VOLUNTEERISM
is the thread that binds communities together

Local volunteerism is a fundamental resilience strategy and a property of resilient communities.

The scale and scope of volunteer activity in responding to shocks and stresses are unparalleled. Moreover, the contribution of volunteerism goes far beyond its magnitude because, like other types of civic participation, it is both a means to development and an end in itself.

Local volunteerism enables collective strategies for managing risk.

By bringing together individual actions under a shared purpose, volunteerism expands the choices and opportunities available to communities as they prepare for and respond to crises.

The characteristics of local volunteerism most valued by communities are the ability to self-organize and to form connections with others.

Community members appreciate the ability to set their own development priorities and to take ownership of local problems. The networks, trust and empathy generated through social action are acknowledged across all contexts.

These distinctive characteristics of local volunteerism can both boost and diminish community resilience under different conditions.

The duality of volunteering as both a means and an end of development means that each characteristic of volunteerism is potentially positive or negative depending on the context.

Volunteerism is particularly significant for vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Mutual aid, self-help and reciprocity are important coping strategies for isolated and vulnerable communities. Self-organized actions can help marginalized groups meet their own needs in the absence of wider provisions and services.

The costs and benefits of volunteerism are not always distributed equitably.

Women are more likely to take on the majority of informal volunteering in their own communities, for example, in an extension of domestic caring roles. Access to formal volunteering opportunities to develop skills, create new connections and access resources are not available for all, particularly those in low-income contexts.

The manner in which external actors engage with local volunteerism matters.

Collaborations should nurture the positive characteristics of volunteerism valued by communities – its self-organizing and relationship-strengthening properties. Peace and development actors can undermine volunteerism when they engage with people merely as a cheap and proximal resource. Done badly, partnerships with local volunteers can reinforce inequalities.

Effective collaboration with volunteers can transform volunteering from a coping mechanism to a strategic resource for community resilience.

Forming complementary partnerships with communities helps to balance risks more equitably, maximizing the potential of volunteering to positively impact those often left furthest behind. Appropriately pooling resources and capacities across actors enables communities to take longer-term preventative approaches to dealing with risk.

An enabling environment for volunteerism strengthens community resilience.

Governments and other stakeholders can strengthen the contribution of volunteerism to resilience-building in two ways: firstly, by nurturing an ecosystem for effective volunteering and secondly, by forming partnerships based on greater appreciation of the value of communities' own contributions. This will ensure that localization processes under the 2030 Agenda build on the commitment and innovations of citizens everywhere.