

Chapter 6

Volunteer–state partnerships and social innovation



Key highlights

- Gaps in services often provide the impetus for and help catalyse social innovation, with volunteers the main drivers of this.
- As experts on the issues in their communities, volunteers can generate new ideas to solve community challenges, resulting in more socially responsive development.
- Innovations facilitated by volunteers can lead to social transformations by changing social norms, attitudes and values, and lead to more sustainable outcomes.
- By helping to facilitate new ways of working, volunteers can play a role in reconfiguring power relations between people and states.

6.1. Introduction

Ongoing development challenges such as climate change, intensifying inequalities, political polarization and the COVID-19 pandemic mean that people and institutions increasingly find themselves working in crisis mode. For instance, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations—including those set up by volunteers—have had to address immediate needs while keeping up with the spread of the disease.¹⁴³ Some volunteer groups have repurposed themselves while others have formed spontaneously, often providing innovative high-tech and non-tech solutions in response to immediate and urgent community needs.¹⁴⁴

Social innovation broadly refers to the development of new ideas or processes that aim to address gaps. Long-term social problems, and the emergence of new ones, mean that people and institutions have to think outside the box and implement new and cutting-edge initiatives. In the context of volunteerism, volunteers are often involved in

generating, implementing and disseminating new ideas and practices that address a social need. Evidence from this report also suggests that people are increasingly interested in volunteering for activities related to social innovation (see chapter 3).

Drawing on case study research on volunteer–state partnerships in Colombia, Kenya, Malawi, Trinidad and Tobago, and a project that spans the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, this chapter explores how volunteerism can be a driver of social innovation and volunteers' involvement in shaping and facilitating new ways of working, and implement new solutions to address sustainable development challenges.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four parts. Section 6.2 discusses definitions and key processes involved in social innovation. This is followed by an introduction to the case studies in section 6.3. Section 6.4 outlines the key components of the different social innovation models illustrated by the case studies. Finally, section 6.5 addresses strengths and challenges.

6.2. The role of volunteering in social innovation

In essence, social innovation implies a new way of doing things in an effort to respond to or tackle an issue. Often, social innovations can lead to new or improved relationships that make better use of assets and resources.¹⁴⁵ In the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s report on social innovation in South-East Asia, "inclusive social innovation describes the pursuit of innovation that has social aims, and local context, at its heart. One can think of it as either—and both—a more inclusive approach to innovation, or a more innovative approach to driving social inclusion."¹⁴⁶ Social innovation has also been used to refer to innovations in technology and business¹⁴⁷ that focus on responding to social needs, empowering and enhancing the capabilities of communities.¹⁴⁸ In terms of public services, social innovations need to be co-designed and co-produced with end users so that they can build on communities' capacities while delivering more direct impacts.¹⁴⁹

It is well documented that social innovation is likely to lead to sustainable outcomes when there is active citizen participation in public policy decision-making and implementation.^{150,151}

This includes volunteers who use their time and knowledge to share new ideas aimed at tackling ongoing development challenges. Increasingly, platforms such as social innovation laboratories and accelerators provide spaces for people to develop solutions to ongoing challenges. Since volunteers frequently work with marginalized populations and are embedded in local communities, they are often open to learning.^{152, 153} For these reasons, volunteers

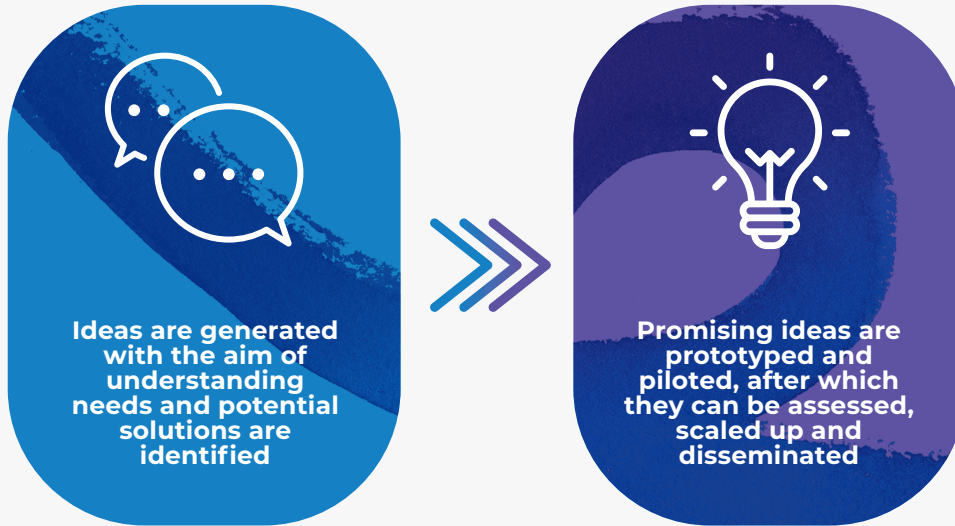
are well placed to contribute to social innovation. A research study on volunteering in the Global South also showed that volunteers helped to facilitate the merging of outside and indigenous knowledge, resulting in solutions that were both locally appropriate and sustainable.¹⁵⁴

Newness is often considered a defining feature of social innovation. But what exactly should be "new" for something to be considered innovative? Innovative solutions might not be entirely new. Instead, they might involve new combinations of existing elements.¹⁵⁵ For instance, an innovation could involve reworking existing volunteer activities to make them more responsive to current needs. Kudumbashree, a women's self-help group in India, did exactly that, adapting its existing community organizing methods, networks and leadership to effectively respond to COVID-19.¹⁵⁶ Social innovation also involves the development of new products and services, such as new Open Government platforms in Buenos Aires, Mexico City and Montevideo which aim to increase people's participation in public policymaking.¹⁵⁷

