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Conclusions

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the UNV programme in terms of its impact. The impact of the programme was determined based on an assessment of the achievement of the objectives of the programme. In addition, the study assessed the value of the programme as perceived by the users and beneficiaries of the programme. One country, Nepal, was used as a case study for the assessment. The study covered the period from 1987 to 1996.

In trying to determine whether the programme had any impact and how the users and beneficiaries perceived the value of the programme, the study addressed six different issues. The first three of these measured the impact of the programme, the latter three determined the perceived value of the programme:

1. changes in human capital
2. changes in social capital
3. changes in job opportunities, poverty, women's lives, and the environment
4. the relevance of the work of the Volunteers
5. the performance of the Volunteers
6. the results and sustainability of the work of the Volunteers.

The broader purpose of the evaluation of the UNV programme was to serve as a case study of the impact of development cooperation

activities of the UN, understood as the extent to which a UN programme achieves its objectives and produces desired outcomes. Finally, the study also attempted to demonstrate a methodology that could be used to assess the impact of other UN funds, programmes, and specialized agencies.

Summary of findings

The first general conclusion of the study is that the UNV programme appears to have had an impact on the communities and organizations in Nepal where the UN Volunteers worked during the period covered by the study. A positive impact of the programme could be found on human and social capital accumulation and with respect to changes in the environment, the level of poverty, and the availability of jobs; with respect to changes in women's lives, a positive impact was less evident. Overall, the impact of the programme was most notable in areas outside the capital Kathmandu.

The programme was rated very highly by the users and beneficiaries of the programme with regard to its relevance and the performance of the Volunteers. In terms of the sustainability of the activities initiated by the programme, more could still be done to ensure lasting benefits of the programme. Both the users of the programme and the Volunteers themselves appreciated the performance of the head office of the UNV programme, and the Volunteers indicated that they had benefited considerably from participating in the programme.

Although too many or too far-reaching conclusions regarding the impact of the UNV programme in other countries should not be drawn based on this one case study, the findings of the study should be relevant to the programme as a whole. One reason for this is that the UNV programme in Nepal during the period covered by the study was both representative and typical of the UNV programme as a whole, in terms of the variety of Volunteer assignments and sectors of work, profiles, and experience of the Volunteers, male to female ratios, etc.

A second reason to consider the findings as relevant to the programme as a whole is that the methodology used in Nepal was also tested in Africa (Mozambique) and Latin America (Costa Rica), with very similar results as in Nepal. Even if the number of interviews completed in Mozambique and Costa Rica were much smaller than in Nepal, the questionnaires worked equally well in African, Latin American, and Asian contexts and the views of the users and beneficiaries concerning the impact of the programme were very similar on all three continents. These results, along with the results of other analyses performed, support the validity and reliability of the findings of the study.

Impact of the programme

In a relative sense, the programme had the biggest positive impact on human and social capital development as well as on changes with respect to the environment, the level of poverty, and the availability of jobs, which represent three of the UNDP's four priority areas in the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. The programme also had a positive impact on women's lives, but the relative importance of the programme in this area appeared smaller. The impact of the programme was particularly noticeable in areas outside the capital Kathmandu.

When compared to definitions of human capital by Gary Becker and others, which include areas such as the health of people, the indicator of human capital used in this study, the number of skills or new knowledge acquired from the Volunteers, must be considered rather narrow. Despite this, the UNV programme can be said to have had an impact on human capital in Nepal.

Nine out of ten of the users and beneficiaries of the programme indicated that the Volunteers had transferred skills or knowledge as part of their assignment. Most users and beneficiaries indicated three as the number of skills transferred by, or areas in which knowledge was acquired from, the Volunteers. The odds of a major change in human capital, defined as three or more skills acquired, or acquisition of new knowledge in three or more areas, was 1.80 times greater

among the users and beneficiaries of the programme than in the reference group.

The relative importance of the impact of the UNV programme must, however, be considered contingent upon how human capital is defined and how a change in human capital is measured. A significant amount of learning also took place in communities and organizations during the period covered by this study without any influence of the UNV programme, through other programmes and no doubt the media as well. The biggest positive impact of the programme on human capital could be found in smaller towns and rural areas.

