

International Volunteer Day 2009 Report

Context:

UNV India played a role of leadership for IVD 2009 involving Swechha, UNDP India, VSO, American Center, Times Foundation, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Department of Environment Govt. of Delhi, NFI, Tehelka, NDTV, Radio MEOW, The YP Foundation and Jamghat joined hands to celebrate and commemorate International Volunteer Day on the 5th of December 2009. International Volunteer Day (IVD) was established by the



UNV Stall in IVD Venue

United Nations General Assembly in 1985 to acknowledge the potential that volunteers promise towards betterment of social conditions, promotion of economic development, and empowering people to take charge. The theme for IVD 2009, as conceived by the United Nations is 'Volunteer for the Planet'. UNV India also organized various events in Orissa, Mumbai and other parts of India. UNV Volunteers working in far flung areas organized events on their own initiatives.

Aims and Objectives of conducting the event and school workshops

- To highlight and showcase volunteer efforts in different Campaigns and Initiatives
- To mobilize more volunteers for a broad range of activities and organizations, specifically for the Environment and Climate Change Solutions
- To connect the concept of Volunteerism with Environmental and Developmental issues and causes



IVD Workshop in St. Thomas school

- To promote Volunteerism as a fun, interesting, engaging and youthful activity amongst the citizenry and media

Summary of Activities

The activities were divided into two phases, the Campaign Phase, directed towards mobilizing scores of volunteers, recognizing the efforts of volunteers and advocating various aspects of Volunteerism among a wide audience (students from Schools, Colleges, and Professionals from various backgrounds); and the second phase, the 5th December event itself- celebrating, visualizing and engaging volunteers.



UNV Volunteer cleaning Yamuna River

The IVD 2009 programme began with a series of workshops conducted in schools across Delhi, with the theme being 'Volunteering for Our Planet'. The workshops were conducted in 30 schools, some government, some private, and touched almost all parts of the city and all social strata. The workshops were extremely well received by the students and teaching staff at all of the schools where they were conducted. In addition, we also created for each school a 'volunteer space' by gifting them a wall magazine where they could write about and share ideas on volunteering with their peers and school mates.



Volunteers are playing in Orissa

The workshops became a highly animated and interactive forum for the students to discuss their own ideas and concepts, and what it meant to them to be a volunteer. In addition, they had the opportunity to meet and interact with volunteer heroes, including representative of UNV who shared their experiences of volunteering with the students.

The event on International Volunteer Day was immensely successful bringing together a cross section of Delhi's society comprising of bureaucrats, media-persons, policy-makers, environmentalists, students and youth who learned about the Yamuna- its importance, its pitiable state in Delhi and realized the need to save the river.

The highlights of the day were as follows:

- Massive Shramdaan, where over 3000 volunteers, including school and college students, NCC cadets, the UNV India Country Team, environmental activists, government officials, celebrities from the worlds of fashion, music and the arts, as well as citizens of Delhi, gave their time and effort towards cleaning up the banks of the River at Kudsia Ghat.
- Musical Performance by Menwhopause, a Delhi based band that are hugely popular on the city's musical circuit. The band is old friends of Swechha and has performed at and supported events hosted by Swechha for many years. They opened the musical part of the event and set the tone for the performances that followed.
- Musical Performance by Terra Naomi. Terra is an accomplished singer-songwriter and musician based in the USA. Her accomplishments include winning the first Youtube "Best Music Video" Award in 2006 and playing solo in front of a crowd of 75,000 at Wembley Stadium during the UK leg of Live Earth in 2007. She was on a 2 week tour of India, the highlights of which were her performances at the International Volunteer Day event on December 8th and the Say It's Possible Climate Change Concert in Srinagar, Kashmir.
- Musical Performance by Indian Ocean, one of the country's best known bands. The band fuses folk, Indian and western musical styles and instruments creating a unique sound. Indian Ocean performed a number of their popular songs at the event, as well as songs that were relevant to the occasion. These included songs that are a call to social action and change, and odes to Rivers.
- Speeches by UNRC and VSO India aimed at the young people in the audience, to inspire them to volunteer and highlight the importance of Volunteering for the Planet.



Terra Naomi Sings at IVD

Environmental sustainability is one of the United Nations' eight MDGs. For 2009 the theme for International Volunteer Day also centered on the environment, highlighting the importance of environmental responsibility and accountability for all of us. Very often the debates and discussions on the environment tend to take a very macro perspective, and local environments and ecosystems get ignored. Swechha has been working consistently over the past ten years towards creating a sense of environmental stewardship among young people, concentrating on local environments, while keeping the big picture in mind. It is with this thought process that much of our efforts are centered on the Yamuna.

