Problem Solving Through Community Action: An Interactive Chat with Jeff Franco

> *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." -Margaret Mead*

Anyone can think about serving their community, but putting service ideas into action is when real change happens. Jeff Franco of City Year Washington, DC and instructor of the "Attracting and Motivating Volunteers" lesson joined us at the U.S. State Department to discuss his views and offer advice on community action through a Facebook Live video chat.

Franco, originally from Cleveland, Ohio, moved to Washington 20 years ago to further his studies and eventually found his place at City Year DC. In his role as vice president and executive director, Franco advocates for youth involvement in the education of children in underserved communities. Participants aged 17–24 take a year to volunteer in schools as friends and mentors in order to close the gap between what students need and what schools are able to provide. Not only is City Year's work beneficial to the students and school districts receiving the assistance, but also to the volunteers, who strengthen their social awareness and build leadership skills during their rigorous year of service.

Being Authentic Leaders

Responding to a request from the online audience for advice to young leaders in community service, Franco talked about the importance of being authentic in your work, especially so in leadership and community service positions. Finding an intersection between your passion and the needs of the world is absolutely necessary to be successful. He described a leader's work as a "beautiful struggle," pointing out the hard work and dedication that is needed to be rewarded with the change you want to see in the world. He went on to emphasize the importance of an authentic leader to provide continuous inspiration to volunteers.

Young volunteers have a special aptitude for being authentic leaders. According to Franco, most people have a desire to serve, but youth especially have the energy necessary to act on that desire. City Year's role is to harness that energy and organize it into a channel for education services.

Interacting with the Community

One obstacle you will need to overcome is how to get involved in a new community. Different cultures may exist or the community members may not always be welcome to your mission at first. It's important to understand the different cultures throughout the community and listen to what their needs are. Franco advises volunteers trying to start in a new environment to take the time to understand the problems the community faces first and ask them what they need from the organization. This shows that the group cares about the community and is there to serve. One mistake City Year made was trying to implement goals in different schools without listening to the requirements of each school system. This clash of ideas strained the relationship between the two

groups but also helped City Year learn how to improve their system for starting in a new place.

Passion for service is a wonderful thing, but Franco points out the need for “humble swag.” This concept illustrates the balance needed between sharing your organization’s accomplishments and having a genuine interest in helping others. Your desire to make the community better should outweigh the need for recognition, but it is important to further your organization’s good work by promoting events and ways to get involved.

Overcoming Challenges

There are many obstacles that people can face, especially when trying to start a new nonprofit organization. Not everyone may be receptive to the work you are trying to do, and failure along the way can set you back. Franco said that if there are people who do not agree with your mission, try listening to them and understanding their needs. There may be room for compromise. He also emphasized that failure is important because it can help you and the organization improve. Always remember to return to humility and the basics of why you want to serve the community, then listen to the critiques and the voices in your community and use those to improve your service techniques and strategies.

> *“Failure is a beautiful thing in the long run, as long as you get back up.” -Jeff Franco*

Learning from mistakes and failures is essential to improving your nonprofit. City Year uses surveys to learn from each service opportunity as well as self-critique from employees and volunteers about what went well and what could be improved upon. This is essential in providing the best service to your community. Constant evaluation will move your organization forward.

Moving Forward

“Where do we go from here?” Franco advises young leaders to use the resources available, such as free tools like social media and building coalitions within your network of people who believe in your goals. Take advantage of young people who have the desire to make a difference in their communities. Above all else, you must stay committed to your goal. You must have the desire and commitment to create change, because it will be a struggle, but it is a beautiful struggle.

#YALIServes chat with Celestina Obiekea and Mimshach Obioha

Celestina Obiekea and Mimshach Obioha joined the YALI Network for a chat about our service initiative, #YALIServes. Along with this chat, the two created videos that are available on the YALI

website, yali.state.gov/serves. These videos highlight all the wonderful parts of volunteering. Throughout the chat, our online audience showed a strong desire to serve their communities but needed guidance on how to get others involved and the best ways to benefit the community.

There are several ways to get involved in your community. Research opportunities online, contact people in your network, or start your own volunteer group. If you find an organization that you want to join, show what skills you have to offer and how you can benefit their group.

Volunteering can be an excellent way to build your own skills and network with members of your community.

