

## Employee volunteering in India

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The role of volunteering in India is gaining importance in today's times, for several reasons. Despite the significant progress India has made in the past decades, it continues to face challenges in achieving its development objectives in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Volunteering offers opportunities to mobilize a segment of motivated individuals to engage with communities that are often difficult to reach, thus facilitating the vital linkage between volunteerism and achievement of the SDGs for the nation. Additionally, with India's expected demographic dividend, the promise of solving developmental challenges, while also enhancing individual skills, social participation and inclusion, have unsurprisingly made volunteering a very attractive tool for governments, civil society actors and corporates.

In India, the ecosystem that facilitates volunteerism is made up of a range of actors, including government, the private sector and civil society, who have contributed to and supported this initiative. This has been highlighted in the “**State of Youth Volunteering in India 2017**” report<sup>1</sup> developed by TTC for United Nations Volunteers and Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, India.

The Government of India has been, in terms of scale, immensely successful in driving volunteerism, through schemes such as the National Service Scheme (NSS)/Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) and more particularly, by enlisting volunteers in the public delivery of its services, such as national literacy mission, and mid-day meal scheme. Civil society is also attempting to fill in gaps in design and implementation by partnering with government-run organisations, such as Self Help Groups (SHGs), and providing new ways for youth to volunteer, such as through online or micro volunteering.

The role of the private sector in voluntary action is increasing at a rapid rate in India, with ‘employee volunteering’ (EV) or ‘employee giving’ being offshoots of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and employee engagement programmes. EV programmes take on various forms: initiatives may be ‘one-off’ (for a particular cause), or ongoing and may offer different levels of flexibility. For example, employees may give in cash or in kind to support a specific initiative, or may have fixed dates to volunteer or volunteer at their will, offline or online.

However, often companies find it difficult to build and sustain the interest of employees in volunteering, particularly when initiatives are taken up on an ‘ad-hoc’ basis, or conducted solely from the perspective of employee engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.in.undp.org/content/india/en/home/operations/UNV/unv-publications/2017-state-of-youth-and-volunteerism-in-india0.html>

TTC's interactions with private sector stakeholders bring out the following key recommendations for pursuing a successful volunteering programme:

- Direction and involvement of senior leaders (including leaders from the business side) are critical in motivating employees and encouraging their engagement;
- Dedicated resources for managing the programme and an effective collaboration between the CSR and Human Resources department are important to address aspects of both employee engagement and impact of volunteering;
- An online survey of ~3,500 volunteers across India brought out that the main motivations for volunteering as follows: *“being part of something bigger than oneself/helping others, exercising values and beliefs, developing relationships and personal benefits”*;
- Not differing from all categories of volunteers, employee volunteers are most interested in issues that are close to their value perceptions. For example, culture-promoting organizations and Community-based Organisations (CBOs) typically see dedicated volunteers, both in terms of their efforts and their time commitments; this may be attributed to the fact that in a geographically large and culturally diverse country like India, faith, culture and ethnic roots play a significant part in constructing sociological and personal behaviour. A successful programme needs to therefore understand - and factor in - causes that employees want to contribute to, which are also ‘material’ to the organisation;
- Choosing the right partner was deemed important - Civil Society organisations that allocated roles based on skill sets, provided orientation and training, and continuously engaged with volunteers, resulted in better experiences for both the organisations and the volunteers.

Finally, globalisation and the digital age are altering the model of volunteerism across the world, and also in India, with the growth of active citizenship, virtual volunteering and concepts such as volun-tourism. Employee volunteering programmes too, must take cognizance of the fact that the development of information and communication technology (ICT) are opening up new spaces and opportunities, thus greatly increasing the freedom and flexibility of employee volunteering options.