

# VOLUNTEERING IN INDIA

A Snapshot of practices, attitudes, and trends.



2017

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## About iVolunteer

iVolunteer is a social enterprise that promotes volunteering. Our mission is to bring volunteers and organisations together to share time, skills and passion to promote India's social development.

Since 2001, we have expanded to reach out to over 350 organizations in India and over 40 countries globally and today, serve pan India through iVolunteer Centres in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Pune. We reach out to more than a lakh of individuals and engage 10,000 volunteers each year, making us one of the largest volunteering enterprises in India.

iVolunteer aims to impact 12 social development areas and achieves its mission through a range of initiatives and a large network of individuals, NGOs, and corporate organisations.

It also established iVolunteer Awards - India's only recognition for volunteers.

## Background



When iVolunteer was founded in 2001, it was difficult to find any research on volunteering in India. Almost any search threw up international results. Then in 2004, iVolunteer undertook a study with support from Sir Ratan Tata Trusts to understand the impressions of volunteering especially on the young university students in metropolitan cities. Since then, we have seen a few qualitative studies. However, empirical research on volunteering in the new emerging Indian economy was sorely missed.

The modern profile of volunteers includes a huge core of working professionals. Through our services we learnt how the preferences, engagement models and potential use of the new age volunteers had evolved. From 2013 onwards, iVolunteer Awards – India's only recognition of volunteers and of the contribution that volunteering makes towards nation building – was undertaken. Successive years brought to light not just inspiring stories of 'Volunteer Heros' but also newer models of volunteer engagement by NGOs, corporates and volunteer leaders. While giving unique insights, the learnings are again qualitative - we wanted a thorough research to understand the parameters that shape volunteering in India it.

In 2016, we decided to conduct such a quantitative research alongside the iVolunteer Awards. When we presented this idea to Macquarie Group Foundation, they instantly saw the huge impetus it could provide to volunteering in India and agreed to support it. Thus the 1st research was undertaken. This paper presents the findings of this research.

We are hugely indebted to Ms. Gaëlle Perrin, who almost single-handedly undertook the design, execution, analysis and presentation of this research. We also thank each individual and organization who supported us with this research. A special mention of Mr. Venkat Krishnan (founder GiveIndia), our mentor and friend, for his support in presentation of the final report.

We understand that this research, in its scope and outreach, could be further expanded. We have learnt through this experience and are fully committed to continue accumulating and sharing the learnings that will further propel volunteering in India.

Our belief: A country of the size and complexity of India can change only when its citizens come forward to adopt change. Volunteering can positively impact lives. And India.

**Shalabh Sahai**

Co-founder & Director, iVolunteer

## Introduction

In 2004, more than 16 million Indians volunteered, and the value of their work was estimated at 1356 millions US dollars<sup>1</sup>. Impressive? Maybe, but these 16 million people only represented 2% of the adult Indian population.

Why don't people volunteer more? The most common answer to this question is simple: people don't seem to have time. Combining demanding school work, professional engagements, a meaningful family life and hobbies, does not necessarily leave a lot of space for time dedicated to others.

Yet some manage to successfully juggle all their obligations, and become real "volunteer heroes". The majority of volunteers, however, do not dedicate much time, or take on many responsibilities: they tutor kids a few hours a week, clean-up their neighborhood after large events, serve food to the hungry a few days a year. Their individual impact might be small, but when multiplied by millions, it yields great results.

Moreover, if volunteers work for free, they also get their share in return: developing new skills, meeting different people, or learning about other realities are only a few of the by-products of volunteering. Beyond the "feel good" effect, volunteering can have very concrete impacts on the life of the volunteer, from finding a new passion to getting a promotion at work.

An ideal situation would be the following: volunteers lend their time and skills to help NGOs or other organizations in helping the community. Schools promote volunteering within the student body as part of the learning experience, and private companies integrate volunteering in their corporate social responsibility activities. Millions of Indians volunteer, and the country benefits.

So, how do we get there? How do we get more people to volunteer?

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<sup>1</sup>John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project: *Global Civil Society: Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector* (Salamon & Sokolowski & Associates), 2004.

The first step is to understand what works, and what doesn't. What differentiates volunteers from non-volunteers, and regular volunteers from occasional volunteers? What makes employees engage within their company's volunteering programme? How can organizations increase the impact of their volunteers? What are the constraints for individuals? NGOs? Companies? Schools?

This study aims to start answering these questions, and to bring to light recent and future trends in the field of volunteering in India. While literature on volunteering is abundant in many countries (the most written about being the UK, the US and Canada), research on volunteering in the Indian context is rather scarce. Through testimonies from individual volunteers, NGOs, and corporate leaders from all around the country, combined with multiple surveys and an analysis of the literature, this study establishes a comprehensive overview of the volunteering sector in India. To further this work, data will be collected every year along the iVolunteer Awards process, thereby creating a comprehensive database to be used to look at short and long-term volunteering trends in the country.

The first section of this report will set the context of volunteering in the Indian context, with a debate on the definition of volunteering, a short history of the Indian volunteering tradition, and an introduction to the recent changes and challenges facing the voluntary sector.

The methodology of the study will then be laid out, before findings are explored. As a conclusion, this report will present some recommendations to increase volunteer engagement, impact on the society, and innovation in volunteering.



# THE CONTEXT

## VOLUNTEERING, IN AND OUT OF INDIA

### Defining volunteering

What is a volunteer? Although the word is commonly used and understood among the general population, its exact definition is not always clear, and this has been the subject of a debate in the scholarly literature. In the common language, a volunteer is simply a person working for free. The reality, however, is that this simple definition covers many distinct realities. Understanding what is meant by “volunteer” is important on several levels: for individuals, being able to put a name on their activity increases their feeling of recognition of their work. For organizations working with volunteers, understanding who is a volunteer and what types of volunteers exist is crucial to effectively recruit, train and utilize talent. It is also important to know what qualifies as volunteering in order to quantify and study volunteering trends.

By looking at the different criteria to define volunteering, and different ways to divide volunteers into distinct groups, this section will shed light on the difficulties in defining volunteering, and on the wide range of volunteering profiles and activities.

### Unpaid or voluntary work?

The first criteria that comes to mind when defining volunteering is the lack of monetary compensation for one’s work. However, this criteria is not sufficient, as it covers all unpaid work. Let’s take an example: in small businesses, it is not uncommon that family members help in running the business, without necessarily working full-time, and without receiving a monetary compensation for the hours that they put in. In this case, even though they do not directly or individually receive money corresponding to the work they put in, they are clearly not volunteers. According to the International Labour Organization’s International Classification by Status in Employment, these workers are “contributing family members” doing unpaid work<sup>2</sup>. Another example is household work: while a person can be paid to do clean or take care of children, this type of work is usually unpaid when accomplished within one’s own house. This unpaid work, done mostly by women, does not, however, fall into the category of volunteering. It is often not recognized as work per say.

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<sup>2</sup>International Labour Organization, “International Classification by Status in Employment (ICSE)”. Accessible at: <http://laborsta.ilo.org/applv8/data/icsee.html>

### Free will and mandatory volunteering

Since all unpaid work is not volunteering, we need to add other criteria to the definition. One comes directly from the family business and the household work examples: volunteering is done out of someone's free will, without it being forced or imposed on them. Of course, this criteria is quite difficult to evaluate, as not all forms of pressure are directly visible. Social pressure, for example, can lead someone to volunteer for fear of not meeting someone's expectations, and in some cases, helping in the community is expected and thus becomes a social requirement. In other cases, strategies to promote volunteering place a requirement on voluntary work. In Canada, students in high schools across Ontario have been required to complete 40 hours of community service to graduate since 1999<sup>3</sup>. In this case, students who were not already volunteering before do not start volunteering out of free will, but they can choose where and how to work, are unpaid and have a positive impact on the community. Can they really be called volunteers?

### Self benefit and impact on the community

Another criteria for defining volunteering is that it benefits others, and not oneself. Here again, this is quite difficult to define, as the two are not mutually exclusive. Volunteers can gain skills, or be favoured in recruitment thanks to their volunteering, but it doesn't mean that they did not have a positive impact when they volunteered. This is also linked to the identity of the beneficiaries of volunteering, when applicable. In theory, the volunteer does not know personally the beneficiaries of the action, therefore their action is not motivated by any benefit they could get from the people they are helping.

### Categorizing volunteers

In addition to defining the common characteristics of volunteers, it can be argued that volunteers should be further divided and defined based on the work that they do. After all, no-one would question that the category of "employees" is divided into many subcategories, from the type of employment (short term, long term, part-time, etc.) to the type of activity performed (nurse, secretary, cook, firefighter, etc.). Why shouldn't it be the case for volunteers?