The impact of the programme on social capital also appears very positive. More than four out of five respondents thought the Volunteers had a positive or very positive effect on the motivation and cooperation of people in their community or the organization where they worked. Almost the same number of respondents attributed a positive or very positive change in people's values and attitudes and participation in local affairs to the work of the Volunteers.

The odds of a positive change with respect to participation in local affairs were 2.11 times higher among the respondents who had contact with the Volunteers compared to those who had none. The corresponding odds were 1.65 times higher with respect to motivation, 1.30 times higher with respect to cooperation, and 1.17 times higher with respect to values and attitudes.

Using an index of social capital, the differences between the users and beneficiaries of the programme, on the one hand, and the reference group, on the other hand, were also significant, and the biggest differences could be found in areas outside the capital Kathmandu. The index was calculated as an unweighted average of the four different components of social capital used in this study – changes in people's values and attitudes, motivation, cooperation, and participation in local affairs.

A positive impact of the programme was also found with regard to three of the UNDP's four priority areas: the environment, poverty,

and jobs. Between half and two-thirds of the users and beneficiaries of the programme considered that the effect of the Volunteers on these areas had been positive or very positive. The odds of indicating positive changes in the environment and on the level of poverty were 2.28 and 2.25 times greater, respectively, among the users and beneficiaries of the programme compared to the reference group. For the availability of jobs, the odds of a positive change were 1.58 times greater among the users and beneficiaries than in the reference group. The biggest positive impact of the programme could be found in small towns and rural areas.

As far as changes in women's lives are concerned, even if almost two-thirds of the respondents indicated that the Volunteers had a positive or very positive effect on women's lives, the changes indicated by the respondents in the reference group were even more positive.

Perceived value of the programme

In terms of the three criteria for measuring the perceived value of the programme, high marks were given on two: the relevance of the programme and the performance of the Volunteers. Room for improvement still exists as far as the third criteria, the sustainability of the results of the work of the Volunteers, is concerned.

The overall conclusion that the programme was relevant during the period covered by the study is based on the fact that almost two-thirds of the respondents rated the relevance of the work of the Volunteers as good or very good. In addition, more than half of the respondents indicated that the Volunteers had done a job that no one else locally could have done. The work of the Volunteers was considered most relevant in areas outside the capital Kathmandu. In the smaller towns and rural areas, the UNV community workers, in particular, were considered to have done a job which no one else could have done locally.

Although a majority of the respondents considered that the results, the continuation, and the long-term benefits of the work of the Volunteers were good or very good, the overall conclusion is that the

sustainability of the programme could be improved. This is based on the fact that one in ten of the users and beneficiaries considered that some aspect of sustainability was poor or very poor. One in two of the users and beneficiaries did not think that the continuation of activities was good or very good, and well over half of the respondents did not indicate a lot or very much use of skills or knowledge learned from the Volunteers.

In terms of the performance of the Volunteers, however, the programme fared well. Three out of five rated the effectiveness of the Volunteers good or very good, and more than two-thirds thought the performance of the UN Volunteers in comparison to other volunteers was good or very good. In comparison to international experts, more than half considered that the performance of the Volunteers was good or very good, and less than one in ten thought the performance of the Volunteers was poor or very poor. Compared to other non-nationals, two-thirds of the respondents considered that the performance of the Volunteers was good or very good.

Compared to Nepalese nationals, approximately half of the respondents indicated that the performance of the Volunteers was good or very good. However, almost half of the respondents did not think the performance of the Volunteers in comparison to a Nepalese national was good or very good, and similarly, almost half of the respondents did not think that the Volunteers had done a job that no one else locally could have done.

A conclusion that can be drawn is that even if the performance of the Volunteers overall was considered good, and even very good in a number of cases, the work of the Volunteers may in many cases not have been indispensable. This in particular seems to have been the case in Kathmandu for the UNV specialists, whose performance in comparison to Nepalese nationals was rated significantly lower than that of the UNV community workers in Kathmandu.