The Yamuna caters to the needs of millions of people along its course and beyond. Yet, the river has been widely abused all along its course. In Delhi, it is safe to say it has been reduced to nothing more than a glorified drain. The IVD 2009 celebrations were designed to have a two-fold purpose, to foster the spirit of volunteering and to put the spotlight on what can be described as Delhi's most significant environmental concern.



Students planting trees

The most important learning that the event gave to the volunteers, participants and audience was that it is most essential to care for our natural resources in order to ensure an environmentally sustainable future. It also laid emphasis on the concept that through individual and collective action, each of us can make a tangible difference to the world we live in. Through this event we reached out to a large number of people, mainly youth who have now become a part of the 'We For Yamuna' campaign.

The event owes its success to days of hard work put in by volunteers. We had a team of over 50 volunteers from colleges in Delhi University, who worked closely with the Swechha team to organize and coordinate all the aspects of the event. The efforts of UNV Volunteers in the preparatory phase of the IVD event were also significant. The volunteers were involved with:

- Mobilising volunteers from schools, colleges and other organizations (event and IVD posters were printed with support from UNV)
- Making and mounting of posters and banners.
- Arranging press coverage.

- Decoration of the venue (Banners were designed and printed with support from UNV)
- Assisting school students who participated in the IVD event
- Making of Email Invites.
- Making 30 Wall Magazines for the IVD workshops, which were then presented to the 30 schools where the workshops were conducted.

Goals Achieved by the Event

The central themes of the workshops and the event were volunteering and environmental conservation. The Yamuna was a central theme in all our discussions, but was used also as a metaphor for what could happen to the entire planet, if we don't change. The idea of collective participation of the state and civil society in saving the Yamuna was propagated. The following broad aims were met during the course of the IVD 2009 activities:



Students participating in IVD

Qualitative outputs

- International Volunteer Day was celebrated on a scale perhaps never before seen in New Delhi. The message of volunteering for the planet was sent out not only to the several thousand who participated in the workshops and the event, but also the lakhs who saw and read about it through coverage by our media partners NDTV, Radio MEO and Tehelka, as well as the other media outlets present at the event.
- The event promoted the spirit of volunteering as young people participated and contributed to conducting the event.
- The event promoted environmental leadership amongst young people. They understood that to make ourselves heard to people who matter for cleaning up of the river we need to mobilize ourselves and sharpen our approach.
- We were able to influence representatives from different strata of society at the same time.
- The event served as a platform for citizens to exchange ideas and suggestions to create a safer, cleaner and greener environment.

- By incorporating music by celebrated artistes, we succeeded in adding an element of fun and energy into the event, thereby furthering the intangible impact of the campaign on the mindset of those participating.

Quantitative outputs

- More than 3000 volunteers attended the IVD Event on the 5th at Kudsia Ghat, helping in cleaning the banks of the river. The volunteers came from different backgrounds- Schools, Colleges, NGOs, Corporate Houses etc.
- The concert was attended by an equal number of people- from street children from Salam Baalak Trust, Jamghat, students from Delhi's private and government run schools, Cadets from the National Cadet Corps, employees of MNCs like Tata Consultancy Services, Genpact, Whirlpool.
- Thousands of people registered with partner NGOs and organizations to volunteer their time and skills in the future for similar activities or campaigns to make a positive change to the environment.
- At the end of the Yamuna Clean-up more than one truck load of garbage had been collected and taken to the landfill from the river bank.
- The UNRC Mr. Patrice Coeur-Bizot addressed the gathering on the 5th of December and also joined the volunteers in Cleaning the banks of the Yamuna, thereby reinforcing the urgent need for all of us in engaging in different ways to help our planet.
- The event was also attended by several noted celebrities including Fashion Designers Rina Dhaka, Ritu Kumar, Shibani Kashyap (singer), Ms.Nafisa Ali (politician).
- There was widespread press coverage. The media organizations that committed to covering IVD 2009 were:

NDTV 24X7

NDTV India

Lok Sabha TV

Radio MEOW

IANS

Tehelka

The Indian Express

The Statesman

The Asian Age

DNA

The Washington Post

Kerala News

Beyond IVD 2009

The success of the IVD 2009 workshops and the event, are not just a feather in Swechha's cap, but more importantly is indicative of the spirit of the people of Delhi. The overwhelming response we received for this programme from all stakeholders, be it volunteers, partner organizations, the Government of Delhi, and even the Delhi Police, will serve as great encouragement to us, and will reinforce the faith that we have in civil society and its ability to change the world we live in. UNV India will continue to keep in touch and work with the volunteer groups that attended the Event on the 5th of December. Many schools, colleges and Corporate Houses have pledged to take on and carry out Action Projects in their neighborhoods and offices that will help the Planet.



UNV Volunteers with UNRC, Mr. Patrice Coeur-Bizot

We are certain that the IVD Event touched innumerable people and infused the passion of Volunteerism and sensitivity for the Planet in them.