<sup>3</sup>Southern Ontario Social Economy Research Alliance. "Does required volunteering work? Results from Ontario's High School Community Service Program". 2009.

### Skills based volunteering versus unskilled volunteers

One way to differentiate between volunteers is based on what they do. While this could lead to the divisions of volunteers in many different categories, one of the most common distinction is made between “unskilled” and “skilled” volunteering. Unskilled volunteering includes tasks that are accessible to most, for example making sandwiches, transporting packages, cleaning, etc. Skilled volunteering, on the other hand, has emerged as a way to engage highly-educated people in volunteering, promising a higher impact with tasks closer to one’s expertise. Skilled volunteers can, for example, design a marketing strategy, or assist an NGO with accounting. This form of volunteering is currently promoted in India to increase the level of professionalization of NGOs, and is fitting with the requirements of many companies wanting to integrate volunteering as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility efforts.

### Commitment level

Another way to differentiate volunteers would be based on their commitment levels. Wymer<sup>4</sup> put forward a model with two groups. On one hand, “ongoing” volunteers, are committed on a regular basis and perform tasks essential to the organization they volunteer for. The other volunteers are called “episodic” volunteer, as they only volunteer for specific projects, or a few times a year. Other scholars, such as Yavas and Riecken<sup>5</sup>, proposed to categorize volunteers based on the number of hours they donated. The underlying assumption here is that ongoing volunteers, or people who donate more hours of their time, achieve a greater impact than episodic volunteers, and that we should encourage people to volunteer regularly and to dedicate many hours of their time to volunteering. However, this type of distinction has its limits, as people can volunteer only at specific times and still have a large impact on their communities.

<sup>4</sup>Wymer, Walter W. “Segmenting Volunteers Using Values, Self-Esteem, Empathy, and Facilitation as Determinant Variables.” *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1997, pp. 3–28.

<sup>5</sup>Yavas, U., and G. Riecken. “Can Volunteers Be Targeted?” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, vol. 13, no. 2, Jan. 1985, pp. 218–228.

### Formal or informal volunteering

A last category is very much linked to the commitment level and the type of work that volunteers undertake. It is related to the type of structure in which people volunteer. Indeed, while some people volunteer for political campaigns, other work with local churches, NGOs, activist groups, neighbours' associations, etc. In some cases, volunteering happens outside of any defined structure, when people spontaneously decide to take on a problem in their community. This distinction is important because it is very difficult to quantify, study, and recognize informal volunteering. This study, for example, covers only formal volunteering. Some measures of informal volunteering do exist, such as the World Giving Index category : "Helped a stranger" , but they are hard to measure and only provide a very superficial picture of informal volunteering.

### An integrated definition? Perception of volunteering and net cost theory

To settle the debate, some scholars have put forward an integrated definition, in which volunteering is seen as the combination of several factors. Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth<sup>7</sup>, describe a volunteer according to four criteria: **free will, availability of rewards, formal organization, and proximity to beneficiaries**. This is linked to the different aspects mentioned above. From these criteria, they conceptualize a spectrum, from "broad" to "pure" volunteer. On the "pure" side, the volunteer undertakes activities without any form of intimidation, including social pressure. Their work is unpaid, and they do not receive any compensation, direct or indirect, in return (this includes for example personal connections or completion of school requirements). According to their definition, the "purest" form of volunteering takes place within a formal structure, where a volunteer is committed to a certain amount of hours. Finally, the criteria linked to the proximity of beneficiaries says that the "purest" form of volunteering happens when the beneficiaries of one's action are not close relatives or friends, but rather strangers. "Broad" volunteers are at the other end of the spectrum, and take on volunteering under pressure or to obtain some compensation.

<sup>6</sup>You can learn more about the World Giving Index of the Charities Aid Foundation here : <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2015-publications/world-giving-index-2015>

<sup>7</sup>Cnaan, R. A. et al. "Defining Who Is a Volunteer: Conceptual and Empirical Considerations." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 3, Jan. 1996, pp. 364–383.

From this definition comes the net-cost theory, which sees volunteering as depending on the perception of the net costs incurred by the volunteer. In this theory, people are more likely to be seen as volunteers if they incur high costs by volunteering. This theory is interesting because it puts at the core of the definition of volunteering not a concrete criteria or factor, but rather the perception of one's actions by other members of the society. It helps in reconciling the contradictions and difficulties in defining volunteering by assigning to the word "volunteer" a social definition, varying not only based on the type of work or frequency of work, or even the type of person involved in volunteering, but also based on the person watching and assigning the "volunteer" status to others.

Put simply, this theory puts forward the following situations: a doctor volunteering its time to serve food to the homeless will be perceived by the population as more of a volunteer than a person completing community service hours as part of a sentence for a crime he committed. While this is obviously a simplification, taking into account the four dimensions of volunteering (free will, availability of rewards, formal organization, and proximity to beneficiaries), and combining them with the relativity of the public's perception enables us to start outlining a broad definition of volunteering.

In all its diversity, volunteering depends by definition on the person undertaking it. Volunteering can take many forms, require intensive work or punctual efforts, and lead to completely different outcomes. Because of this, anyone can volunteer in a different way, and fulfill their aspirations while making a difference. This is what makes volunteering so attractive, and so powerful. The lack of a clear and commonly accepted definition, however, means that the value of volunteers' work is often overlooked, and that volunteers can struggle to gain recognition for their achievements.

## Volunteering in India: a unique history<sup>8</sup>

Volunteering is not a new phenomenon in India. If the country is getting more and more popular as a destination for foreign volunteers, domestic volunteering has been part of the society for centuries, and played a central role in nation-building. Today, volunteering takes on new forms as the society and economic structure evolve.

### A short history of volunteer movements in India

Volunteering has a long history in India, and much of its early presence is due to the promotion of voluntary social action in religious texts. In Hinduism, the *Rig Veda*, one of the four canonical sacred texts written around 1500 BCE, dedicates an entire chapter to the practice of charity. From this, and without a formal welfare system supported by a state or empire through which charity could be channelled, alternative support mechanisms developed, following family or caste networks. In Islam, charity also plays an important role as *zakat* (almsgiving) is obligatory for practicing Muslims, and because members of the community should also give spontaneous alms (*sadaqah*) in the form of monetary donations or voluntary service. Other major religions in India, such as Buddhism, Sikhism or Jainism, also encourage voluntary and charitable action.

Volunteering then evolved in the 19th century, when Christian missionaries started building schools, orphanages and medical centers as part of their action to propagate their faith. This impulse influenced many among the Indian elite, particularly those studying in missionary schools. This led to a rise of Hindu councils (*sabhas*) which integrated activities similar to the ones conducted by the missionaries within the real of Hindu charity.

In the 20th century, volunteering gained even more traction, as it was promoted by both Gandhi and Tagore as the key for the regeneration of India, starting at the village level, the basis of the Indian society. While Tagore was apolitical, Gandhi's philosophy was directly linked to the opposition to the British, arguing that they had destroyed Indians' self-reliance and sense of social responsibility, and that voluntary action was one of the ways to reclaim independence from the colonial power. Gandhi later developed a "Constructive Programme" which including 18 items of voluntary action to support some health, economic or educational initiatives.

After independence, voluntary agencies played an important role in nation-building, under the influence of the Gandhian philosophy. The government supported voluntary activities, and allocated part of its budget to support voluntary associations, as they supported the government.

in providing social welfare services. In 1953, the central government created the Central Social Welfare Board to support and promote voluntary associations and extend their reach into rural and un-served areas. As these NGOs or voluntary associations were largely apolitical, they received extensive support from the government, which explains why the voluntary sector expanded widely after independence.

However, by the late 1970s and particularly during the Emergency period declared by Indira Gandhi (1975-1977), the Congress government realized the potential threat posed by NGO leaders, as they could reach out to many people and organize the population against the government. As a result, the

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<sup>8</sup>For a more complete history of volunteering in India, see Chapter 2 of Handy, Femida. *From Seva to Cyberspace: the Many Faces of Volunteering in India*. New Delhi, India, SAGE, 2011.

government cracked down on the NGO and voluntary sector, accusing many organizations of supporting the opposition. Funding restrictions were tightened, and politically oriented NGOs were accused of subversion. By the mid 1980s, most radical and political NGOs had disappeared. After this episode, the government started to get more involved in regulating and controlling the voluntary sector. The strong central development model of India meant that the government had the capacity to crack down on dissident NGOs while rewarding and attracting others through government grants. Growth of the NGO sector was henceforth mostly controlled by the government, and some NGOs became mere channels for the implementation of government programmes. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the government started to give back more autonomy of action to NGOs and voluntary associations, and a separate entity, the Council for the Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) was founded in 1986 to allocate government and other indigenous funds to NGOs.

