

Findings

Impact of the programme

The impact of the UNV programme was determined based on an assessment of the extent to which the programme was able to achieve its objectives and fulfil its two main mandates – strengthening human and social capital in developing countries. In addition, the impact on the UNDP's four broad priority areas during the 10 years covered by the study was evaluated. This included an assessment of changes in the availability of jobs, the level of poverty, women's lives, and the environment. A summary of the findings relating to the impact of the programme are presented below, with more details given in Appendix A.

Changes in human capital

To assess changes in human capital, respondents were asked to list new skills or knowledge that they, or others in their communities or workplace, had learned. According to 9 out of 10 of the users and beneficiaries of the programme (90.3 per cent), the Volunteers had been able to transfer skills or knowledge as part of their assignment. The average number of skills, or areas in which new knowledge had been transferred by the Volunteers, was 2.8. Areas or fields in which transfer of skills and knowledge by the Volunteers took place included planning, administration, information, communication,

education, vocational training, family planning, health, nutrition, agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, fisheries, handicrafts, income generation, and community development.

Specific skills transferred by the Volunteers included, among others, project management, production of audio-visual materials, preparation of maps, computer programming, plumbing, car mechanics, garment making, curriculum development, development of teaching methods and materials, literacy for adults, preventive health care, personal hygiene, sanitation, disease control, vegetable growing, animal raising, poultry farming, fish farming, bee keeping, and jewellery making.

Based on not only the number of skills or the new knowledge transferred by the Volunteers, but also on the variety of different areas that the skills and knowledge represent, the Volunteers can be said to have had a positive impact on human capital in Nepal during the period covered by the study. This is notwithstanding the shortcoming of the number of new skills and new areas of knowledge as an indicator of human capital. It is, in addition, also important to note that other people in the communities and organizations where the Volunteers worked, but who did not have any contact with the Volunteers, also acquired a considerable amount of skills and knowledge, albeit in many cases in somewhat different areas than the users and beneficiaries of the UNV programme.

If a major change in human capital is understood as the acquisition of three or more skills, or new knowledge in three or more areas, there was a significant difference between the users and beneficiaries of the programme, on the one hand, and the reference group, on the other hand. Results of a logistic regression analysis showed that those who had contact with the Volunteers indicated significantly greater positive changes in human capital. The odds of a major positive change in human capital were 1.8 times greater among the users and beneficiaries of the programme than in the reference group. The odds, however, depended on how a major and minor change in human capital were defined. This needs to be kept in mind when presenting an overall positive conclusion of the impact of the UNV programme on human capital.¹

The biggest impact of the programme on human capital could be found in areas outside the capital city, Kathmandu, where the amount of skills and knowledge acquired by the users and beneficiaries was significantly greater than in the reference group. The users and beneficiaries of the programme also indicated that Volunteers in areas outside Kathmandu had transferred significantly more skills and knowledge than the Volunteers in Kathmandu. This could be because people in areas outside Kathmandu started from a lower level of skills and knowledge, or because the assignments of the Volunteers in Kathmandu were very different from those of the Volunteers outside the capital. This, however, does not change the basic finding of the study that the programme in terms of human capital development had its greatest impact in areas outside the capital city.

Changes in social capital

The second objective of the study focused on changes in social capital in communities or organizations where UN Volunteers had worked. The components of social capital that were measured included people's values and attitudes, motivation, cooperation, and participation in local affairs.

In terms of social capital, the Volunteers also appear to have had a positive impact. Four out of five of the respondents (ranging from 77.9 to 83.3 per cent) considered that the Volunteers had a positive or very positive effect on the values and attitudes, motivation, cooperation, and participation of people in the community or organization where a Volunteer had worked. Meanwhile, one in every five or six of the respondents (between 16.7 and 22.1 per cent) did not think the Volunteers had a positive effect on people's values and attitudes, motivation, cooperation, or participation in local affairs.

