Evaluation Report: Impact of UN Volunteers Online Volunteering service

Rudy Broers, Independent Evaluation Consultant
Executive Summary

The report represents the final impact evaluation report of the United Nations Volunteers’ Online Volunteering service (UNV Online Volunteering service). The Online Volunteering service was launched in 2000 and originally managed in partnership with NetAid, a joint initiative of Cisco Systems and the United Nations Development Programme to “help end poverty by releasing the power of the Internet.” UNV took over full managerial responsibility for the Online Volunteering service in 2004.

In 2007, UNV unveiled a new strategic plan for the Online Volunteering service. The intent was to further integrate online volunteering into development programming; ensure a broader recognition of online volunteering as a volunteering modality for development and peace; and; improve the mobilization of online volunteers.

Context of the UNV Online Volunteering service

The UNV Online Volunteering service emerged during a particularly pro-active period of UNV’s history, with intensified efforts and funding mechanisms to pilot new modalities for people to volunteer in development. Various initiatives were taken to extend opportunities for all citizens to engage in volunteering for development. The Online Volunteering service was one such modality; the service was formalized within UNV in 2004 and renewed in 2007; it has emerged to become a flagship service in the organization and was integrated into the Volunteer Knowledge and Innovation Section of UNV.

The advent of mobile and Internet-based information and communication technology (ICT) is seen by some as revolutionising volunteer action. The 2011 State of the World’s Volunteerism Report dedicated a full chapter to volunteering in the 21st century. It cited online volunteering, online activism through social media, and micro-volunteering as emerging trends with far-reaching potential for development and the achievement of the MDGs.

Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of this impact evaluation report is to provide the UNV Online Volunteering service, UNV and stakeholders with an independent assessment of the UNV Online Volunteering service’s performance since 2007 (i.e., its impact, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability) in the context of its stated theory of change. Specifically, the objectives of the evaluation are twofold:

1. Independently evaluate the impact that the UNV Online Volunteering service has made on organizations (UN, NGOs, governments), beneficiaries, UN Online Volunteers, UNV as an organization and partners (Irish Aid, AusAID, AECID, Belgium); and

2. Assess the value-added by the Online Volunteering service, with a view to documenting results, challenges, opportunities, best practices and lessons.

Methodology

The approach is theory of change based and specifically takes advantage of a contribution analysis approach. Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative sources, the contribution analysis approach seeks to elucidate the extent to which the work of the UNV Online Volunteering service has indeed contributed to the two intermediate outcomes and the final outcome presented by the original UNV Online Volunteering service project. Online surveys, key informant interviews and review of existing data and documents formed the basis of the data collection phase.

The most important limitation in the evaluation was the difficulty in linking the contributions of UN Online Volunteers to the longer-term impact of the organizations they assist. This challenge is not unique to online volunteers nor to UNV; it is a challenge that all volunteer sending organizations face in understanding their overall
impact. Other limitations included the incorporation of recent developments taking place at UNV, notably the 2014 Strategic Framework, a desire to include forward-looking recommendations in the report, and the non-response bias in the survey of UN Online Volunteers.

**Evaluation Findings**
Overall, the evaluation provides an assessment of the UNV Online Volunteering service performed under each of the criteria being analyzed since 2007.

**Relevance** – The UNV Online Volunteering service project document and its outputs have been closely aligned with the strategic plans of UNV as well as the strategic needs of beneficiary organizations, particularly civil society organizations. Across all regions, stakeholders noted the many comparative advantages of the UNV Online Volunteering service due to its ability to:

- deliver high caliber, timely and valued technical services with high levels of satisfaction; and
- leverage quality applicants through its association with the UN;
- forge south-south partnerships which are seen as a value-added compared to analogous online products.

The relevance of the UNV Online Volunteering service can also be noted by the alternatives to the service in the eyes of receiving organizations. Many receiving organizations surveyed have expressed a willingness to pay for such services in the absence of UN Online Volunteers. The UNV Online Volunteering service plays a unique role in helping to bridge and expand volunteerism between organizations and UN Online Volunteers, however much more can be done to improve its advocacy efforts.

**Effectiveness** - In the recent 2007-2014 phase of its functionality, the UNV Online Volunteering service demonstrated an ability to largely achieve its intended results as per its defined objectives and theory of change, including increased mobility and diversity of UN Online Volunteers, and expanded contributions to areas of distinctive contributions. Receiving organizations have benefitted in terms of areas of distinctive contribution, with a focus on “access to services” which are readily assigned through the Internet. Even more important has been a contribution to mobilizing a more diverse cadre of UN Online Volunteers. Not only has the opportunity for volunteerism been expanded through the UNV Online Volunteering service and the strong contribution of UNV Programme Officers in some countries, but specific target groups – persons with disabilities, women, youth and volunteers from developing countries – have gained access to these opportunities. The advocacy role of the UNV Online Volunteering service has been less evident. While the UNV Online Volunteering service is grounded by its theory of change, there is increasing pressure within UN Volunteers to better measure the contributions of all volunteers towards peace and development, something which the UNV Online Volunteering service is carrying in conjunction with others in the organization.

**Impact** – Both organizations and volunteers themselves have cited important contributions of online volunteering towards longer-term organizational objectives. For UN Online Volunteers, personal satisfaction and development are fundamental results reflecting the mutually reinforcing aspects of volunteering. For organizations, particularly those civil society organizations with limited resources, the impact of online volunteerism appears to be significant, with factors such as technical expertise, cost-effectiveness and flexibility being central in decisions to engage UN Online Volunteers. In the absence of the Online Volunteering service, organizations would have difficulty meeting their own peace and development outcomes.

Thanks to important impacts in personal and professional development, the service’s results helped to foster a stronger commitment towards broader goals of global volunteerism. Interestingly, the UNV Online Volunteering...
service also led to long-term channels of communication between itself, the UN Online Volunteers and receiving organizations. On the other hand, some tasks offered by the UNV Online Volunteering service, such as translation, has been shown to compete with private sector market for these services.

**Efficiency** - The UNV Online Volunteering service, through its “OV Management Statistics” has demonstrated in a very transparent manner the efficient use of its team’s resources in creating and maintaining an increasingly complex and growing platform for online volunteerism within a fixed budget (excluding special projects) and relatively small team. Its operating model has provided good value and satisfaction in terms of the coordination multiplier effects with organizations and countries, and has made adjustments to account for the expanding clientele of the service. Satisfaction of all users is measured regularly and communication is maintained between stakeholders, with some improvements on the way. A number of upgrades to the service, including technical upgrades to facilitate connections between volunteers and organizations and an online platform to engage UN Online Volunteers and organizations alike in training, coaching and mentoring opportunities would be another step forward in the UNV Online Volunteering service offering. Alongside the benefits of the relationship with other sections within UN Volunteers (technical knowledge, expanding opportunities, joint advocacy, training), comes the challenge of a common results based management system between UN Online Volunteers and UN Volunteers who volunteer onsite.

**Sustainability** - In terms of assuring the long-term maintenance of the UNV Online Volunteering service over time, it is notable that the service has gone through significant growth and expansion since 2007, with implications for programming, staffing, and systems. While it has become more integrated into the organizational structure of UNV, it has relied primarily on external cost-sharing resources from a small group of donor countries. Future financial resources have been yet been secured, which has commensurate implications on its long-term planning for technological infrastructure, updated platforms and systems which may add value to the overall product. It has engaged in a number of new potential growth areas in an effort to expand its pool of potential resources and offerings. Of note, is that it has carried out a marketing study as well as engaged with private sector entities with a view to expanding partnerships.

**Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned**

From the above general findings, it is evident that in its lifespan since 2007, the UNV Online Volunteering service has played a marked role in the achievement towards expanding global volunteerism. It has established both a presence as a critical innovator within UNV itself and has significantly helped to promote the mainstreaming of online volunteerism around the world. The recommendations that follow are designed not so much to retrospectively correct any of the shortcomings which this evaluation may have uncovered. Rather, they have been developed in the spirit of organizational learning to look forward to complement and support the UNV Online Volunteering service as it moves to adapt to UNVs Strategic Framework.

A primary and overarching recommendation has been set out which recognizes that the needs of the UNV Online Volunteering service going forward with the targets which have been set out in the Strategic Framework exceed its existing resource base. It is clear that more resources than appear to be available will be required over the next three to five years. This implies that the existing donors will have to recommit themselves to the UNV Online Volunteering service and as well, new major entities may need to considerably increase their level of support. Alternatively, this impact evaluation has presented some potential for revenue generation in the future.
Recommendation 1: In line with Finding 7 on the limited success in leading advocacy for global online volunteerism, it is recommended that UNV continues to pursue a proactive campaign of advocacy and fundraising with international partners, national governments and donors, including consideration of mutually supporting activities with key strategic partners in the area of online technology. Engaging in social media to help expand the network of private sector partners and opportunities for innovative tools (SMS, real-time data collection, and analytics) may be one critical element in this regard.

Recommendation 2: UNV should develop a more formalized means of coordination and communication across its network of cost-sharing donors and online volunteer partners, with the view to the eventual promulgation of more common and harmonized approaches which can be shared pro-actively with prospective donors. This may include more regular feedback on national UN Online Volunteers engaged globally and in key partner countries. It may also include a formal Advisory Group comprised of key government and private sector donors to help advance innovation in the coming three to five years.

Recommendation 3: The UNV Online Volunteering service should develop a multifaceted online training and mentoring program for online volunteers and organizations, with the latter receiving particular attention in order to ensure strengthened engagement and communication channels with receiving organizations. In order to expand the services on offer, the UNV Online Volunteering service should engage with its stakeholders in a dialogue about how to expand the capacity development features of its service. This may include training materials, webinars and online mentoring programmes (enlisting online volunteers) to develop the capacities of receiving organizations, online volunteers themselves, and other interested partners. With this, the future relevance of the UNV Online Volunteering service will be strengthened by a "capacity development" component of online volunteerism for those organizations and users who wish to benefit from it.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended that UNV increase the size and responsibility of the UNV Online Volunteering service team at Headquarters at it grows the number of opportunities such that the overall satisfaction rate of UN Online Volunteers and of receiving organizations is maintained. Of note is the importance both of expanding to new organizations and of managing and maintaining relationships with existing organizations in light in increasing competition. Therefore a service which increases opportunities but reduces the satisfaction rate risks the long-term sustainability of the service.

Recommendation 5: It is suggested that UNV engage in or lead a dialogue amongst UN agencies and the global community of volunteer organizations on the topic of online volunteering, with a particular focus on some of the principle challenges and opportunities in the coming years. UNV’s interest in the fair development of and access to ICT in developing countries is reason enough for its involvement in such a venture. Moreover, it would assure a leadership position for UNV on the subject matter.

Additionally, several lessons learned can be gleaned from the generalized findings and data collected over the course of this evaluation:

LL1: The range of qualities and skills of UN Online Volunteers varies dramatically and results in a high level of competition for the limited number of available assignments. Top UN Online Volunteers are highly sought-after by receiving organizations, and across many VIOs, the availability of online volunteers far exceeds the supply of opportunities.

LL2: Receiving organizations of UN Online Volunteers tend to underestimate the level of management that is required to successfully engage Online Volunteers due to distance,
language, cultural impediments and technological differences.

LL3: UNV Programme Officers are at the front-line of promotion of the UNV Online Volunteering service. When highly motivated, they have the potential to significantly contribute to meeting UNV’s ambitious target for the UNV Online Volunteering service’s generation of opportunities and maintaining its age, gender and developing country diversity.

LL4: Across different types of volunteer involving organizations, the highest focus is placed on management and support tools to maintain and grow the number of organizations which are willing to engage online volunteers. Capacity development of receiving organizations has been successful in other VIOs in this regard.

LL5: Better assessment of the contribution of volunteers (both online and onsite) to development results is a preoccupation of all volunteer organizations as they seek to better express their unique contribution to donors and their governments.

LL6: An innovative and transformative product such as that provided by the UNV Online Volunteering service can engage and expand scope for gender equity and equality without specific targeting efforts towards women, even in developing countries.