The role of UNV headquarters

Based on the results of this study, the headquarters of the UNV programme can be satisfied with its performance in the past,

although room for improvement also does exist. Most of the users and Volunteers expressed satisfaction with the performance of the UNV head office in carrying out its primary functions: the identification of competent and motivated Volunteers, matching of Volunteers with posts, and arranging for the recruitment of the Volunteers. A majority of the respondents were also satisfied with the briefing provided to the host organizations of the Volunteers as well as the language and other training provided to the Volunteers.

Improvements are still possible, in particular with regard to the language training provided to the Volunteers. The normal two-year duration of the assignments of the Volunteers was considered too short by half of the users, who perceived a negative effect on the work of the Volunteers as a consequence. Two other issues, which have been pointed out in previous studies but which this study found needed continuous monitoring, are the availability of co-workers, and the management and supervision of the Volunteers – even if UNV headquarters may have limited ways of influencing these issues.

The monthly living allowance, and to a lesser degree the other benefits, entitlements, and the overall conditions of service, were issues with which a large number of Volunteers expressed dissatisfaction. UNV community workers, in particular, perceived that the living allowance was insufficient, and that this had a negative effect on their work.

The fact that almost half of the UNV community workers said that their living allowance had a negative or very negative effect on their work should, however, not be surprising if one takes into account two things. The first is that UNV specialists receive four or five times what UNV community workers receive; the second is that the total package received by the community workers increased by 15 per cent between 1989 and 1996, while the corresponding increase for UNV specialists was 58 per cent.

A disturbing finding that was made at the outset of the evaluation was the poor quality of the records kept by UNV headquarters. The total number of Volunteer assignments completed in Nepal during the period covered by the study was 110. For 12 of these assign-

ments, the addresses of the Volunteers could not be retrieved, neither at UNV headquarters nor at the UNV office in Kathmandu. Consequently, these 12 Volunteer assignments could not be included in the study. This corresponds to a loss of 11 per cent of potentially useful information.

A related area of concern is the quality of the information available at UNV headquarters and the UNV office in Kathmandu. Very little useful information existed in the reports prepared by the Volunteers on the results or expected results and sustainability of their work, and few records existed of co-workers, supervisors, or beneficiaries of the programme. This would have made an assessment of the work of the Volunteers based on existing records and reports very difficult, even if the reports had been completed and could have been found, which was not the case for almost half of the 110 Volunteer assignments included in the study. This no doubt represents a missed opportunity for collecting and storing relevant information about the programme in an easy and inexpensive way.

In the original sample of fifty Volunteers selected for the study, nine replacements had to be made. Two replacements were unavoidable in order not to risk the safety of the surveyors in areas with political unrest at the time of the survey. Of the other seven Volunteers, three completed less than three months at their assigned duty station, and were substituted because three months was considered too short a period for the Volunteers to have an impact. In these three cases, it can be argued that the programme accepted assignments for Volunteers that were not appropriate or failed to identify and match suitable candidates with posts.

For three other Volunteers, neither co-workers, supervisors, nor any beneficiaries of their work could be found. These assignments were therefore considered failures in terms of the sustainability of the work of the Volunteers. Finally, one Volunteer was substituted because her co-worker refused to be interviewed without an official letter from the UNV programme. This could have been arranged, but was not considered necessary following the receipt of a letter from the Volunteer herself, mailed with a completed questionnaire,

that explained major problems in, and the premature termination of, her assignment, which must be considered another failure.

The total failure rate of the programme thus becomes 7 out 50 assignments, or 14 per cent. If this figure is combined with the previous figure of 11 per cent of assignments where it was impossible to even try to locate the Volunteers, the total number of assignments in which the work of the Volunteers had no impact, or no impact could be measured due to lack of proper records, amounts to one-quarter. What this means is that even if the overall satisfaction of the users and the Volunteers with UNV headquarters was very high, it is still possible to improve the performance of the head office.