Getting others to share in your excitement about volunteering can be difficult. It helps to show them all the benefits that come with volunteering. The videos at yali.state.gov/serves provide helpful tools to do this.

This initiative coincides with the Nelson Mandela Day of Service on July 18. Look at the map on our website to find a service opportunity near you or start your own!

Ideas to jump-start your next community service project

The U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa hosts an annual Community Service Day for alumni of their language program to gather together and improve their city. (U.S. Embassy Kinshasa/Flickr)

July 18 was the YALI Network Day of Service on Mandela Day. But, are you thinking about ways to honor his legacy all year round by hosting a #YALIServes event?

Try volunteering for a day in a clinic, school or orphanage in your village, town, city or neighborhood on July 18. Ask your friends and family to join you! Maybe you will find your calling for your next big volunteer commitment.

If you are organizing a new venture, remember that the most successful community projects include input from the community. Give the people who will benefit from your project a voice in identifying and implementing community needs.

- ASK community members to help you identify the most important needs in their village, town or neighborhood. Organize a community meeting or workshop to gather ideas. Make sure people feel invested in the project.
- INVOLVE community members in carrying out your project to help ensure and sustain its success.

Below is a list of some suggested activities to help meet basic community needs throughout rural and urban Africa. These are meant to help inspire your next community project or find an existing program to join that fits your particular skills.

Art projects

- Paint a mural that embodies the values of your community.
- Paint a bus stop.
- Volunteer at an art project event at a local school, library, community center or orphanage.
- Teach a craft at a women's shelter.

Community health

- Volunteer at a medical clinic for a day.
- Teach a short hand-washing activity at a local school.
- Hand out fliers for an HIV/AIDS or vaccination program to increase awareness.
- Organize an "Urgent Run" event for U.N. Toilet Day on November 19, 2017.

Education

- Volunteer at a local school for a day.
- Read a book to children in a local library.
- Teach accounting, bookkeeping or other business skills at a local women's shelter, high school or community center.
- Check out the After School Assistance Project for ideas.
- Organize a book drive and donate to a local library, school or community center.

Farming

- Plant or work in a community garden.
- Help advertise a business start-up idea like iCow.
- Help build a community rainwater catchment.

Neighborhood improvement

- Gather a crew and make repairs to a neighbor's home.
- Organize a neighborhood trash pick-up day with your friends and colleagues.

- Collect supplies for a family that has suffered a recent crisis.
- Campaign for additional streetlights or better ambulance service in underserved areas.

Sports

- Help coach kids at an after-school sport program.
- Get ideas and inspiration from programs like GCU soccer.

Raise funds for your next big community project

- Check out online fundraising platforms like causevox or see this wiki on how to fundraise.

Here are a few volunteer projects our YALI Facebook followers are already carrying out this summer:

- From **Nigeria**: Volunteers are "reaching out to homes of children and adults living with disabilities and to those who are physically challenged in my community."
- From **Burundi**: Volunteers are "getting students involved in the #summer event named 0 pregnancy for teenagers."
- From **Malawi**: "Mkaika Youth Organisation is planning to have a clean up exercise around Mkaika Trading Centre in Nkhotakota, Malawi. We believe in proper waste management to avoid prevalence of some diseases. Sweeping, collecting waste and disposing of it properly."
- From **Uganda**: Volunteers work with "the Nawanyingi Orphaned Families Empowerment Project (NawOFEP), whose goal is to strengthen the capacity of the orphan caregivers and to provide 124 orphans with nutritionally adequate food and other needs on a sustainable basis."

If you have a really BIG idea on how to address global health or food security challenges, consider pitching it to USAID.

Recruiting the right passionate volunteers

Do you work at a charity or nonprofit organization in your community? Do you recruit and supervise volunteers?

If so, then you know the value of the nonpaid worker — the backbone of any nonprofit or community organization.

But HOW do you go about finding volunteers, especially if you need people with a specific skill set such as IT or fundraising?

Recruiting volunteers can be done using online technology and offline techniques. Well-established and new organizations alike rely on both methods to identify a potential volunteer's skills and interests and determine how best to use them to meet the organization's needs.

