



International  
Association for  
Volunteer  
Effort



**LEADERSHIP  
FOR VOLUNTEERING:**

# **THE COVID-19 EXPERIENCE**

A Research Study for IAVE by  
Jacob Mwathi Mati, Cliff Allum and Helene Perold  
With Benjamin J. Lough and Rebecca Tiessen

September 2021



Cover photo

Volunteers distributing COVID-19 donations to community members. (Photo by Juguete Pendiente, Peru)

Photo top

Volunteer preparing care packages for disadvantaged members of the community. (Photo by Naua, Jordan)

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## LEADERSHIP FOR VOLUNTEERING: THE COVID-19 EXPERIENCE

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## FOREWORD

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When people get involved in their communities, things change for the better. We have all witnessed this with especial urgency this past year as the COVID-19 pandemic crept across the globe and responding became an international priority in order to limit the spread of the infection, save lives and find a vaccine.

The new terminology of ‘social distancing’ and ‘lock down’ became common place and mask wearing the norm for people everywhere. Alongside this, volunteer involving organizations and community led volunteering became a vital part of the emergency response whilst continuing to meet existing community needs.

IAVE – the International Association for Volunteer Effort – has always believed that organizations focused on valuing, supporting, and developing volunteering at the national or strategic regional level facilitates greater engagement and mobilization of people to act as volunteers, raises awareness of their efforts and thus provides a catalyst to a healthy civil society. After all, these organizations make up the fiber of a community, with active linkages and partnerships with governments, corporations and institutions. They are also the convenors of myriad local organizations in the communities they serve, enhancing good practice and harnessing the power for collective action at the local and societal level.

For the past decade IAVE has been actively working to support and convene national leadership for volunteering organizations and this work culminated in the establishment of the Global Network for Volunteering Leadership (GNVL) in March 2020.

In a crisis situation leadership is important and as the pandemic unfolded IAVE was working closely with the new members of GNVL to share information and knowledge about not only the challenges but the solutions and innovations that leadership for volunteering organizations were delivering as they advocated for volunteering, developed and mobilized volunteers. It became clear throughout 2020 that the pandemic was having an impact on volunteering and that this impact would result in lasting change. IAVE wanted to ‘get out on the balcony’ of what was happening to and with these organizations in order to capture the learning and innovation. We also wanted to understand and to give recognition to the important role played by national leadership for volunteering organizations during this crisis and to create a body of knowledge about their strategic leadership role in order to more swiftly deploy them as resources in the next crisis or disaster.

I am delighted to present this research report and the pivotal information it contains about national leadership for volunteering across 67 countries. The report provides such a valuable resource to enhance our understanding of how we can support and develop the global volunteer movement to meet current and future challenges.



**Nichole Cirillo**

Executive Director

International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE)

September 2021

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## IAVE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The research study 'Leadership for Volunteering: the COVID-19 Experience' was commissioned by IAVE in November 2020 and took 8 months to complete. The research would not have been possible without the generous financial support provided by the UPS Foundation.

It was carried out by an international research team comprising Jacob Mwathi Mati (South Africa), Cliff Allum (United Kingdom) and Helene Perold (South Africa) with Benjamin Lough (United States) and Rebecca Tiessen (Canada). IAVE recognizes the expertise, hard work and commitment of the team particularly, Jacob, Helene and Cliff who worked closely with IAVE staff, led by Wendy Osborne and the Research Advisory Committee to realise IAVE's vision for the project and complete an important and strategic global research project that enhances our knowledge and informs the global volunteering community.

From the start IAVE wanted the project to access external experts and involve GNVL members in guiding the work. A big thank you is due to the members of the Research Advisory Committee, chaired by Professor Matt Baillie Smith, Professor of International Development at Northumbria University; Nichole Cirillo, Executive Director IAVE; Katie Turner, Deputy Head of Research at the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR); Frederick Sadia, National Coordinator of the Volunteer Involving Organizations Society Kenya; Ahmad El-Zubi, Founding CEO of Naua, Jordan; Flora Chung, Former CEO, Agency for Volunteer Services, Hong Kong; Denise Hayward, Chief Executive, Volunteer Now, Northern Ireland; Marcela Guillibrand, Executive Coordinator of Ahora Nos Toca Participar and former Executive Director of Red Voluntarios de Chile (Chile volunteering network); Giselle Mendez, Volunteer Innovator and Founder/Managing Director, Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago. Thanks also to those national leadership for volunteering organizations who took part in the validation webinars and gave useful feedback on the initial research analysis.

The global diversity and scope of the research is due to the interest and participation of the national leadership for volunteering organizations from across 67 countries who took the time to respond to the online survey and take part in online interviews. It is your sharing of information, knowledge, opinions and ideas that provided the rich data of evidence that makes this report so interesting and relevant.

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## **RESEARCH TEAM ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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This research, commissioned by the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE), was made possible with the involvement of more than 70 volunteering leadership organizations (VLOs) that contributed to the survey and interviews. A complete list is shown in Annexes 1a and 1b. We thank each one of them for their participation and support.

We acknowledge the support and guidance of the Research Advisory Committee in commenting on the research plan and outcomes throughout the study. We would especially like to thank Wendy Osborne and Raaida Mannaa for their support in facilitating our access to the VLO participants in both the interviews and the survey. Wendy's continued engagement assisted us in meeting the aspirations of IAVE for this work.

In addition to the contributions of the research team, we would also like to thank Kiana Klassen, University of Ottawa, Canada for her extensive assistance on the literature related to the study. These resources informed the design of the survey and interview questions.

We would also like to thank Benter Okello, Patricia Kyungu and Ellie Allum-Marshall for their assistance in transcribing the interviews. Our thanks also go to Tania Haddad for assisting with translating and transcribing some of the interviews.

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## ACRONYMS

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GNVL	IAVE's Global Network for Volunteering Leadership
VIOs	Volunteer involving organizations
VLOs	National volunteering leadership organizations
ORGANIZATION ACRONYMS	
AVS, Hong Kong	Agency for Volunteer Service, Hong Kong
CDVC, Croatia	Croatian Development Volunteer Center
CMV, Morocco	Collectif Marocain du Volontariat
CNV, Mozambique	National Volunteer Council, Mozambique
Emirates Foundation, UAE	Emirates Foundation, United Arab Emirates
NVPC, Singapore	National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre, Singapore
PhilCV, Philippines	Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism
RVF, Rwanda	Rwanda Volunteer Framework, Rwanda
VCTT, Trinidad & Tobago	Volunteer Center of Trinidad & Tobago
VIO Society, Kenya	Volunteer Involving Organisations Society, Kenya
Volunteering NZ	Volunteering New Zealand
VSN Thailand	Volunteer Spirit Network, Thailand
VSP Guyana	Volunteer Support Program, Guyana

Photo top left

Volunteer distributing food parcels to the families of informal workers who faced the biggest impacts on their livelihoods due to the lockdowns. (Photo by Naua, Jordan)



Photo bottom left

COVID-19 IEC campaign with the Matigsalog Tribe in Davao organized by Josefa Segovia Foundation. (Photo by PhilCV, The Philippines)



Photo right

Volunteers distributing care packages to vulnerable members of the community. (Photo by Juguete Pendiente, Peru)

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## LEADERSHIP FOR VOLUNTEERING: THE COVID-19 EXPERIENCE

# KEY FINDINGS

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This research report examines how COVID-19 impacted on the strategic leadership role of VLOs in advocacy, development and volunteer mobilization. It also considers what this means for VLOs and the future of volunteering. The research was commissioned by the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) to create a body of knowledge about the experience of national volunteering leadership organizations (VLOs) in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data was collected from VLO members and potential members of IAVE's Global Network for Volunteering Leadership (GNVL) using a mixed methods approach which produced quantitative data from 70 respondents across 67 countries to an online survey sent to 125 organizations, and qualitative data from 31 in-depth interviews conducted online. Survey respondents and key informants were spread



across the six regions in which IAVE operates: Africa, the Arab region, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and North America and the Caribbean. The data was collected between February and April 2021.

The evidence shows that across the globe the pandemic increased the complexity of the volunteering environment, on this basis the research team examined the implications for strategic leadership in VLOs that are navigating an unpredictable future.

## **PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS**

**COVID-19 led to VLOs being involved in more partnerships, working to mobilize, support and advocate for volunteering.**

A key feature of the VLO strategic response to the pandemic has been the growth of partnerships and coalitions between VLOs and their stakeholders, both existing and new. Where these pre-date COVID-19, they have been reconfigured to meet the demands of the pandemic. The scale of such partnerships is clear from the survey in which 64% of the respondents said they have strengthened their volunteer-based partnerships with government during COVID-19, while 52% of the respondents also developed strategic partnerships with companies. 60% stated they had been part of new coalitions of volunteer involving organizations during COVID-19 to support volunteer mobilization.

## ADVOCACY

**COVID-19 highlighted the role of VLOs in creating an enabling environment for volunteering.**

The COVID-19 context produced opportunities as VLOs drew on complementary skills and resources in their coalitions and partnerships to increase their impact. 100% of the survey respondents stated their leadership role was aimed at creating an enabling environment and in the context of COVID-19 88% said this had become a greater priority than before. Quality standards also became a greater priority for 75% of the organizations surveyed.

The pandemic increased the drive to remove barriers to volunteering. VLOs played various roles in crafting national volunteer strategies; advocating for national and regional voluntary service schemes; creating supportive legal and regulatory volunteer infrastructure; and advising on national volunteer management strategies and protocols. A key area of concern was the safety of volunteers, including lobbying for health insurance that includes cover for illness. 82% of survey respondents said they had to strengthen their own policies on volunteer safety and safeguarding.

Educating decision makers on the need for resources also featured in the effort to remove barriers to volunteering. VLOs have sought long-term financing from governments, have tried to expedite delays in receiving public funding, and have lobbied for the removal of costs such as obtaining police clearance.

## THE DEVELOPMENT ROLE OF VLOS

**COVID-19 opened up new opportunities and/or changed priorities for the capacity building work of VLOs.**

The impact of COVID-19 led to organizations becoming more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, identifying gaps in their organizational structures and in their ability to consistently deliver high quality services. 66% of the survey respondents stated that they have been part of new VIO coalitions supporting capacity building, which has enabled them to pool resources, tools and expertise to offer various types of training relevant to the COVID-19 context. The situation has however been complex, with 55% of survey respondents indicating that the pandemic has negatively affected their capacity building work, and 65% said that some of the organizations they work with have ceased to operate or have closed. Yet COVID-19 also opened up new opportunities including highlighting the importance of informal volunteering at community level. 73% of survey respondents had been involved in building the capacity of

community-based volunteers and organizations to support responses to COVID-19 while 45% said they plan to build the capacity of communities to support vaccination programs.

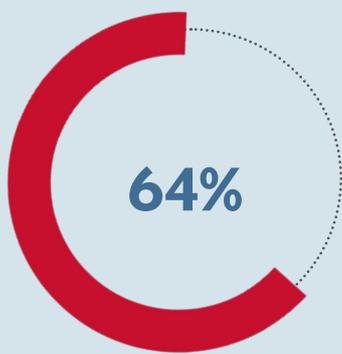
Innovative solutions to lockdown and other restrictions included using technology more effectively: 95% of survey respondents stated that COVID-19 had changed the way they use technology and social media, and that this will continue.

## VOLUNTEER MOBILIZATION

During COVID-19 VLOs continued and/or increased their support for volunteer mobilization.

The importance of volunteer mobilization during COVID-19 is clear, and VLOs faced opportunities as well as challenges. 88% of VLO survey respondents stated that they mobilized volunteers, and 60% said they had been part of new coalitions of volunteer involving

### KEY STATS THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PARTNERSHIPS, COALITIONS AND ADVOCACY



strengthened their volunteer-based partnerships with government during COVID-19



developed strategic partnerships with companies



have been part of new coalitions of volunteer involving organizations during COVID-19 to support volunteer mobilization



stated their leadership role was aimed at creating an enabling environment



stated that creating an enabling environment has become a greater priority than before COVID-19

organizations (VIOs) to support volunteer mobilization during the pandemic. Furthermore, 84% of the respondents stated they were strengthening the capacity of VIOs in their geographical area and/or network to promote and organize volunteering.

However, volunteering activity appears to have both increased and decreased at different times and in different locations, and certainly changed in the way it operated. 55% of survey respondents stated that they had increased the number of people who wanted to volunteer but 55% also stated that the pandemic/lockdown had reduced volunteer activity in their country. The focus of organizations changed as they responded to the new situation, e.g., volunteer safety became a priority with 82% of survey respondents stating they had to strengthen their policies on volunteer safety and/or safeguarding because of COVID-19. The shutdown and social distancing measures resulting from COVID-19 demanded that VLOs reposition their ways of working and their program activities, especially by embracing digital technology and online volunteering. This new reality has confronted VLOs with a need to develop the capacity of volunteers, VIOs and systems to ensure an effective transition to online volunteering.

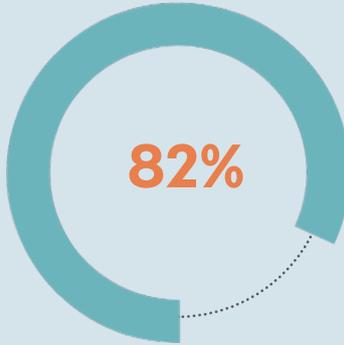
Face to face volunteering became difficult and the continuation of volunteer support and volunteer opportunities required a technological response: 64% of survey respondents stated they moved from supporting face to face volunteering to online volunteering. The reduction of formal modes of volunteer mobilization was a challenge for VLOs as they sought to engage with informal volunteer opportunities and still serve organizations and communities that otherwise benefit from formal volunteering. Changes to the volunteering demographic during COVID-19 posed opportunities as well as challenges. These took the form of engaging a wider diversity of volunteers, notably young people and volunteers from socially and economically deprived groups.

Inclusivity emerges as a key feature of volunteer mobilization strategies. 42% of survey respondents said that their organization had focused more on drawing volunteers directly from groups that were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. 70% stated that the impact of COVID-19 means that in future programs and mobilization approaches will be more inclusive.

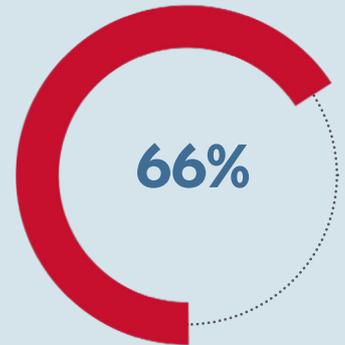
**KEY STATS** THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE DEVELOPMENT ROLE OF VLOS, CAPACITY BUILDING AND VOLUNTEER MOBILIZATION



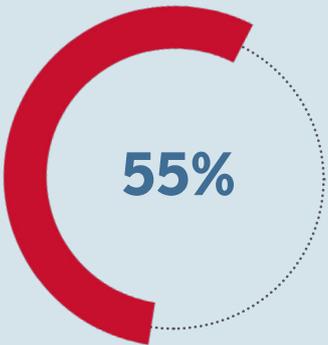
stated that quality standards has become a greater priority



strengthened their own policies on volunteer safety and safeguarding



have been part of new VIO coalitions supporting capacity building



indicated that the pandemic has negatively affected their capacity building work



stated that some of the organizations they work with have ceased to operate or have closed



have been involved in building capacity of community-based volunteers and organizations to support COVID-19 responses



plan to build the capacity of communities to support vaccination programs



have been a part of new coalitions of volunteer involving organizations (VIOs) to support volunteer mobilization during the pandemic



have been strengthening the capacity of VIOs in their geographical area and/or network to promote and organize volunteering

## THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF VLOS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

**COVID-19 produced a step change in volunteering and VLOs had to adapt strategically to deliver an effective response.**

COVID-19 changed the environment in which all actors and institutions function, whether in volunteering or not. This has increased the complexity of the context in which VLOs are repositioning themselves. COVID-19 accelerated and accentuated changes in VLO practice that were already underway. In this sense, the pandemic has arguably been a catalyst to revisit pre-existing systemic problems.

74% of survey respondents changed their leadership approach to respond more strategically to the pandemic. 73% focused more strongly on volunteering to promote human rights, a respectful society, respectful relationships and social change. The vast majority (87%) said their programs changed to engage issues arising from COVID-19, and almost as many (84%) revised their strategies to prioritize online support and engagement with VIOs and volunteers.

In addition, VLO leaders faced new demands such as promoting volunteer welfare and confronting conventional ideas about who can and who should volunteer. It required leadership to adapt and change in a challenging and fast-moving situation.

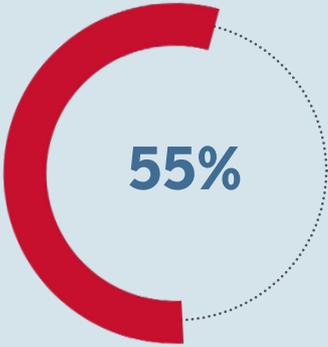
## VLOS AND THE FUTURE OF VOLUNTEERING

**Post COVID-19, VLOs must sustain and build their organizational resilience to be effective advocates for and supporters of volunteering as a catalyst for change in the world.**

This research study suggests that ongoing change and unpredictability are the likely hallmarks of a future in which VLOs, and member organizations, seek to survive, develop and become more prepared for the ongoing global pandemic, climate change, and a growing economic and fiscal crisis. There is no consensus about what form volunteering will take although some opportunities such as inclusivity, are apparent. VLO survey respondents said that relationships formed at the local and regional level will continue to be important and that multinational networks (such as GNVL) will become even more so.

Some respondents expect volunteering to decline in the future on the basis that the economic and emotional impact of COVID-19 will make people more focused on their own lives, and because of ongoing restrictions in response to successive waves of variants to the virus. The

**KEY STATS** THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON VOLUNTEER MOBILIZATION AND THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF VLOS IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC



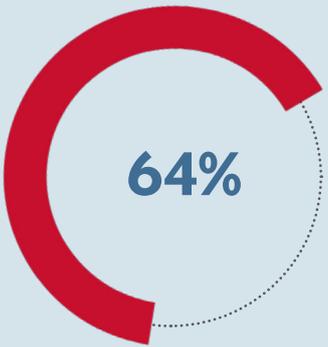
have increased the number of people who wanted to volunteer



stated that the pandemic had reduced volunteer activity in their country



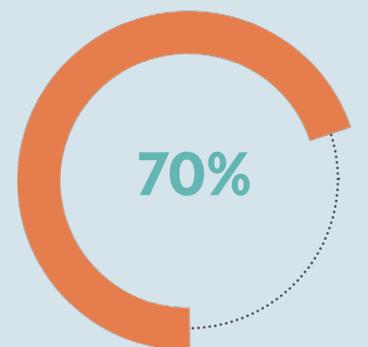
had to strengthen their policies on volunteer safety and/or safeguarding because of COVID-19



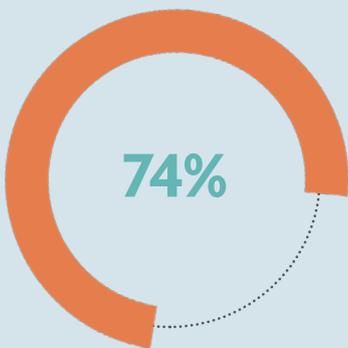
moved from supporting face to face volunteering to online volunteering



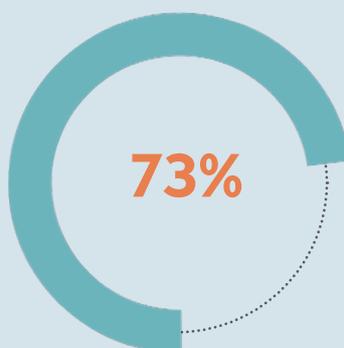
focused more on drawing volunteers directly from groups that were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19



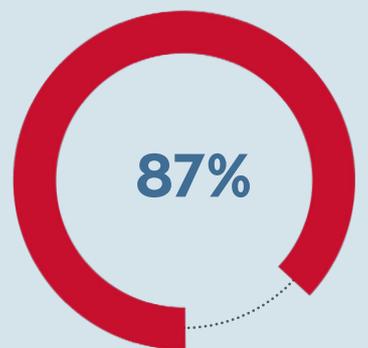
stated that the impact of COVID-19 means that in future programs and mobilization approaches will be more inclusive



changed their leadership approach to respond more strategically to the pandemic



focused more strongly on volunteering to promote human rights, a respectful society, respectful relationships and social change



stated that their programs changed to engage issues arising from COVID-19

anticipated decline in volunteering is confirmed by a recent study in Australia<sup>1</sup> which found that in the first year of the pandemic the proportion of adult Australians doing voluntary work fell substantially.

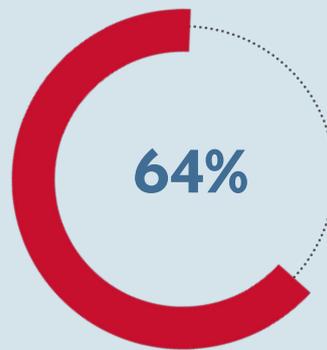
A central debate emerges as to whether technology will replace face-to-face/physical volunteering. 64% of survey respondents agree that 'we have moved from supporting face-to-face volunteering to online volunteering'. However, far from these options being binary, both are seen as opportunities for growth, particularly if more creative roles/ ways of doing physical volunteering are developed and more innovative uses of technology are embraced.

Preparedness for future crises is at the forefront of the minds of many VLO leaders. This is not only about developing safety and security protocols, but is fundamentally about re-organizing, restructuring and retooling programs and operations to respond meaningfully to climate

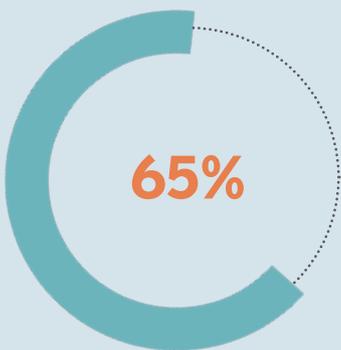
**KEY STATS** THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON VLO'S USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GNVL



revised their strategies to prioritize online support and engagement with VIOs and volunteers



agree that we have moved from supporting face-to-face volunteering to online volunteering



stated that the GNVL network enabled them to connect and share knowledge with other VLOs about issues of common interest



stated that the GNVL network has provided specific support in addressing the challenges of COVID-19

change and other crises. Nevertheless, VLOs also described how difficult it is to future-proof their organizations when they are still dealing with the rapid changes they have had to make in response to COVID-19.

The evidence suggests that the impact of COVID-19 is likely to restructure the volunteer landscape. Some VLOs are unlikely to survive the economic challenges – both large VLOs that experience extensive funding cuts and small VLOs that lack strong governance, leadership and the capacity to manage the radical environmental changes. However, others will flourish because of redirected funding, re-engaged communities or improvements in the value of their service. Some also anticipate that community based VLOs may be more resilient and responsive by virtue of being closely connected with the needs of their communities.

The disruption caused by COVID-19 has left a level of uncertainty with regard to future resourcing models, including the level of state funding and the potential of innovative social enterprise models. With public and private sector funding being diverted to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on societal health, VLOs face difficult strategic options to increase their resource base. 40% of survey respondents disagreed that grant-aided funding from governmental sources will decline for volunteering, indicating a level of optimism about a continued resource-base for volunteering in future. Nevertheless, others are very concerned that reduced donor and grant funding will lead to VLOs closing. Self-earned income is another option, but this drew mixed responses from survey respondents.

The experience of isolation experienced during COVID-19 has emphasized the importance of networks at all levels as a focus for learning and sharing, including the importance of VLO engagement with the GNVL and other avenues for collective advocacy.

The research study shows that GNVL members used the network significantly during the pandemic, with 65% stating the GNVL network enabled them to connect and share knowledge with other VLOs about issues of common interest. 55% stated the GNVL network has provided specific support in addressing the challenges of COVID-19. Members noted benefits linked to the primary role of the network, namely its emphasis on learning and sharing. COVID-19 seems to have increased the recognition of volunteering and enhanced the value of networks. This combination presents as a real opportunity for GNVL in developing as a global network with a focus to support and develop volunteering leadership organizations.

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# LEADERSHIP FOR VOLUNTEERING: THE COVID-19 EXPERIENCE

## INTRODUCTION

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Since early 2020 disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have added significant strain to host of human development challenges across the globe. These have been most acute in countries where states lack adequate capacity to deal with this public health emergency and to cushion citizens from the associated economic impact. We have also witnessed a massive loss of life in many parts of the developed world where ideological muddling, misinformation and disinformation have rendered impotent the state's capacity to contain the pandemic.

In this context, challenges emerging from COVID-19 have nevertheless attracted numerous innovative solutions from the volunteering community at all levels (local, subnational, national, regional and global).<sup>2</sup> These innovations require careful analysis and documentation as important lessons can be learned from them; however, the innovations must also be considered in the context of broader structural challenges and new dilemmas for volunteer involving organizations (VIOs).

Despite the vast experience that VIOs have gained in the face of natural disasters, incidents of mass violence, and infectious disease outbreaks over many years, COVID-19 has exposed these organizations to a new and frightening set of realities on a global scale not previously experienced. How well volunteer effort intervenes and responds to this pandemic is dependent on a number of factors such as strategic leadership capacity, organizational and sectoral capacity, and resourcing and relationships. **In this context, national volunteering leadership organizations (VLOs) are an increasingly important asset in supporting and developing the global volunteer movement to meet current and future challenges.** This new reality has raised several volunteer development and managerial questions about VLO interventions in the COVID-19 pandemic.

This research study was commissioned by the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) in November 2020 to create a body of knowledge about the strategic leadership role of national volunteering leadership organizations, and to understand their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in their countries. VLOs participating in the study include both members and potential members of IAVE's Global Network for Volunteering Leadership (GNVL).



Photo left

Volunteers distributing handwashing kits to community members. (Photo by CISE Malawi)

## THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION:

How have national volunteering leadership organizations<sup>3</sup> across the world responded to the COVID-19 pandemic?

## THE RESEARCH ALSO ADDRESSED FOUR SUB-QUESTIONS:

- ▶ What challenges have VLOs and VIOs faced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- ▶ What solutions have VLOs and VIOs developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- ▶ How might the continued leadership of these organizations shape the future of volunteering?
- ▶ What useful knowledge can VLOs apply to shape their strategic responses to strengthen volunteer efforts locally and elsewhere?