Other findings

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

A large majority of the users did not perceive that the external environment had any effect on the work of the Volunteers. Among the Volunteers themselves, somewhat fewer respondents, but still more than half, felt that the external environment had no effect on their performance. Of the external factors, the effects of the political and economic situation were considered negative by the largest number of Volunteers, approximately one-third.

The effect of the UN and government rules and procedures on the work of the Volunteers was considered negative by one in six or seven of the users. Among the Volunteers, one in five thought the rules and procedures of the government had a negative effect on their work. In general, however, the effect of the rules and procedures was not considered important, and some of the Volunteers even thought the effect of the UN and UNV rules and procedures on their work

was positive. This may be a reflection of the positive view that many Volunteers had of their link to the UN.

The study also provided an opportunity to compare the assessments of the Volunteers of their achievements and performance with those of their former supervisors, co-workers, and beneficiaries. As could be expected, the estimates of the Volunteers of their own achievements tended in most cases to be higher than the assessments by the users and beneficiaries of the programme. This was particularly the case with the UNV specialists, who estimated their own achievements on average 1.70 times higher than their former supervisors, co-workers, and beneficiaries. For the UNV community workers, the corresponding figure was 1.12.

According to this study, the benefits to the UN Volunteers of participating in the programme were considerable. A vast majority of the UN Volunteers considered that they had learned a lot in terms of new skills and knowledge, and gained a lot in terms of their understanding of another culture. The direct effect of their experience as a UN Volunteer on their next job was, however, less important.

Conclusions and recommendations

A starting point for this study was a proposition that little information exists regarding the performance and achievements of different UN programmes, funds, and agencies and that the different UN organizations therefore should be evaluated to assess the extent to which they achieve their objectives and have an impact.

Future orientation of the UNV programme

The UNV programme was originally established in 1970 to promote the transfer of skills and knowledge to developing countries, and to fill gaps in available human resources, where necessary. Later the mandate of the programme was enlarged to include social capital development, in addition to human capital development. During the

period covered by this study, the thematic focus of the programme also included jobs, poverty, women, and the environment – the UNDP's priority areas in the 1980s and 1990s.

What this study shows is that although the programme has been successful in achieving its objectives, significant changes have also taken place without any influence of the UN Volunteers, particularly in the capital Kathmandu. A logical question to ask, therefore, is to what extent the UNV programme should focus more on smaller towns and rural areas where the programme, at least in Nepal, according to this study, has played a more important role? And if this is done, and if there eventually will be less need for the programme in areas outside the capital cities as well, should the programme be closed down, or should the programme look for a new mandate altogether?

An argument could be made that there is much less need for transfer of skills and knowledge today than there was in 1970, because of the ease by which people and ideas move across borders in today's world. Although a commonly held view is that this process gained momentum in the 1990s, it is all the same a process that has been ongoing ever since the UNV programme was established, and something that the programme appears to have been able to respond to. According to two-thirds of the respondents, the relevance of the UNV programme during the period covered by the study was good or very good. One can assume that if the Volunteers in Nepal had been performing the same tasks in the late 1980s and early 1990s as their predecessors were in the 1970s, the ratings would not have been as favourable.

Since 1970, however, a lot has no doubt changed in the world, and certain countries, that 10 or 20 years ago benefited from the assistance of UNV may no longer need the programme to develop the human capacities they require. To some extent, this may also be the case in Nepal, where almost half of the users and beneficiaries of the programme indicated that someone locally could have done the work of the UN Volunteer. In the capital Kathmandu, one-third of the respondents thought the Volunteers did a job that no one else locally

could have done; in other areas of Nepal, the corresponding number was two-thirds.

A possible interpretation of the findings of this study could be that the UNV programme may be reaching a point where it has served its purpose in the capital cities, and should now shift its focus to areas outside the capital, until the programme eventually could be phased out completely. Although no UN programme should be expected to continue forever, this seems like a frightening scenario for the UNV programme. This does, however, not need to be the case if another aspect of the programme is taken into consideration and given more prominence. This is the value to the Volunteers from participating in the programme and what has been referred to as the two-way or exchange nature of the programme.