Respondents who had contact with the Volunteers reported a significantly larger positive change in social capital overall, measured as an unweighted average of the four components of social capital used in this study: change in people's values and attitudes, motivation, cooperation, and participation in local affairs. The biggest differences

between the users and beneficiaries of the programme, on the one hand, and the reference group, on the other hand, could be found in areas outside Kathmandu. The programme thus appears to have been most successful in terms of social capital development in areas outside the capital city.

Using multiple regression analyses, statistically significant differences in favour of the users and beneficiaries of the programme could be found with respect to three components of social capital: people's motivation, cooperation, and participation in local affairs. The results of logistic regression analyses were not statistically significant, but respondents who had contact with the Volunteers were 2.11 times more likely to indicate a positive change in people's participation in local affairs than those who had no contact with the Volunteers. The odds for a positive change were 1.65 times higher in the case of people's motivation among the respondents who had contact with the Volunteers compared to respondents who had no contact with the Volunteers. In the case of people's cooperation, the corresponding odds were 1.30 times higher, and in the case of people's values and attitudes 1.17 times higher.

Changes in jobs, poverty, women's lives, and the environment

To measure other outcomes of the work of the Volunteers, in addition to human and social capital formation, the effect of the Volunteers was assessed on the priority areas of the UNDP: job creation, poverty reduction, environmental protection, and advancement of women.

A large majority (between 55.9 and 66.9 per cent) considered the effect of the Volunteers on these four priority areas of the UNDP, jobs, poverty, environment, and women, to be positive or very positive. Approximately one-third of the respondents (between 32.5 and 42.9 per cent) did not think the Volunteers had any effect on the availability of jobs, the level of poverty, women's lives, or the environment. Only one or two respondents (0.6 or 1.2 per cent), how-

ever, thought the Volunteers had a negative or very negative effect on any one of the UNDP's four priority areas.

Positive changes relating to the availability of jobs, the level of poverty, and the environment that were attributed to the work of the Volunteers by the users and beneficiaries of the programme were significantly greater than the corresponding changes indicated by the reference group. Both multiple regression analyses and logistic regression analyses yielded the same results. The odds of a positive change among the users and beneficiaries were 1.58 times higher with respect to the availability of jobs, 2.25 times higher with respect to the level of poverty, and 2.28 times higher with respect to the environment, compared to the reference group. Users and beneficiaries in areas outside Kathmandu indicated significantly greater positive changes with respect to jobs, poverty, and the environment than the users and beneficiaries in Kathmandu.

In terms of changes in women's lives, on the other hand, those indicated by the respondents in the reference group were more positive than the changes in women's lives that were attributed to the work of the Volunteers, although the difference was not statistically significant, except in the capital Kathmandu. This is consistent with the finding that the programme appears to have had its biggest positive impact on the other three priority areas of the UNDP, jobs, poverty, and the environment, in locations outside the capital.

Perceived value of the programme

The assessment of the perceived value of the UNV programme was based on the following criteria: the relevance of the activities of the Volunteers, the performance of the Volunteers in comparison to other available alternatives, and the results of the activities of the Volunteers and their sustainability. A summary of the findings is given below. Additional details are given in Appendix B.

Overall, very few users and beneficiaries (between 3.0 and 10.8 per cent) gave a negative rating (very poor or poor) to any of the items

that were used to determine the perceived value of the programme. Although the middle option (OK) was selected by at least one in four respondents (between 24.9 and 42.0 per cent), a majority of the respondents (between 51.8 and 72.1 per cent) gave a positive rating (good or very good) to the different items that assessed the perceived value of the programme. In other words, there was a clear tilting of the responses towards the positive ratings.

In terms of negative responses, the largest number of the respondents (10.8 per cent) considered the continuation of the activities started by the Volunteers as very poor or poor. The long-term benefits of the activities of the Volunteers, a second aspect of sustainability, also had a comparable number of responses marked very poor or poor (8.4 per cent). A significant number (15.2 per cent) of the respondents also indicated no or very little use of skills or knowledge learned, which was the third aspect of sustainability measured.