LL7: Effective management of the UN Online Volunteer database and close scrutiny in terms of how and when communication takes place can help to develop an important strategic asset for UNV.
### Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AECID</td>
<td>Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>areas of distinctive contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AusAID</td>
<td>Australian Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>civil society organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>development assistance committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>General Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HLPF</td>
<td>High Level Political Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>information and communication technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRRM</td>
<td>integrated results and resources matrix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>information technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-governmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>millennium development goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCHA</td>
<td>Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (United Nations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OV</td>
<td>Online Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OV4D</td>
<td>Online Volunteering for Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBM</td>
<td>results-based management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSS</td>
<td>Results Management Support Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>receiving organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>short message service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVF</td>
<td>Special Volunteer Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ToRs</td>
<td>terms of reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN DPKO</td>
<td>United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITeS</td>
<td>United Nations Information Technology Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNV</td>
<td>United Nations Volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIO</td>
<td>volunteer involving organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VKIS</td>
<td>Volunteer Knowledge and Innovation Section</td>
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<tr>
<td>VRS</td>
<td>volunteer reporting system</td>
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1. Introduction

This impact evaluation report serves as a basis to measure the impact and value-added\(^1\) of the UNV Online Volunteering service and make recommendations to improve the service so that it can meet the goals set out in the UNV Strategic Framework 2014-2017. The report was commissioned by the Results Management and Support Section (RMSS) and Volunteer Knowledge and Innovation Section (VKIS) of the headquarters of UN Volunteers in Bonn, Germany. The impact evaluation was global in scope and was completed between October 2014 and March 2015 by Rudy Broers, an independent Evaluation Consultant based in Montreal, Canada. The objectives of the evaluation as set out in the terms of reference are twofold:

1. Independently evaluate the impact that the UNV Online Volunteering service has made on requesting organizations (UN, NGOs/CSOs, governments), beneficiaries, UN Online Volunteers, UNV as an organization and partners (Irish Aid, AusAID, AECID, Belgium); and
2. Assess the value-added by the Online Volunteering service, with a view to documenting results, challenges, opportunities, best practices and lessons.

Terms of reference for the evaluation also suggested that the OECD DAC evaluation criteria be used to assess the impact, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the programme from 2007 onwards.\(^2\) The entire evaluation was further guided by United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards.\(^3\)

1.1 Background of UNV

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme was established by the United Nations General Assembly (GA) in December 1970. It began operations in January 1971, administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). UNV has evolved greatly over the past 42 years in terms of the size and scope of its mandate, results and activities, driven by the changing external environment for

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\(^1\) Value-added is herein defined as the incremental enhancements which have been provided by the Online Volunteering service to all stakeholders since 2007.

\(^2\) OECD Development Assistance Committee is an international forum made up of donor countries which provides global guidance and standard setting on international development issues, including evaluation: Relevance: The extent to which the aid activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor. Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. Effectiveness: A measure of the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives. Efficiency measures the outputs -- qualitative and quantitative -- in relation to the inputs. Impact: The positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

peace, development and the eradication of poverty, by the wider acknowledgment of the role of volunteerism globally and by intergovernmental legislation.

UNV recognizes the shared universal values underpinning volunteerism – free will, commitment, equity, engagement, solidarity, compassion, empathy and respect for others – and that these values are deeply ingrained in communities. It is a universal phenomenon that transcends boundaries, religions and cultural divides; it goes by different names and finds different applications in different contexts.

The Executive Board confirmed UNV’s business model in decision 2006/18, leading to UNV being operational in three domains:

- Mobilizing volunteers to enable more people to be directly involved in the humanitarian, peace building and post-conflict recovery, as well as the sustainable development and poverty eradication work of the UN;
- Advocating for volunteerism and civic engagement in peace and development; and
- Pursuing the integration of volunteerism across policy, legislation and programming as well as delivering on internationally agreed upon development goals.

UNV’s most recent policy document, its 2014-2017 Strategic Framework, is the first framework of its kind for UNV. It aims to expand its engagement with stakeholders – including UN member states, the UN system of organizations and volunteer-involving organizations (VIOs) – and partner with them in contributing to the achievement of globally agreed upon peace and development goals. The Strategic Framework articulates the scope and dimensions of UNV’s strategic direction, results and associated resource requirements for the period 2014-2017 and seeks to integrate the most recent developments in the external environment with UNV’s long-term efforts to carry out its expanded mandate. It also focuses on UNV’s efficiency and effectiveness in achieving organizational results including leveraging and expanding the knowledge base on the role and impact of volunteering in transformational global change, and supporting development results through UNV. These latter objectives dovetail closely with the impact evaluation presented in the current document.

1.2 Introduction of the Online Volunteering service

The Online Volunteering service, a UNV tool to mobilize volunteers to help organizations working for development and peace, virtually connects volunteers with opportunities with civil society organizations, UN organizations and government institutions through the use of the Internet. The Online Volunteering service was launched in 2000 and originally managed in partnership with NetAid, a joint initiative of Cisco Systems and UNDP to “help end poverty by releasing the power of the Internet.” UNV took over full managerial responsibility for the Online Volunteering service in 2004.

In 2007, UNV unveiled a new strategic direction for the Online Volunteering service. The intent was to further integrate online volunteering into development programming, ensure a broader recognition of online volunteering as a volunteering modality for development and peace, and improve the mobilization
of online volunteers.\textsuperscript{4} The project included plans to redesign the Online Volunteering service system, to focus on increased promotion at national and global levels, to develop knowledge of online volunteerism for development and to further diversify the composition and field of involvement of online volunteers. The extent to which these results were achieved is outlined below.

\textsuperscript{4} UNV (December 2006). \textit{Project Document Online Volunteering service}.
2. Methodology

A proposed approach and evaluation framework were presented as part of an inception report submitted to and reviewed by UNV, an advisory group and an external reviewer in October–November 2014. Following approval of the inception report, the data collection portion of the evaluation was largely carried out between December 2014 and January 2015.

The approach is theory of change-based, and specifically takes advantage of John Mayne’s contribution analysis approach. This approach assumes that if an evaluator can validate a theory of change with empirical evidence and account for major external influencing factors, then it is reasonable to conclude that the intervention has made a difference.

Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative sources, the contribution analysis approach sought to elucidate the extent to which the work of the UNV Online Volunteering service has indeed contributed to the two intermediate outcomes and the final outcome presented by the original UNV Online Volunteering service project. The two intermediate outcomes are as follows:

- Improvement in areas of distinctive contribution, which encompasses access to goods and services, inclusion and participation, and community mobilization; and
- Contribution to the enhancement of mutually reinforcing characteristics of volunteerism, including mobilization, advocacy and the diversification of the pool of volunteers.

Together these outcomes contributed to the final outcome intended by the project: support of peace and development and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

2.1 Stakeholders

The key stakeholders of the Online Volunteering service were identified during the inception mission as follows:

**UN Online Volunteers**: These are the estimated 320,000 individuals who have registered with the UNV Online Volunteering service since 2007, and who have collectively completed roughly 67,000 assignments. While not all registered volunteers have completed assignments, they all remain part of a network of registered users and receive regular communication from the Online Volunteering service.

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6 Statistics as of mid-October 2014, from the Online Volunteering service.
Receiving Organizations: These are the 2,023 organizations (active and inactive) registered with the UNV Online Volunteering service. Most of these liaise regularly with the Online Volunteering service in order to request new UN Online Volunteers, or provide feedback on past assignments. Receiving organizations include UN agencies, funds and programmes, as well as national governments and civil society organizations (CSOs).

Donors: Several key bilateral partners have financially supported the UNV Online Volunteering service through cost-sharing, thereby helping to assure its financial sustainability. These are Australia (AusAid), Ireland, Spain (AECID) and Belgium.

Internal UNV Stakeholders: These include current UNV Online Volunteering service staff as well as the other UNV staff at headquarters in field offices. UNV programme officers and field units operate at the country level.

Private Sector and Volunteer Involving Organizations: These organizations provide competing or complementary online or on-site volunteering services. In most cases, they benefit from interactions or partnerships with UNV and the Online Volunteering service.

2.2 Approach to data collection
A mixed methods approach of quantitative and qualitative data collection was used to respond to key evaluation questions as defined in the evaluation matrix presented in the inception report and included in Volume II.

On-line surveys
Three surveys were conducted to add primary data to the impact evaluation. The data provided by the online surveys represents a key independent source of information that informed and led to analytical conclusions and recommendations for the evaluation. The results of the surveys were triangulated with other data sources to inform the evaluation. Completed and collected data from surveys were cleaned and reviewed for validity. Subsequently, descriptive statistics (frequency, rates and ratios) and measures of central tendency (means, medians) were calculated. These are presented in table and chart format for all questions in Volume II. Open questions were coded and summarized using NVivo software to assist in determining trends in qualitative data.

Online surveys were available to respondents for roughly two weeks (January 8-23) using the Fluidsurvey application. Two reminders were sent out to non-respondents: the first was one week before deadline and the second was two days prior to survey deadline. Online responses were tracked and reminders sent to ensure an adequate response rate. Surveys, the profile of respondents as well as all survey responses are available in Volume II.

Survey of UN Online Volunteers: The first online questionnaire was used to collect data from UN Online Volunteers using the Online Volunteering service. The online questionnaire, in English, French and Spanish randomly sampled from the estimated 320,000 volunteers who registered since 2007. A sampling approach in which respondents were selected randomly was employed to ensure statistically significant results. In total, 70,390 surveys were sent to a random sample of registered UN Online Volunteers, stratified by whether or not they had carried out an assignment, eliciting a response of 2,352
responses, of which 2167 were valid, for a response rate of 3.3%. The status of volunteer respondents to the survey is presented below.

**Table 1: Volunteer status of survey respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteer Status of Respondents</th>
<th>N=2167</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current/Recent UN Online Volunteer</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Only</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know/Not sure</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** 2015 survey of UN Online Volunteers

*Survey of receiving organizations:* A second survey targeted all of the 2,034 receiving organizations of the Online Volunteering service using the existing available database. It aimed to evaluate the organization’s demand for human resources as well as some of the alternatives to using UN Online Volunteers to respond to resource needs in the organization. It also assessed the overall perception of the quality and impact of the work done by UN Online Volunteers. The survey was disseminated in English, French and Spanish; it received 295 responses, of which 279 were valid, for a response rate of 13.7%.

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7 Survey results are within +/- 2%, 95 times out of 100. A low response rate for the survey was anticipated based on previous surveys carried out.
Table 2: Status of organizational respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Organization</th>
<th>N= 279</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UN organization</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society organization</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Institution</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 survey of receiving organizations

Survey of crowd workers on volunteerism: During the inception mission, it was discussed whether the current database of UN volunteers, through UNV’s volunteer reporting system (VRS), could be used as a comparison group for some of the perceptual data provided in the survey by UN Online Volunteers. However, it was determined that this database was not useful for such purposes. Instead, a pilot survey of 340 global crowd workers on Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in English was completed to provide a baseline (or counterfactual) of individual knowledge of and commitment to both online and onsite volunteerism. The crowd workers represented a globally web-connected community unrelated to the volunteerism movement. Crowd workers were paid a nominal fee according to pro-rated standard hourly wages for the time to complete the survey.8

Key informant interviews

Individual key informant interviews were a second key data source for the evaluation. Interviews were carried out with UN Online Volunteers and representatives of receiving organizations in a formalized and purposeful manner using telephone, Skype and email responses. Interviewees were purposefully selected based on defined criteria to help understand and elicit greater detail on the breadth of the value-added of the Online Volunteering service. These individuals were contacted by email and given the opportunity to speak in person or to submit responses to questions through an online forum link. More than twenty individuals were reached for key informant interviews covering most of the target groups as well as languages (English, French, and Spanish) and geographic regions. Individuals targeted for interviews included:

8 For ethical purposes, all research conducted through MTurk was governed by the standards set and signed by 28 Academic Researchers as per: http://wiki.wearedynamo.org/index.php/Guidelines_for_Academic_Requesters
- UN Online Volunteers representing youth, women and persons with disabilities;
- UN Online Volunteers who have been award winners since 2007;
- UN Online Volunteers who expressed dissatisfaction with the volunteer experience in the past 3 years;
- UN Online Volunteers who have registered but have not completed an assignment;
- Representatives of receiving organizations covering United Nations agencies, CSOs and government partners;
- Representatives of receiving organizations that hosted award winners since 2007;
- Representatives of receiving organizations which have expressed dissatisfaction with the UNV Online Volunteering Service
- Representatives of receiving organizations which did not successfully achieve a collaboration with the UNV Online Volunteering service;

In addition to these target groups, the evaluator engaged directly with UNV staff at its headquarters and at three field units, with donor partners and with representatives of several volunteer involving organizations (VIOs). The semi-structured interviews relied on lines of inquiry in order to give consistency to final remarks and conclusions, but also allow some room for elaboration and examples. In most cases, interviews were completed individually, and confidentiality was assured with all interviews. Data collected from interviews was directly tabulated and analyzed in light of other data from survey and document review. In total, more than forty individual and group interviews were carried out for the purposes of this evaluation.

