

Evaluation of UNV's contribution to the Gender Promotion Initiative of the Peacebuilding Fund

Evaluation Objective

On 18 December, 2014, a Cost Sharing Agreement (CSA) was signed between the Government of Germany through BMZ as the donor and UNV to give support to UNV's work in answering the call of the UN Secretary General's Seven-Point Action Plan on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding. The total funding provided was of €1.500,000. The project ended in June 2020.

The project involved the deployment of 38 volunteers to support the implementation of Gender Promotion Initiative projects (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019). UNV's support to the GPI projects consisted of not only deploying national and international volunteers to five to six countries every year, but also organizing four global learning workshops in partnership with PBSO and UN Women.

Evaluation Purpose

The fundamental objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Assess the performance of and results achieved by the GPI project;
- Provide clear, actionable recommendations for putting in place effective and efficient implementation mechanisms for volunteerism in support of gender-responsive peacebuilding initiatives;
- Analyse and provide case studies on volunteering contribution to gender-responsive peacebuilding programming, looking at the different dimensions of volunteering – what works and what does not work in this context.

Methodology

A mixed method approach was used. A range of qualitative and quantitative methods were used and triangulation was key in order to contrast different sources and reach a common ground which is based on evidence. The evaluation was conducted between April and June 2020 by Melissa Andrade Costa, senior evaluation international consultant.

The methodology included:

- Desk review of relevant documents
- Survey for Host Organizations: response rate was 55% (10 organizations out of 18).
- Survey for UN Volunteers: response rate was 55% (21 volunteers out of 38).
- Review of Volunteer Reporting Application (VRA) forms: a total of 10 available VRAs.
- Remote semi-structured interviews: 24 people were interviewed (UNV, PBSO, UN Women, BMZ, Host organizations and UN Volunteers).
- Case studies: Two countries were selected in order to give nuance to the evaluation. The countries chosen were Mali and Sri Lanka.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: The project brought together three UN organizations that were able to create synergy on the ground with their specific mandates (UNV, PBSO and UN Women) and the support of BMZ. The initiative replied to the call of the Secretary General to increase investment to promote gender responsive peacebuilding and was aligned with BMZ's Gender Road Map. However, the project which had a high level of alignment with UNV's Strategic Framework 2014-

2017, proved to have a low level alignment with UNV's Strategic Framework 2018-2021 in relation to its implementation mode as a project.

Conclusion 2: The project had implementation challenges at the beginning due to delays of projects on the ground and it had four project managers along the implementation cycle. However, it managed to successfully deploy 38 UN Volunteers in 22 projects in 16 countries over 5,5 years, double the project budget and contribute to 4 GPI Cycles (GPI II, GPI III, GPI IV and GPIV).

Conclusion 3: The design of the project had outputs which were beyond the direct governance of the UNV and fell under individual projects carried out by Host Agencies. There was no close contact with UN Volunteers on the ground to follow-up on individual projects. Staff was adequate to place the UN Volunteers and organize global learning workshops, but more staff capacity (time) would have been needed to fully deliver on the initial plans, especially in relation to the knowledge component.

Conclusion 4: UN Volunteers have contributed to projects which have promoted the engagement of women in peacebuilding dialogues and strengthened the capacity of local communities to engage in gender-responsible building at varying degrees, considering the diversity of contexts, UN Volunteers profiles and time spent by UN Volunteers on the ground.

Conclusion 5: The Global Learning Workshops promoted by the project represented a good practice well assessed by all the actors involved. It was a differential of the initiative in terms of helping to build capacity, share experiences and connect the volunteers among themselves. It was the key deliverable under the knowledge component which could have been enhanced by systematic efforts along the project.

Conclusion 6: The UN Volunteers have brought several contributions which will stay after the project is over, especially in relation to new tools, increased coordination among various actors and capacity building in varying degrees, considering the diversity of projects. Most Host organizations (90%) wish to continue to partner with UNV in the future, which shows their overall satisfaction with the work of the UN Volunteers.