Crucially, technology can be used to develop and disseminate innovative ideas, through volunteer-led online hackathons or volunteer-matching platforms, neighbourhood social networking sites, and more.¹⁵⁸ However, as mutual aid initiatives have moved online, they have in some cases excluded groups such as people living in poverty, people living in remote areas and those on a low income.¹⁵⁹

Social innovation can be thought of as a process. Social innovations often begin with ideas generated with the aim of understanding needs, and identify potential solutions.¹⁶⁰ As an initial step, listening to the voices and concerns of marginalized groups to develop a deep understanding of the issues they face, and their ideas for potential solutions, is vital. Next, promising ideas are developed, prototyped and piloted, after

The process of social innovation



which they can be assessed, scaled up and disseminated. An important part of these stages is learning. It should be noted that social innovations may not always work or be disseminated. However, those involved in social innovation can learn from the process. For the purpose of this report, the case studies below illustrate how volunteerism can contribute to this process.

Finally, social innovations can be described according to the kinds of relationships they create and facilitate.¹⁶¹ They might generate social connections between and within population groups and institutions that were previously less connected. Often, social innovation can involve shifts in power relationships, and an increase in beneficiaries' abilities to address their own needs.¹⁶² In some instances, "some of the most effective methods for cultivating social innovation start from the presumption that people are competent interpreters of their own lives and competent solvers of their own problems."¹⁶³ As a result, there may be some overlap as elements of deliberative governance and co-production may be considered to be social innovations, such as in public governance.¹⁶⁴

The case studies in chapters 4 and 5 illustrate how new ways of working between volunteers, community members and state authorities can facilitate shifts in power relations. In this chapter, the case studies illustrate how volunteerism can contribute to or influence social innovation processes.

6.3. Introducing the case studies

The case studies discussed in this chapter focus on volunteer–state partnerships in social innovation in seven countries across diverse geographical regions in the Global South. The case studies, which span SIDS in the Pacific (Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu), the Caribbean (Trinidad and Tobago), Africa (Kenya and Malawi) and Colombia in Latin America, demonstrate that volunteers can play an important role in the process of social innovation. In Trinidad and Tobago and Malawi, volunteer-led organizations have facilitated ideas and relationships that represent new ways of

thinking and working between volunteers and states. The case studies also show that social innovation need not be novel; it can involve new ways of using old practices or applying old practices in new settings. The case studies from Colombia, Kenya, Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu illustrate the kinds of innovative programmes and ideas that can emerge when state authorities engage in reciprocal relationships and partnerships with mutual aid groups and other organizations that facilitate volunteerism.

The case studies consist of volunteers from a wide array of marginalized groups,

including young people (Malawi and Trinidad and Tobago), peasant farmers (Colombia), slum-dwellers and urban poor people (Kenya), and women market vendors (Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). Volunteers tackle a variety of issues, from sexual and reproductive health and rights (Malawi), youth participation (Trinidad and Tobago) and rural health (Colombia), to slum-dwellers' rights and urban development (Kenya) and women's economic empowerment and rights (Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). While the Malawi case study was developed from primary sources (interviews and focus groups) and secondary sources, the rest are based solely on secondary sources.



6.3.1. Art & Global Health Center, Malawi

The Art & Global Health Center (ArtGlo) is a volunteer-led youth organization in Zomba, southern Malawi.

Among ArtGlo's volunteers are youth from key populations, including people living with HIV. For the purpose of this chapter, the case study focuses on ArtGlo's work on youth sexual reproductive health and rights, and HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, particularly among key populations. ArtGlo collaborates directly with community members (in districts such as Zomba, Chiradzulu and Phalombe) via existing community-based organizations (CBOs) (such as Vision for Development and Tiwasunge CBO in Chiradzulu), and with state authorities (notably, the local police of victim support units, district youth offices and district social welfare offices). The organization, which specializes in participatory art as a tool for social change, has created an environment in which local community members are supported to build leadership skills while actively influencing health delivery systems.



6.3.2. Muungano Alliance, Kenya

Slum-dwellers and the urban poor make up half of Kenya's population but only occupy 2 percent of the country's land area.

The Muungano Alliance is a Kenyan federation consisting of three entities that represent the interests of slum-dwellers and the urban poor: Muungano wa Wanavijiji, the Kenyan federation of slum-dwellers (the social movement component); the Akiba Mashinani Trust, the Kenyan urban poor fund (the resource mobilization component); and Slum Dwellers International (SDI) Kenya (the capacity-building and technical support component).¹⁶⁵ The alliance, which comprises slum-dwellers and the urban poor, represents this population, and works to influence changes in practice and policy, particularly national policy for urban development.



6.3.3. Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago

The Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago (VCTT) is a pioneering volunteer-based organization whose goal is to connect various sectors (non-governmental organizations [NGOs] and government institutions) and develop high-impact volunteer activities to encourage sector growth.¹⁶⁶

Its activities include an online volunteer-matching platform, the first national assessment of volunteering in the country, an online/offline youth mentorship programme, and civic education projects in schools.



6.3.4. Model of Integral Care for Rurality, Colombia

The Model of Integral Care for Rurality (MICR) is a health programme based in Sumapaz, in the rural area of Colombia's capital, Bogota.¹⁶⁷

Co-implemented with Bogota's public health system company (Subred Sur), the initiative aims to improve rural health care quality and access in one of the world's largest paramos.¹⁶⁸ With only 2,500 inhabitants, access to health care services has always been a challenge here, and this has been compounded by poor nutrition, armed conflict and a lack of drinking water. The MICR has brought together a community of peasant farmers and the regional health system to develop more inclusive and responsive health care initiatives.