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## RESEARCH

# METHODOLOGY

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To answer these questions, the research team employed a mixed method approach incorporating the collection, analysis and verification of both qualitative and quantitative data. This methodological triangulation was aimed at enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. The approach was informed by a scoping and scanning exercise at the commencement of the study, which used administrative data and literature supplied by IAVE. The data included the register of GNVL members as well as three pieces of literature on volunteering leadership organizations.<sup>4</sup> This was followed by a review of relevant literature on the role of VLOs in response to disasters, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

The scoping exercise and literature review assisted in the development of tools for empirical data collection, as well as the development of a sampling frame for the GNVL membership list. In addition, the literature review generated additional “knowledge about the leadership role of members and potential members of GNVL and in particular how they have been involved in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in their countries.”<sup>5</sup> It further covered the role of volunteering leadership organizations in their response to and mitigation of disasters in general, and the lessons learned from these actions. This review surfaced four key operational roles of VLOs: advocacy, development, mobilization, and strategic leadership. Each of these aspects is covered in the report.

### INSTRUMENTS AND DATA COLLECTION

The research used both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments. The qualitative instrument was piloted in online interviews (using either MS Teams or Zoom) with six GNVL members, one from each of the regions represented in the network.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter the quantitative and qualitative data collection was done concurrently using online platforms: Survey Monkey for the survey and Zoom or MS Teams for the in-depth interviews. The study also engaged GNVL participants (members and non-members) in the IAVE regions through three validation webinars that tested the preliminary findings and secured feedback on whether and how these resonated with their experience.

## SAMPLING

The GNVL network includes a diverse range of organizations within the IAVE organizational classification.<sup>7</sup> The online survey was administered to all GNVL members plus potential members, which generated a sample of 125 organizations from which 70 valid responses were received.<sup>8</sup>

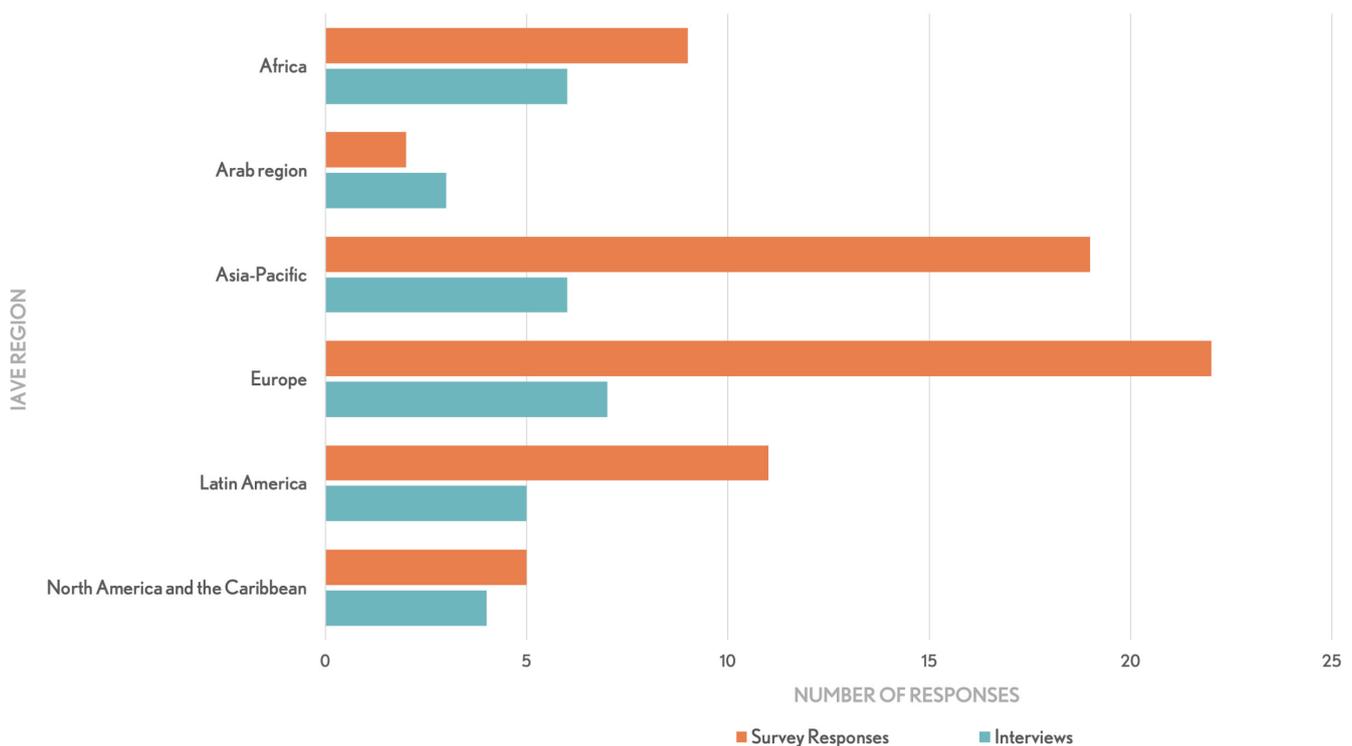
With regard to qualitative data, a total of 31 interviews were conducted with GNVL members (six pilot interviews and 25 subsequent interviews).<sup>9</sup> All the interviews were conducted online with one exception where the data was gathered using written exchanges between the research team and the respondent owing to connectivity challenges.

The data from the 31 interviews and the 70 survey responses inform the findings of this report. A list of organizations interviewed and those who responded to the survey are attached in Annexes 1a and 1b.

## DESCRIPTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS AND INTERVIEWEES

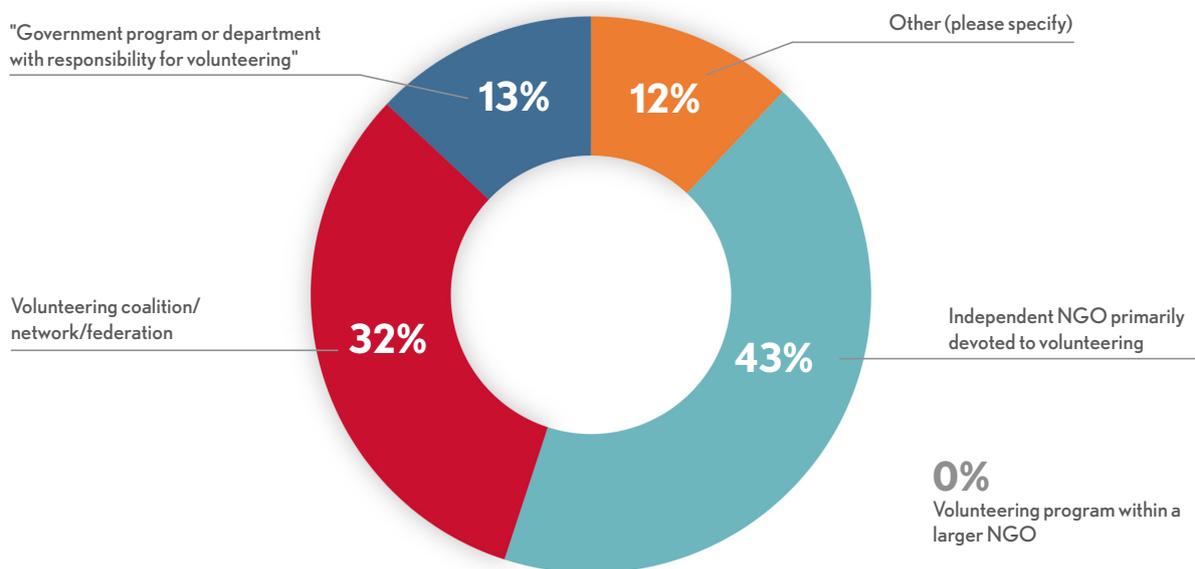
Survey respondents and interviewees were drawn from all the regions in which IAVE is connected and where GNVL members are based. Europe was the location of the largest group of respondents, followed closely by Asia-Pacific as shown in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1 IAVE REGION WHERE YOUR ORGANIZATION IS BASED**



The survey respondents were asked to describe their organizational category from a pre-determined classification list used by the GNVL network. The results are shown in Figure 2. While 43% of those surveyed described themselves as an independent NGO focused on volunteering, others identified as a network or government agency. Some 12% took the option of describing themselves as "other". This indicates the variety of different types of organizations involved in volunteering leadership activity in this research study.

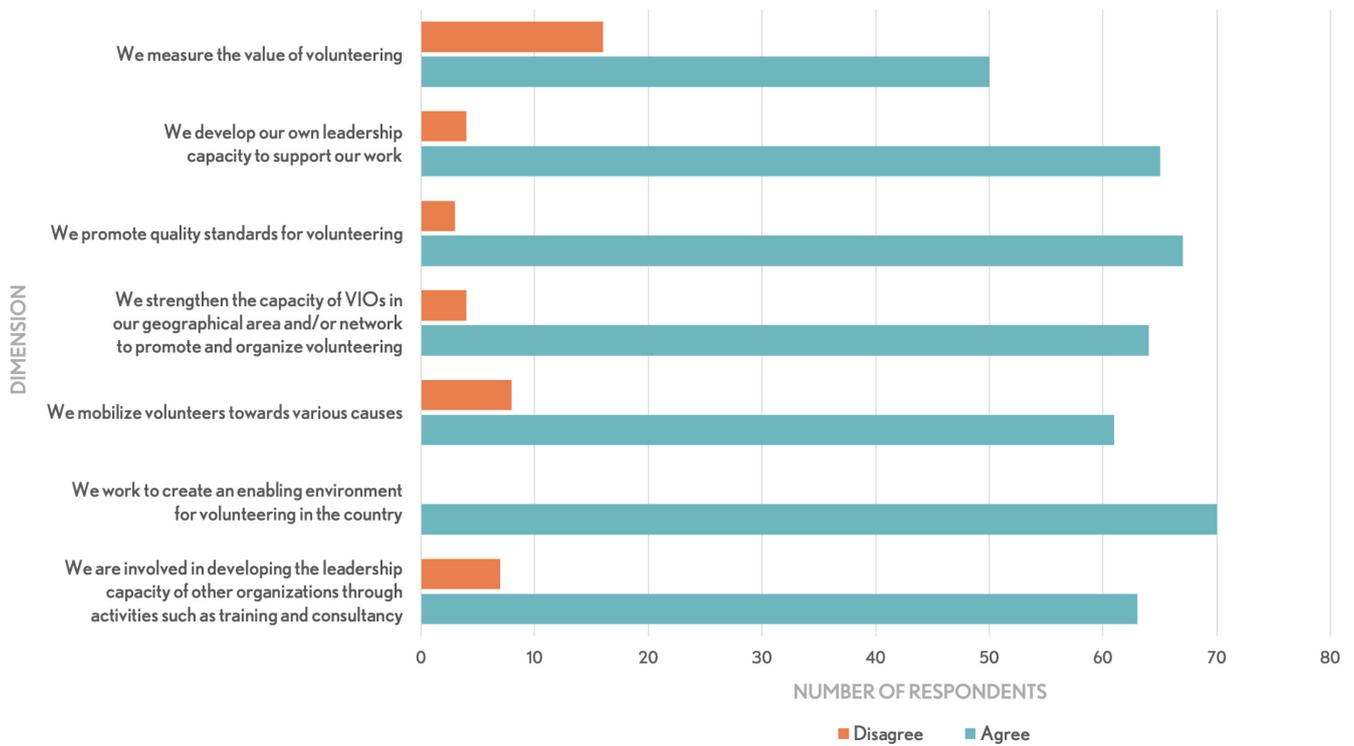
**FIGURE 2** SURVEY RESPONDENT VIEWS OF ORGANIZATION TYPE



Survey respondents were asked to describe their role. This is shown in Figure 3 and indicates that despite the variation in geographical location, organizational type and size, there is a strong commonality in the roles undertaken by the VLOs. This provides a framework for this report to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## REPORT STRUCTURE

This report is presented in five major sections. The sections on advocacy, development and volunteer mobilization<sup>10</sup> have similarities in the way they are presented with a specific view to answering the first two sub-questions of the study. First, they showcase the experiences of the VLOs in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic through their advocacy, development and mobilization activities. Secondly, each of these sections covers challenges that the VLOs have faced and the solutions they developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**FIGURE 3 HOW VLOS DESCRIBE THEIR ROLE**

The section on the strategic leadership role of the VLOs draws on the first three sections to examine the high-level impacts of COVID-19 on the leadership function of the VLOs. It looks at how this role has been exercised in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including through the lens of the volunteer ecosystem.

The last section answers the following three questions:

- ▶ How might organizational responses and continued leadership shape the future of volunteering?
- ▶ What useful knowledge can leadership organizations apply to shape strategic responses to strengthen volunteer efforts locally and elsewhere?
- ▶ How can this knowledge strengthen the comparative case for the volunteering leadership organizations across countries?

This section also includes a review of the role of GNVL during the pandemic and the implications for GNVL in the future. The report concludes with a summary of key takeaways for IAVE and the GNVL.



Photo top

Volunteers visiting the elderly and distributing PPEs and other basic necessities. (Photo by Agency for Volunteer Service, Hong Kong)

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## THE ADVOCACY ROLE OF VOLUNTEERING LEADERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

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This section draws on the views expressed by GNVL members and some non-members about the way COVID-19 impacted on their advocacy role for volunteering. The structure of the section follows the framework developed in IAVE's Report on the First Global Dialogue on leadership for volunteering, held in Mexico, November 2016, which identified advocacy for volunteering as one of three primary functions of national leadership for volunteering. It was defined as:

“ Organized efforts to educate and influence government, media, business, religious bodies, NGOs and associations about the value and impact of volunteering and the actions those groups can take to promote and strengthen it.<sup>11</sup>

This was subsequently amplified in the IAVE Global Perspective on volunteering, notably in the role of National Leadership Organizations, where the role of advocacy is set out:

“ *Educating and influencing government, media, business, religious bodies, educational institutions, NGOs and associations and thought leaders about the value and impact of volunteering and the actions those groups can take to promote, strengthen and sustain it. National leadership throughout the world has played a key role in advocating for and participating in development of national laws and policies on volunteering. It also has brought together leaders from across sectors to give visible endorsement to volunteering as a valuable resource for their countries.*<sup>12</sup>

This assessment of the advocacy role of VLOs is echoed in the survey responses in the research. 100% of respondents stated they are working towards developing an enabling environment for volunteers. 76% of the respondents stated they measured the value of volunteering. The data also suggests that in their advocacy role, VLOs in different countries work closely with, or are advocating to, state agencies, multilateral agencies, regional intergovernmental, non-profit organizations and private sector organizations. Advocacy activities center on the development of volunteering laws and policies, volunteers’ rights, mobilizing volunteers, and resourcing.

How the survey respondents experienced the impact of COVID-19 on advocacy for volunteering is shown in Figure 4 below. Respondents were asked in what ways their work on volunteer advocacy had been affected by COVID-19, indicating their responses on a Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree with each statement and 5 = strongly agree with the statement.

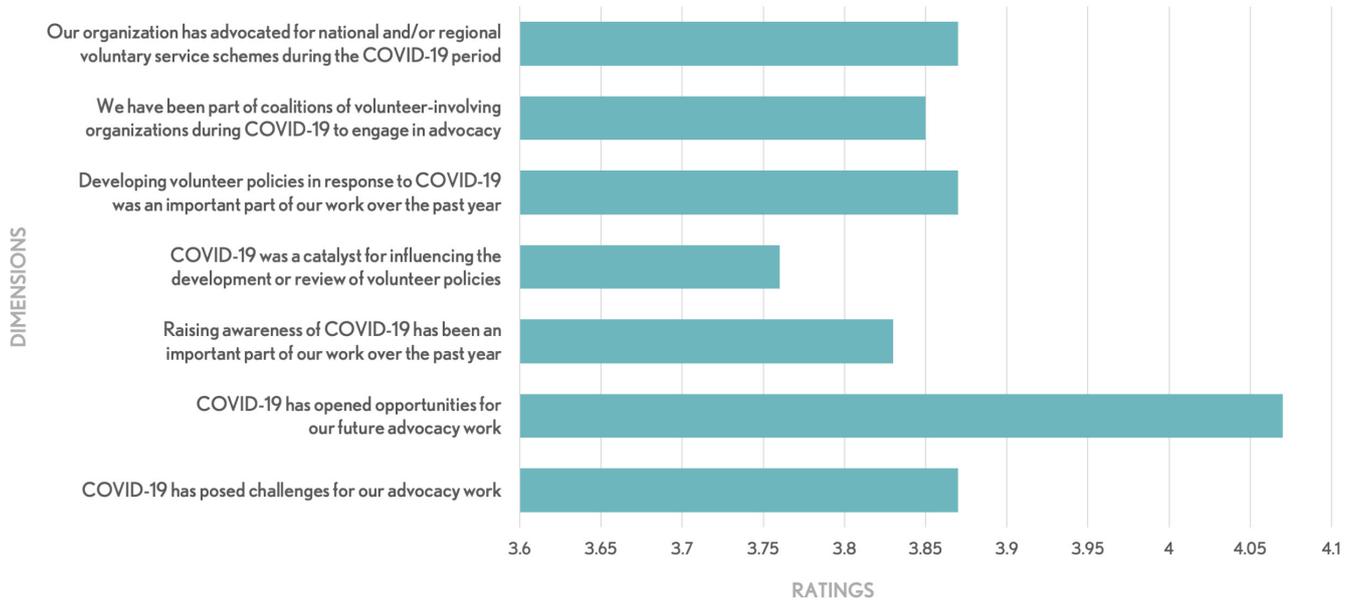
As shown in Figure 4 below, all the dimensions scored 3.75 or above, with a recognition that COVID-19 provided fresh opportunities for volunteer advocacy as the most strongly agreed dimension. This was followed by COVID-19 posing challenges for volunteer advocacy. The focus on volunteer policies and building coalitions also scored highly, as did specific advocacy engagements about COVID-19 itself.



Photo top

*Kaohsiung City Youth Volunteer Group led by Volunteering Taiwan headed to Jhouzai Wetland to clean the exotic plants and fallen leaves for the migrant birds to inhabit in the breeding season (Photo by Volunteering Taiwan)*

**FIGURE 4** IN WHAT WAYS HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION'S WORK ON ADVOCACY BEEN AFFECTED BY COVID-19?



The findings from the survey show that while COVID-19 has posed challenges for 66% of VLOs in their advocacy work, it has also made it easier to advocate on multiple issues. It has also made it easier for some targeted advocacy. This is reinforced in the interviews. Helping Hand Georgia for example argued:

“ Before COVID-19, it was more difficult to promote [volunteering] because of a lack of interest from the media. But since COVID-19 started, it's been easier to provide the real stories of volunteering and sharing their stories on social media, and we got more interest from the media, I mean, the TV and radio.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional did not have much success with the government prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19, however, has created a momentum for VLOs to showcase the important work volunteers do. In their words, COVID-19 has given this VLO the

“ kits for the recognition, promotions, and integration of volunteerism into government programs... going forward. We also were able to showcase trends of mutual volunteering during an emergency response at that moment, which was key... So basically, I wouldn't say it's affected negatively, I think it was an opportunity for us to be engaged and given much attention.<sup>14</sup>

In another case the Emirates Foundation indicated:

“ I think COVID-19 for us was positive because all those ministries now know the importance of volunteering and how, when you are under pressure, or in a crisis... volunteerism should be part of any organization because it's good support. And it's making sure that from now, for a future they need to make sure they prepare, train and develop all the volunteers to be ready for anything in the future.<sup>15</sup>

In other cases, however, COVID-19 has made funding of volunteering worse as government resources and funds were channeled towards emergency support to people affected by the pandemic.<sup>16</sup> In effect, increased advocacy efforts to include support for, and recognition of, volunteers became important new issues in some countries.

Finally, in the COVID-19 context, VLOs also had to be involved in advocacy in support of new programs where volunteers raise awareness of personal and community practice around COVID-19. In this regard 67% of survey participants indicated they were involved in such COVID-19 induced initiatives. Vaccination campaigns were among the examples of new initiatives with 44% of survey participants indicating some direct activity in this work.

We now turn to three specific areas of advocacy, drawn from the key roles identified by IAVE members in the report on the *First Global Dialogue*: (1) Educating decision-makers about the value and impact of volunteering; (2) Advocating for volunteering policy frameworks and legislation; (3) Working towards cross-sectoral leadership endorsement of volunteering as a valuable resource in countries.



Photo left

Volunteers manning the "Stay Safe Hotline" for the vulnerable and elderly who are especially affected by the pandemic. (Photo by Emirates Foundation, UAE)

## EDUCATING DECISION-MAKERS ABOUT THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING THROUGH WORKING IN COALITIONS

COVID-19 has brought home the importance of partnerships, alliances or coalitions for actors in the volunteering ecosystem. In total, 71% of survey participants indicated that they have been part of coalitions of volunteer-involving organizations during COVID-19 to engage in advocacy. The high levels of participation in advocacy work through partnerships is explained in literature to be a product of the fact that effective advocacy is dependent on multiple and complementary skills, and resources that no single actor can easily command.<sup>17</sup> This is reflected in the voices for national service coalitions in the United States:

“ *In advocacy, the recent COVID-19 relief bill passed by the Biden administration...So, we're not the lead on that, it's a coalition. But we're very active in that specific coalitions, and COVID put a spotlight on the impact of service, how national service can be a pipeline around employment as well as a number of other kinds of things that were put in more stark relief because of COVID.*<sup>18</sup>

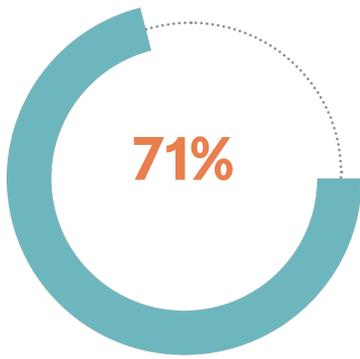
64% of survey participants indicated that they have strengthened their volunteer-based partnerships with governments.<sup>19</sup> Such partnerships enable VLOs that are not part of the state, to take up opportunities to engage in advocacy work in these invited spaces.

Cross-sectoral cooperation between civil society organizations, government and the private sector emerges in our study as an important aspect of a volunteer ecosystem. The formation of the Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism initially occurred within the corporate social responsibility sector,<sup>20</sup> but the organization stresses the importance of enrolling a diversity of actors in its network:

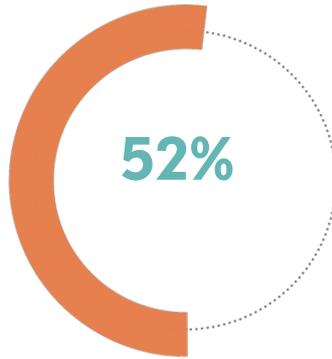
“ *We are... well situated to take the lead for the volunteer sector because of the engagements we've been able to accomplish with various stakeholders - with government, with PNVSCA,<sup>21</sup> with international bodies... All the major volunteer groups are already part of Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism.*<sup>22</sup>

In 2020 the Association of Volunteer Centers in Russia mobilized the All-Russian campaign to engage companies and NGOs in the support of vulnerable communities:

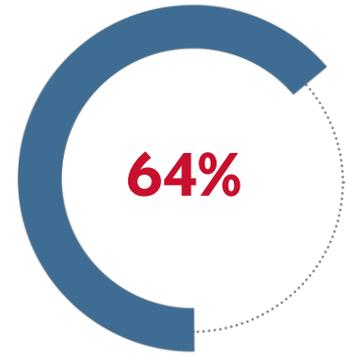
“ *We became a sole organizer of the All-Russian campaign... which brought together more than 180,000 volunteers... we tried to unite business companies, we tried to unite non-government organizations to help people who need this help and in total, almost five million people in all regions of Russia became our beneficiaries.*<sup>23</sup>



have been part of coalitions of VIOs during COVID-19 to engage in advocacy



have strengthened their strategic partnerships with corporations



have strengthened their volunteer-based partnerships with governments

A critical factor in finding common ground among diverse organizations in the network is to develop trust-based relationships. In Jordan, for example, Naua stresses the importance of *“building bridges of trust between civil society organizations and the private sector and government.”*<sup>24</sup>

This view was supported by an organization that participated in one of the webinars conducted for the study:

“*Cenavol in Peru since 2021 has been promoting the creation of Social Capital, which is the trust between different social actors: state, civil society, private company, which contributes to the strengthening of democracy.*”<sup>25</sup>

When the survey asked VLO respondents how their strategic leadership approach changed in response to COVID-19, increased cross-sectoral collaboration featured as an important strategy. For example, a survey respondent indicated: *“We have revised our strategic leadership approach to work through with governments and strengthened our strategic partnerships with corporations.”*<sup>26</sup> Another survey respondent described how it has approached organizations in other sectors (civil society and companies) to explore opportunities for expanding and improving its services: *“We have built relationships and understanding across sectors and now bring together a wider cohort of stakeholders to explore challenges and collaboratively develop solutions.”*<sup>27</sup>

## WORKING WITH CORPORATES IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

52% of survey participants indicated that they had strengthened their strategic partnerships with corporations. Volunteer Canada, for example, has worked with the Corporate Community Engagement Council in developing their corporate citizenship programs related to employee volunteering and, more broadly, their corporate community engagement practices.

CEMEFI in Mexico runs an extensive Corporate Social Responsibility program through which they connect companies with causes and organizations on the ground and shape the nature of that engagement. iVolunteer India is a member of the advisory group on volunteering for the Council of Indian industries, while the Rwanda Volunteer Network has been advocating to remove a barrier in the national labor policy to employee volunteering: *“Some companies... cannot have volunteers... because if I need a volunteer for more than six months, the labor policy doesn’t accept that.”*

The importance of partnering with companies was heightened in the context of the pandemic. One example comes from AVS Hong Kong which reported advocating for the insurance industry to craft a policy that protects volunteers who may be infected in the course of their service. And in Argentina, Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional became acutely aware of *“a weak area... we don’t have a relationship with companies, for example.”*

Two powerful corporate partnership responses to COVID-19 are evident from CEMEFI’s advocacy in Mexico’s corporate sector. The first was to raise awareness in the business sector about the welfare of their employees as well as those who had become unemployed: *“To keep the jobs and take care of their employees... and provide maybe even medicines or health care... And many corporations did that.”* The second was to create a food fund in partnership with Walmart and run a campaign to raise money for food for families who had lost their jobs:

**“** *Walmart would send to their smartphones, a code. So the family that was selected would go with their code and then choose the food that they needed, and they will buy their food. And we were able to help 10,000 families, we had over 1000 donors.” About 200 of them were corporations.*

## VLOS AS THE ‘GO TO’ ORGANIZATIONS

VLOs aim to educate and influence government, media, business, religious bodies, NGOs and their associations with diverse stakeholders to improve recognition of the role and value of volunteering in different ways.<sup>28</sup> As a result, in some countries, VLOs have become the accepted ‘go to’ organizations on matters pertaining to volunteering. This is illustrated by the experience of the Emirates Foundation: *“When they are starting a new organization or committee and they want volunteers to be part of it, they always come to us as a Foundation to take our opinion and use our policies, our terms and conditions.”*<sup>29</sup>

The support provided by VLOs to different volunteer-seeking organizations builds a sense of identity that has been enhanced through the pandemic:

“ I would say that we're considered a leading voice on volunteerism in Canada... I think [COVID-19 has] reinforced that voice, as we've seen in terms of the numbers of organizations who have looked to our resources.<sup>30</sup>

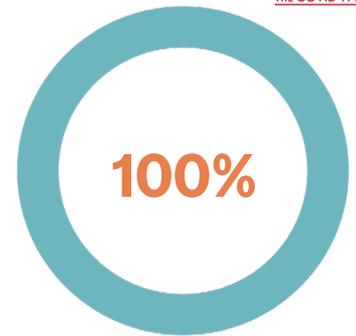
## ADVOCATING FOR AND PARTICIPATING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL LAWS AND POLICIES ON VOLUNTEERING

Both the survey and interviews pursued a number of issues with participants with regard to creating an enabling environment for volunteering in their country/region, and/or promoting quality standards for volunteering. The survey data shows that 100% of participating organizations have specific activities aimed at creating an enabling environment for volunteering, and 76% promote quality standards for volunteering.