**Existing data sources**

All components of the impact evaluation made extensive use of the existing data collected by UNV and the Online Volunteering service. The Online Volunteering service Management Statistics tool (OV Management Statistics) contains historical and real-time data on the service and its users dating back to 2007, and in some cases, back to 2000. The OV Management Statistics tool allows for queries and searches across a range of indicators. In addition to this tool, which assisted in the response to evaluation questions covering efficiency and effectiveness, other data included:

- Online Volunteering service newsletters and other communications;
- Reports to donors and UNV management;
- Razorfish survey data, which provides updated data on overall user satisfaction of many of the Online Volunteering service’s tools and functionality; and
- Other publications and project documents.

**2.3 Scope and coverage of the evaluation**

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9 The OV Management Statistics are also known as Online Volunteering Management Reports. With the exception of “Brief per-country reports”, all the reports are automatically generated and updated daily.
As specified by the ToRs, the evaluation focused on the period from 2007 to the present, tracking and taking account of the changes in the shape and operation of the UNV Online Volunteering service, its organizational context and progress over that time. Existing data and institutional memory within the UNV Online Volunteering service team largely allowed for this level of focus: in many cases, good available data existed since 2000. The survey of UN Online Volunteers targeted those who signed up or completed assignments since 2007.

The evaluation followed a transparent, iterative and participatory approach to deriving and learning lessons. The identification of lessons (learned or not yet learned) and recommendations focused on the outcomes—and as far as possible in the 2007-2014 timeframe, impacts—of the UNV Online Volunteering service, as well as the key aspects of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability.

Limitations
As with any early stage formative evaluation of an entity such as the UNV Online Volunteering service, there were considerations that limited the scope of the assignment. Four procedural and methodological considerations were noted:

1. The most important limitation in the evaluation was the difficulty in linking the contributions of UN Online Volunteers to the longer-term peace and development impacts of the organizations they assist. This challenge is not unique to online volunteers nor to UNV; it is a challenge that all volunteer sending organizations face in understanding their overall peace and development impacts over the long term. Instead, the scope of the evaluation focussed attention on the overall impact of the UNV Online Volunteering service as a whole, and perceptual data from receiving organizations on the contributions made by UN Online Volunteers.

2. Secondly, UNV has been experiencing a period of tremendous evolution since the publication of its most recent Strategic Framework. As such, governance apparatus and internal administrative systems were evolving in a way that already began to affect initial findings. Therefore, the evaluation was expanded to reflects the conditions of the UNV Online Volunteering service through to December 2014, with findings amplified by references to recent developments such as progress on the harmonization of results based management (RBM) and the September 2014 UNV partnership forum.

3. Secondly, feedback on the inception report emphasized a need for forward-looking recommendations regarding the future implementation of the UNV Online Volunteering service. While this was not intended as part of the original terms of reference for the impact evaluation, such prospective recommendations were included.

4. Finally, despite numerous efforts to gain a higher response rate from the UN Online Volunteer survey, the results are negatively affected by the non-response bias. Given the significant population of individuals who have registered but not completed an assignment, a low response rate was expected. Nevertheless, the results were deemed acceptable for analysis for the purposes of this evaluation.

Management, governance and independence of the evaluation
The evaluation was managed and quality controlled by the UNV Online Volunteering service team in the Volunteer Knowledge and Innovation Section (VKIS) with the support of an Advisory Group and headed by the Chief of RMSS. Weekly teleconference calls between the evaluator and the UNV Online Volunteering service ensured regular communication.

2.4 Organization and structure of the report
Following the introduction, methodology and context, findings were divided under three main chapters, covering the principle areas required by the ToRs and under the OECD DAC evaluation guidelines: relevance, efficiency and effectiveness. The structure of the report integrates several of the overarching questions outlined in the original terms of reference. These remain in the text to provide reference points to the key questions posed for this evaluation. This report then presents the evaluation, conclusions and recommendations. In full, the evaluation is organized as follows:

- Chapter 1 introduces the assignment, its purpose and goals;
- Chapter 2 provides a description of the evaluation methodology;
- Chapter 3 presents the context of the UN Online Volunteering service and online volunteering;
- Chapter 4, presents the findings of the evaluation in relation to relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency, and sustainability respectively; and
- Chapter 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations.

A second volume (referred to as Volume II) is annexed to this evaluation report and contains the following appendices:

- Appendix I Survey Responses;
- Appendix II – Survey Responses;
- Appendix III – Evaluation Matrix
- Appendix IV Terms of Reference
- Appendix V Schedule of Key Activities;
- Appendix VI Bibliography;
- Appendix VII List of People Interviewed;
3. Overview of the Online Volunteering service

3.1 Context and evolution of UNV

The establishment and evolution of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme since 1970 provides an important contextual foundation for the UNV Online Volunteering service. While UNV’s activities have expanded greatly since 1970, three basic principles established by the General Assembly remain fundamental: an emphasis on technical competence and skills, adherence to the principles of universality in recruitment and assignments, and the notion that activities be guided by the needs of recipient countries. The 2013 Report of the Administrator on the evolution of the role and function of the United Nations Volunteers programme since its inception highlights three key phases in UNV’s history.

The first phase, from UNV’s inception extending to 1988 is as a volunteer placement agency responding to requests from governments and the United Nations system for volunteer personnel. Volunteers were to have the technical and professional qualifications required for the development of recipient countries including the transfer of skills. UN Volunteers were assigned to United Nations system projects and to projects directly managed by governments. Youth participation and local grassroots development became two emerging responsibilities taken on by UNV during this period.

The second phase encompassed a greater leadership role for UNV in the international community for developing and operationalizing concepts related to volunteer service. This included the use of 15% of Special Voluntary Fund (SVF) income for the development of pilot and experimental projects. With access to a pool of funds that it could manage independently, UNV began to shift from being a largely reactive organization to one with an additional proactive role. A discernible trend in this regard was a shift away from largely "gap-filling" volunteer placements to a much greater emphasis on capacity-building. The placement of volunteers continued to constitute the core business of UNV with two key developments being the initiation of and rapid growth the humanitarian and peace building fields, and the introduction of the national UNV modality.

The third phase was guided by General Assembly resolution 56/38 of 5 December 2001 regarding recommendations on support for volunteering. The General Assembly recognized the contribution of UNV and broadened the UNV mandate from an exclusive focus on individual volunteer service for development and peace to one which covered all forms of volunteerism. Since then, UNV has worked with governments and other partners to promote a better understanding of the many expressions of volunteerism at all levels, and to develop strategies and programmes to ensure that the potential of volunteerism for enhancing the well-being of individuals, communities and societies is fully harnessed.

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Efforts by UNV to engage with United Nations system partners were also stepped up with the publication in 2009 of *Programming Volunteerism for Development* a guidance note aimed at achieving more effective and systematic approaches to harnessing volunteerism’s potential for national development within the framework of UN development assistance. By 2013, over 60 programme countries had included references in their United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks to volunteerism’s myriad development contributions.

These elements were fully recognized during the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Volunteer which culminated in the launch of the first *State of the World’s Volunteerism Report* and its adoption by the General Assembly through resolution 66/67 of 5 December 2011. More recently, the General Assembly adopted resolution 67/138 of 20 December 2012, calling for the integration of volunteering in all aspects of the UN’s work in the coming decade, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the post-2015 UN development agenda. It emphasized that volunteerism offers valuable opportunities for leadership and engagement of youth and women, while allowing both groups to develop skills and improve their employability.

The 2013 Report highlights that while mobilizing volunteers for peace and development continues to be the core of UNV’s work, the SVF has helped to advance aspects of advocacy and integration of volunteerism across the spectrum of the UN’s activities. In this regard, the emergence of the UNV Online Volunteering service has been one such success in furthering the reach of volunteerism globally.

### 3.2 The UNV Online Volunteering service

With an expanded SVF provision to support pilot and experimental projects, UNV intensified efforts to establish new modalities for people to volunteer in development. The Executive Board, in decision 2004/16, welcomed initiatives taken to extend opportunities for all citizens to engage in volunteering for development by expanding forms of affiliation with the programme, and called for relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to continue efforts to integrate volunteerism into their policies, programmes and reports, including those relating to the achievement of the MDGs.

The Online Volunteering service was one of the innovative volunteer modalities that emerged in the post-2000 period. Others included the United Nations Information Technology Service (UNITeS), a global initiative to help bridge the digital divide, and two new youth-focused initiatives. The Executive Board, in decision 2010/19, took particular note of the growth in the scale and scope of the service. Online volunteering is only one outcome of the digital revolution. Exploring the interface between volunteerism and new technologies, the 2011 *State of the World’s Volunteerism Report* provided some examples as to directions UNV could take to further harness this largely untapped and vast resource for development and

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peace; examples included micro-volunteering, open-source volunteering and volunteering using mobile communication technology through SMS.\textsuperscript{12}


The Strategic Framework 2014-2017 directs UNV efforts and programme resources into five priority areas where volunteerism has a transformational and cumulative impact on the lives of people:

1. Securing access to basic social services;
2. Community resilience for environment and disaster risk reduction;
3. Peace building;
4. Youth; and
5. National capacity development through volunteer schemes.

UN Online Volunteers, like their onsite counterparts, engage extensively with UN agencies, funds and programmes. For onsite UN Volunteers, this is the extent of their partnership strategy. However, UN Online Volunteers also connect UNV to a large contingent of civil society organizations, and to a lesser extent, government partners. The UNV Strategic Framework has challenged all part of the organization, including the UNV Online Volunteering service, to build partnerships with organizations in new ways. In particular, the UNV Online Volunteering service is mandated to pilot new forms of online engagement and mobile volunteering, as well as develop new partnerships with volunteer involving organizations (VIOs).\textsuperscript{13} The Strategic Framework seeks greater partnership with UNDP and the private sector. Finally, the UNV Strategic Framework has challenged the UNV Online Volunteering service to double its services in the coming three years from 11,037 volunteers mobilized in 2013 to 22,000 by 2017, which maintaining its gender, youth and developing country profile. This has important implications for the sustainability of the service in its current form. Targets for the coming period are highlighted in the Table 3 below, emphasizing important aspects of diversity in the service offering, including a prevalence of female and youth volunteers and a predominance of UN Online Volunteers from developing countries.