Even if electronic and other forms of communication continue to be developed, the need for exchange programmes, through which people can share experiences and learn from each other through direct contact, will remain important. In addition to the UNV programme and other volunteer sending agencies, many other possibilities for nationals of one country to work in another country exist through other organizations, government programmes, and the private sector. For nationals of many developing countries, however, the UNV programme is one of the few vehicles in the non-profit sector that exist to help them share and gain experiences in another country.

If the benefits to countries of sending as well as receiving Volunteers are taken together, the value of the UNV programme increases. Providing opportunities through the UNV programme for individuals to live and work in another country could also be argued for not only in order to achieve the specific objectives of the programme, but also to promote the broader goals of the UN – peace, justice, and tolerance. This argument was mentioned as early as 1961 in some of the first discussions in ECOSOC on the establishment of the UNV programme, but does not appear to be one of the basic principles of the programme at present.¹

Defining exchange of knowledge and experience as the *raison d'être* of the UNV programme would not necessarily mean limiting the

programme to human or social capital development or priority areas of the UNDP. The programme could continue looking for opportunities to support private sector development, humanitarian relief, peace building, human rights, electoral assistance, or other areas, as circumstances and needs in different countries change. The key would be to provide meaningful opportunities for individuals from different countries or cultures to work together, sharing experiences and learning from each other. If the possibility for nationals of a country to work in their own country as national UN Volunteers is further emphasized, the justifications for the programme become even stronger.

Despite all the changes that have taken place since the creation of the UNV programme, the continuous expansion of the programme, and the constant search for new opportunities, one of the original reasons for the establishment of the programme still seems very valid and relevant today. This is to respond to the desire of individuals to dedicate a period of their lives to the cause of development, and to offer them a positive means of translating their concern for their fellow men into an effective force for economic and social progress throughout the world.

The UN Volunteers as true volunteers

Since its establishment, the UNV programme has had to grapple with two difficult and related issues: the concept of volunteerism and the remuneration of the Volunteers. The perception of volunteers as young, inexperienced, and idealistic has been countered by the programme by stressing the qualifications, experience, and maturity of the UN Volunteers, in addition to their motivation and commitment. In the late 1980s, in an attempt to attract even more qualified and suitable candidates, the monthly living allowance of the UNV specialists was substantially increased and linked to the cost of living in each country. Whether this led to an improvement in the quality of the candidates and the performance of the Volunteers is not clear, since the effects of these changes in the conditions of service were not studied at the time.

What is clear is that the issue of the remuneration of the Volunteers has remained problematic, as is evidenced by the findings of this study. Even if international UN Volunteers are paid much less than international UN staff, UNV specialists earn considerably more than most of the nationals of the country in which they are working. This has led to a perception of them as neither true volunteers nor UN staff. Instead, the UNV specialists, who make up the large majority of the UN Volunteers, are viewed as “cheap labour” or “second class citizens” by many UN staff, while at the same time considered overpaid by many government officials in the countries where they work.

It may indeed be that it was necessary to increase the monthly living allowance in the late 1980s and early 1990s because the pool of qualified candidates was not large enough at that time. Today, however, the situation is very different, as the roster of candidates of the UNV programme also shows. Moreover, shrinking resources for development cooperation overall has led to fewer opportunities to work in developing countries through bilateral or multilateral programmes. This in turn has made the UNV programme more attractive as an option for people looking for opportunities to work in developing countries.

What the UNV programme, therefore, might consider at this point is relying less on, or, if possible, moving completely away from, using the level of the remuneration as a way to attract candidates for UNV specialist assignments. This would, however, require finding other ways of rewarding the Volunteers for their work, showing the Volunteers, and those with whom they work, that their contribution, commitment, and motivation are truly appreciated, even if the rewards in monetary terms are not very high. What would be required is much more than emphasizing the commitment and motivation as the trade mark of the Volunteers, as the programme has in the past.