Today, the Indian civil society boasts an impressive number of 3.1 millions NGOs, that is, one NGO per 400 Indians. However, volunteering in today's India is not limited to NGOs: it takes on diverse forms from online volunteering to voluntourism, and comes from diverse sources, including workplaces and schools.

### Contemporary volunteering in India

Volunteering is well and alive in India today. Indians volunteer with all sorts of NGOs, religious groups, political parties or activist groups.

Indians can start volunteering in school, or, in many cases in college. This can be through either student clubs, volunteer drives by NGOs in colleges, or through specific, student-centered initiatives. An example is the National Service Scheme (NSS), a scheme launched in 1969 to "develop the personality of students through community service", and has 3.2 millions active students as of 2015.<sup>10</sup> Other examples include students associations such as AIESEC, which promotes volunteering internationally.

Another fast-developing avenue for people to start volunteering is through their employer. Companies worldwide face pressure from consumers and governments to develop and showcase their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) through activities that give back a share of their profits to their communities. Indian and multinationals companies present in India are no different, and corporate social responsibility activities are now part of the strategy of many large companies. In the case of India, this trend is encouraged by the Central Government: as per the 2013 Companies Act, it is mandatory for companies with annual revenues of over 10 billion rupees to give away 2% of their net profit for CSR activities. These activities must fall under a number of areas defined by the government, namely for the eradication of extreme hunger and poverty, the promotion of education, gender equality and women empowerment, the reduction of child mortality and improvement of maternal health, the fight against HIV-AIDS, malaria and other diseases, the promotion of environmental sustainability, employment enhancing vocational skills, social business projects or emergency relief. Because of this law, CSR spending is estimated to have increased from 33.67 billions rupees in 2013 to 250 billions rupees after the law's enactment.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>The Indian Express. Numbers for 2015. Based on « India has 31 lakh NGOs, more than double the number of schools », 1 August 2015.

<sup>10</sup>Official website of the National Service Scheme, <http://nss.nic.in/>

<sup>11</sup>The Guardian. "Indian law requires companies to give 2% of profits to charity. Is it working? ". 5 April 2015.



The Companies Act, however, does not have any specification related to volunteering. Indeed, volunteering is only part of CSR efforts by employers, who can decide to spend their 2% on donations to charities. Employee Volunteer Programmes (EVP), however, are becoming increasingly popular as they increase the attractiveness of the firm, keep employees motivated and engaged, make the companies' CSR efforts more visible, and can be part of a global CSR strategy. They can be designed in different ways, from individual assignments spanning over several months to specific "community days" or team building exercises. Employee Volunteer Programmes benefit the community, but also the company itself, helping building meaningful links between staff, encouraging leadership, innovation, and skill development.

Another trend in volunteering, which is beyond the scope of this study, has to do with foreign volunteers coming to India. While this is not new, this form of volunteering has become more and more important in terms of the number of volunteers coming to India each year and engaging in "voluntourism" trips, often organized by specialized agencies. In many cases, these volunteers pay a fee to discover the country and participate in some community development project, for periods of time ranging from weeks to months.

In addition to these trends linked to the type of volunteer and their introduction to the volunteering sphere, the form in which volunteering takes place is also evolving. For example, people now have the option to volunteer online when the task at hand does not require physical presence. This can be the case for content writing, the design of a marketing strategy, or even the development of a website. This can potentially bring new people to the volunteer sphere, if the opportunities for online volunteering are properly advertised and accessible. Specific initiatives are also brought forward by NGOs to engage with more people around a specific cause and a limited period of time. During "DaanUtsav", the joy of giving week, NGOs all around the country mobilize volunteers for various projects. This week serves as a catalyst for the campaigns of the NGOs, while bringing on board new volunteers who might participate in future volunteering activities.

Volunteering is a very important building block of India, and it has been a part of the Indian identity for centuries. While volunteering is now evolving and taking on new forms, it is always facing competition for time, as volunteers having to balance their professional and family commitments with the practice of volunteering. So, who exactly volunteers? How often? For which cause? The next section will try to answer these questions, through the analysis of a country-wide survey of the population.

# **THE STUDY**

## **A SNAPSHOT OF VOLUNTEERING IN INDIA**

### Rationale and methodology

The purpose of the review is to contribute to deepening the understanding of volunteering in diverse cultural environments, and to facilitate cross-regional learning between national and international agencies engaged in similar work and objectives. More precisely, the objectives are to understand the emerging trends in volunteering and to identify popular and successful models of volunteer engagement in India. Once these models are outlined, they can be shared to help volunteer promoting organizations to engage with more volunteers.

The objective of this study is to lay the basis for an annual report on volunteering, which will run jointly with the iVolunteer Awards, a function held by iVolunteer to recognize the achievements of exceptional volunteers and organizations across India. By collecting data annually from volunteers and non-volunteers alike, iVolunteer will build up a quantitative database for studying volunteering trends in India.

This study is based on a literature review and on the data obtained from a country-wide survey. After a first review of the literature, a comprehensive set of questions was designed and tested by the research team. This set of questions was directed at individuals, volunteers or not, to understand their volunteering habits and the reasons behind them. Once the responses were collected, they were analyzed and compared with other reports and studies on volunteering in India.

This survey was written in English in the form of an online questionnaire, and spread through the regular channels of iVolunteer, that is, through employees, volunteers, partners NGOs and companies, and volunteering networks.

The respondents came from all over India, with a representation from 17 states (although Tamilnadu (25.2%), Maharashtra (22.7%), Karnataka (16.2%) and Delhi (13.2%) were over-represented). The sample showed a good balance of women (45,6%) and men (54.4%), with ages spanning from 18 to 62.

However, several bias have to be acknowledged. First, the low number of respondents (432) relative to the size of the population we were studying (the entire Indian population) means that the results cannot be truly representative of the global trends within the Indian population. Second, because of the medium of data collection (online survey), its language (English), and the channel through which the survey was disseminated, the respondents are overwhelmingly urban (with 98.5% living in cities, amongst which 78.9% in metropolitan cities), and educated (88.6% having completed at least graduate education, 40% of which having some postgraduate education). Finally, because the survey was quite long, the respondents were most probably people that were very interested in volunteering and research about volunteering. For this reason, the sample is biased towards more regular and committed volunteers, with less occasional or non-regular volunteers than are present in the general population. This is visible in the fact that 85.6% of the respondents volunteered, which does not reflect the situation of the general population. Still, we feel that the data collected is important for research in volunteering in India, because of the depth of the questionnaire and the variety in the questions asked.

