

NATIONAL POLICY ON VOLUNTEERISM, SRI LANKA

**Ministry of Primary Industries and Social Empowerment
Sethsiripaya, Battaramulla
Sri Lanka**

“Volunteerism is a source of community strength, resilience, solidarity and social cohesion. It can bring positive social change by fostering diversity, equality and participation of all. It is among society’s most vital assets”.

Ban Ki-moon

“The quality of your life will be determined by the quality of your contribution. When you work to improve the lives of others, your life improves automatically”.

Kurek Ashley

1. BACKGROUND

The ‘Mahawamsa’ or ‘Great Chronicle’ is a historical record that describes Sri Lanka’s ancient history from the 6th century BC to the 4th century AD. It contains numerous descriptions of activities that are consistent with the modern definition of volunteerism.

The first two kinds of organizations to recruit volunteers were Dayaka Sabha (an association of people involved in temple activities) and Wewa Sabha (an association of farmers based on the agricultural activities of village dwellers). The Institute for Participatory Interaction in Development (IPID) has described how volunteering in Sri Lanka, is to a considerable extent based on religious beliefs: “Sri Lanka has a long history and rich culture of volunteerism moulded by religion and permeating practically all aspects of human activity. In spite of shifting motivations and permutations much of the impulse for volunteerism has survived to this day. The practice of all religions provides many opportunities for volunteerism.

In Sri Lanka volunteerism has been a part of Sri Lanka’s rich tradition. Indeed, it is embedded in the country’s cultural ethos. From approximately the middle of the 20th Century, volunteering in Sri Lanka began to evolve, its focus shifting from being mainly about ‘charity work’ to being more about development. Voluntary associations increasingly became development oriented Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). After the 1980’s the trend accelerated, resulting in a sharp increase in the number of volunteers involved with organisations engaged in development work. At the same time, new types of development programmes were set up, such as participatory institutions, rural development, sustainable development and poverty alleviation projects.

The 30 year long civil conflict caused significant hardships to the Sri Lankan population resulting in considerable damage to life, environment and property. Further, Sri Lanka was one of the nations affected significantly by the 2004 tsunami. The tsunami was one of the

worst natural disasters in recorded history, killing more than thirty thousand people in Sri Lanka.

A significant number of local community volunteers willingly participated in programme activities in the aftermath of such nation-wide traumatic experience, particularly in the development of the community, post-conflict reconciliation, and disaster preparedness planning as well as in livelihood initiatives at the community level. However, the non-availability of an integrated policy, structures and systems on volunteerism in the country resulted in duplication of work and waste of resources in implementing volunteer programmes in the country following the Tsunami. In the absence of a structured approach towards voluntary sector in general, and volunteers in particular, their contribution remains unaccounted.

Moral and ethical value system is to be maintained with humanistic ideals based on religion, culture and behavior built on ethics gifted by the national heritage of the country. Such an ethical system is to be refined and maintained with human kindness, co-operation and benevolence, which are relevant to the modern society that will be realized through quality volunteerism.

Under the Vision 2025 and Vision 2030 the Government of Sri Lanka is committed to promoting socio-economic and technological development that contribute towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This policy therefore, provides a framework through which Sri Lanka can inclusively engage volunteers to optimize their resources and opportunities for socio-economic development and to supplement government efforts in attaining planned goals under its Vision 2025 and Vision 2030.

PREAMBLE

The Government of Sri Lanka is committed to improving volunteer engagement in socio-economic development, public welfare and environmental protection endeavors of the country.

The commitment stems from guiding principles such as the need for:

1. Improving volunteer engaging mechanisms and infrastructure
2. Ensuring that volunteers incur only a minimal cost when carrying out volunteer activities
3. Utilizing volunteer efforts in relevant sectors for the betterment of communities and the country
4. Ensuring that volunteer efforts are recognized, encouraged and appreciated

On the basis of these guiding principles the Government will explore all possibilities for ensuring health and safety of volunteers. The Government recognizes that safety and health of volunteers has a positive impact on the quality and strength of volunteer activities, which would result in economic and social development. Further, the Government will explore the

possibility of establishing a Quality Assurance mechanism, to ensure that voluntary work carried out meets certain quality standards.

The fundamental purpose of this National Policy on volunteerism is not only to eliminate barriers to volunteering in Sri Lanka and improving the conditions of volunteering but also to enhance the mechanisms through which volunteers may access volunteer opportunities. The necessary changes in this regard will be based on a coordinated national effort focused on clear national goals and objectives.