6.3.5. Markets for Change, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

Markets for Change aims to increase the voice and participation of market vendors in the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, where the majority of market vendors are women.¹⁶⁹

The programme has supported the development of vendor volunteer associations in the three countries. By June 2017, there were 10 registered market vendor associations in Fiji, two in the Solomon Islands and three in Vanuatu. These associations work with government institutions to develop accessible and gender-responsive infrastructure and on-site services.

6.4. Key features of social innovation in volunteer–state partnerships

This section looks at the key features of social innovation in volunteer–state partnerships.

6.4.1. Gaps in services catalyse innovation.

In the case studies discussed, gaps in services among marginalized groups provided the impetus for, and helped catalyse, innovation, with volunteers being the key drivers of these processes. Given that marginalized groups' voices are not always heard, their needs tend to be less visible. For young people living with HIV in Malawi, peasant farmers in Colombia and slum-dwellers in Kenya, social innovation emerged from their needs. ArtGlo's (Malawi) initiative to engage health workers in participatory workshops was born out of the need to challenge the stigma and discrimination faced by minority, marginalized and socially excluded people, which limited their access to health services.

MIRC's (Colombia) long-term innovative health care model evolved from years of working with Sumapaz farmers on the specific issues they face as dispersed populations, particularly poor health care quality and access.¹⁷⁰ In the other case studies, gaps emerged following a crisis or emergency, such as the impacts of COVID-19 on youth mental health and employability in Trinidad and Tobago.

Across the case studies, volunteers were drivers of innovation. In the case of Muungano Alliance, for example, slum-dwellers volunteered their time and knowledge to develop unique profiling tools and community mapping methods, while informal settlers collected data to better understand the situation in the city's slums. The data generated by the volunteers helped in the development of urban planning strategies that took into account the unique

needs of slum-dwellers. In the case of VCTT, data generated from VCTT's National Volunteering Survey became an important resource for the government and other NGOs.¹⁷¹ In ArtGlo (Malawi), youth volunteers co-facilitated participatory arts-based activities to ensure a better understanding of the issues faced by key populations. As members of these communities, the volunteers saw and heard issues (e.g. discrimination, stigma, misinformation) first-hand that were otherwise unknown to state authorities because they were too far removed from communities. District youth officers and health workers were occasionally invited to these sessions to learn from the volunteers and apply this new understanding to their planning and programme development.

6.4.2. Volunteers generate new ideas and solutions.

The relationships developed by volunteers with local communities helped generate new ideas and solutions. Student and youth volunteers in ArtGlo (Malawi) worked with their peers to develop project proposals in areas ranging from sexual and reproductive health to education and creative arts (for example, a project on youth mental health). ArtGlo mobilized funds so that these activities could be implemented. The organization also links with volunteers in relevant local government offices who can then serve as their partners. In Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, the active participation of the market association produced concrete ideas on how the local government could develop more gender-responsive market governance structures and systems. In Fiji, for example, based on the fact that the majority of market vendors are female, the local council committed to building a small hut for breastfeeding women and increasing the number of female toilets in the market.¹⁷²

Box 6.1. Summary of mechanisms involved in volunteering for social innovation

Who volunteers or participates?

Local volunteers who are concerned about gaps in their specific areas such as engagement of key populations, youth participation and employment, market management and healthcare.

What is the extent of participation?

Evidence in this chapter points mostly to local volunteers' participation in generating ideas. It is difficult to assess to what extent they are involved in other stages of innovation, such as dissemination and evaluation. Local volunteer groups were also able to pivot and change their main focus in response to a changing environment, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

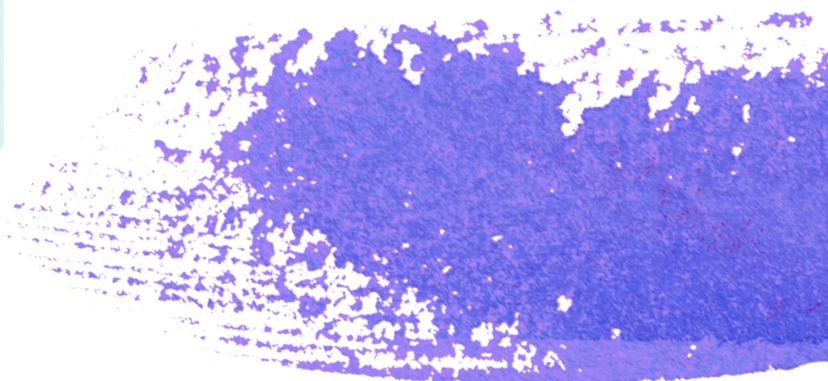
For what outcome?

The innovative outcome is less about developing entirely new products or services, and more about finding innovative ways of working. These include developing community-generated data for project design, transferring old approaches to new contexts, building new cross-sectoral relationships, and repurposing tested tools to address new issues. These innovative ways of working, co-facilitated by local volunteers and volunteer organizations, lead to social outcomes such as changes in perspectives, social norms, values and attitudes.

6.4.3. Partnerships facilitate inclusive structures.

The partnerships facilitated inclusive structures that allowed for the development of new relationships between people and states. In ArtGlo (Malawi), the involvement of other civil society organizations (CSOs) (such as Vision for Development and the Tisuwange CBO) have become an important part of network-building. More importantly, ArtGlo (Malawi) helped develop new relationships between minority groups such as key populations, people living with HIV, local district health officers and district executive committees. This is in a country where homosexuality is still highly criminalized. In the Model of Integral Care for Rural Areas (Colombia), these partnerships are cross-sectoral. Rural farmers engaged with the public health sector, academics and environmental scientists to find solutions that improved health care access, with team members making home medical visits and helping community members access medical specialists.¹⁷³

These features highlight the important role that volunteers play in helping state authorities understand social problems and finding solutions that are responsive to communities' needs. Volunteers can help innovate ideas and put them into action. Volunteers also contribute to social innovations by co-developing methods and tools for understanding community problems. The ideas that these generate then become a basis for further innovative actions.