Relevance

An overall assessment that can be made is that the programme was considered relevant to the needs of the country during the period covered by the study. This can be said based on the fact that almost two-thirds of the respondents (65.9 per cent) rated the relevance of the work of the Volunteers as good or very good, and more than half of them (54.1 per cent) indicated that the Volunteers did a job that no one else locally could have done. The work of the Volunteers was considered most relevant in areas outside Kathmandu, where UNV community workers were particularly perceived to have done a job that no one else locally could have done.

Performance of the Volunteers

In terms of the performance of the Volunteers, the programme scored well: three out of five (61.0 per cent) rated the effectiveness of the Volunteers as good or very good. More than two-thirds (69.5 per

cent) thought the performance of the UN Volunteers in comparison to other volunteers was good or very good.

When compared to international experts, more than half of the respondents (53.2 per cent) considered the performance of the Volunteers to be good or very good, and a very small number (8.9 per cent) indicated that the performance was poor or very poor. This is an interesting finding considering that the average cost of an international expert is normally at least three or four times that of a UN Volunteer.

More than two-thirds of the respondents (69.8 per cent) considered the performance of the Volunteers good or very good in comparison to the performance of other non-Nepalese nationals, such as expatriates on direct contract with the Nepalese Government, seconded, or on loan from another government.

Approximately half of the respondents (53.1 per cent) considered the performance of the Volunteers good or very good compared to the performance of Nepalese nationals. A rather large number of respondents (42.0 per cent) rated the performance of the Volunteers in comparison to a Nepalese national as OK. In this context it may also be worth noting that almost half (45.9 per cent) of the respondents had indicated that the Volunteers did a job that someone else locally could have done. What these findings seem to imply is that even if the overall performance of the Volunteers was considered good, the work of the Volunteers may in many cases not have been indispensable. This seems to have been the case particularly in the capital, Kathmandu.

Of the different questions that assessed the performance of the Volunteers, the only one where there was a significant difference in the rating of the UNV specialists and the UNV community workers was the one that compared the Volunteers to Nepalese nationals. In comparison to Nepalese nationals, the rating of the UNV community workers who had worked in Kathmandu was significantly more favourable than the rating of the UNV specialists who had worked in Kathmandu.

Results and sustainability

In terms of the results of the programme, almost three out of four respondents (72.1 per cent) considered these good or very good. This was true for UNV specialists and even more so for UNV community workers. Also, despite dissatisfaction by a small number of users and beneficiaries (8.4 per cent) with the long-term benefits of the activities of the Volunteers, a large majority of the respondents (63.5 per cent) considered these good or very good.

The overall performance of the programme in terms of the sustainability of the results can, however, not be considered entirely satisfactory given that only half of the respondents (51.8 per cent) considered the continuation of the activities started by the Volunteers good or very good, and taking into account that a significant number of respondents thought the continuation of the activities was poor or very poor (10.8 per cent). Moreover, less than half of the respondents (40.0 per cent) indicated that they or others in their community or organization had used skills or knowledge taught by the Volunteers a lot or very much. In the reference group, the mean use of skills and knowledge was somewhat higher than among the users and beneficiaries, but the difference was not statistically significant.

Other findings

In this section, the role of the head office of the UNV programme is reviewed, and the effect of external factors on the work of the Volunteers are summarized. Since data were collected from Volunteers as well as their former supervisors, co-workers, and beneficiaries, it was also possible to compare the assessments of the Volunteers of their work and performance with those of the users and beneficiaries of the programme. These results are also presented below, along with the views of the Volunteers of the perceived value of the programme to themselves. More details of the other findings of the study are given in Appendix B.