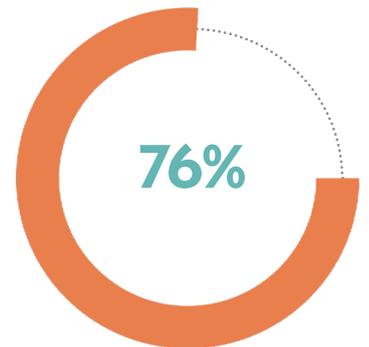
In a number of countries, the state is a key player in creating an enabling environment for volunteering. The research surfaces a spectrum of relationships between VLOs and the state in which the complexity of engagement is evident in examples of both collaboration and contestation.

In Guyana the Volunteerism Support Platform (VSP) is located within government, operating within the Department of Youth in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. Its role is

“ to provide support to the volunteer sector across Guyana... Because... we are government, lots of volunteer involving organizations, NGOs, civil society organizations reach out to the government to provide support as regards to resources, both financial and material, as well as training.<sup>31</sup>



of participating organizations have specific activities aimed at creating an enabling environment for volunteering



promote quality standards for volunteering

Photo bottom

Volunteers distributing food and hosting a COVID-19 awareness seminar. (Photo by Change African Child International, Uganda)



Although Guyana has no policy on volunteerism, its national youth policy provides the framework for VSP support to the voluntary sector, provided the VIO activities contribute to youth development.

Since 2014 the VIO Society in Kenya has engaged closely with government to develop a volunteer policy and to draft legislation for its implementation. At the time of writing, the Volunteerism Bill 2019 was to be tabled in Parliament once approved by the office of the Attorney General. The legislation has found support from the office of the President because *“we were yearning to find a way by which we could meaningfully engage young people.”* VIO Society is determined that such engagement should not compromise the essential spirit of volunteerism:

“ *This was not going to be internships, this was not going to be practicum, there had to be a platform from which people can, out of free will, do something for their communities... looking at the protection of volunteers and communities within which they work and of course the organizations that are sending them or receiving them. And... finding a way by which we would still finance volunteering, but not making it look like a labor that has to be paid like normal jobs that we do every day.* <sup>32</sup>

A different relationship between the state and civil society is evident in the Republic of Ireland where the National Volunteering Strategy has been adapted to respond to the pandemic, recognizing *“the ability of volunteering to react to situations more quickly than others.”* <sup>33</sup> Volunteer Ireland is the lead agency, but is clear about its role in relation to that of government:

“ *The national strategy belongs to the government ... it's not ours. It might sound a little bit strange, but the actions need to be pushed by government, the funding needs to be given by government. So they have the money that's been tied into that for the next five years. ...So that is the security for us... to know that a number of those actions are tied to us as an organization and then to other partner organizations that we worked with in terms of volunteering.* <sup>34</sup>

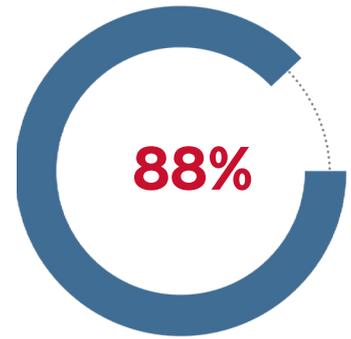
Other types of VLO-state engagement are also described. Chile Voluntario advises government through an advisory group on volunteering, and works with individual government departments (e.g. the Institute of Youth) not only in an advisory capacity but *“also for work in the field with volunteers doing specific jobs.”* <sup>35</sup> The National Volunteer Council in Mozambique is recognized by government as the lead agency for volunteering (supported by legislation passed in 2011), but as one respondent noted: *“the government, they don't support us financially in the level that we expect, but in terms of recognition, we have that.”* <sup>36</sup>

In the context of COVID-19 some organizations have actively sought out government partnerships to increase the impact of their activities. One survey respondent reported that they “*work in coordination [with] local government and elected representatives to identify the area of volunteering and community in need*”. The collaboration is perceived by both parties as beneficial because it promotes efficiency and effectiveness of volunteering activities.

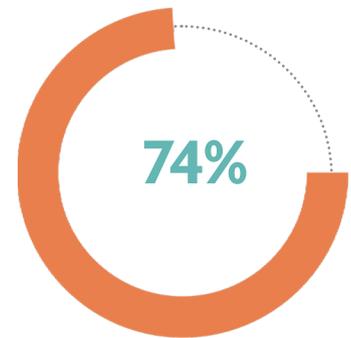
Advocacy geared towards building an enabling environment is part of the focus of iVolunteer in India, Volunteering Australia, and Volunteer Spirit Network in Thailand. Survey data indicates that for 88% of the participants, working towards creating an enabling environment for volunteering in their country has become an issue of greater priority during COVID-19. The specific activities arising as a result of the pandemic are often related to the development of volunteer policies and laws to guide volunteering. Examples include Collectif Marocain du Volontariat, VIO Society Kenya, the Croatian Volunteer Development Center, Rwanda Volunteer Network, Volunteer Spirit Network (VSN) Thailand, and Perú Voluntario, all of whom have been actively engaged in policy and procedural work to guide volunteering.<sup>37</sup>

Interview data provides nuances for the types of activities that the majority of VLOs are involved in. Specifically, interviews indicate the existence of a variety of advocacy activities on volunteer welfare, recognition, financing, removing barriers relating to costs of becoming job ready, volunteering support infrastructure, and legal and regulatory frameworks (laws and policies).

COVID-19 has been the catalyst for the development or review of volunteer policies for 74% of survey participants. Interview data identifies volunteer welfare, including insurance (especially in Australia, Russia, Panama, Hong Kong), as key issues requiring urgent attention. 82% of the survey participants indicated that they have had to work on strengthening policies on volunteer safety and/or safeguarding. As a result, in the last year the development of volunteer policies in response to COVID-19 has been an important part of the work of more than 64% of survey participants.



creating an enabling environment for volunteering in their country has become an issue of greater priority during COVID-19



COVID-19 has been the catalyst for the development or review of volunteer policies



have had to work on strengthening policies on volunteer safety and/or safeguarding.

## WORKING TOWARDS CROSS-SECTORAL ENDORSEMENT OF VOLUNTEERING AS A VALUABLE RESOURCE

Many VLOs engage with governments and other partners in the promotion of the importance and recognition of volunteerism in national development. Here the focus has been on ensuring volunteering is appreciated by policy makers, media, business, religious bodies, NGOs and associations. The reasons for this are varied.

The emphasis here is on awareness building, especially to government and companies, as a way to aid the success of volunteering.<sup>38</sup> In Mozambique the focus is on the importance of community volunteering. In Australia, awareness raising as an advocacy strategy is done in response to a lack of understanding of the important role of volunteers. As one respondent explained “*volunteering is everywhere and all the time*”, yet “*it is poorly understood*.”<sup>39</sup>

One of the explanations for the misinformation about the role of volunteering in Australia is linked to a lack of a “*government strategy for volunteering, despite the fact that every portfolio relies on it in some way to varying degrees of importance upon the implication, and the attendance of volunteers in achieving government portfolio priorities*.”<sup>40</sup> Specifically, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the vaccination rollout, the participant noted how volunteers are overlooked and undervalued:

“*Volunteers, despite the fact that they oftentimes work side by side, shoulder to shoulder, with paid employees on the frontline of essential services, haven't been included in the vaccination rollout, whereas paid employees have.*”<sup>41</sup>

Several examples of the gap between government rhetoric and reality were identified by the participants, and many VLOs explained the need for the government to ‘walk the talk’ – turn its policy commitments into actions that support the volunteering sector and volunteers. In Kenya for example, the VIO Society Kenya uses government’s commitments within the global volunteering ecosystem, especially “*decisions made at the UN level*” and national level priorities to champion these commitments.<sup>42</sup>

The COVID-19 context has provided an opportunity to elevate the importance of volunteering but more critically, to highlight inequalities that exist in the treatment of volunteers. To address some of these challenges, Rwanda Volunteer Network engages with the media to inform other stakeholders of the importance of volunteering and volunteers. Helping Hand Georgia uses social media to promote volunteering, especially in the COVID-19 context, by sharing volunteer profiles and stories that demonstrate the positive impact of volunteers on society.



Photo top

Volunteers distribute sanitary pads to girls who are staying at home due to school closures during the COVID-19 lockdown. (Photo by Volunteer Involving Organizations Society, Kenya)

In other examples, VLOs promote volunteering broadly within society, pointing to *“the intrinsic value of volunteering”*<sup>43</sup> (i.e., volunteering for its own good). Examples are shared with communities about the value of working with others to make meaningful contributions towards a better community, to provide a service or assistance to friends or neighbors, or to feel good about one’s contributions to worthwhile activities.

Fundación Voluntarios de Panamá, for example, promotes a culture of volunteerism as a vehicle for improving citizen participation in public life through an annual public service campaign on TV, radio, and other media justifying *“volunteering as a good in itself, and why people should do it, and how they should do it.”*<sup>44</sup> The Fundación Voluntarios de Panamá is also responsible for organizing the National Volunteer Day on the December 5 every year, which they use as an advocacy tool.

The intrinsic and societal value of volunteering is also often linked to advocacy work promoting inclusiveness in volunteering. Inclusive volunteering is considered a pathway to other forms of inclusive citizenship<sup>45</sup> and peace building.<sup>46</sup> Given this, a major focus among the VLOs is inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups, including people with disabilities (Rwanda Volunteer Network, Volunteering

Australia); refugees (Naua, Jordan); racial and ethnic minorities (Points of Light USA; AVS Hong Kong and Helping Hand Georgia); religious minorities (Helping Hand Georgia); and sexual minorities (Volunteering Australia; VIONet, Sierra Leone).

Our findings are consistent with other studies that indicate that in the COVID-19 context, activism has been geared towards ensuring inclusion of marginalized groups, as well as their rights as citizens.<sup>47</sup> In this regard, survey data indicates that slightly over half (52%) of participants have specific advocacy supporting programs that focus more on youth. In Jordan for example, Naua’s advocacy is aimed at ensuring the inclusion of all age groups, genders and refugees. In Sierra Leone, VIONet’s advocacy highlights the importance they attach to the inclusion of sexual minorities in a largely conservative and hostile environment and “*discrimination [for people who are gay or lesbians] is very high.*” To promote changes in attitudes, behaviors and mindsets in the country, VIONet’s program engages volunteers in an inclusive strategy that promotes gays and lesbians as change makers.<sup>48</sup>

The examples of inclusive practices highlighted by Jordan and Sierra Leone demonstrate close connections between barriers to volunteering and issues of exclusion. From Jordan, Naua argued:

“*Actually part of our mandate to ensure inclusivity and equal access, especially as it relates to young women, young girls, marginalized groups, especially refugees, which is a big issue here in Jordan.*”<sup>49</sup>

On their part, Rwanda Volunteer Network focuses on inclusion of people with a disability, as well as ensuring that the law does not discriminate against participation of volunteers in all sectors especially in private corporations, public institutions and NGOs. In addition, the Rwanda Volunteer Network brings out the importance of partnerships with international NGOs involved in volunteerism in some of these activities. However, they also point to inequalities, especially between local volunteers and international volunteers.<sup>50</sup>

Another key advocacy area is on educating decision-makers on the need for resources and funding of VIOs and volunteering activities. In many cases this requires good working relationships with the government and private sector industry associations. These engagements sometimes occur in or through ‘invited spaces’ for VLOs. This is illustrated, for example, by iVolunteer in India sitting on the advisory group on volunteering for the Council of Indian industries. Similarly, the Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism has “*been actively engaged at the policy level as a sitting member of the committee on people's participation in Congress.*”<sup>51</sup>

For many VLOs, advocacy occurs on friendly terms as opposed to adversarial grounds. This is illustrated, for example, by good working relations between VLOs and governments and corporate entities. In Australia, as already noted, Volunteering Australia has capitalized on their good relationship with the federal government to highlight the discrepancies between a generalized appreciation and involvement of volunteers across the country, and the lack of awareness of the strategic importance of volunteering. This is reflected by the lack of provision of appropriate volunteering infrastructure. In view of this, Volunteering Australia has advocated for the need for such an infrastructure as well as the resources to support the volunteer sector. Similarly, CSV Lazio in Italy has experienced funding challenges for volunteer support from public institutions. They perceive this as a problem requiring their interventions through advocacy:

“ We tried to work on this, but it's a problem and public funding is shrinking. The possibility of municipalities and local public institutions to extend funding is becoming very low. But there are also major problems in how these finances are given and what you have to do to obtain them.<sup>52</sup>

In the words of the CSV Lazio representative, this money also comes with a lot of delays. For small organizations, given the shrinking sources of public funding, this results in many problems including the inability to afford space and pay rent. CSV Lazio's work is therefore trying to ensure the streamlining of these allocations. For AVS Hong Kong, educating decision-makers has entailed the development of their “own guidelines for staff and volunteers: in the COVID-19 pandemic situation, this has been key in ensuring that there are core and risk management guidelines.”<sup>53</sup> Both AVS Hong Kong and Collectif Marocain du Volontariat advocate for better monitoring and organizing of volunteering especially in the COVID-19 context as a way of showcasing impacts and making the case for better resourcing of volunteering.

*The COVID-19 context has provided an opportunity to elevate the importance of volunteering but more critically, to highlight inequalities that exist in the treatment of volunteers.*



Photo top

Volunteers preparing and distributing hand washing stations. (Photo by Volunteers Involving Organisations Network, Sierra Leone)

## THE DEVELOPMENT ROLE OF VOLUNTEERING LEADERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

This section draws on the views expressed by GNVL members and some non-members about the impact of COVID-19 on the development role of VLOs. The structure of this section follows the framework developed in IAVE's Report on the First Global Dialogue on volunteering leadership, held in Mexico, November 2016, which identified Development as one of three primary functions of national leadership for volunteering.<sup>54</sup> The Report on the First Global Dialogue defined development as:

“*deliberate efforts to build community and organizational capacity to mobilize and effectively engage volunteers; training; research; and development of local and/or regional structures to promote and support volunteering.*<sup>55</sup>”

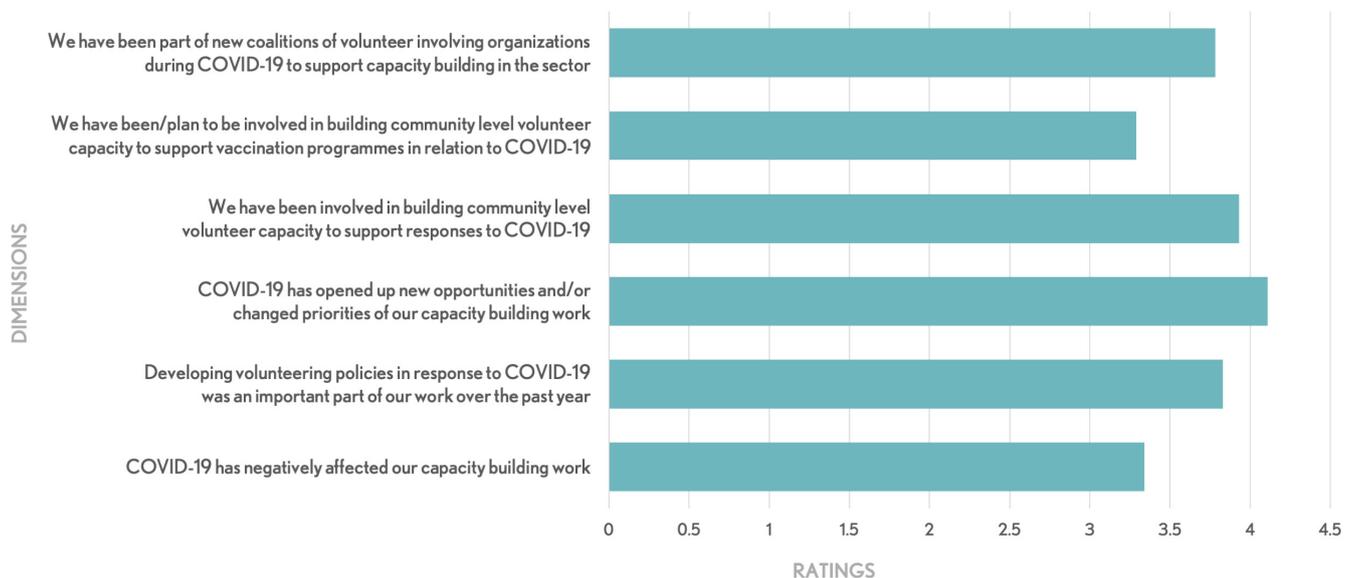
Furthermore, the Report on the First Global Dialogue identified four key development functions of VLOs including, capacity building, knowledge development, network development and innovation. This was subsequently amplified in the IAVE Global Perspective on volunteering, notably in the extending reference to National Leadership Networks:

“ building community and organizational capacity to effectively engage volunteers, including skills training, development and dissemination of new knowledge, and helping create and sustain local and/or regional structures to promote volunteering and to help people get involved. National leadership works to increase the capacity of organizations to effectively engage volunteers through professional development; and, to innovate in the use of technology to connect volunteers with work to be done and to create new forms of digital volunteering.<sup>56</sup>

This assessment of the role of VLOs is echoed in the survey responses in the research. 84% of respondents stated their work was more involved in strengthening the capacity of VIOs in their geographical area and/or network to promote and organize volunteering. 90% of the respondents stated they are involved in developing the leadership capacity of other organizations through activities such as training and consultancy.<sup>57</sup>

How the survey respondents experienced the impact of COVID-19 on their capacity building role is shown in Figure 5 below. Respondents were asked in what ways their work on capacity building had been affected by COVID-19, indicating their responses on a Likert scale where 1= strongly disagree with each statement and 5= strongly agree with the statement.

**FIGURE 5** IN WHAT WAYS HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION'S WORK ON CAPACITY BUILDING BEEN AFFECTED BY COVID-19?



All dimensions scored 3 or above, with the highest scoring dimension being that COVID-19 had opened up new opportunities and/or changed priorities for capacity building work with the formation of new coalitions being strongly evident. At the same time COVID-19 is also seen as having a negative effect on capacity building. This suggests that VLOs were faced with significant challenges, to which they responded by adapting to the COVID-19 situation and finding new ways to continue their capacity building. Some of these different dimensions are explored below in greater depth.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

As we have seen from the above survey results, many VLOs have activities that focus on strengthening the capacity of VIOs in their geographic area and/or network to promote and organize volunteering.<sup>58</sup> The research study points to the COVID-19 context providing opportunities for development of awareness of individual organizational level strengths and weaknesses and highlighted where opportunities existed for collaboration. In Australia for instance, *“COVID-19 has directly driven far greater collaboration amongst a good number of civil society organizations through the creation of the charities crisis cabinet, and the opportunities for collaboration that have come.”*<sup>59</sup>

This is reflected in the survey responses, with 71% of the respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement that they have been part of new coalitions of VIOs supporting capacity building in the sector. An example of that focus is ensuring that *“volunteer centers are equipped and have the capacity to deliver their mandate within their local municipality, regions and communities.”*<sup>60</sup> This has entailed a collaborative network that has pooled together resources and tools to develop and offer various types and aspects of training. An example is the development of the *“Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement, and the Screening Handbook.”*<sup>61</sup>

However, the research study suggests the challenges have been significant. 54% of survey participants indicated that COVID-19 has negatively affected their capacity building work while 64% indicated that some of the VIOs they work with have ceased to operate or have closed. Below are examples of the situations VLOs faced and how they have responded:

- ▶ Challenges emanated from restrictions around public gatherings and not being able to meet face to face. This meant reduced capacity development activities in countries like Australia and Mexico, where VLOs have reacted by embracing technology, described as a *“learning experience, it's got better. Organizations have become more effective at doing it.”*<sup>62</sup>

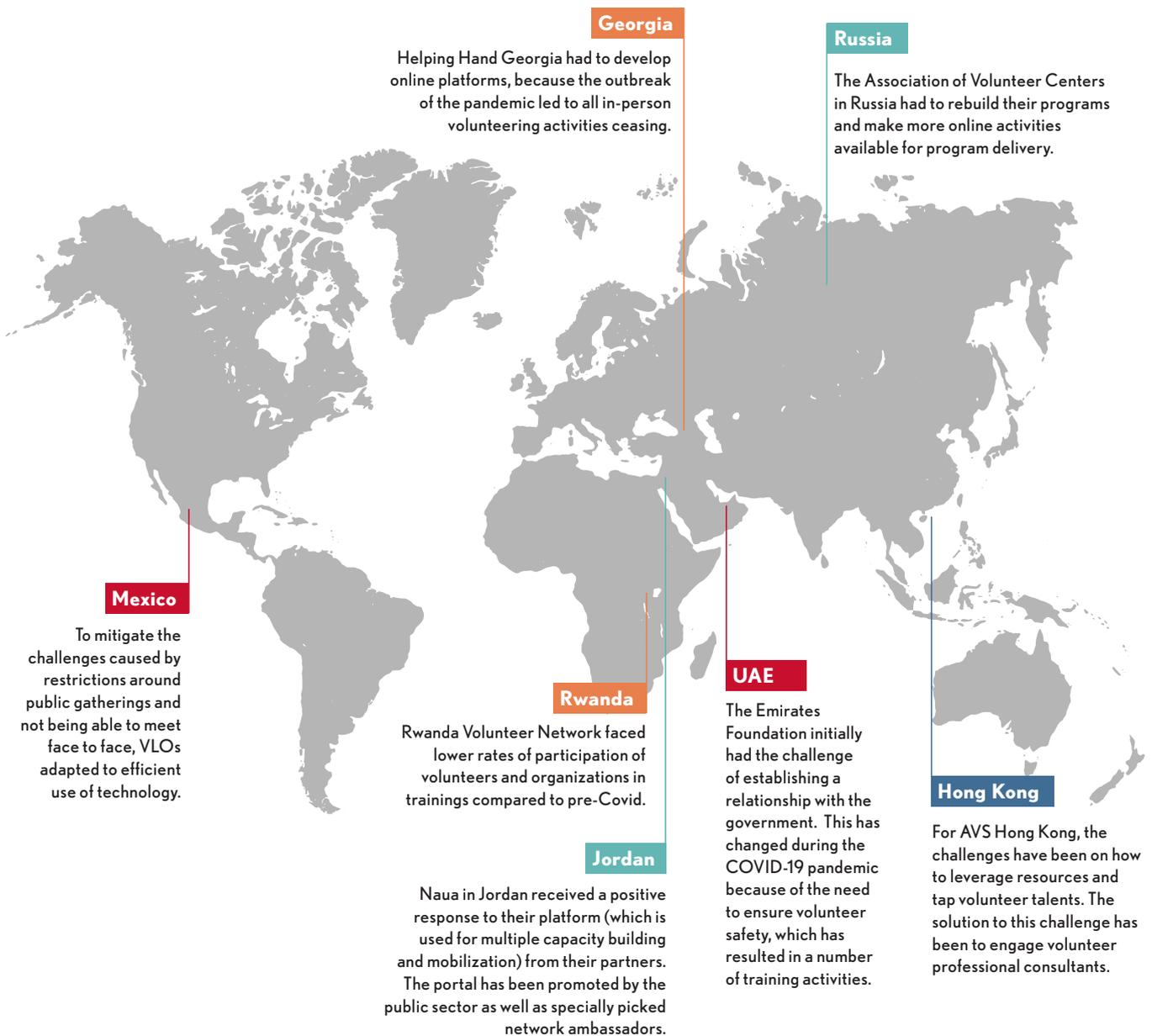
- ▶ For AVS Hong Kong, the challenges have been on how to leverage resources and tap volunteer talents. The solution to this challenge has been to engage *“a number of volunteer professional consultants.”*<sup>63</sup>
- ▶ The Association of Volunteer Centers in Russia had to rebuild their programs and make more online activities available for program delivery. This has meant resources have not always been forthcoming given the diversion of state and philanthropy resources to humanitarian responses. Similarly, Helping Hand Georgia had to rebuild their platforms, because the outbreak of the pandemic led to all volunteering activities ceasing, at least temporarily. They then decided to create online platforms.<sup>64</sup>
- ▶ Naua (Jordan) received a positive response to their platform (which is used for multiple capacity building and mobilization) from their partners who are mainly universities. The portal has been promoted by the public sector as well as specially picked network ambassadors. As a result, their civil society partners have also easily embraced the use of the portal to promote their opportunities: *“So it really is in the most basic sense, you know, crowdsourcing, everyone's doing everything, everyone's doing their part to support the bigger mission.”*<sup>65</sup>
- ▶ For the Emirates Foundation, the challenge at the beginning was how to establish a relationship with the government. This has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the need to ensure volunteer safety, which has resulted in a number of training activities.<sup>66</sup>
- ▶ Rwanda Volunteer Network notes that part of their challenges included lower rates of participation of volunteers and organizations in trainings (for example in the health sector) than it used to have. This is troubling especially at a time when the health sector requires greater attention due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Capacity building is also geared towards ensuring quality standards in volunteering programs. For 76% of the survey respondents, promoting quality standards for volunteering has become more important for their work due to pandemic. This might be seen as an acceleration of a trend and reprioritization of an approach.