**Table 3: Targets for the UNV Online Volunteering service in the UNV Strategic Framework (2014-2017)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of UN Online Volunteers mobilized per annum</td>
<td>11,037</td>
<td>22,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female UN Online Volunteers</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Online Volunteers from the South</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Online Volunteers who are youth</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** UNV Strategic Framework, 2014-2017


\textsuperscript{13} UNV Strategic Framework (2014-2017), Paragraph 53.
3.3 Global context for online volunteering

UNV’s 2011 *State of the World’s Volunteerism Report* highlighted three major trends affecting the way in which people volunteer. The first of these is the way in which information and communications technologies (ICT) are opening up opportunities for people to volunteer in ways that were not possible in the past. The second is the role of the private sector and its interest in volunteerism as a component of its corporate social responsibility agenda. The third is the global movement of populations through migration and travel, which impact traditional forms of volunteerism. Each of these trends is relevant to the context of the Online Volunteering service, as they underline that globalisation and the digital age are changing the face of volunteerism. The 2011 Report goes on to outline some of the advantages of online volunteering, including greater flexibility in carrying out assignments, volunteering from a distance, and empowerment of those with restricted mobility or access. The challenges were also highlighted, noting that Internet penetration is only 18% in low-income countries, and that online volunteering may hinder a more meaningful engagement by limiting face-to-face interactions.

Since the MDGs were first introduced, the international development landscape has become more complex. Recognition that the development process involves many more partners, not just governments, has paved the way for volunteerism of many kinds, including online volunteerism, to emerge as a contributor to peace and development. The growth of Internet and communication technology in developing countries has been seen as a tool, not only for the growth of volunteerism but for economic growth, prosperity and development. The post-2015 UN System task team for the post-2015 UN Development Agenda, of which UNV was a member, stated that:

"...a 10% increase in the penetration of high-speed Internet broadband networks contributes to a 1.8% increase in GDP. This is a clear indication of why promoting access to these networks through improved public policies and regulations can become a vehicle to promote economic growth."

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15 UN System Task Team on post-2015 UN Development Agenda (2012) Science, technology and innovation and intellectual property rights: The vision for development. Thematic Think Piece
Other studies and reports in recent years have pointed to the transformative effect of the Internet age throughout the developing world. For example, a 2013 report by Dalberg and Intel\textsuperscript{16} points to the importance of the Internet in Africa in providing opportunities to pursue social and development objectives in addition to economic growth:

“Throughout the developing world, the Internet is connecting remote populations to markets and strengthening the overall efficiency of service delivery in areas such as health, education, livelihoods and financial inclusion, as well as creating access to government services for the most marginalized populations.”

Among its recommendations to policymakers, the report points to digital inclusion:

“Managing digital inclusion to ensure that the Internet is not only made available across geographic and demographic boundaries but that Internet content also creates channels for socially and economically beneficial services.”

In the context of UNV’s work in further developing online volunteering, it can be seen as playing a significant role in creating opportunities for meaningful engagement on socially beneficial services as well as increasing demand for inclusive access.

A second report focusing on gender and the Internet by the same authors entitled Women and the Web highlights the extent to which bridging the Internet gender gap can increase women’s empowerment, sense of equity and potential for income. Supporting the establishment of gender-focused strategies to expand access and use is seen as a priority in order to reap the benefits of the Internet for women. In the context of the UNV Online Volunteering service, it is already at the forefront of bridging this gender gap by creating opportunities for women to participate in south-south development through online volunteerism.

\textsuperscript{16} Dalberg and Intel (2013). Impact of the Internet in Africa.
4. Findings of the impact evaluation

The following section of this impact evaluation report presents results according to the evaluation matrix questions included in the approved inception report as well as the OECD DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the UNV Online Volunteering service. 17

4.1 Relevance of the UNV Online Volunteering service

Relevance reflects the extent to which the objectives of the UNV Online Volunteering service are consistent with beneficiaries’ requirements, global priorities and partners’ and donors’ policies.18 Retrospectively, the question of relevance often becomes a question as to whether the objectives of an intervention or its design are appropriate given the circumstances within which the programming or intervention takes place. Relevance was assessed in this evaluation using the widest scope possible; partners, donors, volunteers and organizations offered their views on the relevance of the UNV Online Volunteering service and its objectives. Documentation from a range of sources and analysis of survey responses complement the findings for this section.

Finding 1: The Online Volunteering service is highly appreciated by the key target groups identified: organizations, particularly CSOs, volunteers and donors.

Organizations

The UNV Online Volunteering service was closely aligned with the strategic needs of key beneficiaries, notably the organizations which collaborate directly with UN Online Volunteers. Across all regions and organization types, respondents note the comparative advantages of partnering with the UNV Online Volunteering service: its ability to leverage quality applicants quickly and provide innovative solutions for organizations, particularly those with limited resources. For these reasons, the service is particularly applicable to civil society and non-governmental organizations. It also reflects how strongly the UNV Online Volunteering service meets the core UNV principles of technical competence, universality and needs-based programming.

17 OECD Development Assistance Committee is an international forum made up of donor countries which provides global guidance and standard setting on international development issues, including evaluation: Relevance: The extent to which the aid activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor. Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. Effectiveness: A measure of the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives. Efficiency measures the outputs -- qualitative and quantitative -- in relation to the inputs. Impact: The positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

18 Source: OECD Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management.
The relevance of the service is best demonstrated through the demand for UN Online Volunteers since 2007. As noted in Table 4 below, the number of completed assignments increased markedly between 2007 and 2014, from just over 3,000 assignments in 2007 to close to 16,000 assignments in 2014. This represents an average annual increase of 34% since 2007, and an overall increase of close to 400% over the period 2007-2014.

Table 4: Growth in UN Online Volunteer assignments 2007-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>3,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>4,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>7,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>10,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>13,476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>15,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>17,542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>15,826</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of assignments over the life of the UNV Online Volunteering service have been established through CSOs; management statistics demonstrate that roughly 83% of all assignments have gone to these organizations, while the bulk of the remaining have been dedicated to UN organizations. Current engagement with governments or public institutions has been very limited, constituting less than 1% of all assignments since 2007.

The increasing demand for UN Online Volunteers is confirmed not only by number of assignments but also by the increase in demand for flexible human resources by receiving organizations. Survey results confirm a growing demand for flexible human resources from receiving organizations. Slightly more than half (53%) of respondents suggested that their demand for temporary human resources had increased in the past 12 months. Increase in demand for UN Online Volunteers has been almost as noteworthy; fully 49% of organizations noted an increase in demand for UNV volunteers in the previous 12 months compared with 10% which noted a decrease in demand over the same period (see Table 5).
As part of the survey of receiving organizations, respondents were asked to rate the factors affecting their demand for UN Online Volunteers; results suggest that their demand is most strongly influenced by cost-effectiveness (46% of respondents stated that this strongly increases demand) and technical expertise which is not available internally (41%). This conclusion was consistent with a 2008 internal satisfaction survey carried out by the UNV Online Volunteering service: according to survey responses at the time, the top two benefits of UN Online Volunteers to organizations were the “...more diverse set of skills than those available locally” and the fact that they “...allow us to do more things with a smaller budget.”

As was highlighted by one UN organization interview respondent: “The reason why I called upon the UN Volunteers for this was twofold: the lack of in-house expertise in graphic design, and the difficulty to raise funds to have this project subcontracted outside.”

Table 6 below highlights the key factor data, disaggregated by whether the organization is a CSO or UN organization. It elucidates that both the UN and CSOs consider cost effectiveness to be a relevant factor in demand for UN Online Volunteers. However, for factors such as flexible human resources, innovation and a more diverse perspective, the demand of CSOs is greater than that of the UN, suggesting a stronger relevance for the service among CSOs, which tend to be smaller organizations with less internal capacity at their disposition.

\footnote{Zoomerang Survey Results, 2008.}
Table 6: Factors influencing organizational demand for UN Online Volunteers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors which &quot;strongly increase&quot; organizational demand for UN Online volunteers</th>
<th>Civil Society</th>
<th>UN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost-effectiveness</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical expertise which is not available internally</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible human resources to complete tasks</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative solutions</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A more diverse perspective within the organization</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 survey of receiving organizations

The overall satisfaction of organizations following the completion of assignments indicates that the service is relevant to organizational requirements. As shown in the Table 7 below, based on Online Volunteering Management Statistics, the UNV Online Volunteering service has not only maintained the satisfaction rate of its users, but improved it over time; in 2014, fully 96% of users felt the service was either excellent or good; this rose from 82% satisfaction (excellent or good) in 2007.

Table 7: Satisfaction ratings of organizations collaborating with UN Online Volunteers

| Organizations' satisfaction with UN Online Volunteer assignments (percentage submitting "Excellent" or "Good" rating) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
| 82% | 84% | 92% | 94% | 94% | 94% | 96% | 96% |

Source: Online Volunteering service Management Statistics
Other factors affecting the relevance of the service according to the administrators in organizations point to some unexpected effects of the UNV Online Volunteering service, as noted by summaries of respondents in open questions and interviews:

- The UNV Online Volunteering service provides CSOs with credibility and legitimacy by virtue of its affiliation with the UN. This is relevant in that CSOs seek to earn credibility at the country level by connecting with the UN, as cited by UNV Programme Officers in the field units as well as in CSO interviews. The legitimacy offered by experienced UN Online Volunteers can help CSOs in gaining new sources of funds from UN agencies.

- Organizations also noted a benefit from linking with the strong reputation of the UN and the attendant high caliber of the volunteers. In many instances, smaller organizations expressed difficulties in attracting or hosting temporary staff of high quality in their offices, and therefore struggle to solve human resource challenges. For these organizations, the UNV Online Volunteering service is an ideal and relevant solution to their short-term needs.

**Volunteers**

A continued growth in UNV Online Volunteering service’s registrations since 2007 underlines the ongoing relevance of the service in the eyes of the UN Online Volunteer registrants themselves. As the table below illustrates, annual registration to the service has grown from just over 24,000 in 2007 to more than 54,000 in 2014. On average, about 45,000 people have registered for the service each year since 2007. While not all of these registrants remain active, this nevertheless reflects an important relevance indicator for the UNV Online Volunteering Service.

**Table 8: UN Online Volunteer registrations, 2007-2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Annual UN Online Volunteer Registrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>24,337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>54,284</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Online Volunteering service Management Statistics*
As part of its monitoring activity, in 2008 the UNV Online Volunteering service collected satisfaction data on the reasons why they participate in the service and why online volunteerism is relevant in their lives: the most important reasons cited were to make a positive contribution to the world, for personal fulfillment, to have a flexible volunteer commitment and to improve one’s CV or resume. This is consistent with the mutually reinforcing element of volunteerism of all types.

The 2015 survey data of UN Online Volunteers produced for this evaluation reinforced the data produced during monitoring; the strongest benefit of online volunteering was the opportunity to further develop and apply knowledge and skills. Among respondents, 67% strongly agreed with skills and knowledge development, while 72% strongly agreed with the application of skills and knowledge in an online assignment.

**Table 9: Relevance of UN Online Volunteer assignments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of survey respondents on relevance of UN Online Volunteer assignment (in percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="Bar chart showing the perception of survey respondents on relevance of UN Online Volunteer assignments" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** 2015 survey of UN Online Volunteers

Upon completing an assignment, UN Online Volunteers assess their overall satisfaction of the assignment. In 2014, 92% of assignments were assessed by the UN Online Volunteers as either “excellent” or “good,” up from 82% in 2007. This improvement points to a continuous process of monitoring and reviewing the nature and quality of assignments over time.
One frequent complaint noted by respondents was the highly competitive selection for assignments, often due to a high level of technical expertise required to complete tasks. Interviews and survey responses suggest that it is difficult to maintain a high level of engagement with those registered with the UNV Online Volunteering service but who had not carried out any assignments. The 2014 Razorfish marketing survey highlighted some of the reasons for disaffected respondents: 60% felt that there was a lack of appropriate opportunities for their profile; 16% felt that communication was insufficient on reasons for lack of success in being selected for assignments. For those who were selected for assignments, an additional concern was noted by 12% of respondents who felt that they had received insufficient acknowledgement from their assignment.

**Donors**

Since 2007, the priorities of donors with regard to the UNV Online Volunteering service and to UNV at large have revolved around the contributions of volunteerism to MDGs and global peace and development. Simultaneously, donors noted a keen interest in the promotion of volunteerism in peace and development in line with the General Assembly resolutions.