The role of UNV headquarters

A number of functions that the UNV headquarters perform were identified as critical in previous evaluations, or during the exploratory visits, and therefore are included in the study. Both previous evaluation reports and many of the users and the Volunteers interviewed during the exploratory visits were critical of the headquarters of the UNV programme with respect to a number of issues. Based on this study, however, the headquarters of the programme can be rather satisfied with its performance in the past.

Most of the users gave good marks to the UNV head office for the way in which it carried out its primary functions: the identification of Volunteers, matching of Volunteers with posts, and arranging for their recruitment. Three-quarters (75.0 and 74.5 per cent, respectively) considered the competence and motivation of the Volunteers good or very good, and approximately two-thirds (64.6 and 60.4 per cent, respectively) thought the matching of the Volunteers with posts and the recruitment process were good or very good. Among the Volunteers themselves, three-quarters (79.2 and 75.0 per cent, respectively) considered the matching and the recruitment process good or very good.

Responsibilities of the head office of the UNV programme also include ensuring that the host organization where a Volunteer works is adequately briefed, and that appropriate language and other training is provided to a Volunteer. Although there seems to be scope for improvement in these areas, particularly with regard to the language training, a large majority of the users (between 58.2 and 78.0 per cent) and Volunteers (between 68.9 and 74.4 per cent) considered that the effect of the briefing of the host organizations, and the language and other training, was positive or very positive.

The length of the assignment of the Volunteers, which in most cases was 2 years, was considered too short by nearly half of the Volunteers and half of the users. Approximately two in five of the users (41.2 per cent) and almost one in five of the Volunteers (16.7

per cent) perceived that this had a negative effect on the work of the Volunteers.

Findings from previous studies, which this study was able to confirm, were that the availability of co-workers, and to a lesser extent the management and supervision of the Volunteers, were considered problematic by a number of Volunteers (22.7 per cent and 14.6 per cent, respectively). These are issues, however, which the headquarters of the UNV programme has rather limited ways of influencing. Something that may be even more important than the availability of co-workers, which may have been overlooked in the past, is the (lack of) teaching or training experience of the Volunteers. The background data on the Volunteers indicated that none of them had any previous teaching or training experience. Four out of five had said that they did not have any experience and the rest did not respond to the question.

Of the Volunteers, one in five (19.2 per cent) of the UNV specialists and almost three-quarters (72.7 per cent) of the UNV community workers expressed dissatisfaction with their monthly living allowance. Almost half of the UNV community workers (44.4 per cent) thought that their living allowance had a negative or very negative effect on their work.

Although, based on the results of this survey, the overall assessment of the headquarters of the UNV programme is positive, there is no room for complacency. The study covers the period from 1987 to 1996, which means that the results pertaining to the identification, recruitment, and training of the Volunteers relate to a period before and up to 1994. It is therefore possible that the performance of the head office deteriorated in the early 1990s, at a time when the programme grew considerably and began funding projects of its own, which would explain the dissatisfaction expressed by a number of users and Volunteers during the exploratory visits in late 1995 and early 1996.

Another possible explanation of the difference in the views expressed by the current users and current Volunteers, and those of past users and past Volunteers, at least as far as the recruitment of a Vol-

unteer is concerned, is that the delays in the fielding of a Volunteer, for instance, may seem very important at the time a Volunteer arrives, but may in retrospect not really have affected the work or performance of a Volunteer very much.

Many of the comments provided by the interviewees stressed the importance of the language abilities of the Volunteers. The fact that language training did not emerge as an even more important issue in the statistical analyses of the questionnaire items may be explained by the fact that the particular questionnaire item appears to blur the distinction between the language training activity and the language ability of the Volunteers.

What was learned during the exploratory visits was that many of the Volunteers who perceived a real need to learn the local language did so on their own without waiting for training to be provided by the head office of the UNV programme; thus, in hindsight, the language training was really not an issue to many respondents, since the Volunteers demonstrated the required language ability.