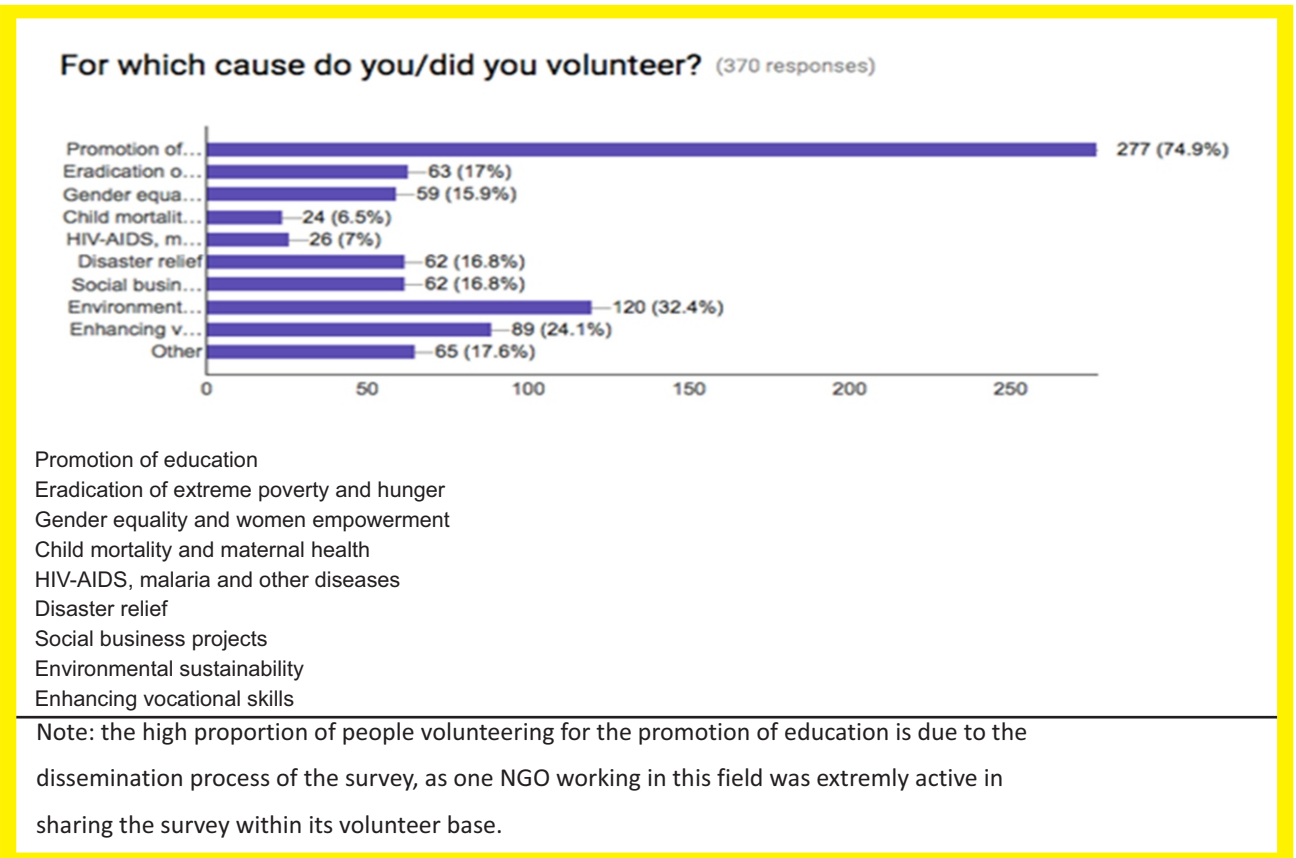
## Findings

So, what can we say about Indians volunteers? The data that we have collected points to three main findings, which are a source of optimism for India volunteering. First, volunteering is extremely diverse, whether we look at the causes supported, the tasks performed, the organizations involved, or the type of commitment showcased by people. Second, volunteering is attractive in and of itself to people, who are unanimous about its benefits. Third, the main constraint in starting or sustaining volunteering might not be time, as generally claimed by people, but the presence of information and accessible volunteering opportunities.

### FINDING 1: Volunteering is extremely diverse

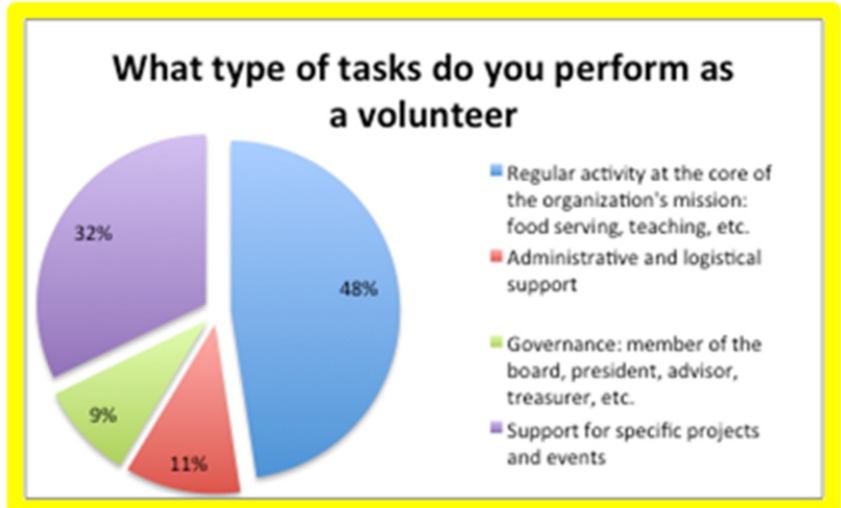
As anticipated, the answers to our survey show just how diverse volunteers are, and how they engage and conceptualize their volunteering experiences in different ways.

The first way to observe diversity in volunteering is very simple: it is by looking at the causes for which people donate their time and skills. In our sample, it was very clear that people volunteered for a wide variety of causes.

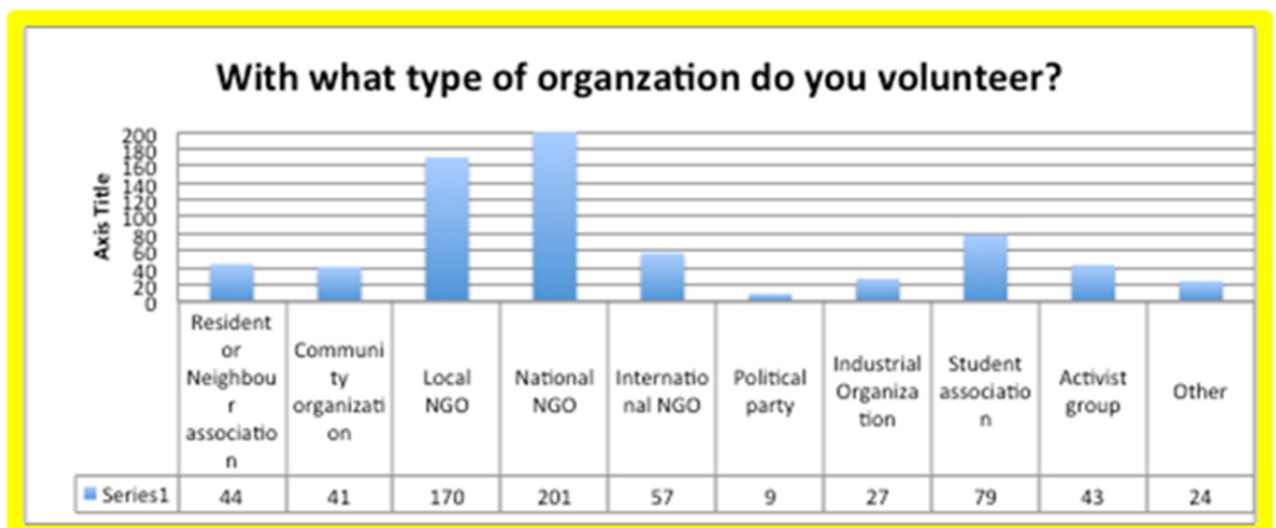


Volunteers also perform a wide range of tasks, from regular, core activities, to governance-related tasks, such as sitting on the board or advising NGO staff.

While most of the respondents reported performing regular activities at the core of the organization's mission, which often required a long-term commitment, it is interesting to note that over 30% of them provided support for specific events or projects, which means that their volunteering was more flexible and probably over shorter periods of time.

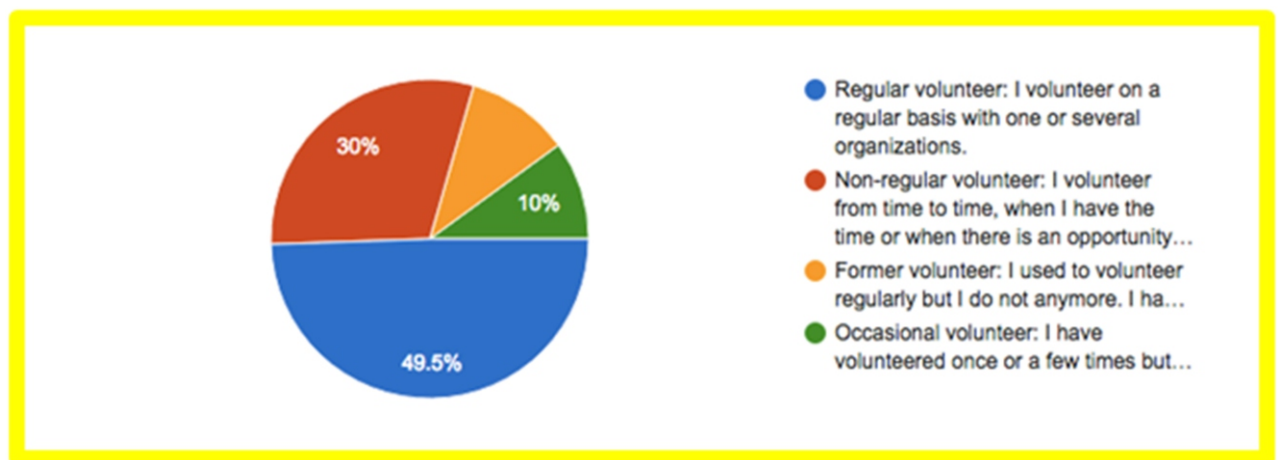


Volunteers also work with a variety of organizations, from international NGOs to neighbours or students associations. The majority of respondents reported volunteering with a national or local NGO (53.4%), which shows how strong and lively the NGO sector is in India.