As defined in the project document, the goal of the Online Volunteering service since 2007 has been a focus on MDGs, the mobilization of volunteers and advocacy in favor of volunteerism. In these respects, the contribution of the UNV Online Volunteering service is significant. The unique opportunities offered by the UNV Online Volunteering service to donors of the UNV Online Volunteering service are twofold: that of expanding their own country’s involvement in volunteerism through online volunteering and; providing timely technical expertise to their national CSOs in targeted regions. Current donors to the service stated that the UNV Online Volunteering service contributed to both objectives. Currently, cost-sharing donors as well as other interested donors receive updates on assignments carried out by UN Online Volunteers who are citizens of their country, as well as on assignments carried out by UN Online Volunteers in targeted countries or with national CSOs. This provides donors with pertinent information to share with governmental authorities and helps to advance national online volunteerism objectives.
Finding 2: The UNV Online Volunteering service is well integrated with the mission and goals of the UNV programme, including its 2014 Strategic Framework.

UNV

Organizational and strategic changes at the turn of the millennium have permitted UNV to become a more pro-active organization. This opened the door to greater innovation in the package of services and nature of volunteer engagements offered by UNV. The UNV Online Volunteering service has emerged from a self-contained project to becoming a more established service within the organization, especially since 2007. Indicators developed through the UNV Online Volunteering service were couched within UNV’s previous results framework outcomes – these outcomes focused on achieving developmental outcomes, promoting volunteerism and diversifying and mobilizing volunteers. In fact, the cross-fertilization of results between onsite UN Volunteers and UN Online Volunteers can be demonstrated across all parts of the organization; from marketing and promotion of UNV on the Internet through driving Internet traffic to the UNV website, to the roles of UNV Programme Officers at the country level; all are inherently supportive of these broad results framework outcomes. However, in most cases, the outputs and outcomes developed in such frameworks lacked clearly defined targets.

The new UNV Strategic Framework demonstrates a growing integration of the service within UNV. The Strategic Framework has, for the first time, directly integrated UN Online Volunteer assignment targets into its integrated results and resources matrix (IRRM) framework. On this basis, UNV Programme Officers working in UNV field units at the country level have begun to integrate targets for developing opportunities for UN Online Volunteers into their field office’s annual planning.

The UNV Strategic Framework has challenged all parts of the organization, including the UNV Online Volunteering service, to build partnerships with organizations in new ways. In particular, the UNV Online Volunteering service is a relevant idea incubator for the entire organization, challenging convention on the ways in which volunteers can be engaged. Recent innovations include the use of crowd-volunteering to bring groups of UN Online Volunteers to collaborate on emergency tasks together. The UNV Strategic Framework has also sought greater partnership with UNDP and the private sector. The UNV Online Volunteering service is well positioned and has started to engage with private sector organizations as they establish global peace and development or corporate social responsibility objectives.

Finding 3: The Online Volunteering service’s promotion of south-south cooperation is a unique characteristic which heightens its relevance for development as compared to analogous services.

The UNV Online Volunteering service has a particular added value as compared to analogous online volunteering services offered by other VIOs; that is UNV’s ability to forge south-south relationships in its approach to volunteerism, a feature which is well appreciated in the global development sphere. As noted on UNDP’s South-South Cooperation page, accessed at www.undp.org, South-South cooperation (SSC) is about developing countries working together to find solutions to common development challenges. Linked by similarities in their development contexts and challenges, the countries of the South have been increasingly active in sharing knowledge, exchanging technologies, and forming common agenda and collective actions. Donor countries
should be noted that this comparative advantage exists within UNV as a whole, both for its UN Volunteers as well as UN Online Volunteers). The growth in UN Online Volunteers since 2007 has been remarkable; over the period, more than 70% of users who have registered with the UN Online Volunteering service have come from developing countries.

Table 11: Origin of users registered annually with the UN Online Volunteers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Developed Country</th>
<th>Developing Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Online Volunteering service Management Reports

of the North also have made notable efforts in supporting the cooperation among developing countries and accepted triangular cooperation as a way to make North-South aid more effective. It is a powerful tool for building new partnerships and creating more democratic and equitable forms of global interdependence and governance.
Leveraging its linkages with the UN system, CSOs and local governments, the UNV Online Volunteering service plays a positive role in helping to bridge and expand south-south volunteerism. This is largely in contrast with other VIOs, whose networks based in developed countries facilitate a north-south relationship. As such, the UNV Online Volunteering service presents a more up-to-date portrait of Internet connectivity in the developing world and the role which the Internet can play in expanding opportunities to engage in volunteerism.

The benefits of this south-south relationship was across survey responses and interviews. UN Online Volunteers have a keen sense of the local or regional context in service delivery; they have knowledge which is relevant to the activities of the organizations and they bring their own rich perspective to development challenges.

**Finding 4:** In the absence of UN Online Volunteers, organizations may substitute UN Volunteers or paid contractors. This has implications for the substitutability of UN Online Volunteers and revenue generation potential of the service.

When asked about alternatives to the use of UN Online Volunteers, the survey responses of receiving organizations were instructive, and point to relevance of the service since 2007. The responses also provide some clues as to the potential of revenue generation for the UNV Online Volunteering service in the future.

In the absence of UN Online Volunteers, survey respondents were able to choose multiple options as potential alternatives for their organizational needs: top responses included a paid contractor (42%), an unpaid intern (42%) or local on-site volunteer (35%). The tables below present the survey data:

**Survey response on how organizations would address needs without UN Online Volunteers**

The UNV Online Volunteering service helped to increase program delivery and to enhance possibilities of south-south cooperation

(UN Organization, Cape Verde)
The responses of receiving organizations suggest that for some tasks, UN Online Volunteers may be competing with the work of onsite UN Volunteers. In many cases, it was noted that UN Volunteers are tasked to work together with UN Online Volunteers on assignments.

Engaging paid contractors in the absence of UN Online Volunteers was more commonly stated as a survey response by UN organizations as compared to CSOs. The survey questionnaire further asked respondents to state a weekly value of such paid contractors; the median value of all responses was US$1000/week. Not only does this point to a significant value placed on many UN Online Volunteers by receiving organizations. It also presents an unintended impact of the UNV Online Volunteering Service in that the service can and does compete on occasion with paid contractors. This was noted in interviews and in data collected from open responses, particularly in assignments such as translation and editing.
4.2 Effectiveness

The question of effectiveness\textsuperscript{21} is assessed on the basis of whether or not the primary objectives of the UNV Online Volunteering service have been achieved. For this section of the evaluation, a heavy reliance was placed on the overall theory of change for the project in 2007. This section examines the UNV Online Volunteering service effectiveness in terms of: the extent to which the UNV Online Volunteering service had well defined and measurable objectives for the period; how the UNV Online Volunteering service has progressed with regard to its objectives; the factors that have contributed to or limited effective programming and; how new products or approaches introduced during the period contributed to the UNV Online Volunteering service’s mission, as well as the benefits and challenges associated with them.

Finding 5: Areas of distinctive contribution (ADC) produced by UN Online Volunteers proportionally benefitted organizations in least developed countries and were heavily centered on providing access to services.

In the recent phase of its functionality since 2007, UNV Online Volunteering service demonstrated a substantive achievement of its intended results as per its theory of change. The theory of change for the UNV Online Volunteering service contended that it contribute to two outcomes: improving the areas of distinctive contribution and; enhancing the mutually reinforcing characteristics of volunteerism. While contributions were realized for both of these, the scope and measurability of each varied significantly.

Targeting least developed countries

A first measure of whether the service is achieving its objectives is if UN Online Volunteers are making a contribution where it is most needed. Data collected by the Online Volunteering management statistics allowed for geographic distribution of assignments for 2013. Cross tabulating this data with UNDP’s Human Development Index (HDI) groupings demonstrates a inverse correlation between number of assignments received per country and the location on the index. Countries with the lowest score on the HDI received an average of 104 assignments per country, whereas those high human development countries received only 15 assignments per country. The data excludes those assignments which are global in nature, or cover regional programmes. In other words, those countries most in need of contributions to peace and development outcomes were indeed receiving most of the UN Online Volunteer assignments.

\textsuperscript{21} “Effectiveness: The extent to which the development intervention’s objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance. Also used as an aggregate measure of (or judgment about) the merit or worth of an activity, i.e. the extent to which an intervention has attained, or is expected to attain, its major relevant objectives efficiently in a sustainable fashion and with a positive institutional development impact.” Source: OECD Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management.
Table 12 Geographic distribution of UN Online Volunteer assignments (excluding regional and global assignments)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Development Level</th>
<th>Average Volunteers per Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>2249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4460</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2014 Online Volunteering service Management Reports, 2014 UNDP HDR.

**Improvements in the areas of distinctive contribution (ADC)**

The areas of distinctive contribution (ADC) encompass access to goods and services, inclusion and participation, and community mobilization. UN Online Volunteers have made their greatest contribution in terms of access to services, largely due to the fact that UN Online Volunteers complete their assignments via the Internet.

As of 2008, the UNV Online Volunteering service began collecting statistics on the areas of distinctive contribution (ADC) of collaborations between organizations and UN Online Volunteers. ADCs consist of 17 established result areas at the outcome level which were reported on by both organizations and UN Online Volunteers at the completion of the assignments. These outcomes ranged from improvements in access, to improvements in coordination and capacities. Two ADCs dominated the data collected by organizations in terms of the contribution of UN Online Volunteers since 2007:

- 36% selected: Enhanced capacity of host organizations to deliver public services;
- 19% selected: Improved availability of information on public services or access to services;
- 45%: Remaining 15 ADCs.

Of the remaining 15 ADCs, the role of the UNV Online Volunteering service has hovered between 0 and 10% since 2008, with many of those better suited to a physical presence. For example, only 2% of contributions were towards strengthening community leadership; 2% towards enhanced physical infrastructure and 1% towards improving services for marginalized groups. In such areas, the service was able to expand its reach, but not by enough to change the relative distribution of ADCs carried out by UN Online Volunteers.

**Task Distribution**

As shown in the table below, the task distribution of valid opportunities is also centered on a limited number of tasks. Once again, these were largely linked to access to services. Almost half of all opportunities were for writing and editing and translation tasks.
Table 13 Task distribution of all UN Online Volunteer opportunities since 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Distribution</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing and editing</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project development and management</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT development</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination and facilitation</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and coaching</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Online Volunteering service Management Reports

Finding 6: Since 2007, the UNV Online Volunteering service has significantly expanded its mobilization and diversified the composition of volunteers. Not only has the opportunity for volunteerism been expanded through the UNV Online Volunteering service, but specific target groups – persons with disabilities, youth, women and volunteers from developing countries – have gained or expanded their access to these opportunities. In many cases, the diversity and mobilization of UN Online Volunteers remains a defining characteristic of the service.

Diversifying and mobilizing

Growth in online volunteer opportunities since 2007 has been an important achievement and success factor as defined by the 2006 project document. This has been accompanied by an important engagement of female volunteers and volunteers from developing countries. Female volunteers have continued to comprise the majority of all UN Online Volunteers since 2007, as shown in the table below. Data from 2014 suggests that 58% of all UN Online Volunteers are women. From a gender perspective, this compares favourably with UN Volunteers who work onsite and where between 37% and 48% of all volunteers were female, for international and national UN Volunteers respectively. In particular, female UN Online Volunteers responded to open questions related to the positives of online volunteering, including the flexibility to carry out volunteer assignments in different phases of life: One respondent stated: “With young children, it’s much easier to volunteer online since I can work on my schedule.”

---

Another respondent wrote: “I have recently had a baby, so onsite volunteering wasn’t an option at the moment for me, which is why I looked into online volunteering.”

Table 14 Percentage of female UN Online Volunteers (2007-2014)

![Percentage of female UN Online Volunteers (2007-2014)](chart)

**Source:** Online Volunteering service Management Reports

The Online Volunteering service’s collection of data regarding persons with disabilities allows UNV to report on this information on a yearly basis. Importantly, the UNV Online Volunteering service has seen incremental growth in persons with disabilities carrying out assignments. The Table below presents this growth since 2007. The number of UN Online Volunteers with disabilities has remained at roughly 2 percent of all UN Online Volunteers over the past five years.