Another area of focus in capacity development is upskilling of leaders. In this regard, 69% of survey participants indicated that they focused their capacity development activities on training and consultancy in developing the leadership capacity of other organizations. This is further supported by data from the interviews. For example, the National Volunteer

and Philanthropy Center, Singapore, tried to achieve capacity development by “*facilitating conversations amongst them [leaders] so that they actually could share and learn from one another. That's how we believe that capacity develops. There are different programs that we run. There are a series of roundtables, for example.*”<sup>67</sup> In some cases, there is mentorship of volunteers using technology to ensure that projects are working: “*with vulnerable young people...to build our internal capacity to support the effect of COVID on our beneficiaries.*”<sup>68</sup>

**MAP VLO RESPONSES TO CAPACITY BUILDING CHALLENGES INDUCED BY COVID-19**



## COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

87% of survey participants had to change their programs to respond to issues arising out of the pandemic. 72% of survey participants indicated that they have been involved in building community level volunteer capacity to support responses to COVID-19 while 45% of survey participants indicated that they plan to be involved in building community level volunteer capacity to support vaccination programs in relation to COVID-19.

The emergence and recognition of informal volunteering at the community level is an experience noted by many VLOs across the globe. This in turn poses issues of leadership. The views of two organizations exemplify the notion of ‘organic leadership’ in their response to the pandemic.

- ▶ In Singapore the NVPC is working to create a movement in which it defines leadership not by position or role: *“Anybody can be a leader, right? You see a need, want to do something about it. You’re a leader. And we see a lot of that happening again, because of COVID.”*<sup>69</sup>
- ▶ The Association of Volunteer Centers in Russia recounts how during the implementation of the All-Russian #WEARETOGETHER campaign, it became clear that *“leadership in society is developing not only among the leaders of NGOs and social projects, but also among citizens, who began to unite their neighbors, colleagues and classmates in order to provide all possible assistance to those in need.”*<sup>70</sup>

One example of new areas of capacity development is gender-based violence (GBV) which has increased during the pandemic, prompting interventions by VLOs. Chile Voluntario for example, mobilized efforts to promote and protect women’s rights in March 2021 for one week as a result of the lockdown in the capital. In Kenya, the VIO society was forced into crisis intervention on *“domestic violence, youth work, social work, cancer support groups.”*<sup>72</sup> The increase in gender-based violence and the role of volunteers in responding during this pandemic is supported by literature.<sup>73</sup>

In another example, the Association of Volunteer Centers, Russia had to shift their priorities from face-to-face activities and capacity building trainings to online delivery owing to COVID-19. In Jordan, Naua has been working in partnership with UNICEF to tackle their capacity gaps: *“We’ve recognized lots of gaps within our organizational structure, gaps in our ability to consistently deliver high quality services. And, you know, we’ve worked directly with UNICEF to tackle this [and] to address this.”*<sup>74</sup>

The more general question of how VLOs had to consider the effect of COVID-19 in generating or accelerating community volunteering posed complex issues. For example, Volunteer Ireland has seen “a lot of interest in informal volunteering” but questions how volunteer centers and VIOs support that going forward. It is particularly concerned that the bureaucracy of volunteer centers may discourage informal volunteering:

“ *A lot of our work now for the last year has been working with organizations trying to get them to look at how they do things and can they get rid of the bureaucracy when they've had really good volunteer programs... running for a number of years... Are they needed? And do they change?... There's obviously a little bit of resistance towards change from different sectors... but now there's more of a willingness.*<sup>75</sup>

## KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

The development role of VLOs also entails the generation and dissemination of knowledge. The research study found that capacity building has drawn on VLO experiences with previous pandemics and crises such as SARS<sup>76</sup> of the early 2000s. Such experiences are shared with individual volunteer centers in the cases of Volunteer Canada and the Croatian Volunteer Development Center. On the whole, 42% of the survey participants indicated that they have used their previous experiences of pandemics or disaster responses in their engagement with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research is one area that VLOs pursue to develop their knowledge base and different VLOs have varying ways of undertaking research. Many VLOs have produced research and publications on a wide variety of issues ranging from community needs and member fundraising, to raising standards in volunteer management, learning from best practice.<sup>77</sup>

This provided a basis for exploring the impact of the pandemic through research and publishing of results. Volunteer Canada conducted two surveys to ascertain the impact of COVID-19 on non-profits and volunteers. In Argentina, Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional produced numerous research publications, including a recently released study that maps private local donors: *“There you have information on different companies and foundations that work with organizations, the things that they are funding or their interests.”*<sup>78</sup>

In response to COVID-19, the National Volunteer Council in Mozambique conducted a mapping exercise to understand how its volunteer management code of conduct and minimum quality standards were being applied by community-based organizations. Unfortunately, this effort was constrained by poor internet access, particularly in rural areas:

Photo left

Volunteer posting important information about the pandemic, including symptoms and preventative measures to control the virus. (Photo by Volunteers Involving Organisations Network, Sierra Leone)



“ We tried an exercise of the mapping of this effort by using a platform through which organizations or even volunteers could report to us about what they were doing in the field. But we need to confess that this exercise was not easy, because most of them ... have smartphones, but they don't have the internet to provide us with that information. So, it was a very big window of learning.<sup>79</sup>

Findings from the research study collaborate IAVE's previous work that the popular model seems to be to work in partnerships with academia or research think tanks either on specific research projects/issues or on an ongoing basis.<sup>80</sup> However, the data shows that the VLOs experienced an uneven uptake of academic partnerships in trying to develop knowledge during the pandemic. For instance, AVS Hong Kong had hoped to do more in engaging research institutions and universities to undertake more research and development work, but this has not occurred due to COVID-19 because physical social interaction has not been possible. Additional issues have been due to lack of funding:

“ In Hong Kong, not many of the universities have conducted studies ... on volunteering. We have tried to partner with universities, but the resources are limited because it's difficult to seek sponsorship, corporate sponsorship to do research...the corporations are more interested in projects, but not on capacity building, or research studies... Two years ago, I developed another proposal for partnership with the University of Hong Kong, but due to lack of funding, the proposal [is] still not yet realized.<sup>81</sup>

The pandemic experience indicates that in many cases, technology has become the medium for knowledge building. In the ongoing Syrian conflict for example, social media and communication tools have been recruited effectively in collecting health information and communicating health messaging, as well as for mass campaigning that has invited local groups to take part in COVID-19 response. This campaign, 'Volunteers against Corona' has mobilized thousands of volunteers covering most localities in the region.<sup>82</sup> This points to ongoing innovation, which is taken up in the next section.

## NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

Organizational learning is a key feature of a volunteer ecosystem: *“In many cases, alliances and networks act as ‘ideas factories’ for members to generate and share knowledge on common issues and strategies.”*<sup>83</sup> This is evident, for example, in the work of the Croatian Volunteer Development Center which creates systemic interventions by producing *“different and specific curriculums that have volunteering as one of the important elements, for example, school volunteering, or inclusive volunteering.”*<sup>84</sup>

The research study indicates that there has been enhanced tapping of knowledge from coalitions and networks, including transnational networks, as a result of the pandemic. In one instance, the training, knowledge, and volunteer management resources used by Fundación Voluntarios de Panamá were informed by the Points of Light network in USA. Points of Light USA has financial partnerships across the globe and a shared knowledge bank available to all affiliates has facilitated mutual learning through an online portal.<sup>85</sup> In 2020, 5,000 people attended the Points of Light virtual conference, which is a major leap from about 1,500 in-person engagements in previous face to face conferences. On average, this platform has between 500 and 2,000 engagements per month.<sup>86</sup>

In the COVID-19 context, Points of Light and Volunteer Ireland were able to build their capacity to respond by having partners from Hong Kong, Singapore and China talk to them about COVID-19 long before it became significant within Europe and North America: *“[so the] knowledge sharing role definitely has a capacity building component to it.”*<sup>87</sup> Points of Light is also one of the VLOs with formal capacity building programs on volunteer management and resource mobilization:

“ One in particular is called service enterprise, which is a certification program. It's a best-in-class certification for how you strategically leverage volunteers. And that's... available for them to be a trainer for other non-profits in their local communities, and which can be a revenue source and a programmatic thing. ... other sometimes have a financial revenue, or another kind of resource attached to them that build their affiliates internal capacity and allow them to strengthen their community.”<sup>88</sup>

The opportunities of moving towards the use of transnational networks were apparent among some VLOs.<sup>89</sup> Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional mentions the importance of regional collaboration to find new solutions in the difficult COVID-19 context:

“ This is a very good opportunity to work closer together as a region. It's a moment to expand and explore new ideas and go beyond what we normally would think. The strategy of enemy and ally doesn't cut it right now. So we need to go beyond that, because these are very difficult and strange times to live.<sup>90</sup> ”

## INNOVATION

In the context of the pandemic, technology has become a significant avenue for knowledge building and capacity development. Webinars for example, have become a popular means of engagement among many VLOs, involving the use of digital technology for remote online activities including Zoom, Teams, Google Meet to conduct training webinars and more.<sup>91</sup>

These posed challenges about how this works technically but also appropriately in response to the impact of the pandemic and the implications for internal VLO capacity.

“ We are struggling to figure it out how can we improve and elevate our online services to another level. Besides, we are thinking and planning about volunteer training and volunteer manager training in crisis. As we have been faced with unconventional and unprecedented situations more often, volunteers and volunteer managers need proper and updated skills for coping with those situations.<sup>92</sup> ”

In doing this and more, VLOs have partnered with volunteers and technical communities i.e. volunteer-based communities who apply their technical skills to support an humanitarian response as well as with technology companies to facilitate collaboration to maximize effectiveness in their response to the pandemic.<sup>93</sup> In the case of the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Center, Singapore, partnerships include, for example, Facebook and Google to run Zoom meetings, as well as for “teaching charities how they can use their social media channels or even their website in more effective ways such as getting donations or engaging with donors.”<sup>94</sup>



Photo left

Youth volunteers distributed PPE to homeless women and youth. (Photo by Helping Hands, Georgia)

Another example in the context of COVID-19 concerns VSN Thailand that used its volunteering platform and social media to organize online activities with partners and intends running volunteer management training to cope with the crisis. To do so, however, the online platform may not be sufficient. VSN has identified the need to create a network of volunteer managers from various backgrounds ranging from CSOs, academia, local authorities to private companies, *“because at the moment, we don't have the network to cooperate or to work during the crisis in Thailand... we have to create a network that should work together during the crises in the future.”*<sup>95</sup>

Portals and websites have also become important platforms for capacity development in a number of countries.<sup>96</sup> The National Volunteer and Philanthropy Center – Singapore for example, has established [www.giving.sg](http://www.giving.sg) which is a portal where over 600 charities have registered and are pre-approved by the Commissioner of Charities, which helps legitimate charities in their fundraising. In Jordan, Naua has invested in a technological platform with a human centric design and partners and volunteers are constantly being trained on its use, especially in the COVID-19 context.

Innovation is also evident in the response from VSP Guyana (located in government) which found ways of using digital communication to engage with its youth constituency and thereby circumvent the bureaucratic blockages usually experienced when VIOs try reaching the head of the unit:

**“** *We're still not there 100%, but we scrambled to come up with a different method of engagement... The public sector is still quite people-based and not digital-based. So we had to get to that place... of doing things [in] a digital environment. It significantly extended our reach... Young people are of the digital age and... we were able to have that dialogue and not have the bureaucracies [which are] a challenge just to meet the head of a unit [in person].*<sup>97</sup>

Overall, the impact of the COVID-19 has resulted in an acceleration of the use of digital technology, with VLOs exploring innovative approaches to both internal and external practice. There has been a movement towards new approaches to volunteer mobilization alongside the development and greater use of online models of volunteer management training.



**Photo top**

*Volunteer healthcare professionals gathering at the Institute of Public Health to address cases developing in Seyno, Finifoot and Sonrai. (Photo by Agence Nigérienne de Volontariat pour le Développement, Niger)*

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## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON **VOLUNTEER MOBILIZATION**

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This section draws on the views expressed by GNVL members and some non-members about the impact of COVID-19 on volunteer mobilization. The findings reinforce the catalytic nature of the pandemic, which brought some activities to a rapid end while accelerating changes already in process. In some cases, the pandemic provided VLOs with new opportunities for mobilization.

The survey responses indicate the breadth and variation of volunteer mobilization activities across the VLOs. They also show a widely shared understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on these activities.

The structure of the section follows the framework developed in IAVE's Report on the First Global Dialogue on national leadership for volunteering, held in Mexico, November 2016 and which identified volunteer mobilization as one of three primary functions of national leadership for volunteering.<sup>98</sup> It was defined as:

“ *Organized efforts to activate volunteers: providing ways for individuals to identify and connect with volunteer opportunities; reaching out to specific segments of the population to encourage their engagement; organizing large-scale and/or targeted volunteer projects; etc.*<sup>99</sup>

This was subsequently amplified in the IAVE Global Perspective on volunteering, notably in the role of National Leadership Organizations:

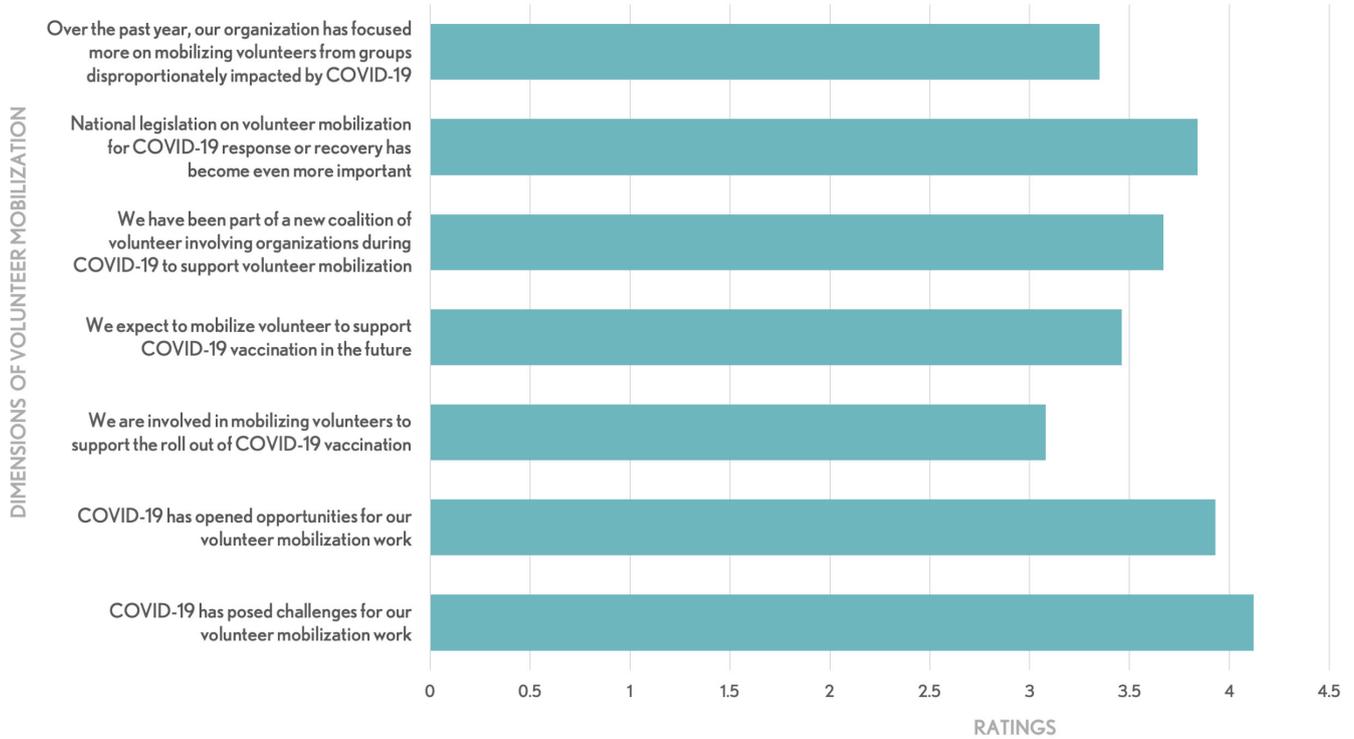
“ *In many countries, national leadership does not directly organize and manage volunteer-involving projects, they support such efforts on the part of other national, regional and local organizations.*<sup>100</sup>

This assessment of the role of VLOs is echoed in the survey responses in our research. 88% of respondents stated they mobilized volunteers towards various causes. 84% of the respondents stated they focused more on strengthening the capacity of VIOs in their geographic area and/or network to promote and organize volunteering. That does not necessarily mean that VLOs are mobilizing volunteers directly, but that they develop mobilization strategies with other organizations who work with volunteers on a day-to-day basis. For example:

“ *Our network is of course made up of member associations that consider themselves as key resource centers for volunteering; and each source of volunteering has a role of mobilizing volunteers... and the network organizes... through relying on a well-formulated system and plan.*<sup>101</sup>

Figure 6 shows how the survey respondents experienced the impact of COVID-19 on volunteer mobilization. All the dimensions scored 3 or above with a recognition that 'COVID-19 had posed challenges' the most strongly agreed dimension. The potential for new partnerships and new opportunities is also strongly evident. These different dimensions are explored on the next page.

**FIGURE 6** IN WHAT WAYS HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION'S WORK ON VOLUNTEER MOBILIZATION BEEN AFFECTED BY COVID-19?



### ORGANIZED EFFORTS TO MOBILIZE VOLUNTEERS

77% of survey respondents stated COVID-19 had posed challenges for their volunteer mobilization work. One of these was that the volunteer infrastructure had been compromised, as demonstrated by almost two thirds of the respondents (65%) who stated that some of the VIOs they worked with had ceased to operate or had closed.

In addition, volunteering activity appears to have increased and decreased at different times and in different locations. 55% of respondents stated they had an increased number of people who wanted to be volunteers, but one VLO described how this produced a difficult balance between supply and demand: *“At the beginning of the pandemic, we had a massive deluge of people signing up to help. And a lot of organizations who weren't actually needing volunteers.”*<sup>102</sup>

The complexity of mobilizing in this context is further evident in that 55% of survey respondents stated that the pandemic lockdown had reduced volunteering activity in their country. One of the contributing factors reported is the fear of infection that has made



55% stated they had an increased number of people who wanted to be volunteers

“

At the beginning of the pandemic, we had a massive deluge of people signing up to help. And a lot of organizations who weren't actually needing volunteers.

Survey Respondent

“

So the volunteers couldn't go to the field, so they started to be prepared to be available for their neighbors... And they are not the volunteers that we are used to work with - they're the neighbors who are doing that for their own community. This crisis, this COVID, somehow pushed us to see ourselves as a community.<sup>104</sup>

Photo bottom

Volunteers distributing PPEs to street cleaners who are at-risk of exposure to COVID-19. (Photo by Agency for Volunteer Service, Hong Kong)



## PROVIDING WAYS FOR INDIVIDUALS TO IDENTIFY AND CONNECT WITH VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

63% of survey respondents stated they had moved from supporting face to face volunteering to online volunteering. For example, being unable to organize physical activities in the public space, one VLO “relied on online interactive communication in significant way... We mainly did organize online activities with partners.”<sup>105</sup> Another had to remodel its website from matching volunteers with on-site volunteer opportunities to including volunteer opportunities in the digital space. This meant encouraging VIOs to include virtual volunteering positions in their offering:

“ Since [COVID-19] it changed - the volunteers that are requested by the organizations... It lowered a lot in last year. But... in changing and inviting the organizations to understand the value of digital volunteering, then the offers for volunteering for virtual volunteering have gone up.<sup>106</sup>

Others built on existing on-line recruitment and/or systems for matching volunteers to vacancies to meet the new challenges of COVID-19.

“ We have the platform on our website and what we did differently was make it easier for folks to find the specific type of volunteering opportunities they were looking for. So we put a separate page for the virtual volunteering opportunities and the COVID-19 opportunities. In the next stage we added more specifics around finding volunteering opportunities that were COVID-19 specific, and also virtual volunteering opportunities.<sup>107</sup>

Other innovative approaches included recruiting ‘volunteer champions’ drawn from young professionals and students, to mobilize volunteers for specific purposes:

“ We’ve come up with what we call the volunteer champions. This mostly comprises young professionals and students from colleges and universities who try to volunteer. So, we’ve created a platform for them through a WhatsApp group. ... I realized that sometimes when I was looking for volunteers, then I wouldn’t get them as quickly as I would want from the member organization. So I set up these volunteer champions within a pool where we can find those that are able to work with us on certain activities that we undertake.<sup>108</sup>

The pandemic also produced a greater need to have policies related to the duty of care of volunteers, and to strengthen organizational practice in this regard: 82% of survey respondents stated they had to strengthen policies on volunteer safety and/or safeguarding.

Photo right

Volunteers distribute liquid hand soap to members of the community, while spreading awareness on how to prevent transmission. (Photo by Volunteers Involving Organisations Network, Sierra Leone)



“Duty of care is really important at this time. A number of our volunteers ended up contracting COVID themselves. An insurance scheme/coverage can be an area where private sector in partnership with government can come up with a risk mitigating product that VIO's can avail for their volunteers.”<sup>109</sup>

The challenges to normal volunteer mobilization practices have had a negative impact on volunteer participation, particularly where VLOs rely on annual national volunteering celebrations to raise awareness levels:

“Because of the COVID-19 related restrictions around public gatherings, events couldn't be held, which meant that the awareness levels were lower and the ability for people to participate was significantly curtailed.”<sup>110</sup>

In Croatia the annual volunteering festival drew a third of the usual participants, largely because of the shift to online engagement: “There was a limitation of opportunities and activities because most of the volunteer involved organizations had to shift to online activities.”<sup>111</sup>

## PROVIDING INCLUSIVITY IN VOLUNTEER MOBILIZATION

One aspect of the impact of COVID-19 has been the effect on marginalized groups. As noted in the advocacy section, the research study explored the issue of inclusivity and the extent to which this had become a greater focus in terms of who volunteered and with whom volunteers worked. 42% of survey respondents stated that over the past year their organization had focused more on mobilizing volunteers from groups disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Behind this there is some suggestion that donors and policy makers had focused on enhancing inclusivity in volunteering because of COVID-19.<sup>112</sup>

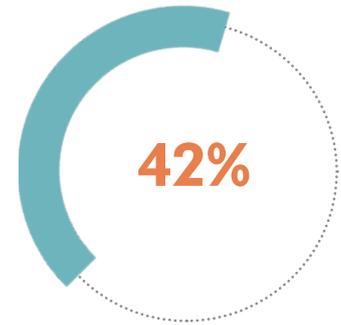
In this sense the response to COVID-19 links with other contemporary social movements. The impact of Black Lives Matter in the USA has impacted on volunteering requests in the time of COVID-19.

“One of the things that people are asking for us right now in the USA is to have the ability to filter for black led, black founded, and black serving non-profits. People want to be able to search and discover non-profits that operate with leaders from the communities that they serve. And so, we're working on figuring out if we can do that.”<sup>113</sup>

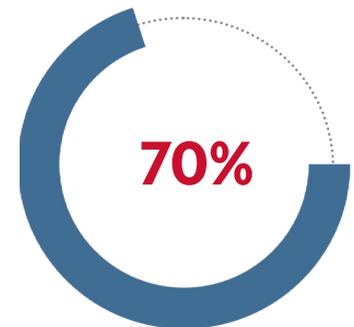
In the case of people living with disabilities, moving volunteering online has been seen to make volunteering “more accessible to those with physical limitations. So, while it's made other things challenging, it's made, I think, the whole sector more sensitive and inclusive.”<sup>114</sup>

Respondents also see inclusivity as a consequence of the pandemic, with 70% stating that one impact of COVID-19 is that future programs and mobilization approaches will be more inclusive.

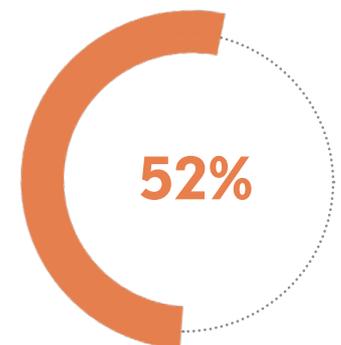
“What we look upon in our strategy is to try to encourage excluded people to volunteer... why is it always the same people that are volunteering? We have this big group of people that is marginalized and are not being asked [to volunteer]. So our strategy and also for the coming years is trying to make volunteering more inclusive, trying to work with both the national and the local NGOs in order to open up their doors to people that they normally do not see as volunteers.”<sup>115</sup>



stated that over the past year their organization had focused more on mobilizing volunteers from groups disproportionately impacted by COVID-19



stated that one impact of COVID-19 is that future programs and mobilization approaches will be more inclusive



stated they were supporting programs that focused more on youth

Connected to this is the way lockdowns are seen to impact on mental health. In this example a VLO sees volunteering as a way of strengthening people's mental health: *"We know the mental health impacts of repeated lockdowns will have an effect on communities as well as people who volunteer to enable better mental health."*<sup>116</sup>

Promoting inclusivity requires recognizing that certain processes and systems may exclude or enhance accessibility to volunteer opportunities. In the digital field, for example, international search engines prioritize national opportunities over local ones, and larger over smaller opportunities, so making it more difficult for some groups to volunteer at local level. In this example the VLO is working to make the search engine more accessible to people who want to volunteer at a local level:

**“** *Most people start their act of discovery on Google. And so we have a number of kinds of partnership approaches with Google that integrate our system so that... a very small non-profit will show up, because they're connected with Points of Light. At higher search results, when someone just... 'I want to help animals in my town', right now the big animal care organizations, the national ones, will come up even if you want to help them in your town on Google... So we're working on something to help the smaller organizations get optimized in the search results.*<sup>117</sup>

According to Points of Light, USA, prioritizing inclusivity also demands that *"size and budget are not the drivers for what volunteer activities get presented to people."* This means ensuring that *"those that we're trying to mobilize and engage are as diverse as the communities that we serve."*<sup>118</sup>

One challenge is to confront conventional ideas about who can and who should volunteer.

**“** *We want to... challenge the status quo that volunteerism is only for saints, or only for those who have loads and loads of time, right? Or loads and loads of skills to offer. It really can be for anybody and everything, just depending on... what you can offer and what are the needs.*<sup>119</sup>

In this context, the role of youth volunteers is interesting, since they might well be seen as unskilled in some volunteering contexts. As will be noted below, because older volunteers are more at risk in the pandemic, young volunteers might be better placed to volunteer around COVID-19. The survey results give some indication that these trends are working through. 52% of the respondents stated they were supporting programs that focused more on youth.

## ORGANIZING LARGE-SCALE AND/OR TARGETED VOLUNTEER PROJECTS

It is clear from the data that the pandemic has become a focus for volunteer activity. Indeed, 87% of survey respondents stated that their programs had changed to engage issues arising from the pandemic. For example, the National Volunteer Council in Mozambique described how they supported a youth group that developed handwashing machines using foot pumps, which are now being installed in ministries and markets. Furthermore, 65% of survey respondents said they were supporting programs where volunteers are raising awareness of personal and community practice around COVID-19.

