



# OUR PEOPLE FIRST STRATEGY

A fair world for everyone

Creating lasting change through volunteering

## VSO: Doing development differently

At VSO, we think that *people matter*.

There are enough resources in the world that no-one need be poor. There is enough opportunity that no-one should be side-lined. Exclusion and poverty are the result of what people do and the decisions they make. We also know that people are the ones who can change this.

VSO brings people together to generate insights, ideas and action on poverty and exclusion. Those people offer to each other a wide range of skills, backgrounds & experience. They volunteer to bring about positive social change.

Our understanding of the places where we work means we are able to place volunteers where they can best catalyse change. We mobilise an extraordinary diversity of volunteers: community, national and international. They come from all parts of the world. They work with communities, with organisations, with government institutions and with businesses.

Our volunteers act as advisors and animators embedded in communities and institutions. They act as trainers and facilitators transferring skills and knowledge. They act as mentors, role models and change agents. They connect people across different levels in institutions and communities. Our volunteers experience first-hand what people live with. As a result, VSO is able to better understand the complex stories of exclusion and marginalisation behind poverty. This in turn allows us to design and deliver programmes that can respond with innovation and scale to the complexity of poverty.



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## VSO's Strategic Ambition

In 2016, governments around the world signed up to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The aim is that no-one should be left behind in poverty. The SDGs will frame VSO's work over the next five years.

In delivering our work, VSO will draw particularly on the SDG principles of universality and leaving no-one behind. We have identified three strategic priorities:

- We will extend and deepen our impact through a portfolio of **Global Programmes**. These will harness the power of our insight and experience to deliver improved services and opportunities to individuals, communities and countries.
- Leveraging our relationships with communities, partners and volunteers, we will deliver increased **Global Engagement** in our core programme areas. We will mobilise active global citizens across the world in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Building on our Global Programmes and Engagement, we will step more fully into our **Global Leadership** role to position volunteering as a powerful contribution to delivery of the SDGs.

Our programmes that deliver impact into communities, countries and regions lie at the very heart of our work. Our global engagement and leadership build out of our practical experience and the diverse networks that we develop through our global portfolio.

### Global Programmes

*Where we are now:* Over the past five years, we have increased our ability to deliver improved services for many more marginalised and impoverished people. We have become better at using organisational learning and evidence to build our core areas of work. In 2015/16 alone, VSO partnered with 375 partner organisations working in health, education and livelihoods across 24 countries. This contributed towards improved service delivery for around 2 million people.

*Strategic shift:* The SDGs set an ambitious agenda for addressing the challenges of marginalisation and poverty worldwide. Through a global portfolio of programmes, we will contribute to the delivery of that agenda, with even greater sustainable impact in the communities we serve. In particular, we will demonstrably contribute to the "leave no one behind" agenda and search out innovative ways in which we may deliver development to those most excluded.

We will:

- Achieve quality outcomes in our core programme areas for those affected by marginalisation and poverty
- Use, prove and "innovate" our distinctive volunteering for development approach to deliver pro-poor outcomes
- Expand the size and diversity of our portfolio of programmes through partnerships, alliances and collaborative practices



## Global Engagement

*Where we are now:* Over the past fifty years, VSO has worked with over 40,000 international volunteers from all over the world. In the past five years, we have grown our work with young people, with national volunteers and community volunteers. And we have increased our focus on the participation of primary actors in our work. This diverse mobilization of people, coupled with our extensive programming, perfectly positions VSO to promote active citizenship across the world, from community to global level.

*Strategic shift:* The SDGs will not be met without mobilising and engaging citizens across the world to support, demand, oversee and deliver them. This underpins the UN recognition of the power of volunteering in SDG implementation<sup>1</sup>. Effective delivery of the global goals requires all of us to have the capacity, the confidence and the willingness to engage. VSO's network of volunteers, partners, employees and primary actors are the foundation for how we deliver the global partnership recognised by governments around the world as essential to achieving the 2030 agenda<sup>2</sup>.

We will:

- Create space for those most affected by poverty and exclusion to plan, implement, advocate for and measure changes in their own lives and communities
- Enable our global network to foster global understanding, engagement and action in support of the SDGs
- Develop multi-sector partnerships to galvanise into action people and their institutions in support of "a world without poverty"

## Global Leadership

*Where we are now:* Over the past five years VSO has made significant progress through practice and research in its understanding of the unique contribution of volunteering to sustainable development and active citizenship. VSO helped build recognition of volunteering as a key means of implementing the SDGs. VSO has contributed to ongoing analysis of the future of International Civil Society Organisations (ICSOs).

*Strategic shift:* Volunteering is recognised as a key means of implementing the SDGs. This provides VSO with both the opportunity and responsibility to redefine volunteering: to take it out of the margins and place it firmly within mainstream development discourse and practice. We know that global practice still has some way to go if the power of volunteering and active citizenship is to be fully harnessed to deliver the necessary innovation and scale. VSO will provide global leadership and influence in the sector on how a volunteering approach can best contribute to developing active citizens and delivering the SDGs.

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<sup>1</sup> A/69/700, December 2014, *Synthesis Report of the Secretary General on the Post-2015 Agenda*. Available at: [www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/700&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/700&Lang=E)

<sup>2</sup> *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1 United Nations (2015) Para 45 and Target 17.16



We will:

- Establish VSO as a leader in participatory, people-led development approaches
- Support civil society, governments and the private sector with effective approaches in volunteering for development and active citizenship
- Participate in international networks and partnerships across civil society, private sector and government that underpin collaboration.



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