Table 15 Number of UN Online Volunteers with disabilities (2007-2014)

![Number of UN Online Volunteers with disabilities, 2007-2014](chart)

**Source:** Online Volunteering service Management Reports

The UNV Online Volunteering service has also demonstrated diversity in terms of the age of UN Online Volunteers. Since 2007, more than 60 percent of all UN Online Volunteers have been between the ages of...
18-29. In 2014, 61% were in the 18-29 age group compared with 29% in the 30-41 age group. Remaining UN Online Volunteers were above the age of 41.

Table 16: Age breakdown of UN Online Volunteers

![Age breakdown of UN Online Volunteers (2007-2014)]

Source: Online Volunteering service Management Reports

The geographic distribution of volunteers has similarly enjoyed an important level of diversity over time; in 2013 for example, UN Online Volunteers from 170 countries contributed to assignments in 87 countries. In addition to these 87 countries, a significant number of assignments were deemed to be “global” or “regional” in nature, and could not be assigned to any one country.

Finding 7: UNV Online Volunteering service has played a limited advocacy role for the promotion of online volunteerism.

The UNV Online Volunteering service team has had a limited scope or scale to promote online volunteerism at a global level. UNV plays an active role in the promotion of volunteerism that is greatly appreciated by other VIOs interviewed. However, these organizations did not see UNV supporting global meetings or advocacy efforts directly specifically at online volunteerism. This has been due to limited resources on the part of the team to expand into knowledge generation or to commit resources to advocate and promote the UNV Online Volunteering service or online volunteering more broadly.

However, UNV Online Volunteering service expansion as per the UNV Strategic Framework is greatly dependent upon increasing the number of receiving organizations available and actively posting opportunities. Therefore, limiting the outreach and advocacy in support of online volunteering will have a deleterious effect on expanding online volunteerism in the coming years and meeting the goals set out in the Strategic Framework. As noted by a representative of another VIO providing online volunteers: “...the key is to expand the number of opportunities for the (online) volunteers...we will have no problem finding the online volunteers to fill them.”

The service’s efforts to expand advocacy has focused on the following:

- Regular communication with registered UN Online Volunteers and existing organizations partnering with the UNV Online Volunteering service. This includes online newsletters and other communications with volunteers and organizations;
- Awards for outstanding UN Online Volunteers;
- Training and communication materials, including a briefing kit, provided to UNV Programme Officers and field units at the country level to encourage and support their own promotion efforts;
- Engagements with existing VIOs which have existing or potential online volunteering programmes of their own;
- Engagements with key donors who carry out advocacy and promotional engagements in their own countries and;
- A 2014 partnership meeting, bringing together all stakeholders working in volunteerism.

In 2014, a Razorfish marketing report reviewed the success of UNV and the UNV Online Volunteering service in marketing and promoting their services. Among the report’s conclusions was the need to promote awareness of the service to more non-users.

Crowd Worker Survey

Overall knowledge of the UN Online Volunteering service remained limited for a number of stakeholders over the course of the evaluation. For the purposes of this evaluation, a contingent of online crowd workers representing 16 countries was solicited through MTurk to respond to a limited survey of nine questions related to their knowledge and interest in online volunteering. It was suggested that this group might provide a baseline and useful comparator group for the purposes of the evaluation. Given that these respondents complete paid tasks online on a regular basis, they represent a population whose level of connectivity should be seen as very high.

Survey data revealed that knowledge of UNV and online volunteering was limited among the respondents. While 38% of respondents were familiar with UNV, online volunteering was only familiar to 11% of survey respondents.

Table 17: Online crowd worker survey response on familiarity with online volunteering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Familiarity with online volunteering</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure, 13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, 11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, 76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 Survey of Crowd-workers
Table 18 Online crowd worker survey response on familiarity with UN Volunteers

| Familiarity with UN Volunteers | Yes, 38% | No, 62% |

Source: 2015 Survey of Crowd-workers

Online volunteering for development

The advocacy role in online volunteering outlined in the 2007 project extended to the development of knowledge about online volunteering for development (OV4D). Thus far, the most important contribution to this end has been a chapter within the 2011 UNV’s State of the World’s Volunteerism Report.

Interviews with other VIOs working in online volunteerism, including many who provide competing online volunteering services, reveal that the UNV Online Volunteering service has been a valued and engaged leader in sharing information and lessons on its experience. Knowledge generation on OV4D among stakeholders and other VIOs has been limited, although most agree that the potential for greater learning is high.

In regard to advancing advocacy on ICT as part of OV4D, the UNV Online Volunteering service is not currently engaged with key global ICT actors in this field. As such, it has not been an active player in advocating to grow Internet usage in developing countries, or to seek ways in which online volunteers in developing countries can be afforded improved (or free) access to Internet facilities. One VIO has aimed to partner directly with private sector companies working in ICT and have developed very user-friendly platforms to integrate directly with the private sector. This has brought them closer to private sector ICT actors.

Finding 8: In some instances, the UNV Programme Officers have been strategic assets at the forefront of promoting the service to organizations. This is expected to increase under the new Strategic Framework

UNV Programme Officers

Interviews with UNV Programme Officers in a number of countries have elucidated the multi-functional role of the field units at the country level. UNV Programme Officers

I was happy to notice that one of the UN agencies had signed up for the service themselves recently, rather than relying on me to support them…

(UNV Programme Officer)
and field unit staff have strategic assets at the disposition of the UNV Online Volunteering service in the promotion and marketing of the service. They have had two key roles in supporting and promoting online volunteering: first in expanding the service and second in solidifying the service quality and operation.

**Expansion** – Many UNV Programme Officers actively promote the UNV Online Volunteering service as part of the job description. This includes promotional meetings and one-on-one engagements with organizations to talk about online volunteering. While meeting with UN agencies might involve discussions about both UN Volunteers and UN Online Volunteers, those discussions with CSOs are more targeted towards the UNV Online Volunteering service. Some UNV Programme Officers have noted that as of 2014, their work planning includes targets for opportunity development of UN Online Volunteers. This data is monitored by headquarters staff in Bonn.

**Operational Support** – As opportunities are generated for UN Online Volunteers at the country level, the UNV Programme Officers and field units are regularly solicited by the organizations to support the process. For example, UNV Programme Officers and field units have helped to edit descriptions of opportunities, provided samples for organizations, and supported the selection, communication and monitoring of the UN Online Volunteers themselves. Interviews suggest that these instances of operational support facilitated the efforts of organizations to take the first step in engaging UN Online Volunteers, in the hopes that the organizations see the early benefit of the service and invest more time accordingly.

**Finding 9:** The UNV Online Volunteering service has made some efforts in expanding its data collection on development and peace results, but more work is left to do.

While the UNV Online Volunteering service has been grounded by its theory of change, there is increasing pressure to better measure the contributions of all volunteers towards peace and development. This pressure exists across the organization as well as with donors and other VIOs. Interviews with key informants have underlined the importance of improving results reporting at the outcome and impact levels.

In addition to the ADCs, the UNV Online Volunteering service has provided a breakdown of development topics and tasks as additional criteria for collecting and measuring development outcomes.

More recently, efforts have been made inside UNV to harmonize the collection of outcome level data within the organization across UN Volunteers and UN Online Volunteers. In addition, UNV is aiming to use the strategic frameworks of partner UN agencies to document the results of UN Volunteers and Online Volunteers. The basis for discussions on results has been the Volunteer Reporting System (VRS), discussions to which the UNV Online Volunteering service has been party in 2014.
4.3 Impact

Impact refers to the positive and negative long-term changes produced by the UNV Online Volunteering service, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. This involves the main impacts and effects resulting from the activity on key development indicators. The examination also seeks to learn about the real difference that occurred as a result of the service, and who was affected.

Finding 10: The Online Volunteering service has contributed to MDG achievement and results in peace and development, particularly for CSOs. Moreover, it has transformed perceptions and practices involving volunteerism.

Surveys of volunteers and receiving organizations provided a general sense of the contribution of UN Online Volunteers. Surveys of volunteers and organizations offer perceptual data on the achievement of development outcomes affected by the UNV Online Volunteering service. Additionally, interview data adds illustrative examples of the types of contributions noted by organizations and volunteers alike. Together, these data sources provide a portrait of the impact of the Online Volunteering service.

Receiving Organizations

The organizational survey results confirm the positive contribution made by UN Online Volunteers to peace and development results. In all aspects of contribution, organizations display significant levels of agreement with statements not only regarding peace and development results, but also in terms of their long-term organizational commitment towards volunteerism. The top contributions point to the effect of UNV Online Volunteering service on their commitment to volunteerism and actions in favour of volunteerism, with 87% and 84% of respondents in agreement. The lowest contribution according to organizational respondents was the improved innovation offered by the UNV Online Volunteering service; in this case only 69% felt in agreement.

Table 19: Survey respondent agreement with contributions to key results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contribution</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased our organization’s openness to diversity</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led to our organization taking positive actions in favour of volunteerism</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positively affected our organization’s commitment towards volunteerism</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased our organization’s level of innovation</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased our organization’s peace and development results</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 Survey of receiving organizations
In interviews, organization staff regularly pointed to institutional arrangements to facilitate volunteerism in their organization, and heightened openness to using UN Online Volunteers to support programmes and projects.

When reviewing this data by type of organization, CSOs have a slightly greater appreciation for the impact of UN Online Volunteers as compared to UN organizations; for example, 78% of civil society organizations agree (strongly or somewhat) that the service has increased peace and development results compared to 72% for UN organizations.

Table 20: Survey respondent agreement with contributions to peace and development results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engaging UN Online Volunteers has increased our organization’s peace and development results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 survey of receiving organizations

Interviews with CSOs point to several factors which have created this dynamic relative to UN organizations over the long-term. CSOs are generally smaller organizations which benefit to a greater extent from the incremental expertise offered by the UNV Online Volunteering service.

Our UN Online Volunteers are a mix of professionals building new capacities and experts. Many are growing new skills even as they bring skills, ideas, enthusiasm and commitment. In some instances we were looking for more experienced professionals in order to save time. We did not expect the overwhelming response to some of our post and keeping up has been a challenge. However, overall we could not have grown or accomplished as much as we have done in just one year without the commitment, hard work and expertise of our volunteers. (CSO Respondent)

As shown in the table below, across the contribution areas of UN Online Volunteers, CSO respondents consistently express greater satisfaction with the service than their UN counterparts. The UNV Online Volunteering service is unique within UNV in terms of having an engagement with civil society. Clearly, the results below confirm the value-added of this engagement.
Table 21: Survey respondent agreement with contributions to key results, CSO and UN agency receiving organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Online Volunteering Service: Organizational Survey Results</th>
<th>Civil Society Organization</th>
<th>UN Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased our organization’s openness to diversity</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led to our organization taking positive actions in favour of…</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positively affected our organization’s commitment towards volunteerism</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased our organization’s level of innovation</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased our organization’s peace and development results</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 Survey of receiving organizations

**UN Online Volunteers**

From the point of view of UN Online Volunteers, 74% of survey respondents were satisfied with the achievement of peace and development results during their assignment. This satisfaction is notable despite a number of interviews and comments from UN Online Volunteers lamenting a lack of knowledge or communication about the long-term effects of their engagement.

...sometimes communication seems a little impersonal and there does not seem to be active or irregular contact from the host representative, so it seems uncertain if the output you’re giving is what is necessary for the volunteer program or not.