Conclusion 7: UN Volunteers were not always fully aware of their mandate to promote Volunteerism and to deliver against the global project outputs. However, most of them (76%) reported to have contributed to bring volunteerism to peacebuilding activities and beyond through various means: a) Creating networks of women; b) Support to implementing partners on the ground; c) Involvement of local volunteers through UNV projects and consultation with women at the ground level; d) Involvement of Civil Society Organizations in the project; e) Networking with volunteers; f) Lectures to students; g) Publication of article on volunteerism and h) Promotion of leadership of women on the ground. Host organizations are formally supportive of volunteerism, but may be doing it indirectly through partnerships with civil society organizations, not as an agenda of its own (peacebuilding and volunteerism).

Conclusion 8: UN Volunteers are not always valued as assets by all partners and are sometimes seen as 'junior collaborators'. They often face the challenge of engaging with various agencies, dealing with the bureaucracy of the UN System, having unclear mandates and insufficient time to complete their assignments. More attention may be needed to follow UN Volunteers on the ground, provide guidance and safety equipment and provision of well-being support.

Lessons Learned

- ⇒ The underlying Theory of Change of the project was overly ambitious in making the connection between individual UN Volunteers, delivery of GPI projects and global outputs.
- ⇒ For peacebuilding context countries, there is a need for early and specific preparation.
- ⇒ UNV in host countries can play a crucial role to engage international and National UN Volunteers with local volunteers.
- ⇒ Careful selection of UN Volunteers to demanding posts needs to be considered.
- ⇒ Host organizations favour volunteerism, but may not be always willing to support it directly in the projects.
- ⇒ UN Volunteers are not always recognized in their workplaces due to their work status and this poses great challenges when they are in leading positions.

Recommendations

Strategic

For: UNV, PBSO and UN Women

Recommendation 1: Continue partnership between UNV, UN Women and PBSO through the deployment of International and National UN Volunteers to PBSO projects and promotion of learning in the linkages between gender, volunteerism and peacebuilding (outside a project framework).

Rationale: UNV, PBSO and UN Women have worked well together to serve the system with the support of BMZ. In NY, PBSO is one of the few partner organizations that are more supportive towards the promotion of volunteerism. There is a strong relation between local volunteerism and peacebuilding that could be further explored, especially in the current global scenario of increasing conflict.

For: UNV, PBSO and UN Women

Recommendation 2: Give light to the importance of volunteerism to peacebuilding through further fostering of learning and research in the area.

Rationale: UNV deploys thousands of UN Volunteers to peacekeeping missions and there are still few studies about their contribution. The same applies for peacebuilding. There is also little dialogue between peacekeeping and peacebuilding volunteerism that could learn from one another. The Global Learning Workshops were a very good experience for everyone involved. More learning opportunities should be provided in the future for UN Volunteers in this area.

Operational

For: UNV and PBSO

Recommendation 3: Improve selection process.

Rationale: Various problems were identified. This is an area that needs careful consideration.

For: UNV

Recommendation 4: Improve preparation of UN Volunteers and Host Organizations before deployment.

Rationale: Deployment in peacebuilding context countries requires special preparation. UN Volunteers should be better prepared for the socio-cultural context of the country to avoid shock on arrival. National volunteers need to be better trained on the values of the United Nations before deployment.

Strategic

For: UNV

Recommendation 5: Sensitize partners on the ground about the links between volunteerism and development.

Rationale: The evaluation found that even though Host Organizations are supportive of Volunteerism, they may not be always active towards promoting it.

Operational

For: UNV

Recommendation 6: Review protocol for UNV's work in host countries to assist UN Volunteers and promote volunteerism.

Rationale: Peacebuilding is built specially through ground work – changing mindsets and attitudes, and that is very much promoted through volunteerism. UN Volunteers have reported less assistance being received in the areas of security equipment and wellbeing.

Strategic

For: UNV

Recommendation 7: Consider building a network of Alumni for UN Volunteers to act as Ambassadors of Volunteerism.

Rationale: There are former UN Volunteers who are in high positions within the UN and beyond. Their voice can be very supportive towards the importance of volunteerism, encouraging new volunteers and the culture of volunteerism.