Simply paying the UNV specialists less, however, is not the solution, and a much broader set of policy changes would be required. These could, however, provide the programme with an opportunity to get away from the existing situation in which the UN Volunteers

are neither considered true volunteers nor regular UN staff. A starting point could be viewing the Volunteers as participants in the UNV programme. This would mean not only focusing on what the Volunteers contribute to the programme, but also acknowledging the importance of the UNV assignment to the Volunteers themselves, both during their time as Volunteers and afterwards.

If the value of the former Volunteers to the programme were fully realized, more attention would probably be given to the Volunteers during their assignment. By the end of 2000, more than 20,000 individuals will have served as UN Volunteers, and they will constitute an enormous pool of, largely untapped, potential ambassadors for the UN, the UNV programme, and volunteerism more generally. For many, their experience as a UN Volunteer will be the only one of working with the UN, working in another country, or working as a volunteer. Most will be influenced in their choices and decisions later on in life by their experience as Volunteers, and for some their willingness to help other people, to work as volunteers, or to promote the overall goals of the UN will be shaped by their experience as a UN Volunteer.

Although associations of former Volunteers have been established in a few countries, the UNV programme itself appears to have been unable to utilize former Volunteers to promote volunteerism, the UNV programme, or the broader goals of the UN. A possible explanation could be that many of the former Volunteers never identified very strongly with the UN, the UNV programme, or other volunteers, and using them to promote volunteerism, the UNV programme, or the goals of the UN has, therefore, not worked very well in practice.

Much more could be done for the Volunteers so that they are seen and perceived to be true volunteers – by the Volunteers themselves and by others. This would require giving the Volunteers the respect they deserve and the recognition they need in order to make them willing to give irrespective of the financial remuneration they receive. Even if the monthly allowance paid to the UNV specialists were reduced, the overall terms and conditions of the Volunteers

could be further improved. This could, for instance, include helping the Volunteers stay up-to-date in their field by providing access to the Internet, books and journals in their field, and opportunities to participate in conferences and workshops during their assignment.

Given that the total cost of the Volunteer assignments should not increase, doing more for the Volunteers as part of the programme means that it would probably be necessary to reduce the amount currently paid to the UNV specialists. The counter argument to doing more for the Volunteers is that it is better to pay the Volunteers as much as possible, a going market rate, if you will, and let the Volunteers themselves decide how to update or upgrade their skills, etc. Experience from the non-profit sector as well as the private sector, however, shows that using monetary rewards as incentives does not work very well in the long run. Moreover, for the Volunteers to be perceived as true volunteers, the size of their financial remuneration should not be driving either the supply or the demand for Volunteers.

The ideal should be to attract Volunteers because they want to contribute to economic development or the other goals of the UN, not because of the financial benefits they receive from participating in the UNV programme. At a time of continued globalization with persisting, and even increasing, gaps between rich and poor, expressions of solidarity with the less privileged are needed, and the UN should be able to provide opportunities for this through a programme such as the UN Volunteers.

If paying less to the Volunteers does not seem reasonable, the living allowance of the UNV specialists could be decreased, while increasing their resettlement grant. This could be seen as a way of paying the Volunteers a remuneration commensurate to that of a true volunteer, but rewarding them after their assignment for their contribution, motivation, and commitment. This would also smooth the transition from being a UN Volunteer.

The role of the UNV programme within the UN system

The situation in which the UN Volunteers have been perceived as neither true volunteers nor regular UN staff has also blurred the

image of the UNV programme and reduced its effectiveness. This study demonstrates that the programme has been able to work with a range of different UN organizations, government institutions, and non-governmental organizations as well as with communities at least since the mid 1980s. It has been successful and appreciated in its work with its non-UN partners, but its influence on other UN organizations appears rather limited.

While this study concludes that the UNV programme has established successful partnerships with what could be referred to as non-traditional partners of the UN, the programme does not appear to have played any role in bringing other UN organizations closer to the non-traditional partners of the UN. Instead, the other programmes, funds, and agencies of the UN have developed their own ways of working with civil society, without using the UNV programme as a bridge or benefiting from the experience of the UNV programme.

