

**THE POWER OF CANADIAN VOLUNTEERISM  
TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE**

**Joint submission  
to the Honorable Marie-Claude Bibeau  
Canadian Minister of International Development and La Francophonie**

**In response to the International Assistance Review Consultation Process**

**By the following Canadian Volunteer Cooperation Agencies (VCA)**

**Canada World Youth  
Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO)  
CECI  
Crossroads International  
CUSO International  
Engineers without Borders Canada  
International Bureau for Children`s Rights (IBCR)  
Lawyers without Borders Canada  
OXFAM-Québec  
SUCO  
Terre sans Frontières (TSF)  
UPA Développement International  
Veterinarians without Borders Canada  
World University Services of Canada (WUSC)  
Youth Challenge International (YCI)**

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# ***International Volunteer Cooperation***

## **The Power of Canadian Volunteerism to Sustainable Development and Change**

According to the United Nations, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will depend in large part on the power of volunteerism. On December 17, 2015 the [UN resolution \(70/129.\)](#), *Integrating Volunteering into Peace and Development: the Plan of Action for the Next Decade and Beyond* was passed. The resolution recognizes volunteerism as a powerful means of implementation for the 2030 SDG Agenda and an essential component of strategies aimed at poverty reduction and sustainable development, resiliency and adaptability, as well as overcoming social exclusion and discrimination. The resolution also encourages governments and other stakeholders to incorporate volunteerism into development strategies at local, national and international levels. Volunteering is recognized as central to the fabric of a healthy and democratic civil society, and is a primary means of expressing local, national and global citizenship.

**Canadians play an important role towards achieving the new and ambitious global development agenda**, which applies to all people in all countries. Canada is especially recognized as having developed one of the most extensive and innovative models of volunteering in international development. Every year, thousands of Canadians choose to share their skills and expertise as volunteers in developing countries through short- or long-term assignments. They choose to volunteer in order to make meaningful contributions to global development efforts and to participate in an extensive range of projects that align with the SDGs and Canada's development priorities: environmental protection, increased access to economic opportunities for the poor, especially women and youth, and increased access to justice for people in situation of exclusion and vulnerability. Development-oriented volunteerism mobilizes and harnesses the power and potential of Canadians to effect sustainable, inclusive and economic change that addresses the specific needs of women and youth. These embody the Canadian values of global citizenship, diversity and inclusion, compassion and acceptance, trust and respect, and the spirit of collaboration as volunteers work side-by-side with those they support throughout their assignments.

In 2014, through the Canadian-government-funded Volunteer Cooperation Program, Canadians collectively contributed the equivalent of \$40M CAD of time to building the capacity of community organizations, businesses and local governments in developing countries. This program, delivered by experienced Canadian development organizations, mobilizes volunteers of all ages and diverse cultures, from a variety of backgrounds and expertise to contribute to concrete development results internationally, with an emphasis on gender equality, as demonstrated in the VCP Summative Evaluation Report in 2014.

Young-, mid-, and late-career professionals contribute an incredible range of skills and expertise as international volunteers. A Canadian international volunteer may be a mid-level business leader whose work assists local businesses in Senegal to develop new markets for their products; she or he could be a recently retired farmer whose agricultural expertise provides guidance and support for coffee producers in Guatemala to improve the quality and quantity of their products; or perhaps a public sector expert working with a women's rice producing cooperative in Burkina Faso; or perhaps still an entrepreneur or a business professional, taking a leave of absence with employer support, to

return to his or her country of heritage to build entrepreneurship skills for young women and young men. Mobilizing the breadth and diversity of experiences, motivations, skills and commitment of Canadians to support partners in developing countries in their work is critical to building long-term, sustainable and inclusive solutions, particularly for women and youth.

Canadian international volunteers with specific skills and expertise can make significant contributions within bilateral and multilateral programs and well-structured volunteer cooperation programs by:

- **Sharing knowledge and expertise** to build capacity and strengthen skills and experience by leveraging technical expertise, knowledge, ideas, and resources
- Facilitating **links between Canadian businesses and businesses in developing countries** to create opportunities for individuals – particularly youth and women – who benefit from economic growth, and fostering entrepreneurship and self-reliance through these networks and opportunities
- Promoting **gender equality and inclusivity**
- Promoting partnerships that foster **inclusive economies**
- Supporting capacity building for a **vibrant civil society** that can hold its government accountable
- Fostering **reciprocal learning relationships** between people and organizations, and between public and private sectors and civil society
- **Bringing together** community-based organizations, volunteers, civil society, governments, academic institutions and the private sector in communities across the world
- **Furthering the Canadian brand and profile abroad** and international development efforts at local, national and regional levels

When volunteers return to Canada following international assignments, many maintain strong ties with the individuals, organizations and businesses they worked with as volunteers. Canadian volunteers leverage their networks in Canada and contribute to engaging Canadians in support of development objectives, to promote Canadian-funded initiatives, and to raise awareness about development issues. For many international volunteers, their experience sparks a renewed commitment to volunteering in their home communities and contributing to development in Canada.

We recommend:

- **Creating a space** to continually and collaboratively review practice and share learnings and innovations with respect to international volunteerism, including the opportunity for Canadian expertise to guide south-south volunteering programs and south-north exchanges.
- **Support for research and development** around private sector involvement in Canadian international development volunteer programs to better understand how to engage private sector and to continue to engage Canadian volunteers in meaningful and effective ways.
- Continued **support for information and outreach activities** for the Canadian public, in order to contribute to its understanding and support of Canada's international development policy, and to offer Canadians concrete opportunities to engage in development efforts.

- The development of a **robust measurement, evaluation and learning system** to better understand and build on the outcomes and impact of volunteering, especially in the lives of women and youth, in the international development context, and the benefits it brings back to Canada.
- Building on a **strong Canadian brand of volunteerism** that offers a breadth of volunteering opportunities to Canadians within innovative well-structured development programs.

We recommend that Canada's policy on international assistance:

- **Explicitly recognize the important contributions of Canadian international volunteerism** to Canadian aid and development objectives specifically, and to the SDGs more generally, particularly on gender equality, women and girls.
- **Recognize the importance of the engagement of Canadians on global issues and global citizenship** as part of Canada's vision, and the role Canadian volunteers play in public engagement efforts.
- Identify specific and focused opportunities for **engagement and partnership with cultural communities** in the areas of active youth citizen participation, employment and markets, and business and trade.