Make a good match

Seek out volunteers who are a good match for your organization. Make sure to match interested volunteers to roles that correspond with their experience, talents and passion. For example, teachers might best be suited to work with children, construction workers could be tasked with physically demanding activities, and/or accountants could work on bookkeeping tasks. Making the right match increases volunteer retention and satisfaction.

Recruit online:

- ***Advertise*** a call for volunteers on your website's homepage. Make sure to include a simple recruitment form with specific fields on skills, interest, physical demands, time commitment and experience as appropriate for your needs. Then you can sort for matches.
- ***Email*** all your donors, supporters and partners and enlist their help to recruit volunteers. Make sure to link to your website recruitment page.
- ***Network*** using social media — Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Facebook — to connect potential volunteers to your recruitment site and advertise your cause.
- ***Register*** with an online volunteer-matchmaking service. Look for online services that operate in your region. For example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation connects local NGOs and community organizations in Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa with foundation employees and partners to assist in their search for volunteers. They even offer board-of-trustees matching services and make onsite visits.

Find people without using technology:

- ***Speak out*** at community events. Ask local places of worship, clubs, businesses and schools if you can make a brief presentation to their members, employees or students about your nonprofit and why it's important. Create passion for your cause. Distribute flyers and collect volunteer registration forms at the event.
- ***Print*** fliers and post around the community. Consider the demographics of your potential volunteer needs (age, experience, interest) and target appropriate locations, such as schools, colleges, places of worship and types of businesses.
- ***Ask*** your local newspaper, radio and/or TV station to run an advertisement for your organization and provide contact information for potential volunteers.
- ***Be creative.*** What works best in your community to attract attention to a cause? Throw a fundraising party and ask your friends to bring their friends.

Use your network

However you recruit, online or offline, remember that your network of friends and family can help you — especially if you are just starting out. If you already work with volunteers, they are your best resource to recruit new ones and replace retiring volunteers.

Consider, for example, what Roxann Seals, the senior manager of volunteer services at the largest food bank in Washington, D.C., has to say: *"Our volunteers are truly our best recruiters!"*

#YALIVoices: Benefits of Volunteering during Waithood

Contributed by Rasak Adekoya, Co-founder, Brand Your Waithood

If you have yet to unravel one of the challenges of inclusive youth development in Africa, permit me to ask you these questions: What was your dream profession as a child? What did you eventually study in the university? And, right now, what are you practicing as a profession?

Sometime last year, Brand Your Waithood took time to ask 232 youths from eight different countries these questions. The responses we got were shocking. Guess what! Only one person wanted to become a medical doctor, studied medicine and practises as a doctor. Fifty-four percent of the others had responses to two of the questions that intersect, while others had none the same. For you, are your answers the same?

In finding out the explanations for this, we realised that lack of mentorship has been the reason that many made wrong choices as a child, and a poor education system has led to many youths going to tertiary institutions to study what is not their choice. They will tell you: If I don't get what I like, I will like what I get. And for the third question, several struggle to practise what they have studied as well as find it difficult to discover themselves.

This delayed period in transitioning from childhood to adulthood is known as waithood. Waithood is a stagnation period in the lives of young people as they transition from childhood to adulthood, a state of helplessness and dependency. During this stage, chronologically, you will see youth who have marked the status of youth by their age, but they are yet to live the responsibilities of adulthood: earn a living, provide for their offspring, establish families, pay taxes, etc. This has led to youth protest, riot and aggression against their government, since they think it's the government's responsibility to do all.

Intuitively, one could imagine that among the best ways to get out of waithood is to volunteer in any field of your interest. Volunteering is an act of investing your intellectual capital (skills), time and other resources to make an impact on individuals, your community and organisations. On the other hand, you are submitting yourself to positive changes, self-development, inclusive leadership skill and sustainable growth.

It is an avenue for you to discover the secret of life hidden in a place you never look at, a place that you only come to when you have exhausted all other possibilities and hide yourself, where the secret of life is hidden — this is your heart. By extension, volunteering during waithood will help you to be active rather than passive in an area of interest.

It is a means for you to break local and global barriers by connecting to diverse people; establishing trust and friendship; and opening doors of unlimited opportunities in the course of sharing what you have learnt, acquired for the benefits of maintaining and sustaining peaceful coexistence. Moreover,

if you want to contribute to the strengthening of institutional capacity to gain social, political, cultural and economic inclusion and participation, volunteering is a path to advance your insight. When you volunteer, you are exposed to practical know-how and experiences from an employer or employers.

