UNICEF.

Aged between 18 and 29 years, the twelve young UNYVs were provided with an **opportunity to contribute to, and to learn about, global peace and sustainable human development** in the specific context of children's rights. They were exposed to UNICEF's core activities and they acquired a better knowledge of UNICEF's work. They were able to put into practice their knowledge and skills, as well as to build their capacities through their assignments.

At the same time, the youth volunteer modality provided **an opportunity to UNICEF to strengthen its activities**. The UNVs contributed to UNICEF's development initiatives by bringing to the organisation their motivation and specific skills and knowledge in various areas such as technology for development (T4D), coordination and management, communication, child protection and survival, social mobilisation for education, community health care, etc. The UNYVs provided ongoing support and follow-up on specific programmes as well as with partner organisations. Furthermore, being young people themselves, the UNVs were able to connect more easily to other young people. In the particular case of HIV and adolescent programming, they provided enriched feedback about the relevance of programming content.

The collaboration between UNV and UNICEF allowed UNV to **assess the functioning of the UN Youth Volunteer modality** as defined under the Strategic Framework 2014-2017. The two

organisations paid specific attention to the group placement element, which consisted of recruiting and supporting the placement of a group of young people at the same time. Some strengths of the modality were identified. Both management and administration were facilitated by the group modality. For instance, the induction and training processes were done at the same time for all volunteers, which saved time and resources and facilitated the promotion of team spirit between the future youth volunteers.

Finally, through the experience, UNV increased its visibility and recognition as an effective volunteer organisation within the United Nations system. The UNV field unit in Mozambique worked together with UNICEF to train, prepare and coach the UNYVs in order to ensure that they would produce the expected results. It also collaborated with UNDP to provide the necessary management, support and operational backstopping to the volunteers.

Lessons Learned & Upscaling

Although the pilot was considered a success, **several challenges were faced** during its implementation, which ranged from operational difficulties encountered by volunteers to coordination issues between UNV and UNICEF.

Operational challenges included among others, **difficulties to communicate in English**, issues related to **payments** and **recruitment** challenges. Through their assignments, UNYVs encountered difficulties to work in English and showed some interest in improving their level. However, the contract modality (six-months contracts renewed) and the allowance for training they received (USD 250 for six months) constituted challenges since courses in Maputo were expensive (USD 700-800).

Related to payments, two UNYVs received higher resettlement allowances by mistake. This caused some concerns among other UNYVs who were paid less. Furthermore, the international UNYV coordinator was subjected to the youth modality and as such received a VLA lower than what international UNVs usually receive. She had difficulties to meet her day-to-day basic needs, which challenged her performance as a coordinator.

The recruitment of the twelve UNYV was highly demanding for UNV Mozambique. Once in place, the UNYV coordinator was in charge of the recruitment process together with two people from UNV Field Unit. The process ranged from the development of the Terms of References to the selection and it took six months to recruit the twelve UNYVs. As a result, the international coordinator's assignment ended before the UNYVs' did. UNICEF hired the coordinator as a consultant for three months to enable her to continue her work but the group was left without a coordinator for the last three months.

Regarding the **cooperation between UNV and UNICEF**, challenges and delays were faced due to the lack of common tools and modalities. UNV and UNICEF have different financial and operational modalities and having diverse systems led to delays in the procurement of training materials, flight tickets and other administrative support to the UNYVs.

Based on the challenges faced, **the key learnings** were related to information sharing and cooperation between the two organisations. UNV and UNICEF understood the importance of putting in place shared mechanisms and tools to better plan and foster cooperation and information sharing. The stakeholders mentioned that working on having all relevant information available in one place accessible by UNV and UNICEF Mozambique could have facilitated cooperation and as a result boost the pilot efficiency.

Overall, despite the challenges, **the youth volunteer pilot has set a precedent for UNICEF Mozambique** to understand why including more young people as part of its team is important to reach its goals and fulfil its mandate. At the same time, it has permitted UNV to promote Youth Volunteerism and to assess the functioning of the UNV Youth group modality. The pilot also

strengthened UNV's relationship with UNICEF and helped build a solid partnership. Finally, young Mozambicans have gained skills, self-confidence and experience and as a result they have contributed to increasing the country's national capacity.

Due to its success, UNICEF Mozambique and UNV are interested in **scaling up the pilot and in continuing their common work** in Mozambique. Furthermore, similar pilots, that count on the collaboration of UNV and UNICEF field offices, could be developed in specific countries as initially planned. On the global level, UNICEF and UNV are working on strengthening and formalising their partnership on youth volunteerism. They are currently developing the **Youth Champions Programme**, which aims at promoting the engagement of young people and children as agents of change.