

---

# Asia-Pacific Forum on Youth Volunteerism to Promote Participation, Development and Peace

28 October 2014, Bangkok, Thailand

---

## INTRODUCTION

On 28 October 2014, 300 youth and other participants from across key sectors of the Asia-Pacific region convened for a groundbreaking forum at the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC) in Bangkok to enhance knowledge and strategies with regard to youth participation in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and to form cross-regional and cross-cultural youth service networks for action in the region.

The “Asia-Pacific Forum on Youth Volunteerism to Promote Participation, Development and Peace” was co-convened by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Global Peace Foundation (GPF) and the Global Young Leaders Academy (GYLA), in conjunction with the 5<sup>th</sup> International Young Leaders Assembly and with generous support from FK Norway, Peace Corps, Australia Volunteers International and many other partners.

Along with young leaders of Asia and the Pacific, participants included representatives of national and multilateral agencies dealing with youth issues, civil society, development partners and the private sector who engaged in lively debates and discussions on enhancing partnerships with youth to address key challenges in clusters concerning the environment, health, disaster response, peace and youth entrepreneurship.

Following these discussions, recommended actions and commitment from the participants representing over 40 nations were summarized in the “Bangkok Statement.” It aims to empower youth participation and service engagement towards life improvement, sustainable development outcomes and peace at national, regional and global levels.

The Forum launched the Asia-Pacific Peace Service Alliance, a youth and multilateral stakeholders consortia committed to further empowering youth and communities across the region through youth engagement and volunteerism addressing the Forum’s cluster issues on development and peace.

Enclosed is the official Bangkok Statement adopted by the youth delegates and civil society partners at the Forum, which will guide and inspire ongoing youth action to achieve measurable outcomes, in particular inclusive and sustainable development centered on peace. Details and updates on the Alliance will be provided at [www.appeaceservicealliance.net](http://www.appeaceservicealliance.net) and #youth4service.

---

**Asia-Pacific Forum on Youth Volunteerism to  
Promote Participation, Development and Peace**

**United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok**

**28 October 2014**

---

**BANGKOK STATEMENT**

**PREAMBLE**

We, the young people, youth-led organizations, civil society organizations, government agencies and other development partners, bound by universal principles and common values and aspirations, have gathered in Bangkok, Thailand on 28 October 2014, at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Youth Volunteerism to launch the Asia-Pacific Peace Service Alliance and promote youth's participation in sustainable development and peace at the local community, national, regional and global levels.

**RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTIONS**

Acknowledging youth's diversity in all aspects and their capacity for innovation, young people must have opportunities for meaningful participation in current and future equitable and sustainable development through the following priority areas:

**a) Environmental Service**

While it is widely accepted that successful solutions to environmental issues span across public and private sectors, with government, corporate and public input, a critical component – youth voice – must be encouraged. This voice includes the utilization of local knowledge and wisdom addressing environmental issues, including access to clean water for marginalized communities, and the restoration and management of important existing water resources.

Today's youth bring many skills to the world of volunteerism through their capacity to innovate, and these skills must be cultivated and utilized to advance environmental activism. Youth fluency in technology and social media platforms provide unique opportunities to promote ap-

proaches to water access, management and restoration, among other environmental issues. Volunteerism must be encouraged in a way that is mutually beneficial to both youth and their cause. As such, providing meaningful and skills-based roles – such as roles in education, Geographical Information Systems and mapping, and media outreach – for youth volunteers is essential to engage them and provide an opportunity to take ownership over environmentalism.

Youth must first understand the realm of environmental issues and be educated on sustainability, ethics, local wisdom, culture and global connectedness. They then must be provided with and encouraged to create opportunities to turn theory into practice and grow as leaders. Finally, youth must have access to meaningful volunteer roles that take a strengths-based approach, as well as whole-hearted support from all sides, starting from their communities and extending through their governments; thus ultimately contributing to global responsibility and effort.

## **b) Youth Entrepreneurship**

We recognize the important role that volunteerism plays in the development of future entrepreneurs. There is a need to identify and address the root causes of youth unemployment. We call for the recognition of unpaid volunteer positions as legitimate work, as volunteers gain practical and useful experience through volunteering, forging social capital and pathways to livelihoods. We encourage the expansion of youth involvement in such work through the creation of opportunities that support volunteers' basic cost of living.

While limited funding and sustainability of civil society organizations remain as significant challenges to youth mobilization, civil society can overcome these with creativity, innovation, partnerships and collaboration. There is a need for more information to develop effective strategic partnerships, and for guidance from young and other business leaders to youth on entrepreneurship. Increased exposure to volunteerism and better matching of opportunities to youth needs are also required.

Significant efforts should be directed to making volunteerism more available to the out-of-school youth who have not completed degrees or formal higher-level education. In addition, student volunteerism should be promoted through school curricula, extra-curricular activities and work site visits, such as to government, non-profit and profit areas.