“ During the early outbreak, all our teams suspended their service, but later we encouraged them to... use their creativity to create new ways of service. For example, the volunteer tour service team... produced some videos and sent to those elderly homes, sent to the disabled homes and then let the elderly and the disabled to enjoy those tour programs.<sup>120</sup>

One of the largest program transitions came where volunteers were mobilized to undertake ancillary medical work due to the medical staff being engaged in emergency pandemic work.

“ The health care workers were busy in the emergency wards... [and so] we also need people to do ... low grade health care work ... people like you and me... Can we get people in and give them some basic training so that they can take care of the swabbing, the temperature taking? So we work with [the government] to... share with them some ideas of how to do that. So that I think was a contribution to volunteer mobilization.<sup>121</sup>

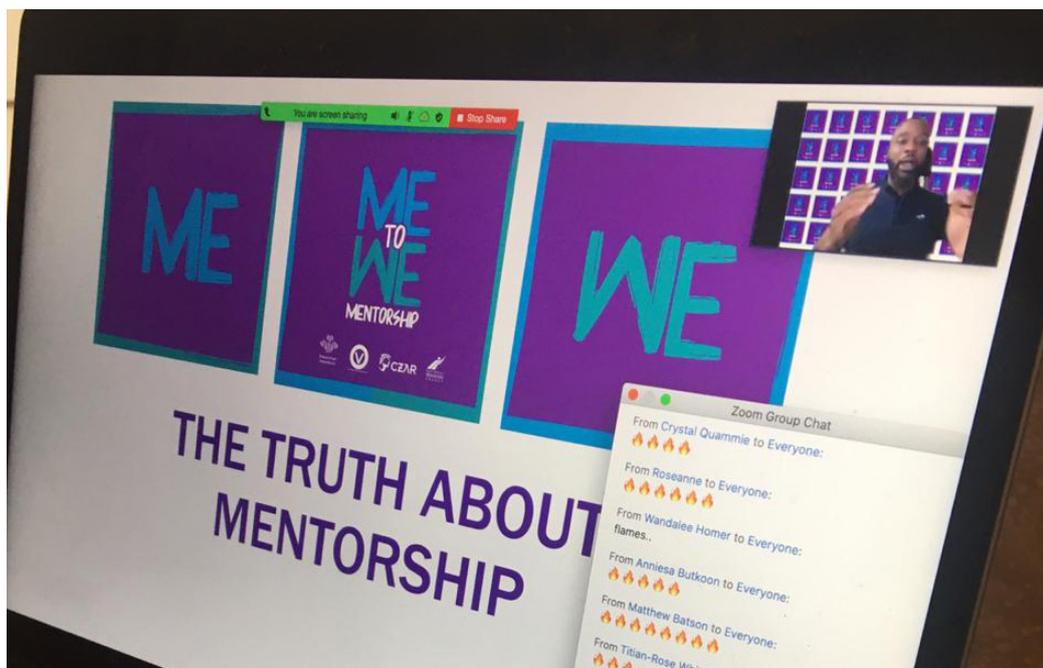


Photo left

Volunteers mentor vulnerable secondary school students from across Trinidad & Tobago via Zoom and online mentorship platform. (Photo by the Volunteer Center of Trinidad & Tobago)

## VACCINATION

This study was undertaken at a time when, in most countries, vaccination rollouts had only just begun. The scale of vaccination required suggests that volunteers would be essential in supporting even medical roles for this to be undertaken effectively.

Respondents to the survey were asked about their current and expected involvement. Some 42% stated they had been involved in campaigns or the implementation of vaccination programs.

“ *The government announced the vaccination plan. ... we are lobbying with the ministry to find ways of involving volunteers in this vaccination campaign, because the professionals of health that we have, maybe they are not sufficient to respond to the demand. What we are trying to identify is how can we use students who are learning and whose courses are related to health. So maybe those students have some basic skills, they can be in some of the vaccination stations playing a role.*<sup>122</sup>

31% of survey respondents stated they were involved in mobilizing volunteers to support the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccination. For some, support was clearly separated from medical practice.

“ *Ah yes, here we are already on the ground in a project which mobilizes 11 volunteers or young people, and which works especially on awareness-raising to fight against the pandemic, COVID19; and also to encourage, explain and alert the populations on the positive effects of the vaccination. We are working more on awareness and not on anything else. Because, of course, a vaccination is done by the medical team. So we are always in support.*<sup>123</sup>

There appears to be some variation depending on how country health systems operate, and on the role of the VLO. For some the issue was really more a local one:

“ *For vaccines, we [are] very much in the promoting that vaccines are the way back to the healthy society that we want, but in terms of supporting the vaccination efforts, that's done locally, at the affiliates, and some countries and some local markets here in the States are very friendly to having volunteers and partners and some don't want volunteers necessarily.*<sup>124</sup>

In countries where the vaccination programs were most developed at the time of the data collection, the role of volunteers and volunteer management systems were more clearly articulated. The following extended quote indicates how this approach required partnerships that worked across different kinds of agencies. Some partnerships involved new connections

or new ways of engaging with each other, a feature already noted under the sections on advocacy and capacity building.

“ We're in partnership with British Red Cross and Ulster GAA; we are delivering volunteer support for the vaccination centers, for the mass vaccination centers. So, there are six of those that we're supporting. And in some cases, they're running 12 hours a day, seven days a week; others, they're all different - they all have slightly different timings or whatever. And so, we are recruiting, training and supporting volunteers here during the meet and greet. So those people are the ones helping you get your mask on, making sure you sanitize your hands, making sure you're in the right queue.<sup>125</sup> ”

Also evident here is how the volunteers are managed in this context:

“ The volunteers are there sometimes by themselves or just working with the staff. And our staff members are usually there for a kind of cover period between 11:00 and 3:00. So, they cover both shifts, they see the team leader from both shifts, and they have an opportunity to troubleshoot any issues that are arising that day.<sup>126</sup> ”

44% of respondents expected to mobilize volunteers to support COVID-19 vaccination in the future. Interestingly, 63% stated new voluntary service schemes are essential to support vaccination programs or other COVID-19 recovery efforts. One VLO is planning to establish a reserve of young volunteers who can be trained and mobilized to support the vaccination process when and where they are needed:

“ The idea we're working on, is maybe to create a youth reserve group of volunteers that we train, that are in good health, as the vaccination effort grows, because ... as the vaccination progresses and many of the [retired volunteers from the] Rotary and Lions clubs ... can't be that exposed to the virus, we can have a reserve of young people. So, the clubs call [us]: “Oh, you know, vaccination starting next week, and I don't know if we have people?” We call the reserve of people.<sup>127</sup> ”



Photo top

Volunteers working with the COVID-19 Food Security Bank to deliver food to vulnerable groups in special care and elderly care facilities. (Photo by Rwanda Volunteer Network)

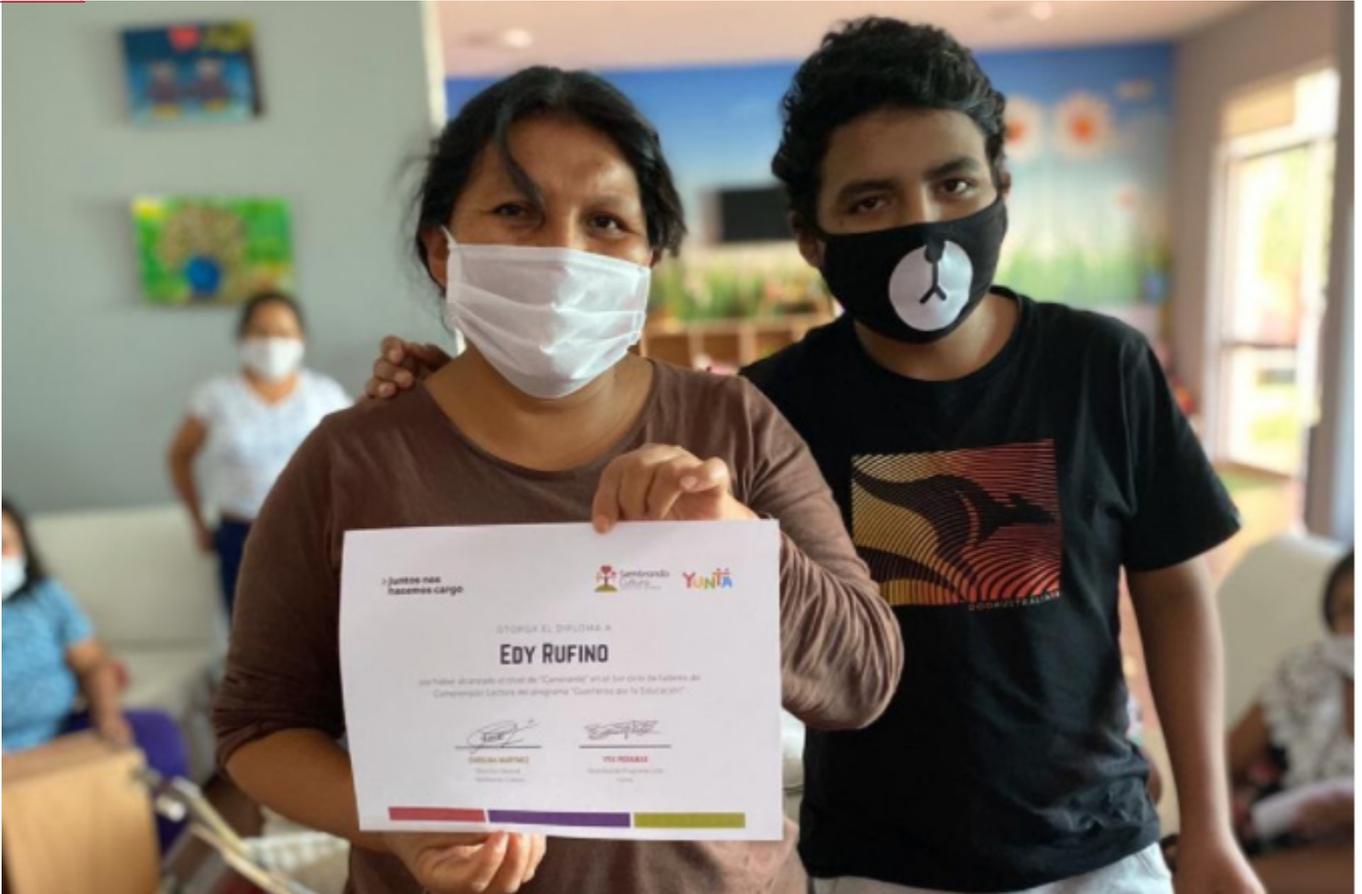


Photo top

Volunteer tutor of PROA's #GuerrerosPorLaEducación receives her diploma for successfully completing the training program. (Photo PROA, Peru)

## THE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP ROLE

### OF NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING LEADERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

This section looks at the strategic leadership role played by national VLOs in response to COVID-19: how the context changed for them; the impact this had on their ability to lead their organizations in this crisis; and the efficacy of the strategies they adopted. This inevitably varies from country to country and relates to the scale of the national VLO, its capacity to function, and the nature of the networks it leads. Nevertheless, the research study indicates common experiences across organizations and regions. The evidence is also able to cast some light on how COVID-19 has impacted on the ability of VLOs to create a more enabling environment for volunteering.

The IAVE Mexico conference of 2016 appears to have been formative in bringing together a coalescence of the importance and role of strategic leadership.

“ Spontaneous voluntary acts of helping remain an essential part of life in every society, no matter how traditional or contemporary. However, organized volunteering, like all sustained, high impact activities, requires strong, effective leadership and management. It is strongest when it happens in an enabling environment, one that places high value on it and that creates an affirmative expectation that people will participate.<sup>128</sup> ”

IAVE regards VLOs not as passive actors within the environments in which they operate, but as active players creating and shaping that environment:

“ Formal, recognized and sustained national leadership efforts are essential to creating and sustaining an enabling environment for volunteering.<sup>129</sup> ”

## VLO STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP: A COMPLEX NETWORK OF RELATIONSHIPS

The research study shows that VLOs operate in complex ecosystems, working closely with other agencies, most often in networks. Here they lead volunteering nationally, regionally, and in some cases, internationally (as is the case with GNVL). This collaborative approach has been especially evident as VLOs responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As might be expected, the leadership of volunteer networks functions in a range of volunteer contexts across the different countries where the sampled VLOs operate. What is most evident is that these contexts manifest not as North/South binaries, but as complex environments that shape the positioning, strategic work and effectiveness of VLOs in the different countries. As noted earlier under the advocacy section, in Australia for example, volunteering is everywhere, all the time, and widely used by government. However, it is poorly understood and no government strategy for volunteering exists.<sup>130</sup>

The disruption caused by COVID-19 has sometimes caused confusion, but sometimes worked to the advantage of VLOs. One respondent indicates that in the context of COVID-19 mutual understanding between stakeholders and partners has increased: *“Whilst we always valued our work with stakeholders and partners those relationships were not always easy to build or broaden - the pandemic has caused a significant shift in the understanding and value of volunteering.”*<sup>131</sup>

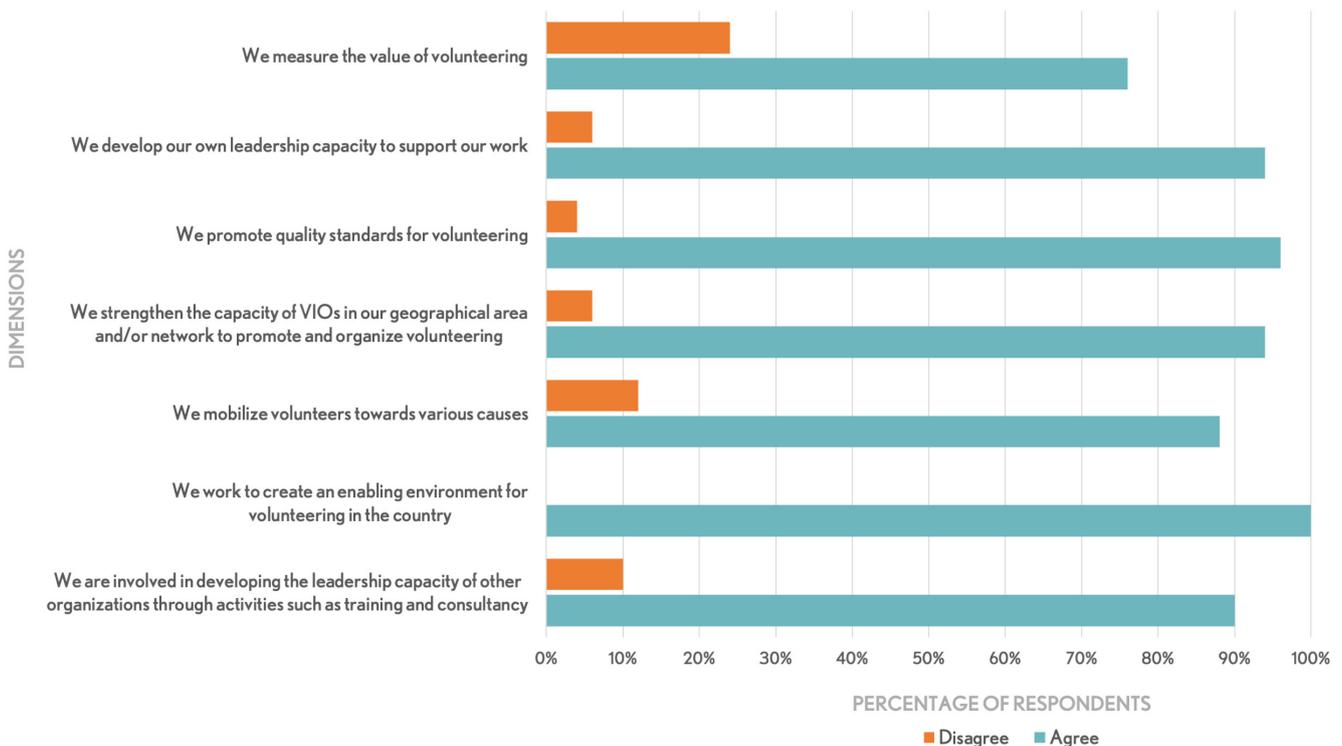
The research data also indicates that a number of VLOs in developed countries were

surprised by the rapid and spontaneous emergence of informal volunteering on a scale that was unfamiliar and challenged their operations. Volunteer Ireland, for example, reported that this produced an effort to reduce the bureaucracy in local volunteer centers to facilitate their response to the informal demand for volunteer placements. Another example shows that despite their respective locations in the global North and global South, both Frivilligcenter og Selvhjaelp Danmark and the Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism responded slowly to the pandemic, initially at a loss as to what to do. In Mozambique, by contrast, the repatriation of international volunteers created the opportunity to foreground and support the role of grassroots and informal volunteering more directly:

“ *International organizations which use international volunteers had to lose their volunteer because they had to be repatriated. So there was a very big space for us to understand the role of grassroots volunteers, community volunteers, informal volunteering.*<sup>132</sup>

As part of the research survey respondents were initially asked about their leadership role in the pandemic. The results are shown in Figure 7 and show a strong commonality of views about VLO roles during the pandemic.

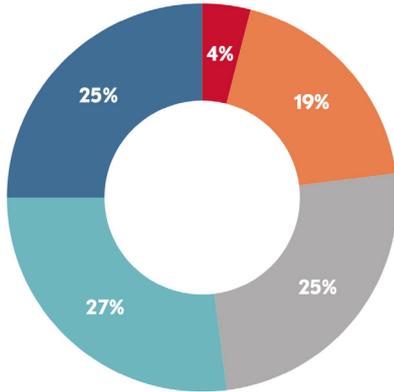
**FIGURE 7 LEADERSHIP FOR VOLUNTEERING: SURVEY RESPONDENT VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF NATIONAL VLOS DURING COVID-19**



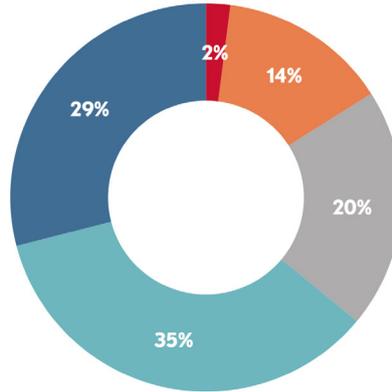
**FIGURE 8** VLO SURVEY RESPONSES AS TO HOW THEIR STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP HAS CHANGED AS A RESULT OF COVID-19



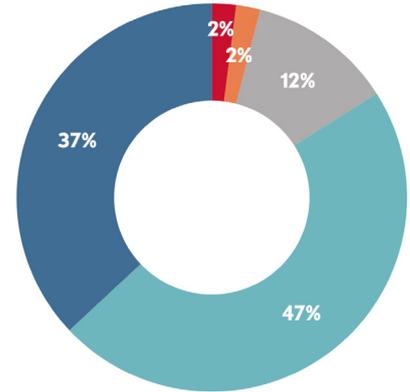
We have strengthened our strategic partnerships with corporations devoted to volunteering



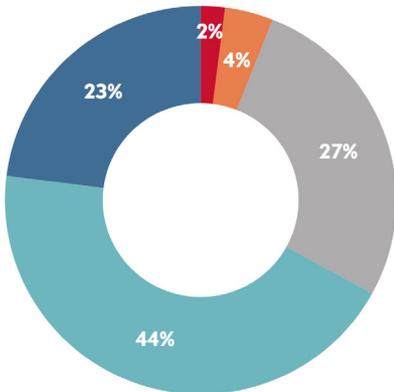
We have strengthened our volunteer-based partnerships with governments



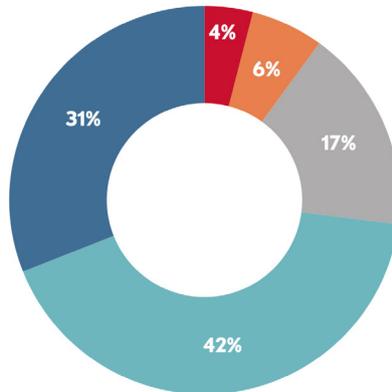
We have revised our strategic leadership approach to work through online support and engagement with VIOs and volunteers



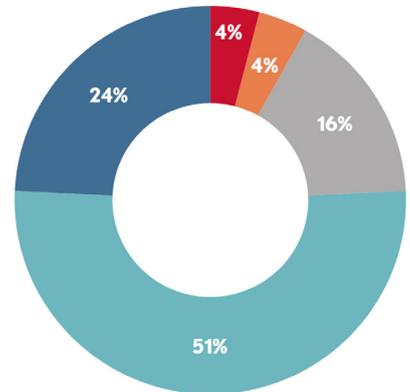
We have prioritized developing our own leadership capacity to support our work



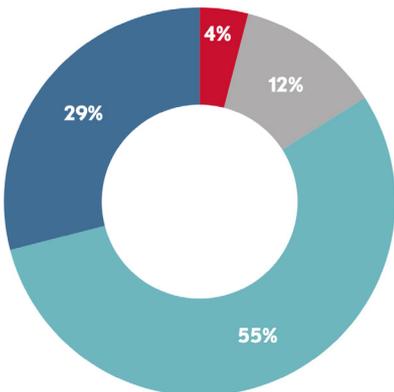
Developing volunteering to promote human rights, a respectful society, respectful relationships and social change has become a more important focus in our work



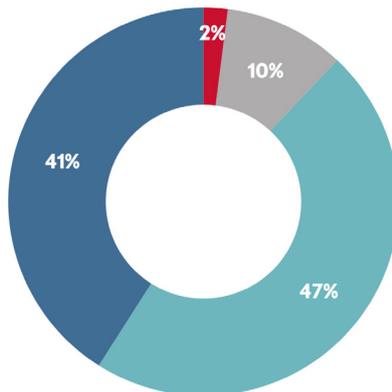
Promoting quality standards for volunteering has become more important in our work



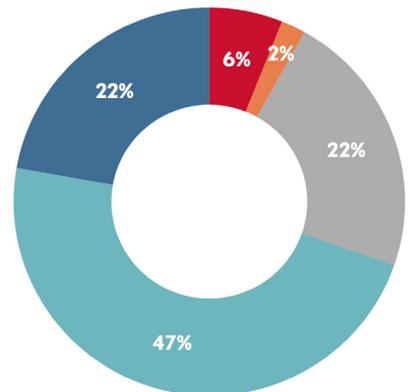
We focus more on strengthening the capacity of VIOs in our geographic area and/or network to promote and organize volunteering



Working to create an enabling environment for volunteering in the country has become a greater priority



We focus more on activities such as training and consultancy in developing the leadership capacity of other organizations



When asked if their strategic leadership role had changed because of the pandemic, 74% stated that this was the case. Figure 8, shows how respondents stated it had changed. The results indicate the range of areas in which VLOs experienced changes in their strategic leadership as a result of COVID-19. The largest change was reported as working to create an enabling environment for volunteering: 88% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with that statement.<sup>133</sup> The lowest score was 52% of respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed that COVID-19 impacted on how they worked with corporations.

## LEADING IN A COMPLEX COVID-19 ENVIRONMENT

Evidence from the research study shows that strategic leadership has been central to both how and whether VLOs were able to reposition themselves in an environment dominated by COVID-19. It is important to bear in mind that COVID-19 changed the environment in which all stakeholders and actors function, whether they were involved in volunteering or not. This has increased the complexity of the context in which VLOs responded to the pandemic. VLOs have had to work with and respond to changing interests within the state, the private sector and communities, as these stakeholders developed their own strategies to deal with the pandemic.

Some of the strategies used by VLOs to change direction are not new. For example, partnerships have been a long-standing feature of network operations, while in some countries national volunteer policy and legislation have been a significant factor in increasing the impact of VLOs. What is new is how COVID-19 accelerated the need for a more diverse range of partnerships and new ways of operating that produced greater synergy between VLOs and the key actors.<sup>134</sup> One survey respondent commented that the pandemic made particular demands on leadership organizations to draw a wide range of stakeholders into the ambit of their work:

“ *The pandemic put forward new requirements for the current leaders of the volunteer community, who now needed to unite NGOs, the media, the state, volunteers and new partners in order to help the population.*<sup>135</sup>

A common thread emerging from the evidence on VLO advocacy, development and mobilization is that COVID-19 consistently produced fresh opportunities for VLOs whilst simultaneously posing major challenges. For example, some VLOs found it easier to advocate on multiple issues and to target their advocacy more easily to decision-makers in media, government, business and religious bodies. This helped increase the visibility of the VLOs and made it easier to showcase the role of volunteering in the pandemic.



Photo top

*Volunteers monitoring COVID-19 symptoms of community member, raising awareness about the virus and providing information about treatment options. (Photo by Said al Saba, Bangladesh)*

However, VLOs faced significant challenges as some organizations ceased to operate or closed down completely; restrictions on public gatherings and face to face activities repeatedly curtailed volunteer activities as countries faced multiple waves of the virus; and volunteering increased and decreased at different times and in different locations. These factors increased the fluidity of the volunteering landscape and forced VLOs to craft strategies within an uncertain context.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN VLOS

In this context the leadership of VLOs faced numerous strategic issues related to their organizational development and sustainability. They had to craft new relationships, some of which were collaborative and friendly, while others were more difficult, sometimes forged in a contested environment. For example, in one case the VLO had to make difficult strategic choices about how to assist government to involve volunteers in its response to the pandemic, whilst being very concerned about the lack of government interest in safeguarding these volunteers.

In some cases, the COVID-induced changes made organizations more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Here we see VLOs assessing their capacity to find solutions to strategic challenges such as declining funding, how to leverage alternative resources and tap volunteer talents, and how to respond to the growing interest among donors and policymakers in making volunteering

more inclusive. For example, in Jordan, Naua has been working in partnership with UNICEF to tackle its capacity gaps: *“We've recognized lots of gaps within our organizational structure, gaps in our ability to consistently deliver high quality services.”*<sup>136</sup>

In repositioning their organizations within a fast-changing volunteer landscape, the issue of quality emerges as a key concern. 76% of survey respondents said that promoting quality standards for volunteering has become more important for their work due to the pandemic.

For example, some of the VLOs regard themselves as leaders in their country's volunteering sector, describing themselves as the ‘voice’ of the sector. This increases the need to maintain their reputation for quality and innovation, particularly when they are consulted by other actors who want to draw volunteers into their operations and need guidance on policies or protocols for duty of care and volunteer management. The research study shows that VLOs have also played a significant strategic leadership role in raising new areas for policy making which impacts squarely on the environment in which they are operating. For example: advocating for national and/or regional voluntary service schemes<sup>137</sup> as being critical in the fight against COVID-19; promoting volunteer welfare; and promoting inclusiveness in volunteering and confronting conventional ideas about who can and who should volunteer. This is related to barriers and inequality in volunteering e.g., discrimination against gender, refugees, people living with disabilities, and sexual minorities.