KEY CONCERNS

- Sri Lanka does not have nationally accepted guidelines and practices on volunteering.
- It lacks a permanent mechanism and infrastructure to facilitate, coordinate and promote volunteering, though volunteering has been a rich tradition of the country. Current services are scattered and fragmented with no commonly accepted mechanism to record efforts.
- People are unaware or do not have reliable access to volunteering opportunities available.
- Sri Lanka is yet to establish a mechanism to track the value of volunteering efforts and its contribution to the country's economy.
- There is a high level of interest and enthusiasm towards volunteering by a section of the population who are willing and able to allocate their time and energy towards volunteer activities.
- There is a large number of educated and experienced retired senior who can be mobilized and there lacks a mechanism to obtain their free time for voluntary work.
- Students, after their General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) and General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) studies who are in transition for higher studies do have some time for volunteering but this is not harnessed and coordinated due to lack of a mechanism.
- University students do have time between semesters and there lacks a process to recognize their efforts as an academic requirement or as a contribution to the society / social work experience or both.
- The understanding of volunteering and its importance to individuals and the society in general is perceived as low and volunteering is also defined and interpreted differently in the country.
- There lacks encouragement to research on volunteering related subjects/concerns/matters.
- No substantial efforts are made to introduce volunteering as a subject in school/higher education curricula, although clubs and societies such as Interact, Scouts Association, Girl Guides, Red Cross engage students in volunteer activities
- A nationally recognised mechanism to recognize outstanding volunteering contributions by individuals and organizations are yet to be mainstreamed though there are some commendable efforts in this direction that are already in place.
- Lack of a formal mechanism to enhance corporate sector involvement and support for volunteering efforts.

2. THE PURPOSE

The Purpose of this policy is to promote and guide the development of a strong volunteer sector in order to optimize volunteer contribution to Sri Lanka's economic, social and political development.

3. RATIONALE

The country faces a number of issues in such areas as poverty alleviation, skills development, social re-integration and harmony, caring for elders & persons with disabilities, addressing issues pertaining to children, youth, women-led households, empowerment of women, combatting HIV AIDS, Dengue and similar diseases, combatting human trafficking, rehabilitation of drug addicts, managing water resources, food and agriculture development, contribution to knowledge economy, environment management and development, contribution to technological advancements, housing development, health and sanitation, among other issues. The contribution of volunteers becomes significant in this context and towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, there arises a need to adopt a systematic approach to the identification and deployment of resources in the voluntary sector to utilize idling man-hours for productive purposes.

4. DEFINITIONS

“Volunteer” means –

- a.** Any Sri Lankan, willing to volunteer and accepts the definition on volunteering referred to in this policy;
- b.** Any overseas volunteer, as far as he/she is willing to volunteer and accepts the definition of volunteering referred to in this policy subject to clearance from appropriate State Authorities;

“Volunteer services” are noble acts of enhancing human well-being on one's free will with no cost to the final beneficiary and without accepting any personal gain.

“Volunteer Involving Organizations/ Sectors” refer to an entity, which uses volunteers to achieve its primary objective, which is social, where they do not return profits to their owners and or directors.

The following institutions may involve volunteers –

- (i) State Institutions;
- (ii) CSR initiatives;
- (iii) Non-profit initiatives with appropriate registration;
- (iv) Organizations, Societies, Community-based Organizations, Social Enterprises, NGOs, INGOs with appropriate registration.
- (v) Youth-led Organizations

5. VISION FOR THE POLICY

“The spark of Volunteerism burning in every heart enhancing people’s happiness”.

6. MISSION FOR THE POLICY

To strengthen and enhance volunteerism in Sri Lanka and to use volunteers as catalysts for rapid, inclusive and substantial development in communities and the nation at-large.

7. MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE POLICY

Mainstream volunteerism in Sri Lanka, create an enabling environment for volunteering, and make volunteering a vital tool in improving community well-being.

8. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Promote volunteerism in the country;
2. Appreciate and adopt volunteerism across all sectors in the country;
3. Establish a volunteer management and co-ordination mechanism;
4. Encourage and promote research on volunteering;
5. Expand the state services without an additional cost to the treasury, through volunteering;
6. Explore possibilities of utilizing idling man-hours for productive purposes;
7. Support mainstreaming volunteerism in the country through appropriate legislation.
8. Provide a policy framework for volunteering
9. Prepare a code of ethics to be followed by volunteers
10. Establish and implement a volunteer recognition mechanism, to ensure volunteers are duly recognized for the services they render.