(UN Online Volunteer)
Table 22: UN Online Volunteer assessment of peace and development results

### I am satisfied with the achievement of peace and development results

- strongly disagree
- somewhat disagree
- somewhat agree
- strongly agree
- Not sure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UN Online Volunteer</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
<th>somewhat disagree</th>
<th>somewhat agree</th>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** 2015 survey of UN Online Volunteers

Across a range of contributions, the UN Online Volunteers provided additional perceptual data. The highest rate of satisfaction emerged from the personal development and learning from which UN Online Volunteers benefitted in their assignment; 84% of respondents agreed either “strongly” or “somewhat” with this contribution. Conversely, the lowest level of agreement from UN Online Volunteers came from the role that their assignments have in encouraging further volunteerism; here only 52% of respondents were in agreement. Responses to this question varied greatly, based on whether or not the UN Online Volunteer had completed their assignment or was currently completing their assignment: for those that had completed an assignment, 62% agreed that it led them to apply to other assignments with UNV; for those that were currently completing an assignment, however, only 40% agreed. Between men and women, a small gap also existed: for men, 58% agreed that their assignment led them to apply to other opportunities within UNV; for women, the figure was 47%.
Table 23: UN Online Volunteer assessment of key contributions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Level of Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the achievement of peace and development results</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed to my personal development and learning</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed to my professional growth and employability</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led me to apply to national or international volunteer assignments with UNV</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led me to apply to other volunteer assignments outside of UNV</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 survey of UN Online Volunteers

A second set of indicators was drawn from questions developed in the VRS system, allowing for potential comparison across different types of volunteers within the organization. They are presented in Table 24 below, and present the multi-faceted role of volunteerism. UN Online Volunteers recognize the personal benefit of the assignment most strongly in terms of applying knowledge and skills (89%), development knowledge and skills (84%) and personal and professional development (83%). UN Online Volunteers who responded to the survey are least in agreement with being supported by UNV, with only 61% in agreement with that statement. For UN Online Volunteers, this response is unsurprising given that the UNV Online Volunteering service acts largely as a silent interlocutor between the receiving organizations and the UN Online Volunteers, and purposely limits its communication with UN Online Volunteers themselves as a way of giving receiving organizations the leadership on assignments.
Table 24: UN Online Volunteer survey response on impact of assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Online Volunteer's assignment</th>
<th>Percent who either &quot;somewhat agree&quot; or &quot;strongly agree&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valuable for my personal and professional development</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My host organisation recognises the contribution I make</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During my assignment I feel supported by my host organisation</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During my assignment I feel supported by UNV</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to further develop my knowledge and skills</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to apply my knowledge and skills</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2015 survey of UN Online Volunteers

Finding 11: On the part of UN Online Volunteers, there is a correlation between online volunteerism and a future commitment towards volunteering.

The impact of the UNV Online Volunteering service on the UN Online volunteers themselves can be significant, particularly if there is a positive experience to reinforce volunteerism as a way of life. Survey data of volunteers does indicate that registering or completing assignments does indeed encourage the UN Online Volunteers to engage in other forms of volunteerism.

Data presented below suggests that the willingness to offer services as a volunteer does tend to increase or at least remain unchanged once someone has registered with the UNV Online Volunteering service. It should be noted that this data refers to both UN Online Volunteers who have completed an assignment as well as those users who have only registered for the service. While a low percentage of respondents (between 8% and 15%) from both groups had a decreased willingness to volunteer, 40% and 56% increased (either somewhat or strongly) their willingness to volunteer online and 41% and 44% increased their willingness to volunteer onsite. One hypothesis for those with an unchanged willingness to volunteer is that this group represents a population who are already strongly committed to volunteerism, and have little time to further their respective commitments.
Table 25: Survey from users on willingness to offer volunteer services: a) Those who became UN Online Volunteers and b) Those who did not become UN Online Volunteers.

Source: 2015 survey of UN Online Volunteers

Finding 12: The strength of relationships developed with UN Online Volunteers since 2007 is a key unintended impact of the UNV Online Volunteering Service.

From the perspective of organizations and volunteers alike, the impact of the UNV Online Volunteering service has been profound and has included many unintended impacts.

One noteworthy is the longstanding relationship which UN Online Volunteers have developed with receiving organizations. In many cases these relationships were maintained well beyond the scope of the assignment. Organizations interviewed have been known to sometimes take steps to communicate about upcoming assignments directly with previous UN Online Volunteers, based on those relationships, rather than using the UNV Online Volunteering service. The level of communication in an online environment led some UN Online Volunteers to switch to onsite volunteering, or to work directly with organizations with whom they had previously volunteered online. One current UN Online Volunteer interviewed as part of the evaluation admitted that she was regularly in contact with one of the organizations in order to
“...check up and see how things were going.” Another organization responded as follows: “... some online volunteers turned into on-site volunteers and when they came to know about our actual work on ground, they became our good will ambassadors that benefited the organization further.”

A second unintended impact revolves around the strength of the relationship which has developed between those who have registered as UN Online Volunteers and the UNV Online Volunteering service. This has been due to regular communications with those who have registered, include monthly newsletters as well as other updates. Over the course of this evaluation, it has been noted that UN Online Volunteers are generally very active participants in all aspects of communications, including in responding to survey requests and interviews. This reflects a strong level of goodwill among UN Online Volunteers, which can be seen as a valuable asset for UNV as an organization. Mobilizing this asset and protecting its value remains an important consideration for the UNV in its future programming and engagements in the post-2015 agenda.
4.4 Efficiency

In the OECD definition of efficiency, the more significant the positive result of an intervention for every unit of input, the greater the efficiency. According to the OECD, this generally requires comparing alternative approaches to achieving the same outputs, to see whether the most efficient process has been adopted.

To review the question of efficiency, this evaluation assesses UNV Online Volunteering service’s use of resources in creating an enabling environment for maintaining and expanding its services. The question can be phrased as follows: how efficiently does the UNV Online Volunteering service’s operating model – based on strong active participation of UN Online Volunteers and organizations to facilitate most aspects of their collaboration – provide value in terms of the mainstreaming and coordination multiplier effects. Document analysis and key stakeholder interviews were carried out with other analogous organizations to assess key areas: the management of partnerships and resources under the purview of the UNV Online Volunteering service and; the development of systems and standards to monitor these resources, systems that are in place for monitoring and reporting on projects and which have some bearing on resource efficiency. This section is divided into two parts: efficient use of resources (including human and financial) and development of systems to efficiently monitor and track progress.

Finding 13: UNV Online Volunteering service demonstrates good value for money, integrating several mechanisms to ensure optimal use of human and financial resources and a strong pattern of record keeping.

A review of available management statistics of the UNV Online Volunteering service underline that the service made a concerted effort to manage overhead and direct costs without compromising programming effectiveness. As is the case for project-based services with limited funding, the service exhibited a culture of strong resource management and data gathering within the team office and other project operations. Management of Human Resources

Even before 2007, the UNV Online Volunteering service team has been closely monitoring use of human resources within its team. The service tripled its number of opportunities since 2007; this growth was managed by two programme staff and one IT staff through to 2009, when a third programme staff member was added and the IT staff was transferred to a support staff role. A fourth programme staff was added in 2012. At the same time, management, screening and support to new organizations was needed for 119 new organizations and 3,245 assignments in 2007; by 2013 this had grown to 663 new organizations and close to 16,000 assignments. Much of this growth has taken place under a budgetary framework of roughly $400,000 per year, excluding costs for special projects. In other words, the UNV

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23 “Efficiency: A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results.” Source: OECD Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management
Online Volunteering Service team has improved efficiency on a year by year basis, growing the service while keeping core operational costs in check.

A shift in the management of resources occurred in 2011/12, when staffing shifted from functional tasks to geographic representation. Each staff member covers opportunities and organizations within certain geographic regions, maximizing language and contextual skills while also building up relationships with relevant UNV Programme Officers in country offices. Beyond core tasks, each staff member is responsible for additional items, such as website development, newsletters, awards, and training.

Optimal use of available human resources and expertise was also noted through the conduct of joint training sessions of UNV Programme Officers and in other activities within the organization.

Management Reports
A desk top review of the online OV Management Reports uncovered a general pattern of strong record keeping in relation to volunteers, organizations and assignment to fully report on results. More specifically, the following was available:

- Detailed data on opportunities, assignments and feedback from both UN Online Volunteers and organizations;
- Data on users, applicants, and Online Volunteers, including gender, age and geographic distribution;
- Reporting on internal monitoring, including administrative management of opportunities and organizations and estimates of number of opportunities managed per administrator.

The implication of this record keeping is that UNV Online Volunteering service maintains a regularly updated set of records on which to base a full assessment of its effectiveness or its relevance, as well as its efficiency. Updating records on a regular basis has allowed the service to track progress and proactively adjust based on assignment turnover and volume of requests.

In discussion with personnel located in the field, all indications pointed to a UNV Online Volunteering service team that was highly responsive, timely and detailed with regards to their review, approval and posting of opportunities, as well as feedback on similar matters.

In the case of cost-sharing donors, many suggested a good level of satisfaction will all aspects of management and reporting, but that the UNV Online Volunteering service could provide a more regular update on the progress of the respective country’s national volunteers or civil society organizations. While it appears that data is plentiful, the breadth of the indicators available from the UNV Online Volunteering service team are not yet fully availed to key cost-sharing donors. This is one aspect which was being reviewed by the team in 2014.

Finding 14: The UNV Online Volunteering service is good value for money for receiving organizations, and efforts are made to ensure high quality applicants while supporting some good management practices by receiving organizations.
This finding is primarily drawn from interview data from both organizations and UN Online Volunteers themselves. As noted in previous findings and tables, organizations have consistently underlined the cost-effectiveness of the service as a key attribute of the UN Online Volunteering service. The benefits of the service to organizations are vast, and are even quantifiable for those organizations whose only alternative was to hire the expertise. But it is consistently noted throughout interviews that the service is not costless, and in particular that both the UN Online Volunteers as well as organizations must commit to certain
practices in order to succeed and provide efficient services. Three of these practices are transparency and communication, infrastructure and technology and oversight.

**Transparency and Communication:**
While all organizations need to communicate to staff, interns and partners, the unique aspect of working with UN Online Volunteers is that the nature and frequency of communication may differ from that found in other arrangements. UN Online Volunteers frequently comment on differing levels of understanding about the frequency and quality of communication with organizations. Similarly, organizations comment on a desire for UN Online Volunteers to communicate in a timely and efficient manner, and to offer a certain flexibility in their availability. Moreover, they expect that UN Online Volunteers will have the skills to deliver the services offered. Differing expectations and levels of transparency can result in lower overall satisfaction.

**Infrastructure and technology**
One commonly cited complaint regarding communication is the limited availability of adequate infrastructure and technology on the part of either UN Online Volunteers or the organizations in order to maintain an appropriate level of engagement. Here again, the overall efficiency of the service can be negatively affected. In one case, a CSO director commented on how his organization could only connect to the Internet properly a few times per week during certain seasons of the year. This had strong implications on the ability to transfer information, communicate with the UN Online Volunteer and benefit from the service.

**Oversight and Feedback**
Management oversight and feedback loops ensure the service provided by the UN Online Volunteer meets the needs of the organization. The UNV Online Volunteering service implements a number of steps to screen registrants and organizations so as to improve the chances of an efficient level of engagement. At the same time, once the relationship is established, the service allows organizations a great deal of accountability and latitude to manage their needs with regards to tasks being implemented by the UN Online Volunteers. When either an organization or a UN Online Volunteer expresses a high level of dissatisfaction, follow-up occurs to resolve outstanding issues. Compared to other VIOs which may play a more engaged role in bringing together and managing online volunteers, the receiving organization takes on most leadership in the UNV Online Volunteering service once the connection is established.
4.5 Sustainability
This section of the report looks at sustainability, notably the ability of UNV Online Volunteering service results to be maintained over time. It also refers to the financial sustainability of the UNV Online Volunteering service in terms of its ability to continue operations beyond the funding from key donors.