## **LEADERSHIP IN DEVELOPING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR VOLUNTEERING IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19**

Referencing IAVE's perspective that *“organized volunteering... is strongest when it happens in an enabling environment, one that places high value on it”*, the research data shows that when the state or business recognize the value of volunteering, this does not always translate into an enabling environment for the volunteering sector. The respondents shared instances in which governments involved volunteers in their responses to the pandemic without acknowledging the contribution that the volunteering sector can make to these initiatives.

In this regard the research surfaced multiple examples of volunteering leadership organizations working to develop a single ‘volunteer ecosystem’.<sup>138</sup> A volunteering ecosystem reflects the wider context in which VLOs operate – local, national, regional and global. Ideally the ecosystem takes the form of a wide variety of institutional and other arrangements shaped by whether and how volunteering is recognized as a force for social change. It is manifested in volunteer policy, legislation, partnerships and resourcing arrangements. The creation of

such an ecosystem or enabling environment for volunteering requires intensive engagement between the VLOs, their networks, the state, the private sector and the wider civil society over an extended period of time.

COVID-19 accelerated the engagement of multiple stakeholders through the increased recognition of the value of volunteering in fighting the pandemic. In response to the pandemic, the development of new volunteer interventions became a priority for some VLOs e.g., *“to combat loneliness caused by COVID-19.”*<sup>139</sup>

However, inequalities and the digital divide made it more difficult to build an enabling volunteering environment under COVID-19 restrictions when VLO members were excluded by virtue of digital challenges:

“ We are pursuing and pushing for a national volunteer strategic framework, ideally physical meetings were used but the national strategic framework engagements are being done virtually. This has, however, limited the participation of many of our VIO members that are mainly small, and grassroots based.”<sup>140</sup>

VLOs described different starting points in working towards creating an effective enabling environment for volunteering. For Perú Voluntario it was the necessity of strengthening VIOs in their country and encouraging them to work together as a force for enhanced volunteer action. In India the goal of iVolunteer was to unify, formalize and ‘modernize’ volunteer organizations previously working in smaller spaces.

It is clear from the research data that creating the enabling environment requires working with others and the complexity of working in coalitions is evident. In response to COVID-19 some VLOs changed their strategic leadership approach to widen the range of their collaborative alliances and partnerships, but a critical factor was developing trust-based relationships between diverse players. One organization cautioned against the risk of losing focus by partnering with an entity that has different objectives: *“when there's give and take, it's very easy to get side-tracked, to lose your original focus and to be pulled into a line of business that you do not entirely wish to engage in.”*<sup>141</sup>

Partnerships with universities and research think tanks provided another opportunity that enabled some VLOs to develop knowledge in relation to their COVID-19 experience.



Photo top

Volunteers set up hand washing stations around the community. (Photo by Mngaro Mtaani, Kenya)

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## VOLUNTEERING LEADERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS, STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND THE

# FUTURE OF VOLUNTEERING

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Ongoing change and unpredictability are the likely hallmarks of an uncertain future within which VLOs and member organizations seek to survive, become more prepared, and grow in an increasingly complex context of the ongoing global pandemic, climate change, and a growing economic and fiscal crisis. Two survey respondents captured the future in this way: *“We will be more virtual than before, but everything else is unpredictable.”*<sup>142</sup> And: *“There are a wide number of unknowns - many beyond the pandemic - that will collectively change the landscape of volunteering in Wales.”*<sup>143</sup> Within this context some VLOs expressed clear views

about strategic priorities and the methods required to navigate an unpredictable landscape. These include innovation and ‘out-of-the box’ thinking to develop a volunteer movement that meets current and future challenges.<sup>144</sup>

The survey of VLOs explored their views on the wider context in which they were operating and what this might mean for their organizations in the future. The results are shown in Figures 9 and 10.

Figure 9 shows the significance of the changing landscape of partnerships, reinforcing the ways in which the pandemic has generated new relationships and forms of co-operation, and these are further seen as important for the future, whether at local, regional or multinational levels. The perceived reduction in volunteering activity sits alongside a noted commitment of donors and policy makers to focus on inclusivity in volunteering in the future. This is matched in the responses shown in Figure 9 about VLOs approach to inclusivity.

**FIGURE 9** RESPONDENT VIEWS ON THE WIDER CONTEXT FOR VLOS

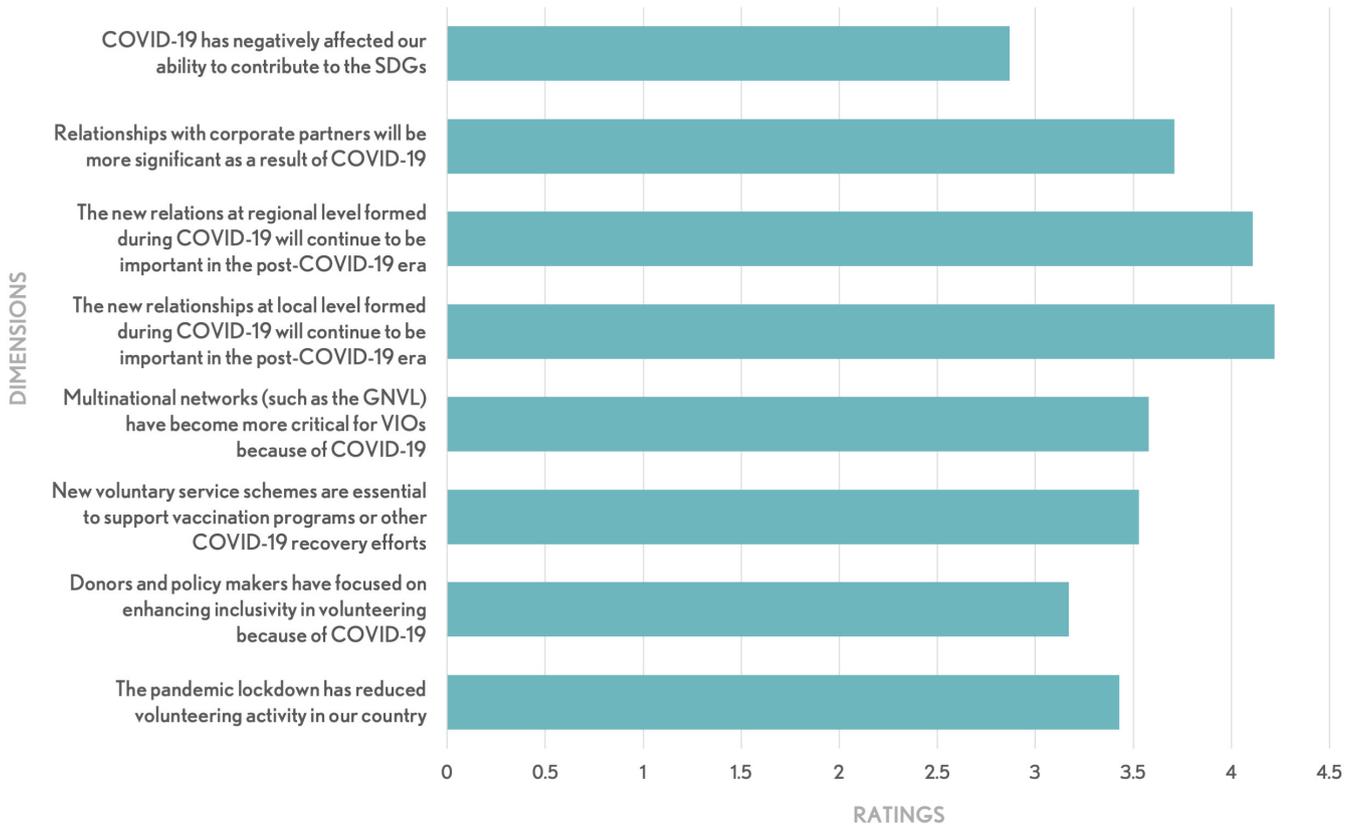




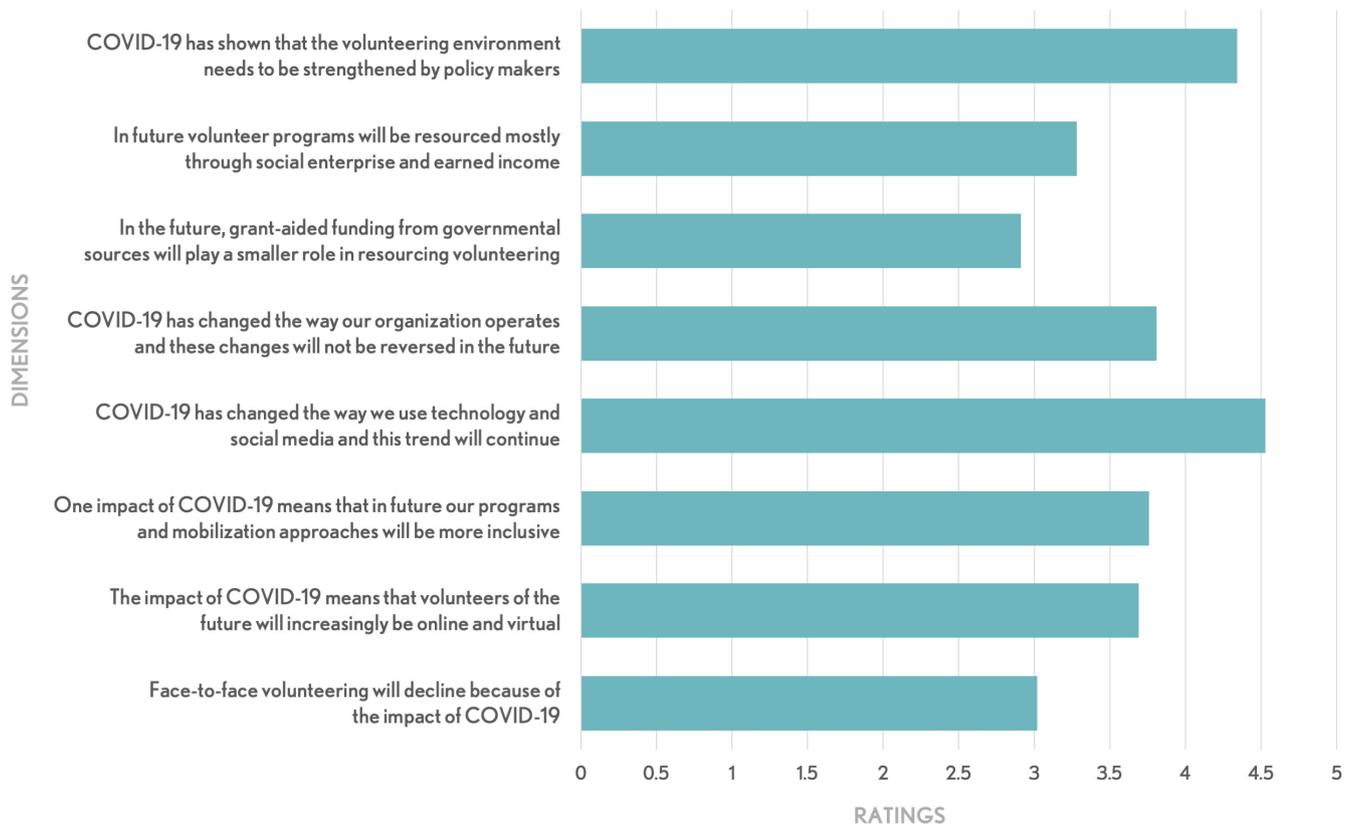
Photo top

Volunteers assisting the elderly. (Photo by Voluntariado Universidad del Magdalena, Colombia)

Figure 10 indicates the uncertainty VLOs face, most significantly in the requirement for policy makers to address the issue of an enabling environment for volunteering. The anticipation of change in new ways of working with technology is widespread, although the use of online volunteering is anticipated somewhat less. Opinion was evenly divided on whether face-to-face volunteering is expected to decline because of the pandemic.<sup>145</sup> The future for funding also looks less clear, showing a relatively small movement in favour of social enterprise away from government funding.

These findings suggest an uncertain future, where change remains a significant feature of the environment within which they operate and resourcing for volunteering being of concern to VLOs. A number of challenges emerge and these are discussed in the following pages.

**FIGURE 10 VLO VIEWS ON THE FUTURE FOR THEIR ORGANIZATION**



## THE TRAJECTORY OF VOLUNTEERING IN THE FUTURE

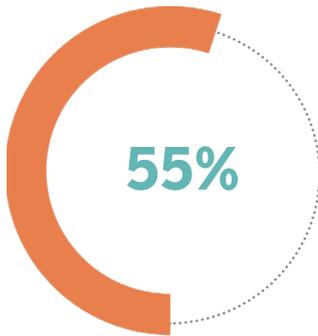
The research data produced a variety of views on how the pandemic impacted on the scale of volunteering activity in the VLO countries surveyed. 56% of respondents said that the pandemic lockdown had reduced volunteering activity in their country while 29% disagreed/strongly disagreed with this proposition. A number of respondents expected volunteering to decline in the future due to financial constraints and the emotional impact associated with the pandemic and the practicality of volunteering given ongoing pandemic restrictions.<sup>146</sup>

Such perspectives are supported by a recent Australian study showing that the proportion of adult Australians doing voluntary work fell substantially in the first year of COVID-19.<sup>147</sup> The study found that despite the easing of COVID-related restrictions, many of those who had previously volunteered had stopped doing so, and they had not returned to volunteering. The same study shows that there were an estimated 2.3 million fewer Australians volunteering in April 2021 than there were in late 2019. Unpaid work declined at a higher rate than paid work. Volunteering Australia refers to this as a “*step change*” in volunteering with implications arising from the fact that “*a large cohort was effectively stripped out of the volunteering workforce. That is the vulnerable and elderly Australians*”.<sup>148</sup> It remains to be seen whether VLO networks will be able to involve volunteers with other profiles (such as young people and people with mental health or physical conditions) to fill these gaps.

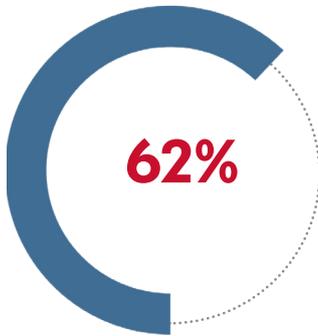
The rising economic crisis may require VLO leadership to focus more squarely on the role of volunteerism as a force for social and economic support. One survey respondent was of the view that “*in future, volunteerism work will be evaluated bas(ed) on social and economic impact created by volunteer organizations.*” In this regard, several other researchers have raised concerns about future expectations of volunteering and questioned whether agencies understand the limits and boundaries of volunteering roles.<sup>149</sup> These include volunteers being asked to take on roles previously performed by paid workers, and volunteers being mobilized at scale to meet new complex needs. Another critical strategic question for VLOs thus emerges: “*Are there limits to what volunteers could or should be asked to do?*”<sup>150</sup>

## PROGRAM AND ORGANIZATIONAL ADAPTATION

COVID-19 has produced fundamental changes in programming as VLOs sought to respond to new needs generated by the pandemic. As shown above, 87% of survey respondents stated that their programs changed to engage issues arising from the pandemic while 65% stated they supported programs in which volunteers raised awareness of personal and community practice around COVID-19.



stated that their programs changed to engage issues arising from the pandemic



agree/strongly agree that COVID-19 has changed the way [their] organization operates and these changes will not be reversed in the future

Looking ahead, the VLOs and the organizations they work with are increasingly aware that they may need to venture into unknown territory in responding to needs arising from the longer-term effects of COVID-19. Mental health is one such area and in the view of one survey respondent, it should be a priority for volunteer and government action: *“We know the mental health impacts of repeated lockdowns will have an effect on communities as well as people who volunteer to enable better mental health. We think this is a priority area that needs to be addressed by the UK government.”*<sup>151</sup>

The evidence is clear that partnerships have been the mainstay of VLO evolution in response to the pandemic. Such collaboration points to the adaptive capability<sup>152</sup> of VLOs that has generated new methods of working around the limitations created by COVID-19. The survey data suggests that such adaptations are likely to endure and evolve further: 62% of respondents agree/strongly agree that ‘COVID-19 has changed the way [their] organization operates and these changes will not be reversed in the future’.

The complexity of cross-sectoral partnerships is also unlikely to be reversed. Naura in Jordan cautioned that organizations risk losing sight of their objectives if they are pulled in directions that do not serve their goals. The Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism is determined to roll out its localized version of the Global Standard for Volunteering for Development<sup>153</sup> and will also not be deflected from its plans to mobilize volunteers during the upcoming national election.<sup>154</sup>



Photo left

Volunteers distributing PPEs and hand sanitizers on the streets. (Photo by Agency for Volunteer Service, Hong Kong)

## COMMUNITY-BASED VOLUNTEERING: NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES?

The evidence suggests that the needs of communities have taken center-stage and VLOs are recognizing the growing importance of community-centered and collective approaches to volunteer involving practice. 90% of VLO respondents agreed/strongly agreed that ‘the new relationships at local level formed during COVID-19 will continue to be important in the post-COVID-19 era’. One study found that *“a new cohort of people at the grassroots level has been more effective than national or regional command-and-control initiatives.”*<sup>155</sup> In Bolivia and Guatemala, UNV identified community-based volunteerism and social cohesion as critical factors in producing resilience in the face of challenges such as COVID-19.<sup>156</sup> This view is consistent with the comment from one survey respondent who said: *“relationality on micro-territorial level is the most important issue for volunteering: this dimension will be strengthened, not impoverished by physical distancing measures.”* It is also illustrated in this perspective shared by one VLO:

“ I was seeing as different groups coming together at local level as the needs of the community... It's these spaces of relationships... if it's on common issues [it] impresses... the possibility to do something meaningful - you as a person and you as the network, a collective interest.<sup>157</sup>

The spontaneous public response to supporting communities and households facing food shortages, ill-health, unemployment and other hardships, confronted VLOs and their members with the need to integrate these forms of volunteering in new ways: *“We saw a surge in spontaneous volunteering and the challenge was to link them to existing initiatives, frameworks, networks, organizations to be effective rather than recreating the wheel.”*<sup>158</sup>

The evidence indicates that COVID-19 increased the visibility of informal and community-based volunteering, which, going forward, offers VLOs the opportunity to think differently about their networks, organizational structures and programs. They will also need to respond to the often informal structural nature of community-based volunteering. One view is that such voluntary action does not simply happen – it requires an investment in community-led infrastructure to build and sustain local voluntary action.<sup>159</sup> This perspective is amplified by a survey respondent:

“ During COVID-19 we learned that volunteering infrastructure is not well developed in our country and the partnership mechanisms on local level need to recognize volunteering as a resource and invest in strategic development of volunteering, to get ready for future crises (of all kinds).<sup>160</sup>

## THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Across all the countries in this study, COVID-19 has entrenched the use of technology in the volunteering sector for both operational and programming purposes. Consequently, the opinion of one survey respondent is not surprising: *“The future of volunteering will be more inclusive and heavily virtual.”* This resonates with the views of close to two-thirds (64%) of the survey respondents who said that ‘volunteers of the future will increasingly be online and virtual’. Furthermore, 95% of survey respondents said that ‘COVID-19 has changed the way we use technology and social media, and this trend will continue’. Nevertheless, the interviews demonstrate that these forecasts may be ambitious in both high and low-income countries. For example, access to internet capacity, software and hardware is a problem for Volunteer Canada and its members:

“ Internet isn't as strong in every part of the country. So, access is a problem, access to software and hardware is a problem. And then comfort with using the technology is another piece. But we are seeing that organizations over time are building those capacities where they can be able to continue with that virtual programming going forward.<sup>161</sup>

By contrast, it is interesting to see that in Perú, COVID-19 is impacting in a small way on the North/South digital divide. Perú Voluntario reports that *“COVID-19 has pushed people to digitalize... We have a lot of families that have internet. I think that without COVID-19 it would not be so fast.”*<sup>162</sup> However, internet access is not prevalent in all sectors and this presented Perú Voluntario with a challenge in reaching micro-entrepreneurs with its financial and business practice support program using digital platforms.<sup>163</sup>

Agence Nigérienne de Volontariat pour le Développement (ANVD) in Niger, Association Jeunesse-Sensibilization-Action in Togo, and VIONet in Sierra Leone all experience software and hardware shortages and constraints, but these form part of a larger set of interlocking factors that limit the participation of member organizations and volunteers in the digital space.<sup>164</sup> According to VSP Guyana, extending the reach of digital infrastructure depends on introducing more competition in the digital space which is dominated in that country by a private sector monopoly.<sup>165</sup>

Despite these constraints, the VLOs interviewed across the globe recognize how digital technology can transform volunteering. Volunteering Australia sees its potential in terms of *“coordination, in terms of capacity, utilization efficiency... to vastly transform the volunteer experience in Australia.”*<sup>166</sup> AVS Hong Kong *“have to increasingly use ICT in order to improve our community, as a marketing strategy or in... provision of service.”*<sup>167</sup> For VCTT in Trinidad & Tobago, digital

technology provides *“deeper reach; we can be in places and spaces that we are not able to be in terms of physical volunteer.”*<sup>168</sup> VIO Society in Kenya found great value in its members participating in the GTA meeting at the UN and in other meetings on the world stage; for Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional, one benefit lies in *“articulating more with regional international organizations”*;<sup>169</sup> and in the UAE, the Emirates Foundation identifies *“an enhanced need for technology to play a role... in recruitment, management, database... managing sign-in/sign-out... to make things easier for the volunteers.”*<sup>170</sup>

A central debate that emerges is whether technology will be used to replace face-to-face/physical volunteering with virtual volunteering. 64% of survey respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement that ‘we have moved from supporting face-to-face volunteering to online volunteering.’ However, far from virtual and face-to-face volunteering being positioned as binary, both are likely to be seen as opportunities for growth, despite COVID-19 induced restrictions on mobility. Survey respondents were evenly divided on whether ‘face-to-face volunteering will decline because of the impact of COVID-19 with 42% agreeing/strongly agreeing with the statement and 41% disagreeing/strongly disagreeing. Comments made by interviewed VLOs suggest that in future, virtual and face-to-face volunteering are more likely to interact in a variety of ways.

Volunteer Canada reported that while 56% of the organizations were able to adapt some programming to virtual delivery, 20% to 30% were not: *“There was a push to virtual, but there’s still the pull of in-person.”*<sup>171</sup> CSV Lazio in Italy regards ICT as *“a tool, not a substitute for direct relations.”*<sup>172</sup> VCTT Trinidad & Tobago argues that *“there’s room and space for both. I think we still have to do a lot of work in terms of really... understanding what truly is happening with online volunteering... we really want to have robust systems to monitor and evaluate what is happening online.”*<sup>173</sup> And Volunteer Ireland cautions that *“A little bit of the volunteering has been switched into the virtual space and [it] doesn’t always work in every context.”*<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless, Naua in Jordan is confident that in the future *“everything needs to become a couple of clicks. And that’s where we’re hopefully heading towards now.”*<sup>175</sup>



Photo top

Volunteers cleaning up trash and clearing blockages on the streets. (Photo by Ekiti Parapo Youth Empowerment, Nigeria)

## THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

As already noted, some organizations reported that government and the private sector have developed a new appreciation for the role of VLOs, particularly for their ability to mobilize and deploy volunteers in communities and activate campaigns in response to the pandemic. In some cases, this has produced formal recognition of the role of the VLOs going forward. For example, the government of the Republic of Ireland placed Volunteer Ireland at the center of implementing its national volunteer strategy, launched early in 2021. A critical success factor cited in this regard is the minister's experience of volunteering and his understanding that *"it's not just numbers and thinking volunteering is a solution for everything, and volunteers are free"*.<sup>176</sup>

In other cases, however, the good relationship with government has not translated into a more enabling environment for volunteering. This is reflected in *"the lack of provision of appropriate volunteering infrastructure."*<sup>177</sup> The concern is that, going forward, the focus will be on the short-term *"recovery and COVID-19 challenges and immediate fixes"*, rather than driving for strategic and longer-term change.<sup>178</sup> These perspectives suggest that VLOs need to build on the recognition of volunteering that the pandemic has produced, and that they cannot assume that their public/private partnerships will be sufficient to strengthen the volunteering environment. For this reason, organizations such as Chile Voluntario and the VIO Society in Kenya are determined to continue their efforts to develop policy and legislation in support of national volunteer activities.<sup>179</sup>

By contrast, the conditions in Panamá provide Fundación Voluntarios de Panamá with few options for forward-looking policy engagement: *"There's just no possibility that anybody in the government is interested at all in anything that has to do with our issues."*<sup>180</sup>

These accounts demonstrate a spectrum of engagement between VLOs and the state in the context of the pandemic. The case of Volunteer Ireland provides an example of an integrated relationship with the VLO leading the implementation of the national volunteering strategy; in the UAE the Emirates Foundation is the recognized authority for volunteering in the country. In other countries (Thailand, Australia) VLOs are still marginalized by government (as described earlier in this report), even though their ministries enrol their own volunteers in pursuit of their objectives. And in Panamá the prospects of government engaging with the VLO appear bleak. Clearly the struggle to build an enabling environment for volunteering will continue, despite COVID-19 having raised the visibility and power of volunteering.

## PREPAREDNESS FOR FUTURE CRISES

Some VLOs spoke about the importance of being prepared for future disasters and other humanitarian emergencies. In this regard it is interesting to note that despite the sudden shock of COVID-19, 42% of survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed that they had used previous experiences of pandemics or disaster responses in the way they engaged with the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is different from these previous events is that COVID-19 is a global pandemic that is currently ongoing and morphing in different ways. The evidence shows that preparedness for future crises is not only about developing safety and security protocols, but is fundamentally about re-organizing, restructuring and retooling programs and operations to be able to respond meaningfully to climate change and other crises in the future.