Effects of the external environment

The study also looked at a number of factors that may have affected the work of the Volunteers, even if these were considered largely beyond the control of the UNV headquarters, such as links between the activities of the Volunteers and those of other organizations as well as support for the activities of the Volunteers. As could be expected, the effect of the links to other organizations and support was considered positive by most users of the programme and, even more so, by the Volunteers.

Four out of five of the users (between 80.9 and 88.2 per cent) and the Volunteers (between 84.1 and 91.3 per cent) considered the effect of links to other government agencies, international organizations, or non-governmental organizations positive. Financial support was mainly provided by the UN, and considered positive by more than three-quarters of the users and Volunteers (80.4 per cent, for both categories). A vast majority of the Volunteers (between 72.1

and 89.7 per cent) also considered support other than financial assistance from the government, the UN, or other international organizations as positive.

A very large majority (between 73.1 and 89.9 per cent) of the users did not perceive that the external factors, such as the climate, or the social, cultural, economic, political, or security situation, had any effect on the work of the Volunteers. Among the Volunteers themselves, the number of respondents who felt the external environment had no effect was somewhat smaller (between 55.3 and 83.3 per cent), and the number of respondents who perceived the effect was negative was correspondingly bigger. Of the external factors, the effect of the political and economic situation was considered negative by the largest number of Volunteers (40.4 and 34.9 per cent, respectively).

A small number of users (between 11.4 and 17.3 per cent) thought the rules and procedures of the UNV programme, the government, or the UN had a negative effect on the work of the Volunteers. Among the Volunteers, one in five (20.5 per cent) considered that the rules and procedures of the government had a negative effect on their work, but only two respondents (4.4 per cent) said this about the rules and procedures of the UN and UNV. More than one in every four of the Volunteers thought the effect of the UN and UNV rules and procedures on their work was positive (26.7 and 31.9 per cent, respectively).

Self-evaluation

The study also provided an opportunity to compare the responses of the Volunteers to those of their former supervisors, co-workers, and the beneficiaries of their work. As could be expected, the Volunteers' estimates of their achievements and the perceived value of their work were, in general, higher than those of the users and beneficiaries of the programme. This was particularly true for the UNV specialists, who estimated their achievements and the value of their work on average 1.70 times higher than their former supervisors, co-workers, and beneficiaries. The biggest differences in the assessments related to perceptions of the influence of the Volunteers on peace, democracy

and/or human rights, women's lives, and perceptions of the Volunteers having performed a job which no one else locally could have done.

The assessments of the UNV community workers and those of the users and beneficiaries of the programme came quite close on many issues, and on a few issues, the UNV community workers even underestimated their achievements and performance compared to the assessments of the users and beneficiaries. On average, however, the UNV community workers' estimates of their achievements and the value of their work were 1.12 times higher than those of their former supervisors, co-workers, and beneficiaries. On two issues, the continuation of the activities started by the Volunteers and their long-term benefits, the assessments of the UNV community workers were much more positive than those of the users and beneficiaries of the programme.

Based on this survey, the benefits of the programme to the Volunteers appear very big. Four out of five of the Volunteers considered that they had learned a lot or very much in terms of new skills and knowledge, and increased their understanding of another culture by a lot or very much (79.2 and 87.5 per cent, respectively). The benefits of working as a UN Volunteer for another job were, however, only considered important by one-third of the Volunteers (32.6 per cent). The views of the UNV specialists and UNV community workers were very similar, and the assessments of the users of the programmes of the benefits to the Volunteers corresponded very well with those of the Volunteers, although the users' assessments of the benefits to the Volunteers were overall more reserved. All in all, the results pertaining to the perceived value of the programme to the Volunteers underline what could be referred to as the two-way nature of the programme, that is, that the Volunteers as part of their assignments both give and receive.

Note

1. Throughout the presentation of the findings of this study, a significant difference refers to a probability of a difference of more than 95 per cent ($p < 0.05$).