It has severally been said that success belongs to doers, not mere knowers. Africa Volunteering Week August 12–18 every year serves you as a platform to practicalize and put to the test what you have learnt as well as to improve through real-life experiences. This helps you to build your resume and prepares you for your professional career and future opportunities.

Your greatest success can be measured by the number of people whose lives you are able to affect positively. Whether incentive is involved or not, it is a life-fulfilling activity to be part of the inclusive development of an individual, an organization or your immediate community. In addition, it is an avenue for you to develop confidence in taking on challenges to try new things and develop community identity.

According to experts, when you focus on someone other than yourself, it reduces stress and makes you healthier. This implies that your mood — such as optimism and joy — controls your fate and ultimately controls your immune system.

Dear Millennial, every generation has been charged with a responsibility and a task. There have been generations before yours, and there will be generations after yours. Yours is not the beginning, and it will not be the end. But you can be more than a generation that just passed through. You can be the change. Every generation has had their fair share of tasks, responsibilities and opportunities. What sets them apart — or not — is what they DO with what they have, not what they SAY about what they have. While you pass through waithood, while that youth in your community is still waiting, while clamouring for your government to provide you the dividend of democracy, take your time to volunteer your skills and resources now. The advancement of you, your community, your country and Africa is a personal responsibility. Trust me, if you volunteer, you and your community will be better for it.

For more information on Brand Your Waithood, visit:
Africa Volunteering Week: http://brandyourwaithood.org/africa-volunteering-week/
Facebook Group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/AfricaVolunteeringWeek/

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Mandela Day is 18 July: How Can You

Serve?

What is Mandela Day?

Former South African President Nelson Mandela (1918–2013). (© AP Images/Denis Farrell)

Mandela Day is a call for all of us to promote social justice wherever we can.

The United Nations launched Nelson Mandela International Day in 2009 on Mandela's birthday, July 18, in honor of his lifetime of sacrifice and devotion to end racism and apartheid in South Africa.

His contribution to the world remains an inspiration to the next generation. Near the end of his life he said, "It is in your hands to make of our world a better one for all."

On this day we recall Mandela's lifetime of service in a collective global effort to make the world a better place.

What can I do?

Think about what inspires you, and how your passion can help others in your community.

- Make a commitment to serve those in need. Think of what cause speaks to you and decide how you can help.
- Spread the word about Nelson Mandela Day at your place of work, among your friends, and in your neighborhood.
- Contact a local social service organization and volunteer your time on a regular basis.
- Organize a community service event on July 18. Plan your event using the #YALIServes toolkit and visit yali.state.gov/serves for more information.
- Use the hashtag #MandelaDay and #YALIServes in all your social media posts for your event.

"TAKE ACTION. INSPIRE CHANGE. MAKE EVERY DAY A MANDELA DAY."

Education is power, says top U.S. diplomat for Africa

Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield (U.S. Institute of Peace)

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the State Department's assistant secretary of state for African affairs, has

a request to YALI Network members that fits well with the current #YALILearns campaign: take the time to educate your peers.

“There is nothing more powerful than education, and you can help,” she told a group of 2016 Mandela Washington Fellows who are attending a program hosted by Howard University in Washington. “You can help one person. If you see someone on the street, hand them a book and sit down on the curb with them and teach them how to read, because reading is powerful and no matter what happens in your country, education can’t be taken away from you.”

Thomas-Greenfield said she gets her energy and a lot of happiness in her job thanks to YALI participants.

Because Africa’s population is relatively young, with 50 to 70 percent under the age of 30, “you are Africa’s greatest future resource,” she said, adding that when the current generation of leaders leave power, “young people will have no other choice but to stand up and take your leadership skills to the next level.”

“I have tremendous hope for this continent. I don’t think that Africa has lived up to its promise yet, but I know that it will. And I know it will because of you,” Thomas-Greenfield said.

“This continent is rich in resources, including its people,and there’s no reason that this continent should be so impoverished. There is no reason there should be a deficit in governance and a deficit in education. This continent ought to be a beacon to everyone in the world,” she said.

“You have an opportunity to move this continent forward, and I am absolutely confident that you will do it,” she told the group.