“ I think we can find many ways to fight this virus, but probably next to the virus we will face another challenge like a climate crisis, migration, starving and many other challenges... We have to take this time, to take technology as a preparation... And then I think we will be more prepared to confront or to face up to new challenges in face to face volunteering.<sup>181</sup> ”



Photo left

Volunteers teaching Filipino sign language to deaf children. (Photo by the School of Deaf Education and Applied Studies, De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde, The Philippines)

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*We have to take this time, to take technology as a preparation... And then I think we will be more prepared to confront or to face up to new challenges in face to face volunteering.*

**Survey Respondent**

A number of priorities for preparedness were cited by VLOs:

- ▶ Focusing more closely on fostering community resilience, especially in anticipation of future global disasters: *“We all realize that we’re going to have more of these situations.”*<sup>182</sup>
- ▶ Creating networks that can cooperate during future crises: *“Because at the moment we don't have the network to cooperate or to work during the crisis in Thailand.”*<sup>183</sup>
- ▶ Increasing the resource base for volunteer involving organizations: *“From the level of government, I can tell you the budget will double and triple as regards to COVID-19 and how we put things in place to not suffer the setbacks you would have suffered if another pandemic is to befall us.”*<sup>184</sup>
- ▶ Influencing systemic change for volunteer involvement in civic protection.<sup>185</sup>

VLOs also described difficulties they are encountering in taking steps to future-proof their organizations. Some continue to deal with the rapid changes they had to make in response to the onset of COVID-19, which may slow their ability to undertake further innovation in the short-term: *“We did experience ... very real challenges which we still need to work through.”*

<sup>186</sup> In Niger, Agence Nigérienne de Volontariat pour le Développement (ANVD) described its concern about how further restrictions on mobility would cut its activities and result in staff reductions. This *“leads to a strong lethargy in implementing the ANVD action plan.”*<sup>187</sup> Fundación Voluntarios de Panamá is concerned that it is losing momentum and that while *“virtual works... it might hurt our ability to communicate our message and to be more visible.”*<sup>188</sup> VSN Thailand described the challenge of improving its online services whilst planning to train volunteers and volunteer managers with *“proper and updated skills for coping with those [crisis] situations.”*<sup>189</sup>

In navigating this unpredictable terrain, preparation for the future will likely require working towards organizational sustainability. This involves being clear about the organization’s goals and planning to deal with challenges that will inevitably arise. There is some evidence that VLOs recognize this.<sup>190</sup>

## RESTRUCTURING IN THE VOLUNTEERING SECTOR

The study shows how in a number of countries COVID-19 is giving rise to restructuring in the volunteering sector, albeit in somewhat contradictory ways. One survey respondent anticipates “*seismic shifts in VLOs*” that might mean some not surviving while others thrive.<sup>191</sup>

In some instances, networks are being reconfigured e.g., pairing smaller and larger organizations for greater impact.

“*We are promoting that smaller organizations work with bigger organizations, with international organization. Everyone wants to have a small organization in our community in their projects; donors are looking for projects where we have bigger organizations with small organizations... We need to articulate a national organization and a small organization.*”<sup>192</sup>

While smaller, grassroots organizations may be more vulnerable, there are also contexts in which larger VLOs are being weakened by funding cuts. Conversely, this suggests that some smaller organizations appear to be more resilient given their close proximity to the communities they serve.

These trends are closely related to the changing resource base for VLOs. There is evidence of government funding being reallocated to the formal health sector and emergency relief, which has impacted negatively on the VLOs.<sup>193</sup> Larger organizations that rely on extensive public fundraising have had to “*pull back.*”<sup>194</sup> In this context organizations could reduce administrative costs by coming together, which, it is argued, would redefine “*what’s going on in the sector and what’s needed.*”<sup>195</sup>

VLO strategies being used to manage this uncertainty include looking at self-earned income as a means of alternative resourcing, but this option drew mixed responses from the VLOs. While 43% of survey respondents said that in future volunteer programs will be resourced mostly through social enterprise and earned income, 20% disagreed and 37% were neutral. Social enterprise may provide a basis for stabilizing an organization in the face of funding challenges, but this may not address the shortfall from previous sources. Reducing staff costs leads to a consequent loss of capacity, which has implications for the future: “*It’s harder to build back if you take all your experience out.*”<sup>196</sup>

Other efforts to reduce funding dependency are also evident: “*We are trying to consider seriously how we can build our own capacity within the network so that we can operate without a lot of dependency*”<sup>197</sup> and “*the coalition needs to find a way of economic sustainability for future.*”<sup>198</sup>

The worldwide drive to vaccinate citizens against COVID-19 may also contribute to reshaping the volunteering sector. This is envisaged in the response from 63% of survey respondents who said that ‘new voluntary service schemes are essential to support vaccination programs or other COVID-19 recovery efforts.’

The literature indicates that new approaches to building organizational resilience will require reimagining the future:

“ Shifts must happen in the way resilience-building activities are implemented - the notion of ‘bouncing back’ is not an option when the past model is broken. We need to reimagine completely different futures, built through grassroots coalitions that can address local needs and build decentralized leadership.<sup>199</sup>

Photo bottom

Youth Volunteers from Taiwan travel to Germany to volunteer at the St. Anna Caritas Augsburg for a memorable cross cultural volunteering experience. (Photo by Volunteering Taiwan)



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## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GNVL

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The GNVL is a new network established by IAVE and is open to organizations who provide a strategic leadership role at national or regional level.<sup>200</sup> There is no separate membership of GNVL outside of being an IAVE member. The primary role of the network is focused on learning and sharing, which is conducted on both open platforms and in safe spaces for members only. But it also offers some direct support, such as funding grants for capacity development and access to a mentoring program.

While the research undertaken to support the framing of GNVL dates back a number of years, the formation and development of the new network was soon concurrent with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is reasonable to expect that the pandemic both shaped the initial experiences of the network and the experiences of its members, but also offered opportunities for the network to demonstrate its value and its potential for the future.<sup>201</sup> Consequently, this section considers the impact of COVID-19 on the way GNVL operated and the implications for the relationship of GNVL members to the network in the future.<sup>202</sup>

The research study shows a significant usage of the GNVL network by members during the pandemic, with 65% stating the GNVL network enabled them to connect and share knowledge with other VLOs about issues of

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*IAVE believes that leadership organizations focused on valuing, supporting and developing volunteering provide a catalyst to enhance our common mission, getting more people involved as volunteers and raising awareness on the strategic value of volunteering, all while building key-partnerships to develop and execute successful initiatives. Thus, establishing this dynamic network advances our promise to deliver on key-asks being made by volunteering leadership organizations all over the world.*

**International Association for  
Volunteer Effort - IAVE**

common interest. 55% stated the GNVL network has provided specific support in addressing the challenges of COVID-19. Members noted benefits linked to the primary role of the network, specifically its emphasis on learning and sharing.<sup>203</sup> This is where the impact of COVID-19 on the activities of GNVL during the pandemic was especially articulated by members.

The survey also indicates that in future, members will use GNVL more: 56% of survey respondents stating they thought multinational networks (such as the GNVL) have become more critical for VLOs because of COVID-19. Some of the reasons can be translated into practical activities, but that sense of isolation generated by the pandemic applies also to VLOs and this is where GNVL has – and can in the future – play an important role:

Photo bottom

Volunteers preparing grocery parcels for delivery to vulnerable members of the community. (Photo by CSV Lazio, Italy)

“ *The value of being part of a network of volunteering leaders gives you that, that feeling of strength that you are not alone; that you are together with a bunch of people doing a similar thing, a similar leading role in the respective geographies and, and in regions.*<sup>204</sup>



## LEARNING AND SHARING IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

GNVL sets out two pathways for learning and sharing: access to virtual learning and development opportunities, including skills-based webinars, toolkits, and resources for volunteering; and opportunities to engage and interact with other members of the network through a password protected section on the platform that allows for member-to-member engagement.<sup>205</sup>

The members of GNVL/IAVE provided positive feedback of their experience in the time of COVID-19. In the write-in option in the survey, 16 out of 40 responding organizations specifically mentioned attending webinars, while 9 organizations mentioned on-line learning and sharing. This was also an area in which members stated they had contributed to the webinar series (often as well as attending) with 12 organizations stating this in the write-in comments.<sup>206</sup>

The sharing within the network also facilitated individual GNVL members in supporting organizations that they engaged with in their leadership role.

“ *It has been a great source of insights and sharing of experiences that has impacted on how we share information within our own network, as I regularly share the information I have received from the GNVL. The materials I received, I forwarded to our WhatsApp group.*<sup>207</sup>

## ONLINE COMMUNICATION AND WEBINARS

The research study shows the COVID-19 pandemic clearly accelerated movement towards online communication, online ways of working, online approaches to learning, sharing, and technology-supported volunteering itself. Some GNVL members were already on the pathway to being virtual organizations. For IAVE and GNVL, some of the regular ways of face-to-face networking were no longer available and webinars were used as an important way of connecting with members but also sharing information in a structured format. Alongside this, the use of online communication in this era is inherent in the functioning of a global network.

The significance of networking (through GNVL and other VLO networks) to understand what was taking place during the pandemic was clearly articulated, for example through networked briefings *“around the shifts that people were seeing; how some shifts are common across all communities; how some shifts are local, needed for a specific community.”*<sup>208</sup>

For some the benefit of learning and sharing through GNVL changed because of COVID-19



Photo top

Volunteers manning the "Mental Health Hotline" for anyone experiencing mental or emotional anguish during these challenging times. (Photo by Emirates Foundation, UAE)

and could also be seen as a more efficient use of time. *"It's got harder to meet each other face to face, but I think that we started to be more open, more efficient in online activities."*<sup>209</sup>

For others, the extent and scale of webinars carried its own issues, these included reference to the digital divide, where some GNVL members had connectivity challenges and/or could not afford to participate in online webinars;<sup>210</sup> informants also contrasted webinars with their pre-COVID-19 experience, reflecting on the benefits of attending face-to-face conferences and gatherings.

Overall, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that IAVE/ GNVL has played an important role for members during the pandemic, as well as for volunteering generally and the network itself:

“ *Even though we can say COVID disrupt a lot of them, I think it was a good opportunity to the network, for the network to be able to, like show itself and show the importance of volunteering in all this.*<sup>211</sup>

This carries implications for the future role of GNVL. The research study shows the uncertainty facing VLOs in a number of areas. There is a significant requirement for learning and sharing on a range of themes, such as the enabling environment; program development and support for expressions of informal volunteering; organizational ways of working; and the restructuring of the sector. Following on from its success with webinars and online learning, GNVL is well placed to develop and expand its role, using the engagement of its members as contributors to - as well as recipients of - learning and sharing. However, the feedback on 'webinar fatigue' and the digital divide are underpinning matters for GNVL to address to enable all its members to participate and engage effectively.



Photo top

Volunteers distributing cargos of donations for underprivileged families in the community. (Photo by Juguete Pendiente, Peru)

## DIRECT SUPPORT

GNVL offers direct support to members in the form of funding grants for organizational capacity development and the opportunity to benefit from a mentoring program.

In the survey, four organizations referred to small financial support and one organization mentioned the mentoring program. In the interviews, members mentioned their appreciation of this direct support, specifically the mentoring program, as well as support for the development of networks and the disbursements of small grants. The financial grants received significant appreciation: *“The trainings and the webinars have helped shape our future programs in terms of volunteer promotions.”*<sup>212</sup>

In the interviews the mentor program was referred to as a success, both by mentors and mentees.<sup>213</sup> One effect is closer ties within the network with some members committing to utilize the benefits of the mentoring program for others:

“ I will not just go through the membership and leave. I have a duty to ensure that when I learned from the mentorship, whatever, again, I must pass it on to the other members there to ensure that I mean, the benefits not just me alone.<sup>214</sup>

The impact of the pandemic has arguably accentuated the importance of direct and mentoring support for the less well-resourced members of the network.



Photo top

Youth volunteers dedicate their time to make improvements to community parks. (Photo by Chilean National Institute of Youth, Chile)

## COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY

Part of the role of GNVL is to enable the “*opportunity to work together to advocate for volunteering, enhancing recognition for its importance and adding greater value to the support of global initiatives such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals.*”<sup>215</sup>

The role of GNVL as a voice for members did not emerge as an area of activity in the way that learning and sharing did. Yet throughout the study, issues were raised that would benefit from collective advocacy, e.g., the issue of getting policy makers to strengthen the enabling environment and implementing safeguarding policies and practice. The potential of the network in giving a voice to communities did come through in some instances:

“*Organizations that provide operational volunteering support on the ground, like ours, have opinions and experiences that we often are not able to allocate resources for putting forward an opinion and experiences. But through a forum like GNVL, our voices, and our experiences are gathered and put together in a structured form for other people, other influencers to listen. I feel good our voice is being gathered and heard possibly by somebody.*”<sup>216</sup>

This appears as a strong opportunity for GNVL. One of the COVID-19 effects has been a sense that recognition for volunteering as an important element within society has grown, and valuable relationships have been formed on a new basis and/or with new partners. The uncertain environment has also seen the value of networks enhanced. This combination presents as a real opportunity for GNVL in developing collective advocacy.



Photo top

Volunteers participate at an at-home literacy project for young students who are temporarily unable to attend school due to COVID-19 lockdowns. (Photo by Grace Braimah, Ghana)

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### FROM THE RESEARCH STUDY FOR IAVE AND THE GNVL

#### A NETWORK-BASED APPROACH TO VLO STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

This study shows that VLOs, despite their diversity, work through networks of relationships with multiple stakeholders. These networks and relationships are “*complex and unstable.*”<sup>217</sup> An analysis of these complexities provides a framework for assessing the strategic leadership practices of VLOs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first observation is that the drive to build cohesive volunteer ecosystems in different countries suggests that VLOs are taking a holistic and strategic approach to strengthening volunteering as a component of civil society action. COVID-19 has strengthened the imperative for cross-sectoral collaboration between VLOs and the public and private sectors.

Secondly, opportunities for regional collaboration form part of this drive and raise the prospect of regional structures supporting national coalitions in their work.<sup>218</sup>

Thirdly, the development of leadership emerges as a critical factor and while numerous respondents described the importance of leadership development in their network and in member organizations, there is little information about how exactly this is achieved or what impact it has. **Leadership development may be an area that IAVE needs to focus on in supporting and growing the GNVL network.**

## PARTNERSHIPS

The research study shows that during the pandemic VLOs delivered capacity development programs, advanced advocacy agendas and supported volunteer mobilization. Most of these efforts were undertaken in partnerships, often with new stakeholders or on a new basis with existing partners. These range from partnerships with governments and VIOs to corporates and academia. It would be useful for VLOs to continue entrenching these partnerships for the future and **the GNVL has a key role to play in facilitating linkages and enabling VLOs to understand how to form effective partnerships in new ways.**

## VOLUNTEER MOBILIZATION

The mobilization of volunteers has been widely impacted by COVID-19, but this has been a complex issue as the interest in volunteering has also surged and declined in waves: while some volunteer activities closed down, new opportunities have emerged. VLOs supported the movement to online volunteering, as well as adopting online mechanisms for organizational processes and systems such as mobilization. The growing trend towards internet-based provision of volunteer opportunities within countries demonstrates how VLOs have adapted to the changing situation arising from the pandemic. COVID-19 can be seen as an accelerant of the changes in organizational processes and systems whilst also demanding changes in volunteering models and practice.

Changes to the volunteering demographic during COVID-19 posed challenges as well as opportunities. These pointed to the central role of community volunteers; fewer older people being involved (due to health risks); and a wider diversity of volunteers being engaged, notably young people and volunteers from socially and economically deprived groups. VLOs stated that a key impact of the pandemic has been a greater focus on inclusivity in the mobilization of volunteers. **The GNVL has a potentially important role in working with its members**

to address the future actions of VLOs in the context of supporting inclusivity, mobilizing new sources of volunteers, and responding to the emergence of a new phase of community volunteering.

## ADVOCACY

The research study reveals that while COVID-19 posed challenges for VLO advocacy work, it also opened opportunities for future advocacy activity. Involvement in campaigns or the implementation of vaccination programs and raising awareness of COVID-19 became features of VLO activity during the pandemic.

COVID-19 was also a catalyst for VLOs to influence the development or review of volunteer policies. Issues of national legislation for volunteering, safeguarding of volunteers and the communities they worked with, moved higher up the VLO agendas. Working in partnership with others to increase volunteer recognition, build capacity and share resources became a feature of the VLO response to volunteering and COVID-19. **The GNVL has an opportunity to build on its learning and sharing mission through (a) collective advocacy efforts and (b) by developing and promoting policies and good practice guides.**



Photo top

Volunteers hand out masks via a drive-through system for safe distribution. (Photo by Naua, Jordan)

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## ANNEXES

### ANNEX 1A: LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY<sup>219</sup>

Name of organization	Country
Myanmar Education Volunteer Association	Myanmar
Association for Democratic Prosperity - Zid	Montenegro
Afghanistan Volunteering National Organisation (AVN)	Afghanistan
Agence Nigérienne de Volontariat pour le Développement (ANVD)	Niger
Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS)	Hong Kong
Agence Nationale du Volontariat au Togo (ANVT)	Togo
Association Bénévolat-Vaud	Switzerland
Association JSA	Togo
Association of Volunteer Centers	Russia
bagfa - Federal Association of Volunteer Centers in Germany	Germany
CARDO - Slovak National Center	Slovakia
Center National de Volontariat d'Haiti (CNVH)	Haiti
Centro Boliviano de Filantropia (CEBOFIL)	Bolivia
Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía (Cemefi)	Mexico
Centro Nacional del Voluntariado CENAVOL	Peru
Collectif Marocain du Volontariat	Morocco
CSV Lazio	Italy
Dividendo Voluntario para la Comunidad	Venezuela
Ethelon	Greece
Frivilligcentre og Selvhaelp Danmark (FriSe)	Denmark
Fundacion Voluntarios de Panamá	Panamá
Halley Movement	Mauritius
Helping Hand	Republic of Georgia
Indorelawan	Indonesia
Instituto Guatemalteco de Turismo	Guatemala

Name of organization	Country
Interessengemeinschaft Freiwilligenzentren Österreichs (IGFO)	Austria
iVolunteer	India
Japan Association for Volunteer Effort (JAVE)	Japan
lagfa bayern e.V.	Germany
Mesa Nacional Dialogo Sobre de Voluntariado	Uruguay
National Council for Voluntary Organizations (NCVO)	England
National Volunteer Center	Russia
National Volunteer Service of Papua New Guinea	Papua New Guinea
National Volunteer Council (CNV)	Mozambique
Naua	Jordan
NGO Federation of Nepal	Nepal
National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC)	Singapore
Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism (PhilCV)	Philippines
Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency (PNVSCA)	Philippines
Plataforma del Voluntariado de España	Spain
Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations	Slovakia
Points of Light	USA
Pro Vobis - National Resource Center for Volunteering	Romania
Proa	Peru
Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional (RACI)	Argentina
Rwanda Volunteer Network/V-Net Rwanda	Rwanda
Sistema Nacional de Voluntariado	Colombia
Slovenska Filantropija, Association for Promotion of Voluntary Work	Slovenia
University of Central Punjab	India
Vereniging Nederlandse Organisaties Vrijwilligerswerk (NOV)	Netherlands
Vietnam Volunteer Information Resource Center	Vietnam
Volunteer Canada	Canada
Volunteer for Lebanon	Lebanon
Volunteer Involving Organizations Network Zimbabwe (VIONet Zim)	Zimbabwe
Volunteer Ireland	Ireland
Volunteer Now	Northern Ireland

Name of organization	Country
Volunteer Saint Lucia	Saint Lucia
Volunteer Scotland	Scotland
Volunteer Spirit Network (VSN)	Thailand
Volunteering Australia	Australia
Volunteering New Zealand	New Zealand
Volunteering Taiwan	Taiwan
Volunteerism Support Platform (VSP)	Guyana
Volunteers Pakistan Organization	Pakistan
Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)	Wales
Welfare Volunteers Association of Nepal	Nepal
YES Empowerment Services Uganda	Uganda
Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, INJUV (Ministerio Desarrollo Social)	Chile

## ANNEX 1B: LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE INTERVIEWS

Name of organization	Country	Region	Interviewer	Date
Volunteer Canada	Canada	North America	Cliff Allum	March 17, 2021
Points of Light	USA	North America	Cliff Allum	April 01, 2021
Volunteerism Support Platform - VSP	Guyana	North America and the Caribbean	Cliff Allum	March 17, 2021
The Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago	Trinidad and Tobago	North America and the Caribbean	Cliff Allum	February 12, 2021
Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional (RACI)	Argentina	Latin America	Helene Perold	March 15, 2021
Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, INJUV (Ministerio Desarrollo Social)	Chile	Latin America	Helene Perold	February 10, 2021
CEMEFI	Mexico	Latin America	Jacob Mati	March 08 & 17, 2021
Fundación Voluntarios de Panamá	Panamá	Latin America	Cliff Allum	February 15, 2021
Perú Voluntario	Perú	Latin America	Helene Perold	March 22, 2021
Croatian Volunteer Development Center	Croatia	Europe	Cliff Allum	March 18, 2021
Frivilligcenter og Selvhjaelp Danmark	Denmark	Europe	Cliff Allum	March 15, 2021
Helping Hand	Georgia	Europe	Jacob Mati	March 18, 2021
Volunteer Ireland	Ireland	Europe	Helene Perold	March 10, 2021
CSV Lazio	Italy	Europe	Jacob Mati	March 11, 2021
Volunteer Now	Northern Ireland	Europe	Helene Perold & Cliff Allum	February 08, 2021
Association of Volunteer Centers	Russia	Europe	Jacob Mati	March 15, 2021

Name of organization	Country	Region	Interviewer	Date
Volunteering Australia	Australia	Asia-Pacific	Jacob Mati	March 05, 2021
Agency for Volunteer Service	Hong Kong	Asia-Pacific	Jacob Mati & Cliff Allum	February 08, 2021
iVolunteer	India	Asia-Pacific	Jacob Mati	March 13, 2021
Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism (PhilCV)	Philippines	Asia-Pacific	Helene Perold	March 15, 2021
National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre	Singapore	Asia-Pacific	Cliff Allum	March 24, 2021
Volunteer Center Network	Thailand	Asia-Pacific	Cliff Allum	March 23, 2021
Volunteer Involving Organisations - VIO Society	Kenya	Africa	Helene Perold	February 12, 2021
National Volunteer Council (CNV)	Mozambique	Africa	Helene Perold	March 11, 2021
Agence Nigérienne de Volontariat pour le Développement (ANVD)	Niger	Africa	Cliff Allum	March 23, 2021
Rwanda Volunteer Network	Rwanda	Africa	Jacob Mati	March 08, 2021
Togo Association of Volunteering Organizations	Togo	Africa	Helene Perold	March 29, 2021
Volunteers Involving Organisations Network (VIONet) Sierra Leone	Sierra Leone	Africa	Cliff Allum	March 10, 2021
Emirates Foundation	UAE	Middle East	Jacob Mati	April 6, 2021
Naua	Jordan	Middle East	Jacob Mati	February 10, 2021
Collectif Marocain du Volontariat	Morocco	Middle East	Helene Perold	March 26, 2021

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Biddle, N. & Gray, M., Volunteering during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. ANU Center for Social Research and Methods, Australia National University”, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> See Perold, H., Mati, J.M., Allum, C. & Lough, B.J. COVID-19 and the Future of Volunteering for Development, conducted for the International Forum for Volunteering in Development. Produced for the International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum), 2021

<sup>3</sup> As is shown in the description of sampling below, organizations participating in the study ranged from national volunteer leadership organizations to volunteer platforms located in government, to individual nonprofit organizations that offer influential leadership in their countries, as well as regional organizations. To encompass this diversity, the term ‘national volunteering leadership organizations’ has been abbreviated in this report to ‘volunteering leadership organizations’ (VLOs).

<sup>4</sup> IAVE, Leading for Volunteering – The Role of National Leadership Organizations for Volunteering. Report of a workshop held on October 17, 2018 in Augsburg, Germany, 2019; IAVE, National Leadership for Volunteering: A Report from a First Global Dialogue, 2017a. IAVE, National Leadership for Volunteering: A Global Perspective, 2017b.

<sup>5</sup> IAVE/Chadwick, A. and Fadel, B. ‘Community resilience: Locally owned solutions delivering impact’, July 2020.

<sup>6</sup> The six members were AVS Hong Kong; Naua, Jordan; Volunteer Now, Northern Ireland; Chile Voluntario; VIO Society, Kenya; and the Volunteer Center of Trinidad & Tobago. The pilot of the qualitative data collection instrument informed the online survey instrument.

<sup>7</sup> See Figure 2 for the classification. By the start of data collection, the GNVL had signed up 71 members in different parts of the world; these were eligible to participate in the study.

<sup>8</sup> One response was received significantly past the closing date of the survey and is not included in the statistical data set. Write-in comments have been included in this report where appropriate.

<sup>9</sup> One challenge for sampling was how best to capture the potentially diverse views of all current and potential future GNVL network members. Some of the members are large-scale national volunteer leadership organizations while others are much smaller in scale. Likewise, some are national while others are either sub-national, or supra-national. The selection of organizations was guided by the distribution of GNVL members across the six regions in which IAVE operates. The selection was made by IAVE in consultation with the research team.

<sup>10</sup> These sections align with the three dimensions of strategic leadership adopted by IAVE following the Mexico conference in 2016: advocacy, development and volunteer mobilization.

<sup>11</sup> IAVE 2017a, op cit. p.3.

<sup>12</sup> IAVE, 2017b, op cit. p.2.

<sup>13</sup> Helping Hand, Georgia [interviewed by Jacob Mati March 18, 2021]

<sup>14</sup> Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional [interviewed by Helene Perold, March 15, 2021].

<sup>15</sup> Emirates Foundation, UAE [interviewed by Jacob Mati, April 6, 2021].

<sup>16</sup> Helping Hand, Georgia op cit.

<sup>17</sup> An example of working in partnerships or coalitions is given by Points of Light (USA) [interviewed by Cliff Allum April 01, 2021] which participates in voices for national service coalition in the United States. This coalition “advocates for the government to fund a couple of different areas to support service with formal programs like AmeriCorps Peace Corps, and a lot of just non-profit support, in general, for those that are largely powered by volunteers.” The critical question here is: What attracts these VLOs to working in coalitions for advocacy? Literature points to three dominant explanations: a transaction cost-benefit motive, a strategic behaviour motive, and an organizational learning motive (see for example Kogut, B., 1988; Mati, J.M., 2009; Østergaard, L. R. & Nielsen, J., 2005.) Specifically, organizations find it easier to work in coalitions as they are able to magnify their power by use of complementary assets to leverage existing structures. In doing so, they also learn best practices from one another and are likely to be more impactful.

<sup>18</sup> Points of Light, USA op cit.

<sup>19</sup> This finding is consistent with literature that shows that partnerships with government agencies, each with varying outcomes, are a common feature in the volunteering ecosystem. In some cases, such partnerships are driven by the state, and can have outcomes such as legitimation. In this regard a study of civil society responses to COVID-19 in China argues that the state in recent years has actively sought to develop a state-led volunteer management system in its state legitimacy building project. (Hu, M., & Sidel, M. “Civil Society and COVID-19 in China: Responses in an Authoritarian Society.” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 2020, 49(6), pp.1173-1181.)

<sup>20</sup> The chair of the Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism board heads up the corporate foundation of the Philam Life Insurance company. Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism [interviewed by Helene Perold, March 15, 2021].

<sup>21</sup> Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency (PNVSCA) manages international volunteers on behalf of government.