A volunteer leads a debate on issues relating to gender-based violence to an audience of students and parents in Malawi. Source: UNV.

6.5. Key strengths and challenges of social innovation models

As volunteers engage in tasks, they help generate new ideas and solutions and reconfigure relationships. As a result, the social innovation process is strengthened. However, there are challenges too. This section explores both sides of social innovation models.

6.5.1. Innovative platforms can enhance understanding of marginalized communities' issues.

Several of the case studies show that developing innovative platforms facilitates understanding of community issues. Crowdsourcing platforms, at times aided by technology and developed by volunteers, enhanced outcomes for marginalized communities. The Muungano Alliance (Kenya)'s unique community-centred slum assessment methodology, which was co-developed with a slum-dwellers' association, provided state authorities with a more accurate assessment of Kenya's informal settlements.

In addition to increasing understanding of the challenges faced by slum-dwellers and the urban poor, it provided the basis for a COVID-19 government response that was tailored to their needs (see Box 6.3 for more details).¹⁷⁴ Platforms and methods developed by VCTT (Trinidad and Tobago) and Muungano Alliance (Kenya) were able to reach a wider range of target populations, thereby creating a more comprehensive picture of the issues and challenges.

By contrast, innovative approaches used by ArtGlo (Malawi) (see Box 6.2) and Markets for Change (SIDS) enabled volunteers to engage with local government authorities, such as district health officers and urban planners, and target populations, such as people living with HIV/AIDS (ArtGlo) and women market vendors (Markets for Change). For Markets for Change (SIDS), more than 600 market vendors in Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu participated in a series of workshops to help create more structured market associations.¹⁷⁵ In Vanuatu, a first-of-its-kind association with about 1,000 members—the majority of them women—was established. With a collective voice, the vendors were able to advocate for their needs to local market managers (such as additional toilets for women) and influence the market budget allocation.¹⁷⁶

A female market vendor in Fiji (the only woman kava seller at Tavua market) stated, "I continue to raise issues with the council on the market facilities. We pay our stall fees and we would like the market facilities to be improved."¹⁷⁷

In ArtGlo (Malawi), participatory arts-based strategies and approaches led to more open discussion between state authorities and volunteers from key population groups about the discrimination and challenges that key populations and people living with HIV face.



A volunteer from ArtGlo's Make Art for Women's Activism project coordinates student performances on gender-based violence in Malawi. *Source: UNV.*

Box 6.2. Participatory arts-based strategies to tackle difficult issues

ArtGlo uses participatory art as a tool for social change. It creates an environment in which local community members are empowered to make informed decisions on the issues that affect them and build leadership skills, while actively influencing equitable health delivery systems. ArtGlo's participatory art method is one of its core strengths and unique attributes: song, dance, poetry, drawing, theatre and drama are used to spark important conversations during community meetings, as well as within workshops and training programmes with local district officers. These participatory techniques are viewed as an innovative approach to health and community engagement. In addition, these techniques combine traditional elements of performance, particularly drama, dance and local songs. This has contributed to behaviour change strategies. A young volunteer explained:

“We do dramas and songs which helps people from our communities understand the dangers of violence.”¹⁷⁸

These participatory activities have also been well received by government workers. For instance, during a health workers' workshop in Thekerani, Thyolo, youth and key population volunteers performed a play depicting the challenges faced by young members of key populations when accessing health services. The volunteers played the roles of both client and health worker. They portrayed how they often feel discriminated against when disclosing their sexual orientation and leave the health clinic without receiving any services or suggestions for follow-up. This drama technique is called “forum theatre”: health workers and other participants were asked to intervene on aspects of the performance as thought were inappropriate. Participants then shared points of reflection. A health worker said, “Through the role play, I realized I didn't take time to listen to key populations that came to the hospital. I also did not respect their privacy but now I am ready to change.”¹⁷⁹ Another commented, “I will do my part to be welcoming to key populations in my health care centre. I want them all to know they are welcome and will be treated with dignity.”

Sources: Interviews through case study research and ArtGlo (2020a).

ArtGlo (Malawi)'s approach is an innovative way of facilitating discussion, creating an open environment for both the health workers and the key population volunteers. The approach centres on the social aspects of innovation, such as changing social norms, practices, relationships and attitudes. It is worth noting that issues around youth sexuality, sexual health and associated topics such as gender violence and abuse remain

taboo in these communities as well as many other places in Malawi, partly owing to legislation in this area. For these volunteers, key populations and people living with HIV, expressing themselves through drama seemed to be a less threatening way for them to share the issues they face. At the same time, the health workers heard these issues directly from those who experience them, but in a less confrontational way.

These examples illustrate how volunteers can contribute to innovative approaches to community assessment and people–state dialogues. Such approaches offer new ways for public policymakers and local state authorities to engage with, and gain a better understanding of, those groups who are most impacted by social stigma and other issues (e.g. informal settlements in Kenya). The outcome is more responsive policymaking and programme development.

6.5.2. Socially innovative approaches lead to new ideas and change, even with limited time and resources.

Several case studies demonstrate that volunteers play a role in innovative responses to social needs in situations where time and resources are limited.

