



IYV+10, from 2001 to 2011

So what?



by Philip Sen

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Not every kid dares

The rain hardly ever stops in Vanuatu. It's pouring as usual when Jayleen sets out on her daily walk among thatched villages to talk to the local Ni-Van youth, face to face, about HIV and Aids. She is a peer educator who volunteers her time and energy to fight the root of this disease: ignorance. Together with the NGO Wan Smol Bag, teams of volunteer peer educators like Jayleen mingle with ordinary people, young people and sex workers. They laugh, crack jokes and talk about sex.

'The whole thing about these volunteers is that they're young and they're local,' says Jo Dorras, founder of Wan Smol Bag. 'They understand the culture just like every other kid. But they're special, because not every kid dares to do what they do.'

Through their work in the community theatre, youth centres and health clinics, these volunteers are a living example of youth action. As volunteers, they have become more than just beneficiaries; they are actors.

Young people want to change the world. Volunteering gives them the chance to do it. It empowers youths like Jayleen to take an active part in the development of their own communities, to take responsibility for the needs of others and to make an impact in their own lives. Volunteering often starts at home, but together, volunteers can change the world.

The year 2011 not only marks the International Year of Youth but also the 10th anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers. Through General Assembly Resolution 63/153 (2008), the United Nations called for this anniversary to be marked across the planet.



The aims of the wide range of partners are to promote the values of volunteering, recognise the value of volunteering, build and reinforce volunteering networks both nationally and globally, and help people tap their potential to make a difference through peace building and development. Volunteering turns youth from problems into solutions.

The International Year of Volunteers +10 campaign, known as 'IYV+10', aims to demonstrate how volunteer action can speed up development progress, especially when governments, the development community and civil society integrate volunteer action into their work. It brings together a host of partner NGOs and civil society organisations such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Association for Volunteer Effort.



With the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme as the focal point, these partners are organising regional conferences and advocacy campaigns, and revitalising volunteer committees at the country level. Towards the end of the year, UNV will also launch the first 'State of the World's Volunteerism' report, to coincide with a special General Assembly session on volunteering and its impact on achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Since the original International Year of Volunteers, in 2001, more than 70 countries have adopted or introduced new laws or policies on volunteering, often igniting the enthusiasm of youth for making a lasting change in their communities. However, while government, the private sector and the media may now be more aware of volunteering, more support is still needed.

As well as promoting, recognising and facilitating volunteering, IYV+10 is also about sharing knowledge and experience. Managing youth volunteers and properly integrating them into development programmes and national policies take hard work and expertise. Early volunteer schemes that plunged inexperienced young people from the North into complex development problems in the South didn't always work out.



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Volunteer projects involving young people are more about reciprocity and mutual learning than the transmission of knowledge and skills. Stringent monitoring and evaluation are also essential. But with the right tools, there's so much that youth volunteering can achieve. Offer young people role models and inspire them with a new outlook, and their creativity pays dividends. Take youth seriously, give them responsibility and a place in society based on trust and they excel.

Across the planet from Vanuatu, the values that volunteering can instil are exactly the same. 'These are kids from single parent homes, maybe a history of delinquency,' explains Jean Wintz, a UN Volunteer Community Facilitator with the United Nations Development Programme in Guyana. Three years ago, township violence left 23 people dead.

'But we're getting them to give back to the community, and training them to be volunteer leaders,' says Jean. 'The change is being felt,' adds the 20-something Guyanian national, 'school attendance is up, behaviour is changing, participation in the community is getting better.'

Through volunteering, young people become actors in their own community solutions. And that's what IYV+10 is all about.

***Find out more about the International Year of Volunteers at
www.worldvolunteerweb.org/iyv+10***