9. MODES OF VOLUNTEERISM

This policy recognizes the following modes of volunteerism:

- a. **Disaster preparedness, management and response:** This relates to providing volunteer services in awareness creation on disaster mitigation measures and responding to emergencies.
- b. **Communal:** These are collective endeavours where people with shared views, needs, interests or challenges join forces to address them.
- c. **Philanthropy:** Philanthropy involves providing individual or collective service to others in form of financial, professional or in kind.
- d. **Advocacy and Civic Engagement:** This is a service offered by individuals or groups of people in creating awareness and lobbying for better governance.
- e. Other such relevant modes that address issues recognized in the rationale to this policy.

10. CATEGORIES OF VOLUNTEERISM

The policy recognizes the following categories of volunteers:

- i. **Youth Volunteers** –Young people aged between 15-29 years as enshrined in the constitution.
- ii. **Retired Volunteers** – Individuals retired from formal employment offering their services voluntarily.
- iii. **Online Volunteers** – Individuals or groups of people offering volunteer services using modern information and communication technology.
- iv. **Institutional Based Volunteers**– Includes individuals or groups offering volunteer services through organizations or institutions.
- v. **International Volunteers** – Non-Sri Lankans offering volunteer services in Sri Lanka and Sri Lankans offering volunteer services abroad.
- vi. **Diaspora volunteers** –Sri Lankan citizens living abroad who come to Sri Lanka to offer volunteer services.
- vii. **Community based volunteers** – Individuals or groups that are engaging in volunteer activities informally within their own communities.
- viii. **Children and adolescent volunteers** – Include Sri Lankans below the age of 18 years engaging in volunteer activities under guidance of an adult or institution.
- ix. **Government volunteer initiatives**
- x. **Professional volunteers** –Individuals who are in active formal employment in various sectors and offer their services voluntarily on a part time basis.

11. KEY SECTORS OF FOCUS FOR VOLUNTEERING CONTRIBUTIONS

- Health
- Youth
- Sports
- Education
- Disaster Prevention and Management
- Social Integration, Social service and Social Welfare
- Agriculture
- Forestry
- Water
- Climatic Change
- Religious or faith-based volunteerism
- Technology Development
- Any other sectors where volunteering could make a significant contribution to human well-being

12. POLICY FOCUS

This policy encourages –

- a. **Encourage social dialogue and partnerships on volunteering with all sectors of the country.**
 1. All Ministries, state institutions and corporations to recognize volunteerism and adopt mechanisms to involve volunteers for the expansion of state services.
 2. State sector employee volunteering;

3. Corporate sector to adopt organization-based volunteering by-
 - (i) Involving their staff to volunteer through volunteer sign-up days;
 - (ii) Staff participation in external formal volunteering projects and initiatives;
 - (iii) Adopting more meaningful mechanisms to broad-base and extend their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts through involvement of volunteers for greater national benefit;
 - (iv) Adopting appropriate safety and compensation mechanisms for employees engaging in volunteering;
 - (v) Encouraging corporate sector volunteering activities by offering incentives considering volunteering contributions;
 - (vi) Encouraging private sector CSR funds for volunteer activities for human well-being.
- b. Formulate guidelines to provide safer and conducive volunteering work environment;**
- c. Establish a volunteer management and co-ordination mechanism –The National Volunteering Secretariat (NVS) is established as an institution under the Subject Ministry for the co-ordination, facilitation, and promotion of volunteerism in Sri Lanka as a touchstone of a strong, open and a sustainable national volunteering infrastructure. In addition, NVS is to implement suitable projects/programmes jointly with institutions referred to in the policy. A Board of Management to be established for the administration of affairs of the NVS.**