In Sumapaz, Colombia, farmers' access to health care has long been limited due to lack of resources but this has been made worse by food insecurity, lack of drinking water, poor nutrition and various armed conflicts. The Model of Integral Care for Rurality (Colombia) is a socially innovative health initiative in which groups of peasant farmers take a central role in co-designing the health programme.¹⁸⁰ For instance, medicinal herbs that are commonly used in the rural community, better management of organic waste and home gardens were studied and integrated into the health provisions. According to their website, “the model integrates community and technical knowledge, recognizing the practical knowledge of the farmer about his/her [sic] environment and the intersectorality.” Despite limited resources and staff, the project was able to develop a long-term, innovative project that led to better health

outcomes, with the Sumapaz region recording the best health indicators in infant mortality and a reduction in acute and chronic malnutrition. This is also an example of social innovation building on the indigenous knowledge of farmers and their communities.

Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic put volunteer–state relationships to the test and prompt the need for context-relevant and innovative interventions. During the pandemic, ArtGlo (Malawi) capitalized on their expertise with youth training to address COVID-19 disinformation and lack of access to health information in communities, and community-based youth volunteers collaborated with the Ministry of Health in the dissemination of life-saving COVID-19 information to these communities. A Health Surveillance Assistant who participated in one of ArtGlo's workshops shared, “This is a typical rural area. People have no radios or any source of information. When COVID-19 preventive measures were put in place, a vehicle with a loudspeaker drove around the villages disseminating COVID-19 messages. It was not an effective strategy. It left people with more questions than answers. Thanks to [the] Umunthu programme for the timely interventions that we are doing, people now understand, and they are observing restriction measures.”¹⁸¹

This demonstrates the flexibility of a relatively young NGO to quickly step in to support new needs, especially when they have built good working relationships with the community.

In Kenya, the Muungano Alliance also played a significant role in shaping the government's COVID-19 response (see Box 6.3).

Box 6.3. Community-generated data for an innovative COVID-19 response¹⁸²

Stakeholders in Kenya recognized the Muungano Alliance's strength in generating community data on Nairobi's informal settlements which are typically absent from the government's census, including through community mapping exercises, slum profiles and household surveys.

The data, which focus exclusively on the unique characteristics of informal settlements (e.g. small with densely packed populations), have fostered an understanding of poverty in the city (through street maps, visuals and statistical analyses).

During the pandemic, this community-generated data became even more important. The Muungano Alliance partnered with Kenya's national COVID-19 taskforce to develop a COVID-19 health care response that was tailored to the needs of informal settlers. Given that informal settlements differ spatially from other neighbourhoods, data collected by Muungano, which included real-time data (every two to three days) across 10 informal settlements, were used to inform the country's COVID-19 strategy.

The data generated by the Muungano Alliance showed that residents of informal settlements had limited access to health care facilities. The alliance worked with these communities in a mapping exercise to identify possible isolation centres within the settlements, including traditional health centres, churches and school buildings. They developed context-specific isolation guidelines so that residents could quarantine properly and receive health care and treatment. It is expected that these improvements will lead to increased social understanding and cohesion, as well as to enhancing informal settlers' capacity to contribute to government programmes.

Sources: Banyai-Baker, Mwangi and Wairutu (2020) and Muungano Alliance (n.d.).

The Muungano Alliance's experience points to the need to tailor responses to individual communities and groups. Here, it was important to understand the situation and realities of Kenyan slum-dwellers. Reliance on community participation to identify isolation centres meant that these spaces were safe for community members to use, thereby helping to limit the spread of the virus in such densely populated areas. Their experience also demonstrates how the organization, together with mutual aid groups and volunteers, was able to swiftly apply old approaches to newer contexts and crisis situations.

In the case of VCTT (Trinidad and Tobago), technology played a role in responding to the needs of young people and students for

education and employment. VCTT launched the "Me to We" movement, an online and offline youth mentorship platform that links "underperforming" young people from Trinidad and Tobago's secondary school with a group of volunteer mentors trained in coaching, mentoring and working with young people.¹⁸³ With resources from several private donors and NGOs, VCTT was able not only to mobilize a number of youth volunteers, but also to respond to the urgent need to address youth's mental health, employability and development, particularly during the pandemic.

These examples show that volunteers draw on assets in their communities, including existing relationships and mechanisms, and

leverage technology, to foster new ways of working with state authorities. With these new ways of working come new solutions that better respond to the needs of their communities and make a real difference, despite limited time and resources.

6.5.3. Volunteers facilitate new ways of working and help reconfigure power relations.

Volunteers can help facilitate new ways of working. As the case studies have illustrated, volunteers bring together otherwise unconnected groups to think of solutions together, in some cases reconfiguring power relationships between groups.

VCTT (Trinidad and Tobago), for instance, created an online volunteer-matching platform that curates a range of development projects in Trinidad and Tobago and Latin America. Volunteers can choose a project based on their capabilities and interests. A unique feature of the platform is that it categorizes projects according to which of the SDGs they could best contribute to. The volunteering activities carried out by young people as part of these projects could be seen as part of a wider, global strategy for development.¹⁸⁴ Opportunities are also grouped by theme such as teaching and training, fund-raising and event organizing. This platform co-exists with a volunteer-led, on-site school project called V Challenge which promotes civic participation and volunteerism in school.¹⁸⁵

In the Muungano Alliance (Kenya), three CSOs were already working together. Each had a specific role, having been brought together by their shared advocacy of the rights of informally settled populations. As part of the alliance, slum-dweller associations

engaged in what the association described as “horizontal learning exchanges”. These involved localized urban poor associations learning from each other’s projects. This is one way in which potentially innovative projects such as income-generation, re-planning of a settlement or building a toilet block, can be disseminated across an alliance. This approach builds on the notion that “doing is knowing”, where the pool of knowledge and new ideas created through these exchanges become a community asset.¹⁸⁶

Building and maintaining people–state relationships has also been helpful in turning innovative ideas into actual projects. For example, ArtGlo (Malawi) funded project proposals developed by their volunteers, but partnerships played a key role in making these proposals a reality (see Box 6.4).