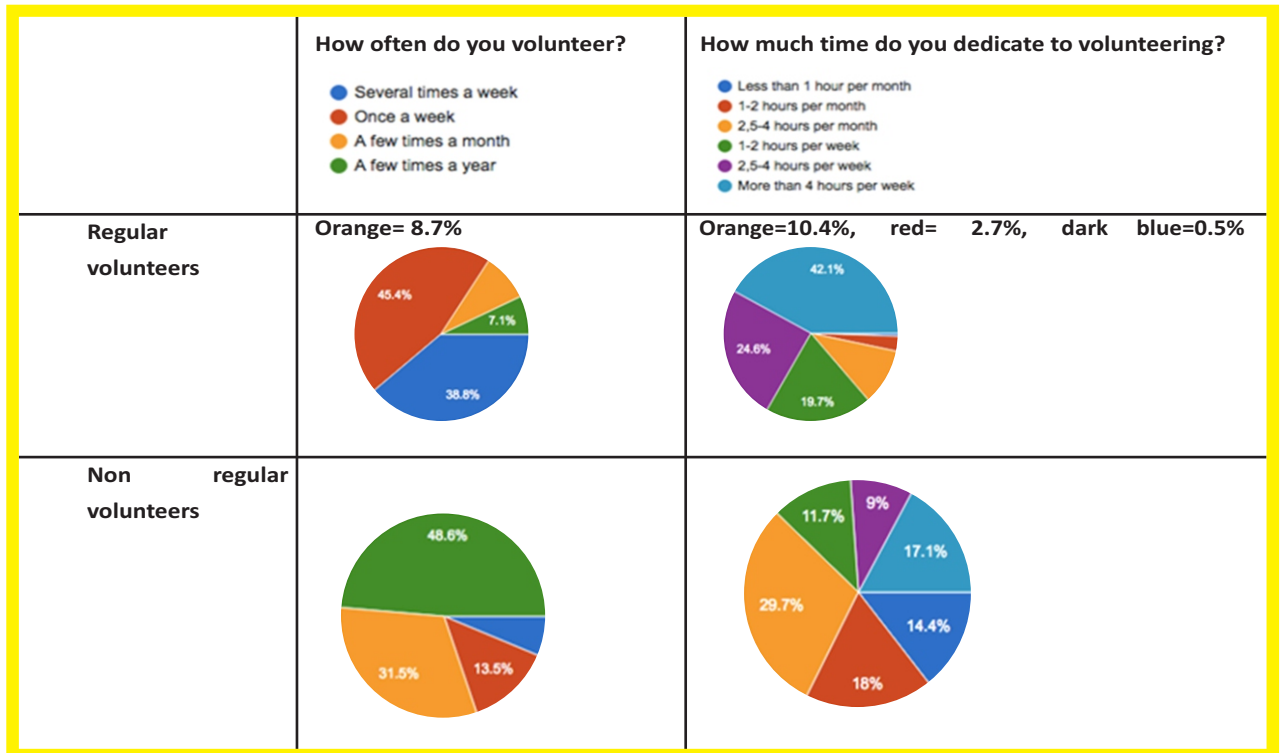


The variety in the profiles of volunteers is also evident when looking at their commitment level. While 50% of respondents reported being regular volunteers, 30% were non-regular volunteers, volunteering from time to time according to the opportunities, but having volunteered in the last

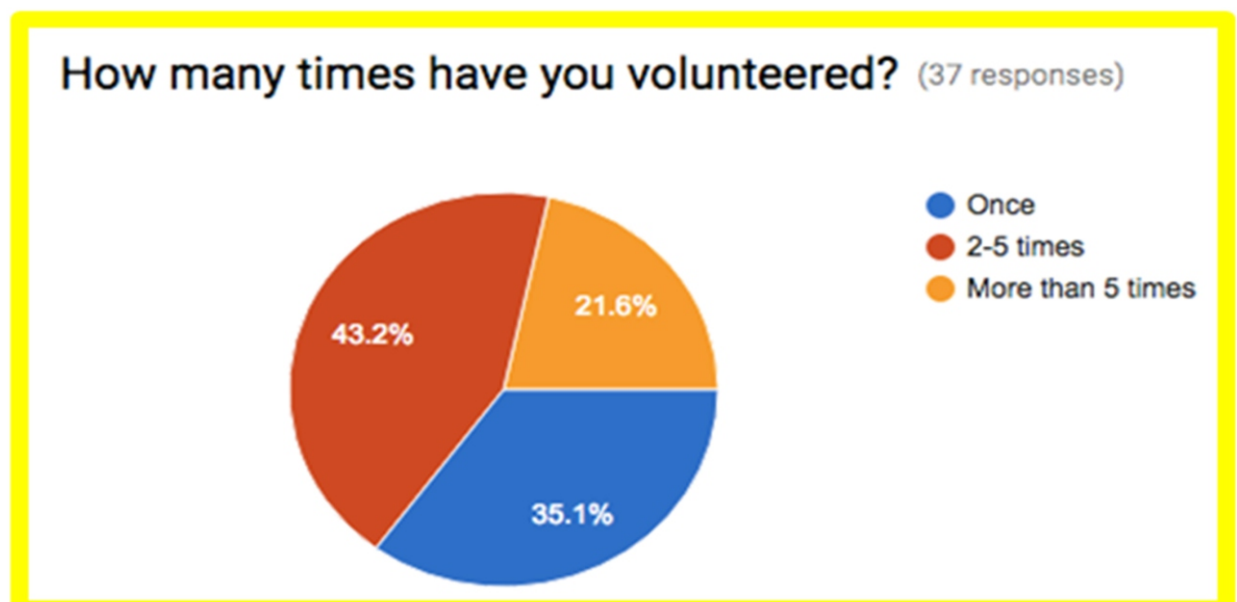
year. In addition, 10% described themselves as “occasional” volunteers, having volunteered only a few times, but without any extensive commitment or will to commit.



Accordingly, the time they committed to volunteering was very different, as well as the frequency at which they performed volunteering activities. If regular volunteers were active at least once a week in the large majority (84%), most non-regular volunteers volunteered a few times a year (almost 50%), or a few times a month (31.5%). From these different commitment patterns stem differences in the amount of time committed by the volunteers, with regular volunteers understandably spending more time volunteering than non-regular volunteers. Interestingly, non-regular volunteers reported very different time commitments, ranging from over 4 hours a week (for 17% of them) to less than one hour per month (for 14%) of the respondents. This is another proof of the diversity and flexibility in volunteering opportunities and profiles.



In addition to the regular and non-regular volunteers, a third category, the “occasional” volunteers, regrouped people who would not defined themselves as volunteers, but who have tried volunteering a few times. While a minority within the respondents who volunteer (10%), these people still represent an important group, and they can give us valuable insight into why people start volunteering. Amongst them, the majority had volunteered only once or less than five times (respectively 35.1% and 43.2%), with a smaller group having volunteered more than five times (21.6%).





## FINDING 2 : There is a universal appeal of “volunteering” in and of itself: but for further volunteering, the cause and the organization matter

People seem to be attracted to volunteering as an activity. Indeed, when asked why they volunteered for the first time, the majority of respondents say that their main reason was that they simply wanted to try volunteering. In addition, trying volunteering was the most cited secondary reason among the people who did not pick “trying volunteering” as the main reason for volunteering for the first time.

### Why did you volunteer for the first time?

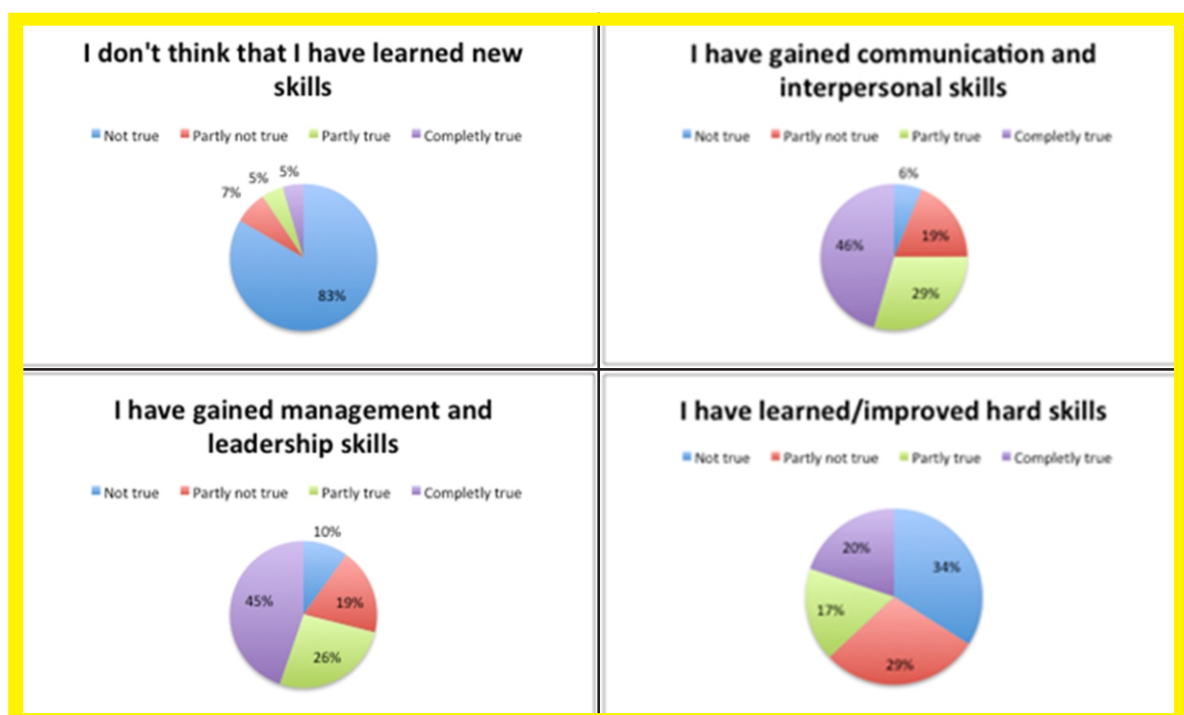
#### The main reason was:

1. I wanted to try volunteering (38.5%)
2. I wanted to learn new skills (20.4%)
3. I volunteered for a specific action in my community (12%)

#### A secondary reason was:

1. I wanted to try volunteering (23.6%)
2. I wanted to learn new skills (22.5%)
3. I volunteered for a specific action in my community (14.6%)

Moreover, all of the respondents agree on the benefits of volunteering, as well as on the usefulness of volunteering in the society.

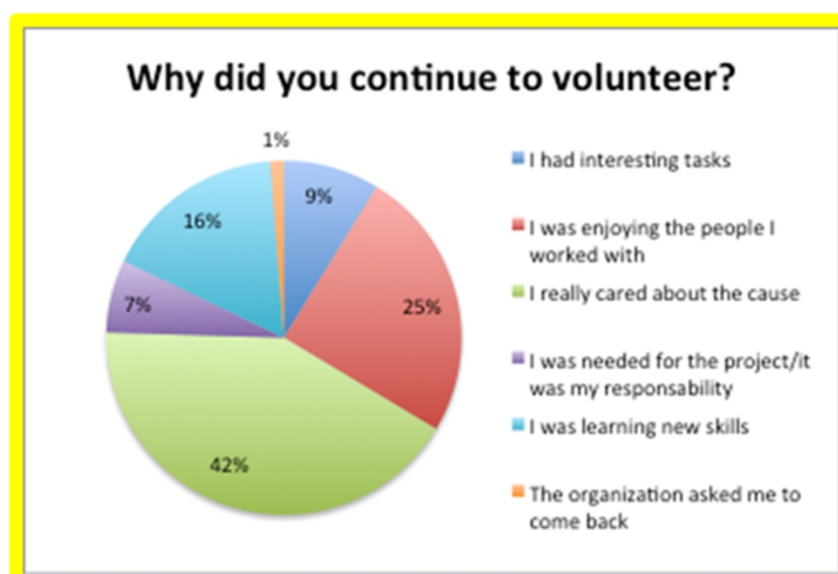


**Impact ranking: how would you rank the following charitable activities in terms of their impact on the community?**

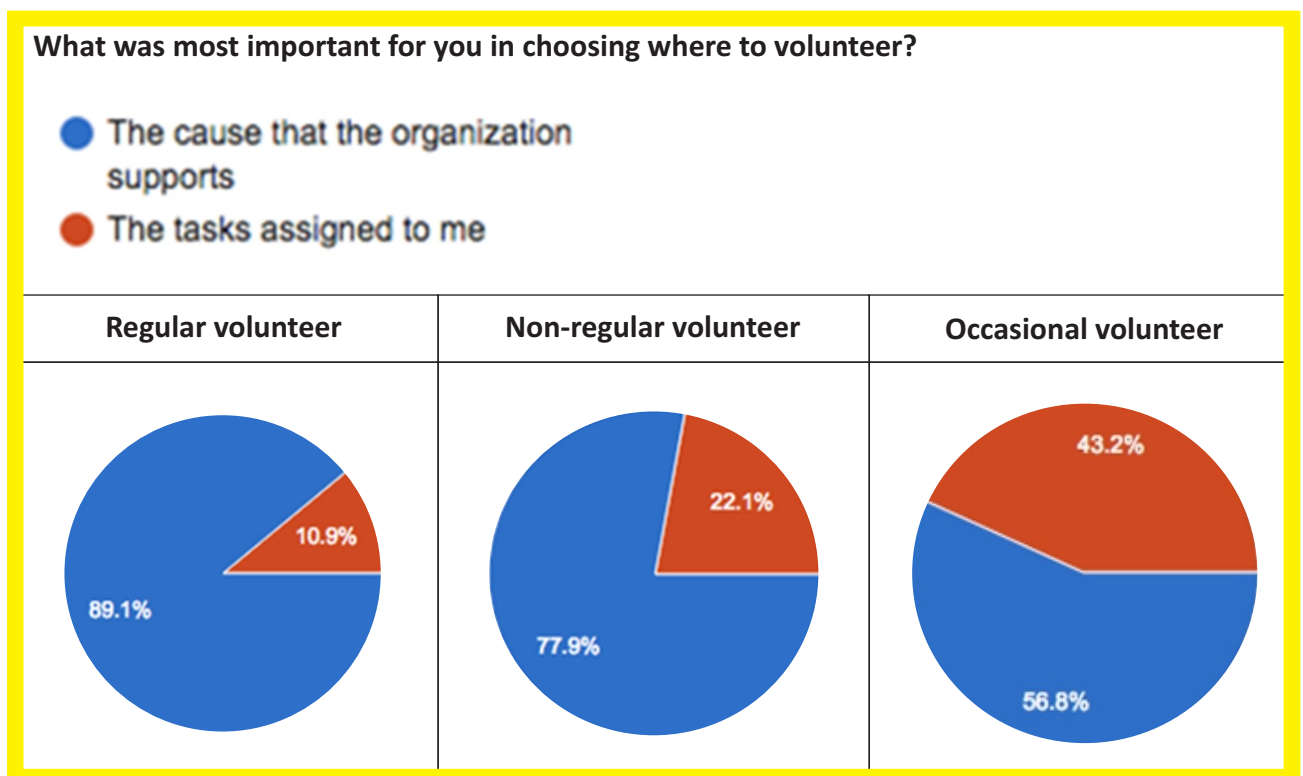
1 Volunteering a few hours a week within a formal organization	(ranked most impactful by 47% of respondents)
2 Participating in your school or workplace volunteering programme	(ranked second most impactful by 42% of respondents)
3 Giving a large amount of money once a year to a specific organization or giving small amounts to several organizations	(ranked third most impactful by respectively 36% and 40% of respondents)
4 Regularly giving money to or buying small things for people on the streets	(ranked fourth most impactful by 32% of respondents)

If the benefits of volunteering are clear to the respondents, this does not seem to be the case for the general population: 11.1% of volunteers indeed state that they do not volunteer more because their friends and family do not understand why they do so. This points to a clear problem of recognition of the work of volunteers, and a lack of information about the value of volunteering.

This attractiveness of volunteering and the recognition of its benefits, however, should not distract from the fact that other factors determine whether volunteers sustain their efforts. Among the reasons cited by volunteers for returning, the most often cited are the cause (42%), the other volunteers and staff (25%) and the learning of new skills (16%).

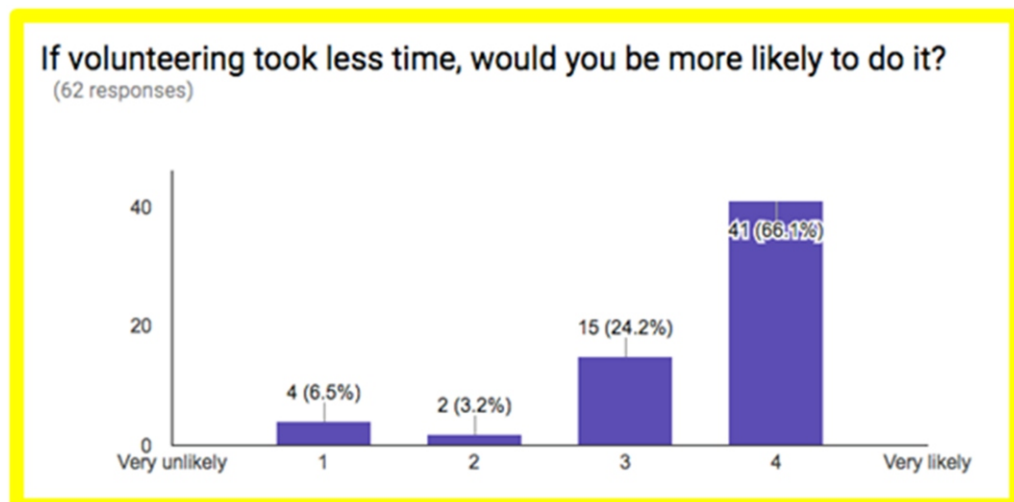


Even while choosing where to volunteer, the cause supported by the organization is the most crucial factor to ensure sustained efforts by the volunteers. We tested whether volunteered considered most important the tasks that they would be assigned to, or the cause they would support, particularly when initially choosing where to volunteer. The results were striking: more of the regular volunteers favoured the cause compared to non-regular or occasional volunteers. This hints to the fact that it is the cause that makes people come back to volunteering, and not necessarily the tasks that people have to perform.