<sup>22</sup> Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism op cit.

<sup>23</sup> Association of Volunteer Centers, Russia [interviewed by Jacob Mati, March 15, 2021].

<sup>24</sup> Naua, Jordan [interviewed by Jacob Mati, February 10, 2021].

<sup>25</sup> Contribution to webinar March 5, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Survey respondent.

<sup>27</sup> Survey respondent.

<sup>28</sup> The Croatian Volunteer Development Center for example, is involved in advising government on the policies on volunteer awards through the National Strategy for the Development of Volunteerism. In some cases, VLOs have set up their own volunteer recognition awards and prizes. These include iVolunteer (India), the Volunteerism Support Platform (Guyana), the Helping Hand Georgia, and Fundacion Voluntarios de Panamá.

<sup>29</sup> While different VLOs have varying areas of focus, volunteer management is a common focal point. AVS Hong Kong for example, has been advocating for effective volunteer management to ensure it gets the attention it deserves.

<sup>30</sup> Volunteer Canada, op cit.

<sup>31</sup> VSP, Guyana [interviewed by Helene Perold March 17, 2021].

<sup>32</sup> VIO Society, Kenya [interviewed by Helene Perold, February 12, 2021].

<sup>33</sup> Volunteer Ireland [interviewed by Helene Perold, March 10, 2021].

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Chile Voluntario [interviewed by Helene Perold, February 10, 2021].

<sup>36</sup> National Volunteer Council (CNV), Mozambique [interviewed by Helene Perold, March 11, 2021].

<sup>37</sup> In Kenya for example, the VIO Society is championing volunteering particularly at the second tier of government (i.e. the 47 county level governments). VIO Society in Kenya has been actively lobbying county governments to “adopt national volunteerism policy, customize it to fit their needs within their own counties. And this is the same that we hope to do with the bill when finally, it is enacted to become law” [op cit]. On its part, the Croatian Volunteer Development Center has contributed to the creation of public policies around volunteering in Croatia and the EU level.

<sup>38</sup> National Volunteer Council, Mozambique op cit.

<sup>39</sup> Volunteering Australia [interviewed by Jacob Mati March 05, 2021].

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Volunteering Australia, op cit.

<sup>42</sup> VIO Society, Kenya, op cit.

<sup>43</sup> Brummell, A. The Value of Volunteering. Volunteers Connecting Community, Summer 2001.

<sup>44</sup> Fundación Voluntarios de Panamá [interviewed by Cliff Allum, March 15, 2021].

<sup>45</sup> See for example Mati, J.M. Civil Society, Volunteerism and the Production of Youth Citizenship in Fiji, 2018; and Milligan, C., & Fyfe, N. R. Preserving space for volunteers: exploring the links between voluntary welfare organizations, volunteering and citizenship. *Urban studies*, 2005, Vol. 42(3), pp.417-433.

<sup>46</sup> See for example Lough, B., & Mati, J. M. Volunteerism for peace in East Africa, 2012; and Caprara, D., Mati, J. M., Obadare, E., & Perold, H. Volunteering and civic service in three African regions: Contributions to regional integration, youth development and peace. *Global Economy and Development at Brookings Institution*, 2013, pp. 1-27.

<sup>47</sup> See for example Hu, M., & Sidel, M. “Civil Society and COVID-19 in China: Responses in an Authoritarian Society.” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 2020 who argue that in China, citizen activists launched an online campaign to advocate the welfare rights of women (particularly women health workers) and other vulnerable groups such as widowed older people, the disabled, and the homeless in the COVID-19 response.

<sup>48</sup> VIONet, Sierra Leone [Interviewed by Cliff Allum, March 10, 2021].

<sup>49</sup> Naua, Jordan, op cit.

<sup>50</sup> “We are still facing those national volunteers working with local volunteers, compared to those national volunteers working with international volunteers. For instance, ...has national volunteers, but when you look at how much support they give to them, you cannot compare them really as volunteers compared to cost of life here. So if you are a volunteer, they give you a motorcycle, they give you a house, they give you 300,000 Rwandan Francs, which is 300 US dollars, here it is considered as a salary... because if a teacher is paid the 50,000 and you are saying, you're giving the volunteer 300,000. So we are still

advocating at least to have the standards of all volunteers.” (Rwanda Volunteer Network [interviewed by Jacob Mati, March 08, 2021]).

<sup>51</sup> Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism, op cit.

<sup>52</sup> CSV Lazio, Italy [interviewed by Jacob Mati, March 11, 2021].

<sup>53</sup> AVS, Hong Kong [interviewed by Jacob Mati & Cliff Allum, February 8, 2021].

<sup>54</sup> IAVE, 2017a, op cit. p.4. The report uses the term ‘Development’ and we have used this terminology although it risks confusion with the wider usage of the term ‘Development’ in the field of international aid and development.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> IAVE, 2017b, op cit. p.2.

<sup>57</sup> Also 95% of survey respondents stated they developed their own leadership capacity.

<sup>58</sup> The qualitative data indicates that this applies to multiple countries across the globe, including VLOs in Denmark, India, Canada, Australia, Mexico, Jordan, Sierra Leone, Northern Ireland, USA, Singapore and Morocco, choosing to work in partnership in their community and organizational capacity building role.

<sup>59</sup> Volunteering Australia, op cit.

<sup>60</sup> Volunteer Canada, op cit.

<sup>61</sup> Working partnerships have also allowed VLOs such as Volunteer Canada and the Croatian Volunteer Development Center to use a tiered process in capacity building. For example, Volunteer Canada has set up a network of volunteer centers responsible for such training which cascades from national to local communities. Working this way allows Volunteer Canada to draw on the complementary sets of expertise within their network to support the network members in their capacity building roles. For its part, the Croatian Volunteer Development Center’s “regional volunteer centers are in direct contact with the local volunteer centers and support the development of their capacities.”

<sup>62</sup> Volunteering Australia, op cit.

<sup>63</sup> AVS, Hong Kong, op cit.

<sup>64</sup> There are also challenges in the way this may be implemented. For Helping Hand Georgia [interviewed by Jacob Mati, March 18, 2021], the other nonprofits (VIOs) did not like the new platform. Helping Hand Georgia had to invest to ensure it became more user friendly while also building the capacity of VIOs to be able to utilize it, to register on the web platform and place announcements about their volunteer needs.

<sup>65</sup> Naua, Jordan, op cit.

<sup>66</sup> Emirates Foundation, op cit. Another challenge for the Emirates Foundation has been the demand for professional volunteers which has shot up, especially in the medical field. This has meant that the foundation has been unable to recruit sufficient number of volunteers.

<sup>67</sup> National Volunteer and Philanthropy Center, Singapore [interviewed by Cliff Allum March 24, 2021].

<sup>68</sup> The Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago [interviewed by Cliff Allum, February 12, 2021].

- <sup>69</sup> National Volunteer and Philanthropy Center, Singapore, op cit.
- <sup>70</sup> Association of Volunteer Centers, Russia [interviewed by Jacob Mati, March 15, 2021].
- <sup>71</sup> UN Women, The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19, nd. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-COVID-19-response/violence-against-women-during-COVID-19> [Accessed on 8 July 2021]
- <sup>72</sup> VIO Society, Kenya, op cit.
- <sup>73</sup> See for example, Perold et al 2021, op cit. See also Silakan, D. N. Isiolo County, Kenya: Local radio stations aid in creating awareness on COVID-19 and Gender-Based Violence', 2020. International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD). September 14 2020.
- <sup>74</sup> Naua, Jordan, op cit.
- <sup>75</sup> Volunteer Ireland, op cit.
- <sup>76</sup> Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
- <sup>77</sup> For example, in recent years Volunteer Ireland has conducted three pieces of research “to explore and look at ... the impact of volunteering on different audiences and ... the social impact and also mental health benefits of volunteering.”
- <sup>78</sup> Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional, op cit.
- <sup>79</sup> National Volunteer Council (CNV), Mozambique, op cit.
- <sup>80</sup> See for example IAVE 2017a, op cit. In this regard, Volunteer Canada for example, have, since 2018, been working with Statistics Canada which implements the General Social Survey to ensure that they capture data on giving, volunteering and participation. Volunteer Canada also works with other organizations such as Ipsos Public Affairs to translate this data into specific usable packages to inform their capacity building programs and services.
- <sup>81</sup> AVS Hong Kong [interviewed by Jacob Mati & Cliff Allum February 08, 2021].
- <sup>82</sup> Ekzayez, A., al-Khalil, M., Jasiem, M., Al Saleh, R., Alzoubi, Z., Meagher, K., Patel, P. COVID-19 response in northwest Syria: innovation and community engagement in a complex conflict, *Journal of Public Health*, 2020, Vol. 42 issue 3. pp. 504–509, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1093/pubmed/fdaa068>
- <sup>83</sup> Mati, J.M. 2009, op cit.
- <sup>84</sup> Croatian Volunteer Development Center [interviewed by Cliff Allum, March 18, 2021].
- <sup>85</sup> See [www.community.pointsoflight.org](http://www.community.pointsoflight.org)
- <sup>86</sup> Points of Light, USA, op cit.
- <sup>87</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>88</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>89</sup> The value of regional engagement is echoed by the Croatian Volunteer Development Center in relation to its active participation in Europe as a member of European Volunteer Center: “We provide leadership to other volunteer centers, offering them support in achieving quality in their work, and offering also new

insights that we get from Europe ... I myself [am] a president of European Volunteer Center.” (Croatian Volunteer Development Center [interviewed by Cliff Allum, March 18, 2021]).

<sup>90</sup> Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional, op cit.

<sup>91</sup> In Mexico, CEMEFI has partnered with technology companies to continue their capacity building role of their partners in Mexico and beyond. Literature points to similar partnerships for capacity development purposes. In one case Translators Without Borders (2020) reported that they started the Translation Initiative for COVID-19 (TICO-19) with multiple technology companies including Facebook, Google, Amazon, Microsoft, and others like Translated, Carnegie Mellon University, John Hopkins University, and individual translators and technologists joining it to develop COVID-19 language technology for 37 languages.

<sup>92</sup> Survey respondent.

<sup>93</sup> See for example, Capelo, L., Chang, N., & Verity, A. Guidance for Collaborating with Volunteer and Technical Communities. Digital Humanitarian Network, 2012.

<sup>94</sup> National Volunteer and Philanthropy Center, Singapore, op cit. In another example in Trinidad & Tobago, such partnerships are aimed at upscaling the use of technology by VIOs to enhance the matching of volunteer opportunities, recruitment and management (The Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago, op cit).

<sup>95</sup> VSN Thailand [interviewed by Cliff Allum, March 23, 2021].

<sup>96</sup> Including Hong Kong, Singapore, Jordan, Mexico, Russia, Georgia, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Trinidad & Tobago and Mozambique.

<sup>97</sup> VSP, Guyana, op cit.

<sup>98</sup> IAVE, 2017a, p.4.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> IAVE, 2017b, p.3 op cit. The full statement reads: “MOBILIZATION - developing innovative ways to communicate the importance and value of volunteering; engaging segments of the population often excluded – seniors, people with disabilities, people on the margin who themselves need supportive services; and organizing both large-scale and targeted volunteer projects that directly respond to both ongoing and emerging needs. National leadership has led the way in introducing and supporting corporate volunteering and in supporting the growth of youth volunteering. While in many countries, national leadership does not directly organize and manage volunteer-involving projects, they support such efforts on the part of other national, regional and local organizations.”

<sup>101</sup> Collectif Marocain du Volontariat, Morocco [interviewed by Helene Perold, March 26, 2021].

<sup>102</sup> Volunteer Now, Northern Ireland [interviewed by Helene Perold & Cliff Allum, February 10, 2021] The VLO further explained: “We had 4,000 people registered in the space of three weeks ... we don't have 2,000. people every year. I think it's dropped off.”

<sup>103</sup> Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism op cit.

<sup>104</sup> Chile Voluntario op cit.

<sup>105</sup> Survey respondent.

<sup>106</sup> CEMEFI, Mexico [interviewed by Jacob Mati, March 08 & 17, 2021].

<sup>107</sup> Volunteer Canada op cit.

<sup>108</sup> VIO Society, Kenya op cit.

<sup>109</sup> Survey respondent.

<sup>110</sup> Volunteering Australia op cit.

<sup>111</sup> Croatian Volunteer Development Center op cit.

<sup>112</sup> 51% of survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed that donors and policy makers have focused on enhancing inclusivity in volunteering because of COVID-19. This compared with 36% who disagreed/strongly disagreed. The data are shown in Figure 9 below.

<sup>113</sup> Points of Light, USA op cit.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Frivilligcenter og Selvhjaelp Danmark [interviewed by Cliff Allum March 15, 2021].

<sup>116</sup> Survey respondent.

<sup>117</sup> Points of Light, USA op. cit.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> National Volunteer and Philanthropy Center, Singapore op cit.

<sup>120</sup> AVS, Hong Kong op cit.

<sup>121</sup> National Volunteer and Philanthropy Center Singapore op cit.

<sup>122</sup> National Volunteer Council (CNV), Mozambique op cit.

<sup>123</sup> Collectif Marocain du Volontariat Morocco [interviewed by Helene Perold, March 26 2021].

<sup>124</sup> Points of Light, USA op cit.

<sup>125</sup> Volunteer Now, Northern Ireland op cit.

<sup>126</sup> ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Fundación Voluntarios de Panamá op cit.

<sup>128</sup> The report explicitly connects to the UNV perspective on enabling environment: “United Nations Volunteers, charged by the UN’s Member States with giving global leadership for volunteering, says, ‘Creating an enabling environment is the sine qua non for volunteerism to fully contribute to the realization of any future sustainable development agenda.’”

<sup>129</sup> “Without a focal point around which others can gather, without strategic and operational leadership, without someone making its development and maintenance a priority, an enabling environment is unlikely to develop organically. Civil society support organizations have been defined as “value-based agencies whose primary task is to provide services and resources that strengthen the capacities of their constituents to accomplish their missions.” (IAVE 2017b, p.2).

<sup>130</sup> Volunteer Australia op cit.

<sup>131</sup> Survey respondent.

<sup>132</sup> National Volunteer Council (CNV), Mozambique, op cit.

<sup>133</sup> The impact of the pandemic on VLO efforts to strengthen an enabling environment for volunteering is discussed in greater depth below.

<sup>134</sup> As noted shortly, greater synergy between VLOs and the key actors has not always possible. Relationships with state institutions is a case in point where in some instances, there have been contestations. In addition, it is yet not clear whether synergies, where they exist, will be sustainable.

<sup>135</sup> Association of Volunteer Centers in Russia [interviewed by Jacob Mati, March 15, 2021].

<sup>136</sup> Naua, Jordan op cit.

<sup>137</sup> 74% of VLO survey respondents stated they have advocated for national and regional voluntary service schemes.

<sup>138</sup> Howard and Burns, 2015, p.4 define a development ecosystem as “a set of inter-related and inter-dependent elements which interact to comprise the whole system of development.”

<sup>139</sup> Survey respondent.

<sup>140</sup> Survey respondent.

<sup>141</sup> Naua, Jordan, op cit.

<sup>142</sup> Survey respondent.

<sup>143</sup> Survey respondent.

<sup>144</sup> VSP Guyana for example, observed: “I’ve witnessed some innovative ways organizations have come up with to still do the work that they would have done and I anticipate that much more innovation comes to the sector. ... In the height of a pandemic ... lots of innovation and thinking has to go into still impacting climate change but not at a physical level. So I anticipate that lots of volunteer leaders, lots of organizations will continue to think outside the box as regards to how they impact society and how they do the work.” Volunteer Support Program, Guyana op cit.

<sup>145</sup> 42% agreed it would decline, while 41% disagreed it would decline.

<sup>146</sup> For example, Rwanda Volunteer Network (op cit.) indicated: “People have been affected, not only financially but emotionally, so people will be more focused on their life than focusing on what they give to others” while Emirates Foundation (op cit.) argued “[COVID-19] will impact a lot on the humanitarian activities or environment activities because ... the number of activities and number of volunteers will be less; we are always to make sure that there is social distance, you cannot do a lot of activities with a big number of volunteers.”

<sup>147</sup> Biddle, N. & Gray, M. Volunteering during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. ANU Center for Social Research and Methods, Australia National University, 2021.

<sup>148</sup> Volunteering Australia, op cit.

<sup>149</sup> McCabe, A., Wilson, M., & Ellis Paine, A. Stepping up and helping out: grassroots volunteering in response to COVID-19. Local Trust. October, 2020.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.* This debate concerning volunteer roles has been located in the UK in the ‘Big Society’

discussions since 2010 and in the face of declining resourcing of public services. The likely economic impact of COVID-19 on public finances may make this issue more acute and make the provision of certain services even more dependent on volunteer support.

<sup>151</sup> While this priority is not disputed, it does present programming challenges: “[We see] mental health ... presenting real challenges that our organization has had to meet, make strategic decisions about - whether we're going to respond, then you've had to respond and how best to respond. ... I'm sure you could well understand that adjusting [to] psychosocial challenges is an undertaking within itself” (The Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago, op cit).

<sup>152</sup> By ‘adaptive capability’ we mean how organizations adapt and reinvent their work in response to the sudden and disruptive impact of a pandemic (Dickens, P.M. *Facilitating Emergence: Complex, Adaptive Systems Theory and the Shape of Change*. Dissertations & Theses. 114. Antioch University, 2012; Frej & Rama Frej, W., & Ramalingam, B. *Policy and Complex Adaptive Systems: Exploring New Paradigms for Analysis and Action*. SFI WORKING PAPER: 2011-06-022. Santa Fe Institute, 2011; Gleick, J. *Chaos: Making a new science*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1989.)

<sup>153</sup> In 2019 the International Forum for Volunteering in Development launched the Global Standard for Volunteering for Development. The standard is intended to support organizations that work with volunteers to improve their practice and their impact. It is being piloted in a number of countries (including the Philippines and Mozambique) where VLOs have adapted and localized its content.

<sup>154</sup> “We need to find a way to work around those limitations ... we are in the thick of ... piloting already the localized contextualized version of the global standards for volunteering ... it just made it more difficult, but we are doing it at the moment, we're accomplishing that. And in the same way with regards to the plans for the volunteering for the election, that's something that we just need to do, to sort of work around and find ways to be able to still accomplish it, knowing that COVID is there.” (Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism, op cit).

<sup>155</sup> McCabe, Wilson & Ellis Paine, 2020, op cit.

<sup>156</sup> UNV (2020). “Volunteering in Bolivia and Guatemala boosts national COVID-19 response and recovery”. <https://www.unv.org/Success-stories/Volunteering-Bolivia-and-Guatemala-boosts-national-COVID-19-response-and-recovery>.

<sup>157</sup> CSV Lazio, Italy, op cit.

<sup>158</sup> ClearThinking Coaching Ltd, New Zealand. Webinar participant (May 18, 2021).

<sup>159</sup> McCabe, Wilson & Ellis Paine, 2020, op cit.

<sup>160</sup> Survey respondent. Valuable insights also come from a study of the role of community-based organizations in disaster response in Zhejiang, China where the authors recommend that public sector leaders strategically leverage the strengths of community-based organizations at multiple stages of the COVID-19 response; incentivize volunteers to participate in epidemic prevention and control; provide data infrastructure and digital tracking platforms; and build trust and long-term capacity of community-based organizations. See Cheng, Y., Yu, J., Shen, Y., & Huang, B. *Coproducing Responses to COVID-19 with Community-Based Organizations: Lessons from Zhejiang Province, China*. *Public Administration Review*, 2020: 80(5).

<sup>161</sup> Volunteer Canada, op cit.

<sup>162</sup> Perú Voluntario [interviewed by Helene Perold, March 22, 2021].

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> For example, VIONet, Sierra Leone (op cit) noted: “We're looking at the platform, we're looking at the capacity of the [digital] network, of the volunteers, the base of community volunteers, what it takes to be able to be online ... many of them don't have a computer, many of them don't have the app, the phone, they don't have internet. If they have internet, the internet is not strong enough. In fact, they're using their phone data, which is quite bad, they just load small data, which they can use for a call for a minute, seconds, [then] it's finished.”

<sup>165</sup> VSP Guyana, op cit.

<sup>166</sup> Volunteering Australia, op cit.

<sup>167</sup> AVS, Hong Kong, op cit.

<sup>168</sup> The Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago, op cit.

<sup>169</sup> Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional op cit.

<sup>170</sup> Emirates Foundation, op cit.

<sup>171</sup> Volunteer Canada, op cit.

<sup>172</sup> CSV Lazio, Italy, op cit.

<sup>173</sup> The Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago, op cit.

<sup>174</sup> Volunteer Ireland, op cit.

<sup>175</sup> Naua, op cit.

<sup>176</sup> Volunteer Ireland, op cit.

<sup>177</sup> Volunteering Australia, op cit.

<sup>178</sup> Volunteering NZ participant in webinar (May 18, 2021).

<sup>179</sup> Chile Voluntario, op cit; VIO Society, Kenya, op cit.

<sup>180</sup> Fundación Voluntarios de Panamá, op cit.

<sup>181</sup> Chile Voluntario, op cit.

<sup>182</sup> Croatian Volunteer Development Center op cit.

<sup>183</sup> VSN Thailand, op cit.

<sup>184</sup> VSP Guyana, op cit.

<sup>185</sup> Croatian Volunteer Development Center op cit.

<sup>186</sup> The Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago, op cit.

<sup>187</sup> Agence Nigérienne de Volontariat pour le Développement, Niger [Pers. Comm. with Cliff Allum

March 23, 2021].

<sup>188</sup> Fundación Voluntarios de Panamá, op cit.

<sup>189</sup> VSN Thailand, op cit.

<sup>190</sup> Naua, Jordan, op cit. indicated: “We always have to be forward-looking, we always have to be planning. Thankfully ... we have a roadmap on where we want to be. And this just goes to show you the importance of doing your best to prepare for eventualities. That's the biggest lesson I have. Jumping head-first, no plan, no strategy ... just a bunch of people doing something because they feel good, that does not lend itself to sustaining. ... That might help you do something exciting for a moment, but you won't be ready for the first difficulty that comes your way.”

<sup>191</sup> Survey respondent: “There are - some won't survive the economic challenges, some will struggle to develop/maintain strong governance and leadership and others will flourish because of redirected funding, re-engaged communities or improvements in interpretations of value of their service.”

<sup>192</sup> Red Argentina de Cooperación Internacional, op cit.

<sup>193</sup> Rwanda Volunteer Network, op cit.

<sup>194</sup> Volunteer Ireland, op cit.

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Volunteer Now, Northern Ireland, op cit.

<sup>197</sup> VIO Society, Kenya, op cit.

<sup>198</sup> Chile Voluntario, op cit.

<sup>199</sup> Sitas, N., & Wamalwa, R. “OPINION: African women are leading community responses to COVID-19 crisis.” Thomson Reuters Foundation News, 2020, December 2.

<sup>200</sup> Responses from GNVL members frequently conflated IAVE and GNVL. As noted earlier, organizations participating in the GNVL range from national volunteer leadership organizations to volunteer platforms located in government, to individual nonprofit organizations that offer influential leadership in their countries, as well as regional organizations.

<sup>201</sup> This section draws upon the views expressed about GNVL in both the survey and interviews. The organizational survey showed that 52 (78%) of the respondents stated they were GNVL members. Of these, 50 addressed the section in the survey on GNVL. All 31 interviewees were asked about their experience of GNVL.

<sup>202</sup> While many comments do not relate directly to COVID-19, these are made during the pandemic and in the context of a survey and/or interview that focuses on the impact of COVID-19. What follows may be considered as views specific to the pandemic or more general views that have been shared during the pandemic.

<sup>203</sup> Also referenced were direct support opportunities including funding grants. Additional benefits were also highlighted to demonstrate a perceived value of the centralizing role of the network that can facilitate engagement, reciprocity and member-to-member sharing as well as a community through which to advocate for important change.

<sup>204</sup> iVolunteer, India [interviewed by Jacob Mati, March 13, 2021].

<sup>205</sup> As stated on the IAVE website <https://www.iave.org/gnvl/> . [Retrieved on 25 May 2021]

<sup>206</sup> “I have done a number of things for (GNVL/IAVE) over the last six months, I did a webinar for them in the spring, just based on some of the learnings that we've had from our COVID experience, and some of the good practice materials and stuff that we had.” (Volunteer Now, Northern Ireland, op cit).

<sup>207</sup> CEMEFI, Mexico, op cit.

<sup>208</sup> Points of Light, USA, op cit.

<sup>209</sup> Association of Volunteer Centers, Russia op cit.

<sup>210</sup> The connection [is] expensive for us; we do not have enough financial resources to keep up with conferences, online webinars (Togo Association of Volunteering Organizations [interviewed by Helene Perold, March 29, 2021]).

<sup>211</sup> VIONet, Sierra Leone, op cit.

<sup>212</sup> Rwanda Volunteer Network, op cit. Similar comments were made by others e.g. National Volunteer Council (CNV), Mozambique, op cit.

<sup>213</sup> The Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago, op cit.

<sup>214</sup> VIONet, Sierra Leone, op cit.

<sup>215</sup> As stated on the IAVE website <https://www.iave.org/gnvl/> [Retrieved on 25 May 2021]

<sup>216</sup> iVolunteer, India, op cit.

<sup>217</sup> Mati, J.M. 2009, op cit.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Note that the names of the organizations are listed here in the way they were entered on the questionnaire by survey respondents.



Photo top

Volunteer at the Ministry for Social Development in Jordan. (Photo by Naua, Jordan)

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

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**Helene Perold** is the Director of Helene Perold & Associates, an organization based in Johannesburg, South Africa. Since 1993 she has developed extensive research and evaluation experience in South Africa, Argentina, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Costa Rica, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, USA, and Zimbabwe. She was the founder and Executive Director of VOSESA, a non-profit research organization that worked from 2003-2013 to build an evidence base in the field of volunteering and civic service in Southern Africa.

**Cliff Allum** is an Associate Fellow at the Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham, UK. After more than 20 years of CEO-level experience in international volunteering and international development, he has focused on research and consultancy work with a range of IVCOs. He has written widely on volunteering for development issues, including the future of international volunteering. His current areas of interest include IVCO repositioning, climate change and a longitudinal study of international volunteers.

**Benjamin J. Lough** is a Professor of Social Work and Business Administration and Director of Social Innovation at the Gies College of Business, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. He is a leading academic researcher and writer in the volunteering field. He has a prolific research and publication record with key strengths in both qualitative and quantitative research.

**Rebecca Tiessen** is Full Professor and Deputy Director of the School of International Development and Global Studies at the University of Ottawa. She has supervised more than 10 research grants and projects on volunteering for development and has written extensively on a broad range of themes from national to international volunteering.

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