ArtGlo (Malawi) demonstrates that the relationships and linkages developed between volunteers, community members and state authorities are vital in turning ideas into reality. This echoes the findings in previous chapters that volunteers play a role in creating spaces for deliberation (chapter 4) and in co-producing and co-implementing government programmes (chapter 5). It is also clear in the case of ArtGlo that volunteers were keen to create relationships with a variety of stakeholders and to develop a sense of solidarity with other actors.

The innovation and impact that the MICR (Colombia) has achieved over the years has partly been attributed to the cross-disciplinary nature of the team. Rural communities offer their practical knowledge about everyday farming while academics and public health officers contribute scientific knowledge and other assets. For instance, agronomists have been looking at medicinal plants that are heavily used by the community: “We articulated with the integrative medicine component and developed actions so that the families

complement the conventional treatment given by the Subred Sur and can have a greater adherence and health approached in a holistic way.”¹⁸⁷

However, access to information necessary to generate ideas remains a challenge,¹⁸⁸ as outlined in chapter 4 on deliberative governance. For example, a study in three markets in Fiji found that knowledge about municipal bylaws was severely lacking.¹⁸⁹ Only a few women had received information on these aspects through noticeboards or public announcement systems, and more than 50 percent of those surveyed expressed their preference for learning about these issues via word of mouth. The kind of information that they wanted included fisheries bans and new legislation that affected their source of income.

Box 6.4. From “dreams” to reality: the role of partnerships

Students with Dreams is a creative leadership programme by ArtGlo in Malawi that engages with student and youth volunteers to think of new ideas to solve a range of different issues, from sexual and reproductive health to education and the environment. These young volunteers develop what ArtGlo call “dreamer projects” which, with its help, are turned into reality. One such project is the Umunthu, which started out as a film documentary looking at discrimination faced by marginalized groups such as LGBTQI people. The project grew from there and a series of workshops were created based on the film’s findings and insights. It became its own programme that aims to challenge the discrimination faced by marginalized groups of LGBTQI youth. The programme has since grown and works with various state actors who participate in the programme’s implementation, such

as the district health office, the district executive committee, government health workers and the Ministry of Health. In its other programmes, ArtGlo (Malawi) learns from and builds on relationships in different districts, and encourages its partners to do the same. One of its partners is the community-based organization, Vision for Development. A CSO leader stated, “One thing that ArtGlo has also done with Vision for Development and other CSOs is close the gap in coordination. We are coordinating with stakeholders like government [and state] ministries. For example, in this programme, we are working with the Ministry of Gender, the Department of Social Welfare, and the Department of Home Affairs—that’s the police. This coordinated engagement helps a lot to work together, not in isolation.”¹⁹⁰ ArtGlo links up with the district health office in Zomba through their joint meetings and workshops. The district health office is involved in all ArtGlo’s health-related, youth-focused, anti-discrimination and community development programmes, from inception to completion. For health service provision, ArtGlo works with the state through the district health management team who mobilize district health staff to join ArtGlo’s workshops. As well as providing programme updates to the district health office, ArtGlo also provides recommendations on health, youth and gender. It does this by feeding into the district implementation plan, having a seat on the Zomba district review committee, or through the district health office. ArtGlo’s findings and recommendations are then shared at the national level through meetings and workshops.

6.6. Conclusion

Volunteerism plays an important role in social innovation. Volunteer–state partnerships illustrate new ways of working that engage people in social innovation with gaps in their communities providing the impetus for volunteer action.

As partnerships between volunteers and state authorities in social innovation draw on and leverage volunteers' experiences, knowledge and expertise in their communities, they not only help shape development outcomes that are more responsive to communities' needs, but also play an integral role in spearheading and driving innovation. As the case studies make clear, volunteers contribute to a deeper and more detailed understanding of the issues because they are members of their local communities. For young people in Zomba, the challenge was not necessarily the lack of health clinics but the fear of being discriminated against by government health workers because of their

HIV status or sexuality. ArtGlo's innovative response focused on bringing these two groups together to increase understanding and ultimately lead to the young people accessing the services they needed.

Volunteers' commitment to shared values (often based around ideas of inclusion and equality), their reciprocal relationship with state authorities, and the demand for their voices to be heard further strengthens their contribution towards the social aspect of innovation. Volunteers are therefore a vital asset to state authorities.

Importantly, social innovations that emerge from volunteer–state relationships may not necessarily result in the development of new products and services. Instead, the outcome may take the form of innovative ways of working, including through the establishment of new processes. The use of the Muungano Alliance's 20-year-old profiling methodology in the government's COVID-19 strategy is a good example of this.



A student participates in volunteer-led discussions on gender-based violence in Malawi. Source: UNV.

Volunteer voice: Sumitra Sahu from India on her volunteering role during COVID-19

Volunteers generate new and innovative ideas for social impact. During crises, this process can be accelerated. Sumitra Sahu from India shares how self-help groups and other volunteer organizations in her local area came up with fresh approaches to problems during the pandemic.

I'm Sumitra, I'm 30 years old and I'm a youth volunteer with the Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS). I'm a resident of Rajnandgaon district in Chhattisgarh and have been a volunteer with the organization for the past two years. I faced persecution in my birthplace, Raigarh district—my family was forced to flee from Naxalism, a communist insurgency led by militant insurgent and separatist groups that was rampant, and which made living there unsafe, especially for adolescent girls. In 2011, I benefited from joining a women's self-help group, which enabled me to improve my career prospects, and complete secondary schooling via open schooling.