Core activities of the NVS are –

- (i) Develop real-time Volunteer Management System (VMS);
- (ii) Maintain information of volunteers by the numerous expertise, but will not grant any legal status for volunteers and volunteer involving organizations;
- (iii) Issue a volunteer contract for formal volunteering of over 20-30 hours per week.
- (iv) Issue guidelines and regulations to protect and promote volunteers
- (v) Maintain information of Volunteer Involving Organization (VIO
- (vi) s) who are already registered under appropriate legislation;
- (vii) Facilitate volunteering opportunities as posted online in the VMS or indicated in writing by VIOs;
- (viii) Receive feedback on the completed volunteer activities;
- (ix) Post details of the completed assignments on the database;
- (x) Generate reports as appropriate with minimum contribution values for the volunteering effort;
- (xi) Share such statistics with Department of Census and Statistics and other relevant bodies;
- (xii) Co-ordinate with relevant authorities on volunteer engagement where required;
- (xiii) Coordinate and facilitate bi annual meetings with stakeholders
- (xiv) Co-ordinate and conduct orientation for volunteers as appropriate;
- (xv) Promote volunteering as an important social experience for students;
- (xvi) Encourage research on volunteering subjects and issues;

- (xvii) Develop constant dialogue with sectors that would assist in mainstreaming volunteering in the country;
- (xviii) Encourage state sector to expand the existing state services with involvement of volunteers.

d. The Board of Management of NVS to comprise the following and collectively decide on its roles and responsibilities

- (i) The Secretary of the Subject Ministry, who shall be the Chairman/Chairperson;
- (ii) One senior member, in the ranks of Additional Secretary or Director from the Subject ministry, nominated by the Secretary of the same Ministry
- (iii) Representatives from the Ministries for the subjects of Youth Affairs, Education, Finance, Health and Environment in the rank of Additional Secretary or Director invited by the Secretary of the Subject Ministry
- (iv) One senior member in the rank of President or Vice President or CEO of a Chamber of Commerce and Industry, invited by the Secretary of the subject Ministry
- (v) Two members from the Civil Society, invited by the Secretary of the Subject Ministry;
- (vi) One member from the United Nations Volunteers Sri Lanka.
- (vii) One senior representative from the corporate sector, in the ranks of Managing Director or CEO or Head of CSR, active in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), invited by the Secretary, of the Subject Ministry.
- (viii) One senior representative of the Department of Census and Statistics, invited by the Secretary of the subject Ministry.
- (ix) A senior member from a youth led organization
- (x) One representative from a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)
- (xi) Two representatives from Volunteer Involving Organizations
- (xii) Two researchers or representative from an academic institution
- (xiii) Two awardees or finalists from previous V-Awards
- (xiv) In the absence of the Chairperson to the Board of Management, his/her designate from within the Board of Management shall be the acting chairperson

It is important to provide equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and maintain gender and ethnicity balance within the Board of Management of the NVS.

The convener/secretary to the Board of Management shall be the Head of the National Volunteering Secretariat (NVS).

13. Issuing of a Volunteer Contract

A volunteer contract shall be issued in case of formal volunteering, if such volunteering

- Exceeds 20-30 hours per week
- Is carried out through a Ministry, Government Institution, Private sector or Non-governmental organization registered as a volunteer involving organization.

Such contract will entitle the volunteer to obtain an allowance to cover basic living expenses for the volunteering period.

14. Rights and Responsibilities of volunteers

Volunteers in Sri Lanka will be entitled to the following rights:

- (i) Safety and security during the performance of volunteer activities
- (ii) Reimbursement of expenses incurred during volunteer activities
- (iii) Entitlement to a volunteer contract in the case of formal volunteering exceeding 20-30 hours per week
- (iv) A written confirmation of volunteering
- (v) The appropriate training to improve the quality of activities to be performed.
- (vi) Professional assistance and support during volunteering.
- (vii) The protection of privacy and personal data

Volunteers will be responsible for the following:

- (i) Carrying out volunteer activities promptly and in a reliable manner.
- (ii) Participation at volunteer training programmes, awareness creation workshops, meetings, orientation programmes as requested by the NVS
- (iii) Maintain a smooth working relationship with different communities during the execution of volunteer services, with a strong understanding of the cultural, traditional and communal roles in society.
- (iv) To ensure quality of service in volunteer activities carried out.
- (v) Comply with policies, guidelines and procedures issued by the NVS
- (vi) Adhere to the code of ethics of the National Volunteering Secretariat (NVS) and other relevant institutions.

15. LEGISLATION

The Government shall enact legislation on volunteerism to mainstream volunteerism in Sri Lanka.

16. IMPLEMENTATION

The subject Ministry will prepare an action plan, in consultation with relevant stakeholders for the implementation of the National Policy on Volunteerism.

17. REVISION OF THE POLICY

The National policy on Volunteerism shall be reviewed every three years or as directed by the Board of Management.

18. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation of volunteer activities to be carried out by the NVS