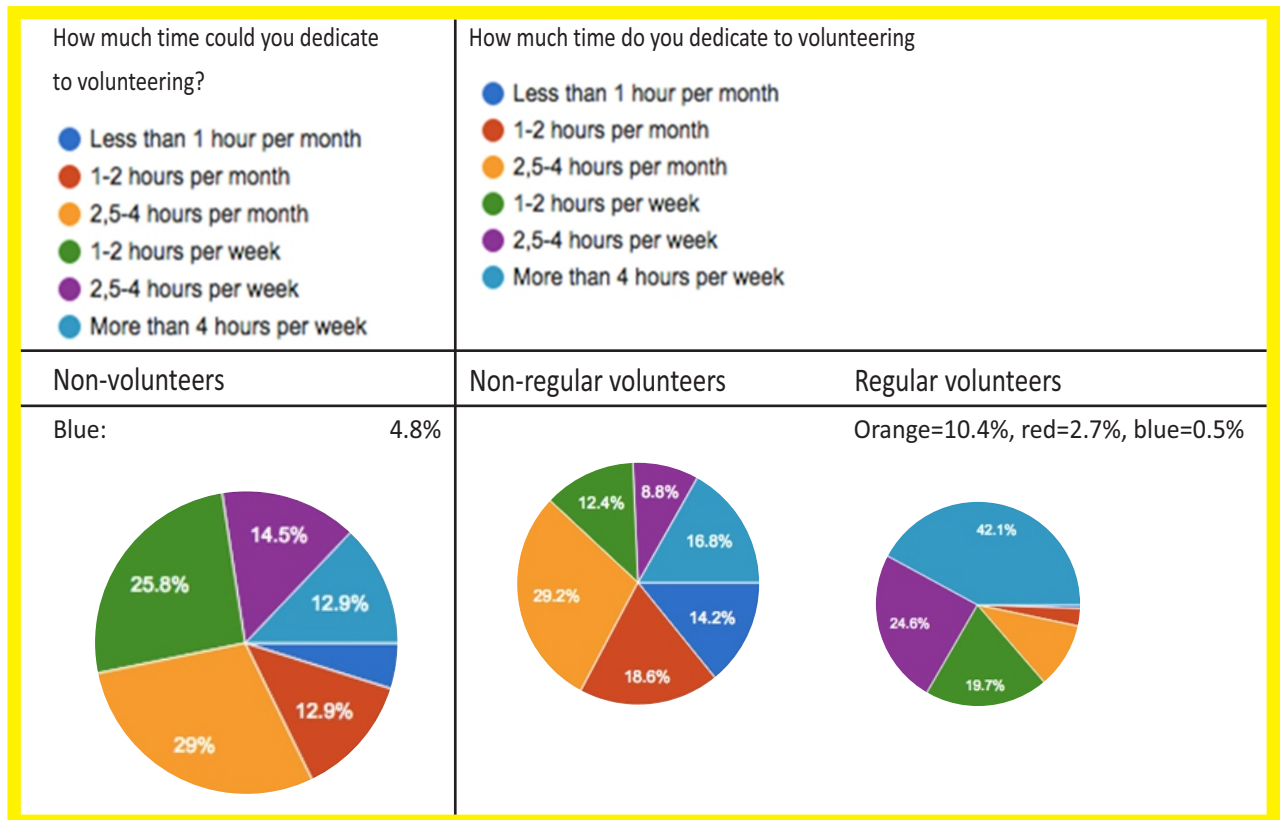


### **FINDING 3 : Time is not necessarily the defining factor in starting or sustaining volunteering- opportunity is.**

We asked non-volunteers a simple question: if volunteering took less time, would you be more likely to do it? The response was overwhelmingly the affirmative: 90.3% said that they were either likely or very likely to do so.



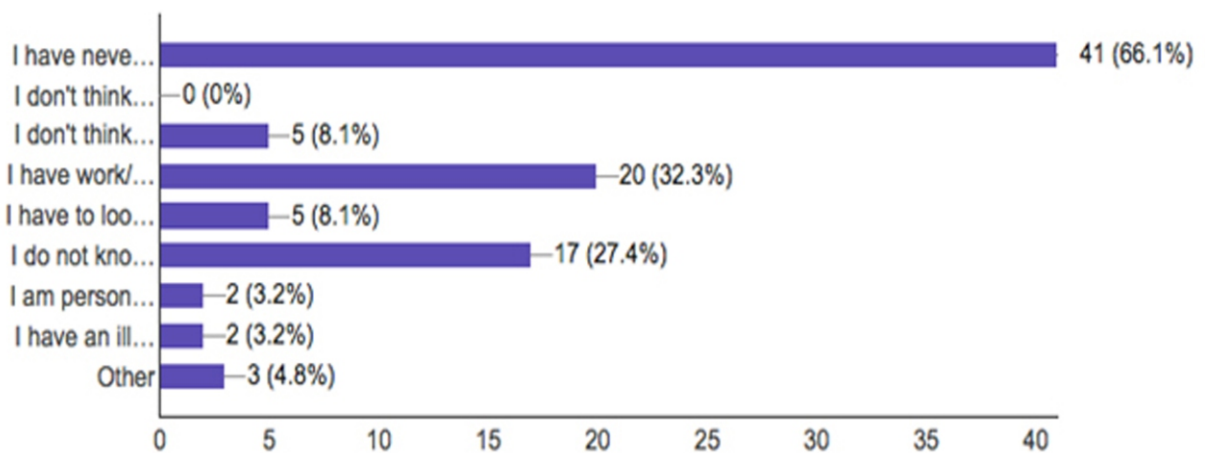
This is no surprise, as time is cited the most when it comes to reasons for not volunteering. We then asked them how much time they had that they could dedicate to volunteering. The answers here were quite surprising, as over half of the respondents said they could dedicate over 1 hour per week to volunteering. When comparing this answers with the amount of time that regular and non-regular volunteer commit, the contradiction became even clearer: non-volunteers think that they do not have enough time to volunteer, but they could actually spare as much time as non-regular volunteers do, and in some cases, even as much time as regular volunteers.



Clearly then, time is not the main factor preventing people from volunteering. It seems, rather, that the problem is a lack of awareness about how much time volunteering really takes, and, most importantly, a lack of easily accessible information about volunteering activities. This fact is visible among all the people surveyed.

For non-volunteers, the main reasons as to why they haven't started volunteering is that they have never had the opportunity to do so (66.1%), and the third main reason is that they do not know of a structure they can trust (27.4%). Combined, this means that 93.5% of non-volunteers are not volunteering because they do not know how to start and have never had the opportunity.

### Why have you never volunteered? (62 responses)

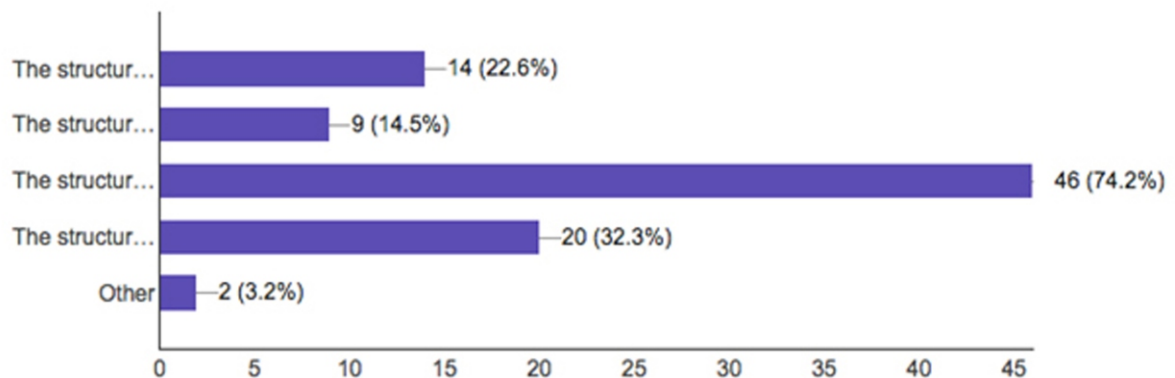


I have never had the opportunity  
 I don't think that volunteering is useful  
 I don't think I have the skills required  
 I have work/school commitments  
 I have to look after my family  
 I do not know of a structure I can trust  
 I am personally not interested in volunteering  
 I have an illness or disability which prevents me from volunteering

In addition, the main factor for them in choosing where to volunteer would be that the structure communicates frequently about volunteering opportunities (74.2%), or that it provides long-term volunteering opportunities (32.3%). This comes even before recommendations by friends (22.6%) and recognition of work of NGO in public sphere (14.5%).