During the pandemic, many vulnerable women and children in Rajnandgaon were at risk of malnutrition as food supplies became erratic. Volunteers came up with simple, cost-effective, local solutions and raised awareness about the need to eat healthy, locally grown food and practice better hygiene. In addition, they introduced a new farming method aimed at ensuring a nutritious food supply to families even in the most remote parts of our tribal villages. For many villagers who lost their livelihoods during the pandemic, this solution also helped them save on expenses, and be more self-reliant.

The most exciting part of volunteerism has been providing support to my community and simple solutions to improve their lives. When I help raise awareness on the benefits of healthy behaviour, hygienic practices, how to overcome taboos and how to access useful government schemes, or just open up their minds to think and act with reason, I know I am helping society at large.

I feel that my journey as a volunteer has connected me better with the people in my community. I feel that they trust, love and respect me now.

Special contribution: Shaping the future of development in the Sahel region through youth volunteer-government partnerships – an opportunity not to be missed

Reflections by the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, Mr. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye

Volunteerism is a function of selfless sacrifices, primarily by young people, who desire meaningful change. This ideal is entrenched in the work of the United Nations and is integral to the work of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and its Support Plan.

The Sahel is a paradox of multiple realities, on the one hand characterized by humanitarian and peace and security challenges, and on the other, a region of bountiful human, cultural and natural resources with immense potential for growth.

For development to be achieved in the Sahel, the selfless sacrifice of its youth is highly desired. With young people comprising more than 60 percent of the region's population, they are undoubtedly the Sahel's greatest asset. How then, can governments in the region, alongside other partners, best leverage young people across the Sahel, many of them volunteers for development?

To harness the region's potential and reverse the negative narrative that is associated with the Sahel, stakeholders need to engage youth in development. Recognizing this, the UNISS, which aims to tackle the Sahel's structural challenges, has made significant strides in articulating ambitious pathways aimed at addressing the root causes of protracted crises and underdevelopment in the region, with Sahelian youth, many of them volunteers, being an invaluable resource in addressing these challenges.

Volunteering is a noble cause that can benefit the people of the Sahel. Young volunteers are agents of transformation who are willing and ready to make meaningful development contributions in their communities; partnering with them to support the development of their countries is one of the most effective ways to shape the region's development.

Indeed, young Sahelians have been at the forefront of responding to the region's various crises and have made numerous contributions in its development, peace and security. As part of the COVID-19 response, for example, 170 UN Volunteers, most of them female, supported the United Nations and governments in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger in addressing emerging needs.

As the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres noted, “I appeal to all governments to promote volunteering, support volunteer efforts, and recognize volunteer contributions to the achievement of the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals].” To shape the development paths of Sahelian countries, governments in the region must recognize the place of volunteerism and youth, and to be a win-win for all, volunteering must be at the centre of development efforts.

Recognizing the important contributions of young Sahelians, in 2021, the UNISS started an initiative that seeks to reflect the perspectives of young Sahelians in development, including by engaging them in direct conversations (Voices from the Sahel: Conversations, Visions & Solutions) on how the United Nations can better partner with youth to change the negative narrative surrounding the Sahel.

With volunteering bridging the intergenerational gap, tackling the root causes of conflict and rebuilding broken social contracts while leaving no one behind, governments in Sahel countries and other partners who want to meaningfully achieve the development aspirations of the Sahel and the SDGs need to tap into and collectively recognize volunteers' efforts, provide support, and dedicate resources and investments to and for youth-led initiatives, especially those that involve volunteerism.

There is no better time to engage in volunteering.

References

- Abrams, Amanda (2020). How to get mutual aid to those who need it most. *openDemocracy*, 1 May.
- Art & Global Health Center Africa (2020a). Using theater to create safe spaces: Reflection on stigma in Healthcare services, 22 April.
- _____ (2020b). Engaging communities on COVID-19 prevention through the spirit of Umunthu, 8 August.
- Banyai-Becker, Whitney, Charity Mwangi and Jane Wairutu (2020). The power of data in a pandemic: repurposing Muungano's data-collection expertise to fight Covid-19 in Kenya. *African Cities*, 23 November.
- Bautista Gómez, Martha Milena, Kathleen Agudelo, and Diana María Castro-Arroyave (2020). Comprehensive Care Model for Rural Health: Sumapaz Locality. Geneva: Social Innovation in Health Initiative.
- Biljohn, Maréve Inge Madlyn, and Liezel Lues (2020). Citizen participation, social innovation, and the governance of local government service delivery: Findings from South Africa. *International Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 43, No. 3, pp. 229–241.
- Bonina, Carla, and Ben Eaton (2020). Cultivating open government data platform ecosystems through governance: Lessons from Buenos Aires, Mexico City and Montevideo. *Government Information Quarterly*, vol. 37, No. 3, 101479.
- Burns, Danny, and others (2014). *The role of volunteering in sustainable development*. London: Voluntary Service Overseas; Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Davies, Anna (2012). *Spreading Social Innovations: A Case Study Report*. A deliverable of the project: The theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for building social innovation in Europe (TEPSIE), European Commission – 7th Framework Programme. Brussels: European Commission.
- de Wit, Arjen, and others (2017). Beyond service production: Volunteering for social innovation. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 525–715.
- Fitzgerald, Gabrielle (2021). What Working in Crisis Mode Teaches Us About Collaboration and Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 19 July.
- Fleming, Farida, and Marica Tabualevu (2018). *UN Women Markets for Change Midterm Review Report*. Available at <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/markets-for-change-independent-mid-term-review-2018.pdf>. Accessed on 25 October 2021.
- Ghouralal, Darlisa (2020). ME to WE: More than a mentorship programme. *Loop*, 12 March.
- Glennie, Alex, and others (2020). Strategies for supporting inclusive innovation: insights from South-East Asia. United Nations Development Programme.
- Hulgård, Lars, and Silvia Ferreira (2019). Social Innovation and Public Policy. In *Atlas of Social Innovation: 2nd Volume: A word of new practices*, Jürgen Howaldt, Christoph Kaletka, Antonius Schröder and Marthe Zirngiebl, eds. Munich: oekom.
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (2010). *Paramos*, 9 July.
- Mulgan, Geoff (2006). The Process of Social Innovation. *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization*, vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 145–162.
- Mulgan, Geoff, and others (2007). *Social innovation: what it is, why it matters, how it can be accelerated*. London: The Young Foundation.
- Muungano Alliance (n.d.). About the Alliance. Available at <https://www.muungano.net/about>.
- Newth, Jamie (2015). Social Enterprise Innovation in Context: Stakeholder Influence through Contestation. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 369–399.
- Piatak, Jaclyn, Nathan Dietz, and Brice McKeever (2019). Bridging or deepening the digital divide: Influence of household internet access on formal and informal volunteering. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 1235–1505.
- Rioba, Benson (2020). With schools shut by pandemic, solar radios keep Kenyan children learning. *Reuters*, 23 December.
- Shamsuddin, Aysha (2021). How a Women's Organization became 'chief architects' of the COVID-19 response in Southern India. *FP2P Blog*, 1 March.
- Social Innovation in Health Initiative (2021). *Integrated Care Model for Rural Areas*. Available at