There are many opportunities for youth to improve their engagement with society through youth volunteerism. Governments, international organizations and other relevant stakeholders should provide youth with guidance, leadership, direction and opportunities, including networking for youth empowerment and engagement in society.

Empowerment at the grassroots level can be achieved through the provision of entrepreneurship training, which has the potential to include contributions by volunteers. This will allow us to capitalize on local resources and promote local champions within our communities.

We recommend that the United Nations Youth Associations Network and United Nations Volunteers coordinate a knowledge-sharing platform on youth volunteerism and youth entrepreneurship, so that youth are able to promote and exchange good practices, including by use of manuals, training materials and videos.

### **c) Disaster**

We note the complex terminology often applied in the context of disasters and call upon international organizations and governments to use lay language for disaster and crisis plans so that we can understand it.

There is a need for more youth discussion on preparedness for both natural and man-made disasters, and risk reduction through education and other youth activities. There is also a need to create awareness about risk reduction and crisis preparedness and the role that children and youth have in both, and to engage children and youth in proactive disaster reduction programmes through interactive education.

A focus should be placed on empowering youth leaders to help pass on the knowledge from within their communities at local, national and international levels and consequently train their peers, families and communities. Schools should be used as institutions of disaster preparedness and response.

Youth who are not included in traditional communities are the most vulnerable and efforts should be made to reach them through targeted non-formal education.

The media coverage of disasters focuses largely on discouraging content, such as worst-case forecasting and fatality statistics; it should lay more stress on progress in relief and rehabilitation operations. Social media and other outlets can help report on progress and also hold stakeholders accountable.

We commit to working to unite youth to draft a children and youth framework for disaster risk reduction. We ask for the help of UNESCO, UNISDR, ESCAP, GPF, the private sector and United Nations member States to achieve this. Further we request all organizations present today to mobilize children and youth as partners for resilience, which means involving young people at every level of disaster preparedness, reduction, response and recovery.

### **d) Culture of Peace**

We are aware that peace is a dynamic and holistic process which must be prioritized for the pursuit of happiness, equity and justice. Culture of peace can be best defined as acceptance, harmony and mutual respect, and recognition of individual and group rights as stated in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A primary tool for achieving this long-desired peace globally is cultural understanding through education and building awareness.

Education and equal opportunities are key solutions to end social conflicts. The heart of education is education of the heart. Volunteerism is a mutual learning opportunity that can only be truly successful when a strong foundation of cultural understanding is established. Promoting equal opportunities for all allows peace to be sustainable. When our basic human needs are fulfilled, we are able to create and maintain a global society that is connected through humanity.

Cultural exchange through volunteering is a good practice to build trust and promote peace. Through cultural exchanges people become more connected on a basic human level. These experiences create the ideal environment to share ideas in order to construct a better global society.

### **e) Health Service**

We are concerned that youth in the Asia-Pacific region face barriers to good health that include, among others, domestic and gender-based violence, mental illness and, especially for girls, early marriage and teen pregnancy. Risk-taking behaviour among youth can also lead to substance abuse, addiction and injury or deaths from road traffic accidents. Varying socioeconomic and cultural factors in many countries in the region pose additional barriers to health.

Social stigma, gender discrimination and limited access to accurate information are among the challenges regarding the provision of quality health care as a basic human right. We recommend creating youth-friendly health-care networks, defined by youth themselves, to empower youth to take responsibility for changing unhealthy behaviour to the better and for tailoring and accessing the services available to them.

Governments should enter into multi-stakeholder partnerships to address barriers to health and access to care for youth. We encourage youth participation in community governance to highlight critical issues and increase access to accurate and thorough information, resources and services. Youth participation in developing, implementing and monitoring youth programmes on health is essential to the success of such programmes as preventative measures.

Combining the intellectual capital of youth and the socially responsible goals of global entities, corporations and others would incentivize both volunteerism in the health sector and more inclusive participation in health policymaking.

### **f) Volunteering and exchange**

We recognize that community integration is a vital component of successful cultural exchange – despite the challenges that arise from experiencing new cultures, languages and communities – and recommend emphasizing open-minded exchange and communication.

Volunteer exchanges require reciprocity and balance among partners, and should be supported by an enabling institutional environment, including targeted programmes and financial strategies that allow volunteers to fully participate in spite of social, economic and cultural differences.

Exchanges are strengthened by effective training and support for volunteers. This enables the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for leadership and successful cultural exchange that promotes peace and development.

Cultural exchange is enhanced and facilitated by the opportunity to share the experiences of an exchange with one's home community in a collaborative manner, and such opportunities can

strengthen relationships between youth volunteers, exchange communities and sponsoring organizations.

## **RECOMMENDED MODALITIES OF ENGAGEMENT**

### **a) Youth empowerment/social media**

Challenges in the Asia-Pacific region with regard to social media include: a lack of accessibility and restricted access to social media platforms in certain countries, an excess of social media content and a need for an established online community devoted to volunteerism.