Finding 15: The UNV Online Volunteering service has been integrated into UNV in a more structured manner in recent years.
UNV Online Volunteering service has gone through significant growth and expansion since 2007, with implications for programming, staffing, and systems. Of note, is that it carried out a marketing study in 2014 as well as engaged with private sector entities to inquire about and engage in potential partnerships in order to assure its sustainability. Additional examples of its integration are as follows:

- Some UNV Programme Officers and field units have received an induction on the UN Online Volunteer Service during their formal UNV induction training; interviews with several Programme Officers suggest that these officers have now received targets for the development of new opportunities for UN Online Volunteers in their country. It also appear that these are monitored throughout the year;
- UNV Online Volunteering targets have been included in the IRRM of the UNV Strategic Framework.

Finding 16: Financial viability of the UNV Online Volunteering service has been largely assured by external cost-sharing. Its future is hampered by lack of a clear financial strategy and growing competition from other VIOs for supply of opportunities.
Interviews with cost-sharing donors and financial data within UNV suggest that the financial viability of the UNV Online Volunteering service since 2007 has been largely met by cost-sharing donors. Since 2007, Australia, Belgium, Spain and Ireland have funded 69% of the UNV Online Volunteering Service’s budget, with the remaining 31% coming from the SVF and UNV extra budgetary funding. However, the future finances of the service have not yet been assured. In particular, while the UNV Online Volunteering service’s growth and engagement has been unprecedented since 2007, this has not been matched by a commensurate growth in funding (internal or external) for the service. As the 2014 Strategic Framework has highlighted, the current target of UNV Online Volunteering service requires additional growth in opportunities in the coming years through 2017. Without funds to invest in new tools, software and a revamped service as well as strengthened marketing and promotion efforts, the service will not meet its growth targets. In 2014, the Online Volunteering service team launched a concept note in order to raise $3 million for the service. It proposes to further expand the service through additional technical innovations, expanded usability and accessibility as well as a platform which can engage with private sector partners.

As noted by other VIOs, the future on online volunteering is heavily dependent upon the continued creation of new opportunities to meet the demand from available online volunteers. Much like UNV, analogous services have an excess of willing online volunteers as compared with available opportunities. Pressure by all VIOs to foment a supply of opportunities in the future is likely to place UNV under continued competitive pressures.

Finding 17: The Online Volunteering service’s flexibility and short-term profile can be a detriment to the broader capacity development role sought in UNV’s Strategic Framework.
This finding responds primarily to the forward-looking nature of this evaluation, rather than the retrospective impact evaluation that was set out in the ToRs.

The demand-driven nature of UN Online Volunteer assignments tends to emphasize short and flexible collaborations between UN Online Volunteers and organizations, as opposed to longer relationships...
between both parties. While these collaborations clearly respond to the immediate needs of the receiving organizations they are often limited in scope and duration.

This is particularly relevant given the emphasis within the UNV Strategic Framework on capacity development, as one of five priorities for the coming four-year period. In essence, both UN Online Volunteers and organizations acknowledge that the UNV Online Volunteering service provides temporary capacity support to organizations. However, in some cases, the UNV Online Volunteering service is a victim of its own success; several interviewees stated that stand-alone tasks were completed by UN Online Volunteers without a commensurate “development” component. So instead of capacity development, in some instances the service is seen as simply “capacity” for the receiving organization.

UN Online Volunteers are of mixed views on this matter; in some cases during interviews they lament the lack of a stronger relationship between UN Online Volunteer and organization. This was particularly noted by several experienced UN Online Volunteers. In these instances, they felt a strong inclination to collaborate and support in a meaningful and substantive way. One interviewee suggested that: “...I have a lot of energy to give them, but they only ask me to help on small projects.” Equally, one civil society organization respondent requested a similar level of longer-term collaboration, seeking: “...tools / incentives for forming long term relationships with volunteers.” Several survey respondents expressed a desire to be a UN Volunteer working on site. Here too was a strongly expressed desire to play a more substantive role within an organization over a longer duration. Conversely, a number of volunteers expressed their satisfaction with having clearly defined tasks to complete within set timeframes, irrespective of whether or not there was a capacity development component attached. As stated by one online volunteer in Nigeria: “There should often be short assignments. The goals of any project should clear and decisive.”

From the perspective of receiving organizations, the need to engage more directly with these organizations through online capacity development and other online tools has win-win potential. For UNV, it provides a window to an organization’s management and structure in order to better determine future needs, preferences and hence better develop future opportunities. Other VIOs have demonstrated significant value in fomenting such an online capacity development presence. For the receiving organization, they gain more regular online contact with UNV in a learning context. 

We wish to suggest that UNV Online Volunteering service organize online training courses/programs on specialized fields.

(CSO, Cameroon)

24 The OVS website provides a link to the UNDP website and provides a clear definition of Capacity Development: Capacity is the ability of individuals, institutions and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner. Capacity Development (CD) is thereby the process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time.
This is particularly relevant for small CSOs with limited resources for their own training and capacity development.
Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned

Since the MDGs were first introduced, the international development landscape has become more complex. Recognition that the development process involves many more partners, not just governments, has paved the way for volunteerism of many kinds to emerge as contributors to peace and development. Within this landscape, volunteer groups are now cited in a range of resolutions as one such important partner. The most recent UN Resolution 67/290, for example, which set up the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), named volunteer groups as an official stakeholder whom member states should involve in their discussion on and monitoring of sustainable development goals. Increasingly, the role of UN Online Volunteers within this volunteer family has been secured.

The impact evaluation concludes that the UNV Online Volunteering service has been a leading service in its field. Since 2007, it has demonstrated significant growth while maintaining an enviable level of satisfaction with the service, by both the receiving organizations as well as the UN Online Volunteers themselves. It is an entity with the global reach and capacity to mobilize a large and diverse number of people as online volunteers for peace and development programmes, enhanced by south-south and triangular cooperation.

In terms of its effectiveness, the service has largely met its theory of change as set out in its 2007 project document, although much can be done to expand the advocacy role that the service plays. The UNV Online Volunteering service’s longer-term contribution to peace and development results is perceived as high by stakeholders, but the threshold of assessment of these results is variable due to the nature of the tasks along the results chain as well as the lack of continuity between UN Online Volunteers and organizations, which makes feedback difficult in the long term.

While the UNV Online Volunteering service is itself efficient, and provides a service that is seen as efficient, there is considerable risk to its financial and technological viability in the future. Concurrent studies demonstrate a crowded marketplace for online volunteering services and being on the cutting edge of innovation is a critical indicator of success.

From the above general conclusions, it is evident that in its lifespan since 2007, the UNV Online Volunteering service has played a marked role in expanding global volunteerism. It has established both a stronger presence within the organizational structure of UNV and has promoted the mainstreaming of online volunteerism around the world. It has enhanced the relevance of UNV field units, and has brought civil society organizations closer to the United Nations broadly and to UNV specifically. In spite of this, its status going forward to meet UNV’s ambitious targets is not assured.

The recommendations that follow are designed not so much to retrospectively correct any of the shortcomings which this evaluation may have uncovered. Rather, they have been developed in the spirit of organizational learning to complement and support the UNV Online Volunteering service as it moves to adapt to the UNV Strategic Framework and expand and modernize its service package and portfolio of partners.

The recommendations concentrate on three primary areas that correspond to this evaluation’s topology of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, a primary and overarching recommendation has been set out which recognizes that the financial needs of the UNV Online Volunteering service to meet its projected expansion vastly exceeds its existing resource base. It is clear that more resources than appear to be available will be required over the next three to five years, according to the current concept note. This implies that existing donors will have to recommit to the UNV Online Volunteering service and new
entities may need to engage support of the service. Alternatively, this impact evaluation has presented some potential for further revenue generation in the future, as highlighted in Finding 4.

Recommendation 1: In line with Finding 7 on the limited success in leading advocacy for global online volunteerism, it is recommended that UNV continues to pursue a proactive campaign of advocacy and fund raising with international partners, national governments and donors, including consideration of mutually supporting activities with key strategic partners in areas such as online technology, OV4D, south-south partnerships, youth employment and employability, and gender empowerment through the Internet. Engaging in social media to help expand the network of private sector and development partners and piloting of innovative tools to generate new information (SMS, real-time data collection, analytics of current UN Online Volunteers) may be one critical element which UNV can offer in these partnerships.

Recommendation 2: UNV should develop a more formalized means of coordination and communication across its network of cost-sharing donors and online volunteer partners, with the view to the eventual promulgation of more common and harmonized approaches which can be shared proactively with prospective donors. This may include more regular feedback on national UN Online Volunteers engaged globally and in key partner countries. It may also include a formal Advisory Group comprised of key government and private sector donors to help advance innovation in the coming three to five years. This recommendation responds to Finding 13, which pointed to a need to better inform and share management statistics with cost-sharing donors. It was understood that this recommendation was already being partially addressed at the time of the evaluation.

Recommendation 3: The UNV Online Volunteering service should develop a multi-faceted online training and mentoring program for online volunteers and organizations, with the latter receiving particular attention in order to ensure strengthened engagement and communication channels with receiving organizations. In order to expand the services on offer, the UNV Online Volunteering service should engage with its stakeholders in a dialogue about how to expand the capacity development features of its service. This may include training materials, webinars and online mentoring programmes (enlisting online volunteers) to develop the capacities of receiving organizations, online volunteers themselves, and other interested partners. With this, the future relevance of the UNV Online Volunteering service will be strengthened by a “capacity development” component of online volunteerism for those organizations and users who wish to benefit from it. This recommendation responds to Finding 17 on the win-win benefits of engaging in online capacity development activities with a focus on receiving organizations.

Recommendation 4: Finding 13 pointed to the efficiency of the UNV Online Volunteering service team and the challenges in assuring the continued growth of its portfolio to meet the needs of the UNV Strategic Framework. It is recommended that UNV increase the size and responsibility of the UNV Online Volunteering service team at Headquarters at it grows the number of opportunities such that the overall satisfaction rate of UN Online Volunteers and of receiving organizations is maintained at its current levels. Of note is the importance both of expanding to new organizations and of managing and maintaining relationships with existing organizations in light in increasing competition. Therefore a service which increases opportunities but reduces the satisfaction rate places the long-term sustainability of the service at risk.

Recommendation 5: It is suggested that UNV engage in or lead a dialogue among UN agencies and the global community of volunteer organizations on the topic of online volunteering, with a particular focus on some of the principle challenges and opportunities in the coming years. UNV’s interest in the fair development of and access to ICT in developing countries is reason enough for its involvement in such a venture. Moreover, it would assure a leadership position for UNV on the subject matter. This recommendation responds to Finding 7 on the limited advocacy role played by UNV thus far, as well as
Finding 12 on the tremendous potential which is available to UNV through the positive communication channels developed with UN Online Volunteers as well as with receiving organizations.

Additionally, several lessons learned have been gleaned from the generalized findings and data collected over the course of this evaluation:

LL1: The range of qualities and skills of UN Online Volunteers varies dramatically and results in a high level of competition for the limited number of available assignments. Top UN Online Volunteers are highly sought-after by receiving organizations, and across many VIOs, the availability of online volunteers far exceeds the supply of viable opportunities.

LL2: Receiving organizations of UN Online Volunteers tend to underestimate the level of management that is required to successfully engage UN Online Volunteers due to distance, language, cultural impediments and technological differences.

LL3: UNV Programme Officers are at the front-line of promotion of the UNV Online Volunteering service. When highly motivated, they have the potential to significantly contribute to meeting UNV’s ambitious target for the UNV Online Volunteering service’s generation of opportunities while maintaining its age, gender and geographic diversity.

LL4: Across different types of volunteer involving organizations, the highest focus is placed on management and support tools to maintain and grow the number of organizations which are willing to engage online volunteers. Capacity development of receiving organizations has been successful in other VIOs in this regard.

LL5: Better assessment of the contribution of volunteers (both online and onsite) to development results is a preoccupation of all volunteer organizations as they seek to better express their unique contribution to donors and their governments.

LL6: An innovative and transformative product such as that provided by the UNV Online Volunteering service can engage and expand its scope for gender equity and equality without specific targeting efforts towards women, even in developing countries.

LL7: Effective management of the UN Online Volunteer database and close scrutiny in terms of how and when communication takes place can lead to an important strategic asset for UNV.