<https://socialinnovationinhealth.org/case-studies/integrated-care-model-for-rural-areas/>. Accessed on 25 October 2021.

Spear, Roger, and others (2020). Innovations in Citizen Response to Crises: Volunteerism & Social Mobilization During COVID-19. *Interface*, vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 383–391.

Tucker, Simon (2014). *Social Innovation for Public Service Excellence*. Singapore: United Nations Development Programme Global Centre for Public Service Excellence.

United Nations (2021). COVID-19 has exposed endemic gender inequality, Guterres tells UN Women's commission, 15 March.

United Nations Development Programme (2020). Coronavirus vs. inequality. Available at <https://feature.undp.org/coronavirus-vs-inequality/>. Accessed on 27 October 2021.

United Nations Women (2015). Markets for Change Project. Available at: https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2016/02/m4c_regionalbrief_17feb16_email.pdf?la=en&vs=3159.

Vitukawalu, Bulou, and others (2020). Addressing barriers and constraints to gender equality and social inclusion of women seafood sellers in municipal markets in Fiji. *Women in Fisheries. Information Bulletin*, No. 31, pp. 30–36.

Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago (n.d.a). About us. Available at <https://www.vctt.org/community/why-we-are-here>. Accessed on 25 October 2021.

_____ (n.d.b). National Survey on the State of Volunteerism in T&T. Available at <https://www.vctt.org/volunteers/survey>. Accessed on 25 October 2021.

_____ (n.d.c). V Challenge. Available at <https://www.vctt.org/volunteers/v-challenge>. Accessed on 25 October 2021.

Endnotes

- 143** Fitzgerald (2021).
- 144** Spear and others (2020).
- 145** Mulgan and others (2007).
- 146** Glennie and others (2020, p. 7).
- 147** For example, according to Mulgan (2006), business innovations are generally motivated by a desire to maximize profit. However, these differentiations are often blurred in the case of social enterprises, which aim to achieve both social and economic ends. See also Newth (2015).
- 148** Mulgan (2006).
- 149** Tucker (2014, p. 4).
- 150** Biljohn and Lues (2020).
- 151** Tucker (2014).
- 152** de Wit and others (2017).
- 153** See Davies (2012) for more case study examples.
- 154** Burns and others (2014).
- 155** This draws heavily from discussions in Mulgan and others (2007).
- 156** Shamsuddin (2021).
- 157** Bonina and Eaton (2020).
- 158** Spear and others (2020).
- 159** Abrams (2020).
- 160** Mulgan (2006).
- 161** Mulgan and others (2007).
- 162** Mulgan (2006).
- 163** Mulgan (2006, p. 150).
- 164** Hulgård and Ferreira (2019).
- 165** Muungano Alliance (n.d.).
- 166** VCTT (n.d.a).
- 167** Social Innovation in Health Initiative (2021).
- 168** According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (2010), "the paramos form a neotropical high altitude ecoregion distributed mainly along the Andean mountain range in Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela...[They] play a fundamental role in sustaining the lives of millions of people, providing essential ecosystem services such as water production for urban use, irrigation and hydropower generation."
- 169** UN Women (2015).
- 170** Bautista Gómez, Agudelo and Castro-Arroyave (2020).
- 171** VCTT (n.d.b).
- 172** Fleming and Tabualevu (2018).
- 173** Social Innovation in Health Initiative (2021).
- 174** Banyai-Becker, Mwangi and Wairutu (2020).
- 175** UN Women (2015).
- 176** UN Women (2015).
- 177** UN Women (2015).
- 178** Focus group discussion, youth club (Vision for Development), 15 July 2021.
- 179** Art & Global Health Center (ArtGlo) Africa (2020a).
- 180** Bautista, Agudelo and Castro-Arroyave (2020).
- 181** ArtGlo Africa (2020b).
- 182** Banyai-Becker, Mwangi and Wairutu (2020).
- 183** Ghouralal (2020).
- 184** VCTT (n.d.a).
- 185** VCTT (n.d.c).
- 186** Muungano Alliance (n.d.).
- 187** Social Innovation in Health Initiative (2021).
- 188** Vitukawalu and others (2020).
- 189** Vitukawalu and others (2020).
- 190** Interview, Team Leader (Vision for Development), 15 July 2021.