The limited influence of the UNV programme on the work of its UN system partners illustrates that as long as the image and status of the UN Volunteers remains unclear, the impact of the programme remains below its potential. In the early 1990s, in what may have been a reaction to a lack of recognition of the programme, the programme began funding its own development projects, ostensibly to promote volunteerism. The real reason, however, may have been to try to demonstrate that the programme could be viewed as a development agency in its own right, not merely as a recruitment arm of UN system.

Although there may be some justification for special UNV projects, it is likely that the efforts of the programme to design and manage its own projects diverted attention and resources away from what could be considered the core functions of the programme. This could explain some of the dissatisfaction of the Volunteers and the users of the programme with the ability of the programme to recruit and match Volunteers with posts, to prepare the Volunteers for their assignments, and to provide them with the necessary support.

While there are a number of multilateral and bilateral programmes and non-governmental organizations with considerable ex-

perience of developing and managing projects, few, volunteer sending agencies apart, have extensive experience in the area in which the UNV programme originally was set up: recruitment. Recruitment of personnel may not be as exciting as management of projects, but its importance should not be underestimated or undervalued. As long as the development cooperation efforts of the UN include a personnel component, the recruitment of qualified, committed, motivated, and suitable individuals remains extremely important, irrespective of whether the individuals are volunteers or not. The UNV programme can perform this function and provide a service to other UN organizations and governments that is needed to complement the work of the other UN programmes, funds, and agencies, to make the development cooperation efforts of the UN as a whole more effective.

A conclusion of this study is that the programme should focus on the function that it was originally established to do and that it probably does best, recruitment of Volunteers, and continue trying to do this even better. In this way the UNV programme could best support the development cooperation efforts of the UN system as a whole. This applies irrespective of whether the programme is able to come to terms with the issue of the UN Volunteers as true volunteers or not. However, if the term "Volunteer" remains a misnomer, it might be better to rename the UN Volunteers as UN Aid Workers, UN Development Workers, UN Relief Workers, or something similar. This would acknowledge that the individuals recruited through the programme may be qualified, committed, motivated, and suitable, but that they are not volunteers in the sense usually understood as people doing something for little or no financial reward.

Need for improved documentation

Whereas the overall conclusion of this study is that the programme has had an impact and is appreciated, improvements could be made, particularly in the area of documentation. In this area a lot could be achieved with little effort, and little or no additional costs. Although access to all records of the programme was provided for this study, an enormous amount of effort had to go into trying to identify re-

spondents for the survey and to retrieve records, which in many cases could not be found. When records could be found, the quality of the information contained in them left a lot to be desired.

To deal with the problem of inadequate documentation, two issues could be addressed at the same time. The first is collecting more relevant information from the Volunteers in the countries where they work; the second is keeping better records at the headquarters of the programme. Very little would be required to have the Volunteers list supervisors, co-workers, and beneficiaries in their periodic reports. A somewhat more challenging task would be asking the Volunteers to collect baseline data of objective indicators of development against which it would be possible to measure overall changes and outcomes of their work.

Different indicators and benchmarks would be needed in different fields of work – to assist the Volunteers, the head office of the programme would need to provide examples that could be used in different fields in different countries. Yet more time consuming, but also possible to do at the outset of a Volunteer assignment, with some guidance and training, would be the identification of individuals who could constitute a control group.

Listing beneficiaries, collecting data on indicators of change, and establishing control groups, where possible, would allow for a comparison of a situation before a Volunteer took up his or her assignment with the situation after his or her departure. This would make future impact assessments much easier and faster to carry out. In this study, the data collection and analysis alone took more than a year and a half to complete by one full-time researcher, fourteen surveyors who carried out the interviews with the backing of a Nepalese NGO, and four research assistant who compiled the background data and coded the survey data.