“Everywhere I go on the continent of Africa, I see young people like yourselves — not just YALI Fellows, but young people who are engaged, who are active, who are ambitious and who want to contribute to their country’s future and their country’s success,” she said.

“We are making a difference because for every one of you, you are going to touch 10 people like you,” Thomas-Greenfield said, challenging the group to use their experiences in America to the benefit of their home countries.

She urged them to use the YALI Network to stay in touch with each other after their return and to use it to support and mentor each other.

American Conservationist Learns from Kenya

Join #YALIGoesGreen this month. Learn how to get involved at yali.state.gov/climate

By Karin Rives

Adam Whelchel of The Nature Conservancy with Wangari Maathai, the founder of Kenya's Green Belt Movement. (The Nature Conservancy)

After practicing and preaching environmental conservation for the past 60 years, The Nature Conservancy knows a thing or two about strategy. So when Adam Whelchel, a conservation director for the U.S.-based group, traveled to Kenya in 2009, he thought he would teach the Green Belt Movement in Nairobi how to, well, run an environmental movement.

Instead, he says, "I walked away as a student."

In fact, the 38-year-old Green Belt Movement (GBM) is a formidable force in the struggle to protect East Africa's threatened water and forest resources. On its list of accomplishments is the planting of some 45 million trees, not a small feat in a country where competition over land is fierce.

Whelchel said he has been humbled by GBM's remarkable ability to overcome conflicts and bring together people with different interests. "I saw that in every village I worked with them. People show a tremendous pride over their relationship with GBM," he said.

He was also impressed by the commitment he witnessed. GBM staff, he said, will put in 14-hour days to try to save their country's environment — and then still have energy for a joke at the end of the day.

The ability to laugh, no matter how big their challenges, Whelchel said, may give the conservationists in Africa an edge over many of their peers in other parts of the world.

Planting a Grass-roots Organization

Wangari Maathai, who founded the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in environmental conservation and women's rights. (© AP Images)

GBM's world-renowned founder, Wangari Maathai, began small in the late 1970s, gathering village women to grow seedlings and plant trees. After operating under the government's radar during the early years, her rapidly expanding movement caught the attention of Kenya's then-president, Daniel arap Moi. He and others in power didn't appreciate the fact that women were organizing on their own.

In an old public speech shown in a 2008 documentary about Maathai's work, Moi can be seen criticizing a "certain woman" who had dared to rally other women to plant trees. "According to African traditions," Moi said with a wry smile, "women must respect their men."

But Maathai continued, fearlessly, to organize communities in the country's semi-arid countryside, winning over more women and eventually men, teachers, children and politicians. In 2004, she became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts. Maathai stayed involved with the group's advocacy campaigns while writing articles and books at a prolific pace until her death in 2011.

Moi left power years ago, but East Africa's environmental challenges remain. Today, GBM enjoys support from the Kenyan government as well as from seasoned environmental groups such as The Nature Conservancy. GBM staffers in Nairobi, London and Washington continue working to recruit new activists and obtain funding to increase the organization's impact.

Strategy for a Growing Movement

The Green Belt Movement teaches environmental education to Kenyan schoolchildren. (The Nature Conservancy)

Whelchel traveled from his office in Connecticut to Nairobi to help GBM take what he calls "a business approach to conservation."

"It's a way to think strategically about what priorities do we have and what actions need to be taken to achieve those priorities, and to then measure the outcome," Whelchel said. "Without such plans … your messaging isn't as sharp. People want to see a return on the investments and how their efforts have made a difference, and without having a way to measure, you're less effective in telling that story."

The Nature Conservancy returned Whelchel to Kenya in January 2011, this time to conduct a workshop focused on how GBM can incorporate watershed management in its strategy for Kenya and other parts of Africa.

Trees are critical to a healthy ecosystem because they help retain rainwater and replenish groundwater supplies. Kenya, however, has lost almost its entire forest cover in the past half-century due to illegal logging, tea plantations, and pressures from a growing population that must clear land to grow food.

Today, only 6 percent of the country is covered by trees.

Deforestation has aggravated droughts and also affected energy supplies. Kenya depends on hydropower for 44 percent of its electricity, making the entire economy vulnerable to water shortages.