Recognizing these challenges, the Asia-Pacific Peace Service Alliance recommends that volunteer communities in each country develop or use existing action-oriented social media platforms to engage youth in volunteerism, as well as showcase national and regional efforts. Recommended platforms vary among countries, but include Instagram, Pinterest and Tumblr. Instagram is able to capture images of volunteer work, Pinterest follows volunteer activity and Tumblr allows for individual creativity. Using standard hashtags, such as “#youth4service” and “#volunteer”, across social media platforms will promote and link Alliance efforts.

Fifteen volunteers from the youth empowerment/social media session group will shape further development of a social media platform for the Alliance.

### **b) Corporate social responsibility partnerships**

Companies and corporations can utilize their considerable reach and resources to effect sustainable change on local, regional and global levels. By partnering with corporations and corporate charitable foundations, civil society organizations and youth organizations can address issues of participation, funding and sustainability facing their projects. Participating corporations can also contribute to more effective research and knowledge generation around pressing social issues.

Often there is a divide between well-meaning interest in volunteer opportunities and actual participation levels. Corporations and companies should encourage their employees to directly volunteer within the communities in which they are located, by engaging in partnerships with stakeholders, including youth. Additionally, by having clearly-defined goals for projects, organizations can strategize to meet objectives more effectively.

Many youth organizations lack the funding necessary to pursue desired development goals. Corporations should provide funding directly to projects and organizations with shared social values and goals. By partnering with corporations that are mutual stakeholders, volunteer organizations can promote development at the grassroots level.

Moving away from one-off projects and focusing on organizations with clearly focused models allows for greater sustainability.

### **c) Volunteer capacity building at national and regional levels**

Volunteer-sending and -hosting organizations act as important capacity building entities, both for volunteers and the communities and regions in which they serve. We recommend that the United Nations and well-established volunteer organizations support governments in developing legal frameworks that define and promote volunteerism. Such legal frameworks, along with networks, will form the basis for strategic capacity building; not only of institutions but also of volunteers and the communities they serve.

We believe that both volunteers and their communities are enriched through volunteer services and development projects. Moving forward, volunteerism should be recognized as an important avenue for youth engagement and international development. Well-established volunteer sending and -hosting organizations should lend their expertise, volunteers and networks to help develop the capacity of emerging volunteer organizations at grassroots, national and regional levels.

### **d) Multilateral international volunteering corps**

There is a need for a new multilateralism in volunteering. There is also a need for empowering youth leadership opportunities and engaging youth from outside the mainstream in volunteer activities. Another issue is that funding for the largest volunteer sending programmes, such as those of KOICA, JICA and Peace Corps, comes from governments. When funding comes from government agencies it limits the funds and communities that can be reached.

These issues can be addressed by outlining what the new multilateral model would look like and how it would function. We recommend that international volunteerism in the new multilateral model includes reciprocity within partnerships, meaning that countries exchange volunteers and share in the financial responsibilities of funding volunteer programmes. Partnerships among corporate, civil and volunteer organizations should be created around shared objectives. Additionally, all stakeholders should engage youth through service learning. Youth from ethnic and other minorities should be recruited when choosing volunteers for programmes.

### **e) Sustainable development goal frameworks and university consortia research**

Within five years there should be measurable progress in sustainable development using accountability measures. Research has a key role in proving to funders that their support is needed, and understanding what makes volunteer programmes successful. Research can also contribute to policy studies on volunteer organizations. In addition, public support for research on volunteerism substantiates the important role that volunteers play in sustainable development, and this in turn motivates youth to become involved in sustainable development initiatives.

Funding for research that collects data needed to quantify the importance of volunteerism is a major challenge. Without data, volunteerism is less supported, and without volunteerism, there is less data to support its impact. Societal challenges that require our attention include shifts of the population from rural to urban lives, a larger population of older persons and the need for cross-generational work; the influence of technology also poses unique challenges to our world. Further challenges include attaining commitment from universities and other research institutes to volunteerism. Without good measures, and new questions, we will continue to get old answers without new solutions. The challenge of the complexity of social research with many variables remains.

Government, civil society and the private sector must work together, and youth have to be involved, in order to accomplish the goals of volunteerism and sustainable development. Research can make the Asia-Pacific Peace Service Alliance sustainable, and, through qualitative research and story-sharing, demonstrate the efficacy of volunteerism more powerfully; quantitative research is also significant.

There is a need to strengthen means of implementation used to revitalize global partnerships for successful sustainable development. An interdisciplinary approach to sustainable development in curricula and beyond academia is necessary, while students should undertake more research on volunteerism.

Research is important in pushing forward the agenda of sustainable development, and should be explicitly included in the sustainable development goal framework. The word "volunteer" itself should be included as a reminder to stakeholders of the qualitative and quantitative importance of volunteer support.

We believe that the sustainable development goals would not only benefit from volunteerism, they cannot be accomplished without the empowerment of youth and engagement of volunteers.