In addition to facilitating future research, better records, baseline data, objective indicators, and control groups would also allow for the use of more robust research designs in future evaluations. Although the relationship between time, costs, and complexity of a study, on the one hand, and the usefulness of the results, on the other

hand, need to be kept in mind, in certain instances, for selected countries, more costly and more time-consuming longitudinal or quasi-experimental studies could be considered. Beneficiaries could also be involved in the design and implementation of evaluations of this kind. Finally, the establishment of control groups at the outset would also allow for the use of other methods, such as productivity comparisons, to determine the impact of the work of the Volunteers.

Value of the study and suggestions for future research

For the UNV programme, this study was a first assessment of its impact, and many lessons can be learned from it. Compared to previous evaluations of the programme, the study was different in four important respects.

The first difference is that the study assessed the impact of the work of UN Volunteers a few years after the Volunteers had left, which almost by definition is required of an impact assessment.

A second difference is that the study was based on the responses of a relatively large number of individuals (169) who had first-hand experience of the work of specific Volunteers. In the past, evaluations were based on the views of a handful of government and UN officials of the performance of the UNV headquarters and the work of the Volunteers in general.

A third difference was that results of the work of the Volunteers were compared to changes that had taken place without any involvement of the Volunteers, that is, a “counterfactual situation”. The performance of the Volunteers was also compared to others who, at least in theory, could have been recruited to do the same job as the Volunteers.

The fourth difference was that information was collected from users and beneficiaries of the programme as well as from the Volunteers themselves. This made it possible to determine how much the Volunteers’ assessments of their own achievements and performance differed from those of their former supervisors, co-workers, and beneficiaries.

What this study has confirmed is that it is possible to carry out an assessment of the impact of a programme, such as the UNV programme, that does not produce physical outputs, and that the results of an assessment of this kind can provide useful information about the programme. What the study has also shown that there is a need for more rapid and economical ways of assessing the impact of the UNV or any other UN programme.

As far as the methodology of the study is concerned, the approach of combining different sources of information, reports by Volunteers and external evaluators, interviews, and a mail survey, can be considered very useful. This approach can be recommended for future research, as can using locally hired surveyors to carry out the data collection. The survey instruments that were developed for the study can also be used, with minor modifications, in future evaluations. By arriving at an estimate of the extent by which the Volunteers' estimates of their performance differed from those of their supervisors, co-workers, and beneficiaries, this study has also laid the ground for future assessments of the impact of the UNV programme based on self-evaluations by the Volunteers.

This study provides many useful insights to the programme, but cannot explain what determines the effectiveness or success of individual Volunteers, or how different factors and circumstances influence the work of the Volunteers, or, ultimately, the impact of the programme. This will require further research, for which the conceptual framework used in this study can provide a starting point.

There are also valuable lessons to be learned from this study for other UN programmes. Even if the UN Volunteers are thought of as a distinct category within the UN, the work the Volunteers does often not differ significantly from that of other UN staff. Increasingly, in fact, UN Volunteers are doing jobs that other staff of UN agencies used to do in the past. The methodology used in this study could therefore equally well be used for assessments of other UN funds, programmes, and agencies. The most direct application of the approach used in this study would be assessments of the impact of training programmes, such as on-the-job training. However, the

study also showed that the methodology can be used to assess the impact of a programme on a variety of different areas, such as job availability, poverty, women's lives, and the environment.

In the end, there are at least four lessons to be learned for other UN funds, programmes, and agencies.

1. Existing records and data are likely to be of little use for an impact study, and collection of original data probably becomes necessary.
2. Carrying out an impact evaluation without both pre- and post-intervention assessments and a control group, in the true sense of the term, is possible but is both costly and time consuming.
3. Relating achievements of a programme to objective indicators of development is recommended to further strengthen the design of an impact evaluation.
4. The importance of collecting baseline data, identifying beneficiaries, and establishing control groups at the outset of programmes or projects cannot be emphasized enough to enable monitoring of progress and to facilitate future impact assessments.

Note

1. See Economic and Social Council Document E/3548. "Use of Volunteer Workers in the Operational Programmes of the United Nations and Related Agencies Designed to Assist in the Economic and Social Development of the Less Developed Countries". 3 August 1961; and United Nations Volunteers. *Strategy 2000*. Bonn: UNV, 1997.