"The prognosis is not good, and one thing they need for sure is more forest that can capture and filter more rainwater for the people who need it," Whelchel said.

Wanjira Mathai, the daughter of the movement's founder and its international liaison, said she remembers her mother telling her and her siblings at an early age to fight for what they believe in. Mathai (who spells her last name without the double a) has since earned a business degree and transitioned from a job in public health to work full time for GBM.

“We have benefited tremendously from the exchange of technical knowledge that has enabled us to not only do our work more efficiently, but also talk about our work in ways that demonstrate the impact,” she said.

Today, GBM is stronger than it has ever been as it networks with similar organizations in other parts of the African continent and with people in power.

“It’s one of the things that has become so wonderful,” Mathai said. “The government is the custodian of these forests, so we need to be working with them.”

Volunteerism

The experiences of the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellows were as varied as the programs at their host universities, but they all had one component in common: community service.

Nangamso Koza, a Mandela Washington Fellow from South Africa, wore gloves while shoving garbage into a plastic bag. Along with other fellows at Howard University in Washington, Koza joined in for Nelson Mandela Day with other local organizations cleaning a Washington neighborhood.

Howard University Mandela Washington Fellows joined other Washington organizations to offer service on Mandela Day, July 18 2015. (State Dept./D.A. Peterson)

“Today, we served the people of DC through cleaning up the streets,” said Koza. “I am representing my village, the people of the Eastern Cape. I’m representing South Africa. I’m representing Africa. They were serving me, and now it’s my turn to do service for them.”

“The program really stresses servant leadership, being a servant of your community, leading by example and engaging through community service,” said Colleen Brady of IREX, the organization that implements the Mandela Washington Fellowship. All the programs the fellows participate in include at least one service event each week.

At Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, Mandela fellows mentored secondary school students on entrepreneurship as well as interviewing and resume writing.

At Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana, the fellows pitched in at Unity Gardens, which aims to help the hungry, offering gardening, food and cooking instruction.

University of Notre Dame Mandela Washington Fellows (from left) Lebohang Selloane from South Africa, Raindolf Owusu from Ghana, and Veronica Affuah Da-Silva from Ghana (Courtesy photo)

Fellows at the University of Delaware worked with, among other organizations, the Delaware Center for Justice, on gun-violence intervention programs, legal services for both elderly victims of crime and aging prisoners.

University of Delaware Mandela Washington Fellow, Amina Nur Alkali (center), speaks with representatives from education advocacy groups. (Courtesy photo)

"To be a leader, you have to be serving people," said Setloke Lekhela, a fellow from Lesotho. "You have to get out of your office and be part of the people."

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4 ways volunteering benefits … you

More than 1 billion people around the globe volunteer to help others. Whether working in a soup kitchen to feed the hungry or using your skills to help the needy, volunteers develop new skills while helping their communities.

Consider these great reasons to volunteer.

It develops your job and leadership skills

According to Forbes, volunteer work is one of the best ways to hone the leadership skills needed for top executive positions in the business world. Volunteering for the board of a nonprofit organization, for instance, can offer a young professional executive experience she would not find in her early professional life.

In a nationwide survey, one in five volunteers in Australia said they had learned skills that would help their current or future employment prospects. 26 percent said volunteering had helped them acquire an accreditation or qualification.

It adds to your country's economic output

Unpaid economic work adds value to national economies. A survey in Bangladesh estimated the number of volunteers in that country as 16 million and their economic contribution at $1.66 billion. In Britain, the Office for National Statistics says volunteers contribute $37 billion to the British economy. That's 1.5 percent of British GDP.

Volunteers in Johannesburg, South Africa, deliver food and clothes to a local charity. (© AP Images)

It changes your government for the better

A recent United Nations report says citizen volunteers help make governments more responsive and accountable to their citizens. It cited crowdsourced mapping of post-election violence in Kenya and citizen volunteers monitoring air quality in China as examples where volunteerism resulted in policy change.

It makes you healthy

Not only is volunteering good for the world around you, it’s good for your health — both mental and physical. Studies have shown that volunteering makes the volunteer feel more socially connected and helps ward off feelings of loneliness and depression. A study from Carnegie Mellon University suggests that adults who volunteer regularly are less likely to develop high blood pressure, a contributor to heart attacks, strokes and premature death.