## What would be the key factors for you in choosing an organization to volunteer with?

(62 responses)



The structure is recommended by friends, family members or colleagues

The structure is present in the media and publically recognized for its work

The structure is easy to approach and frequently promotes volunteering opportunities

The structure provides long-term volunteering opportunities

Occasional volunteer also reported not volunteering further because they lack the opportunity: 16% said that they did not volunteer further because no one approached them or they didn't find an opportunity, and 32.4% said that they would volunteer again if the opportunity arose.

Former volunteers also reported stopping their volunteering activities because they did not find opportunities: the most cited reason for stopping was moving to a new place and not finding a new organization to volunteer for (51.3%).

## Why did you stop volunteering?

1. I moved to a new place and did not find a new organization to volunteer with 51.3%
2. I started working or changed jobs and could not find the time 46.2%
3. My family situation changed and I could not find the time 17.9%
4. My project was completed 10.3%
5. I lost the motivation to volunteer 2.6%

Finally, when we asked all the volunteers why they did not volunteer more, the lack of opportunity was the second most cited answer.

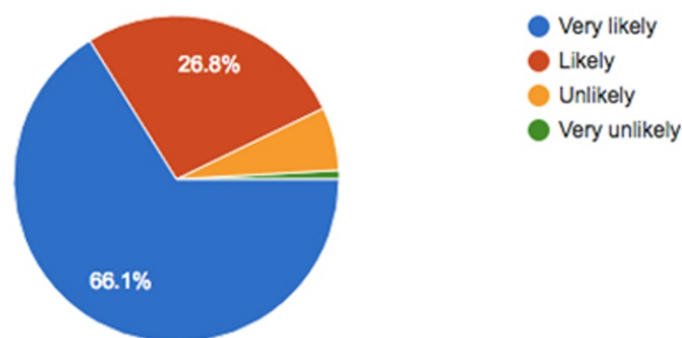
### Why don't you volunteer more or more often?

1. I do not have more time: 41%
2. I cannot find opportunities to volunteer: 22.4%
3. My family/friends do not understand why I spend time volunteering 11.1%

An easy way to create opportunities and make people engage with voluntary work is to bring volunteering directly to them. For this, volunteering activities at work or through school are crucial.

Volunteering at work is a promising avenue to promote volunteering, as it is already well established in many companies. In our sample, 61.7% of the respondents that were employed reported to have participated in a volunteering activity through their workplace, and 13.5% of them had volunteered only through their workplace. What is interesting here is that volunteering through work seems to be a positive experience, motivating people to volunteer outside of work. 92.9% of respondents said they were likely or very likely to volunteer again through their work, and 67.9% reported that they would either start volunteering or volunteer more outside of work because of this experience.

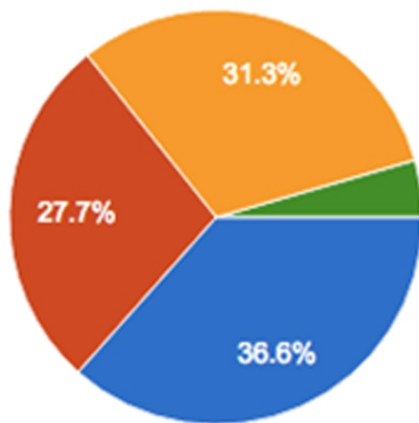
### Will you volunteer through your employer in the future? (112 responses)



Orange= 6.3%, Green=0.9%



Did volunteering at work motivate you to volunteer outside of your workplace?



- Yes, I started/will start volunteering outside of work after this experience
- Not really, I was already volunteering and continued the work I was doing
- Yes, I was volunteering outside of work but this motivated me to v...
- No, I did volunteer outside of work before and did not/will not...

Green = 4.5%

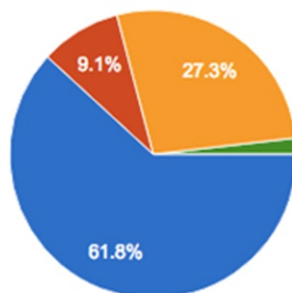
Orange= Yes I was volunteering outside of work but this motivated me to volunteer further

Green= No, I did not volunteer outside of work before and did not/will not start after this experience

Volunteering through school also seems like a good entry point into volunteering, as 61.8% of people having participated in a school volunteering opportunity report that they will start volunteering outside of school.

Did this experience motivate you to volunteer outside of school?

(55 responses)



- Yes, I started/will start volunteering outside of school after this experience
- Not really, I was already volunteering and continued the work I was doing
- Yes, I was volunteering outside of school but this motivated me to...
- No, I did volunteer outside of school before and did not/will n...

Green=1.8%

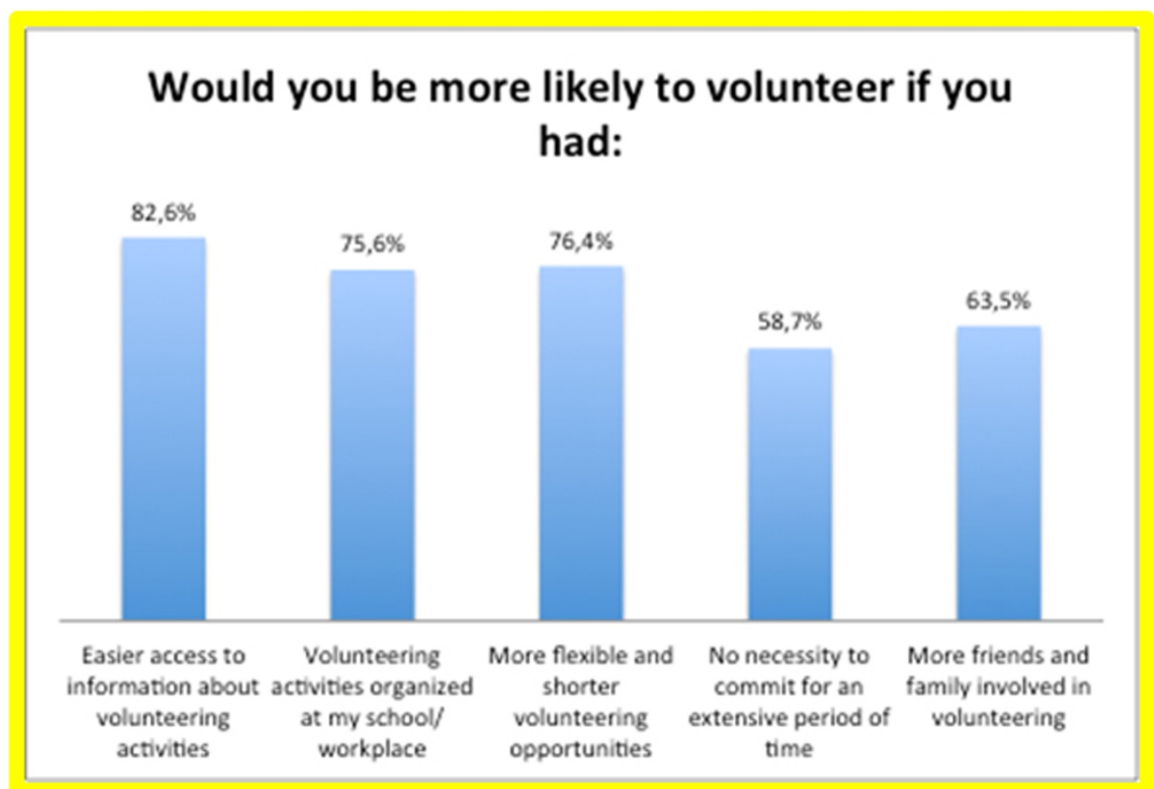
Orange= Yes I was volunteering outside of school but this motivated me to volunteer further

Green= No, I did not volunteer outside of school before and did not/will not start after this experience

# THE CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that volunteering is thriving in India, and there are avenues to get even more people involved.



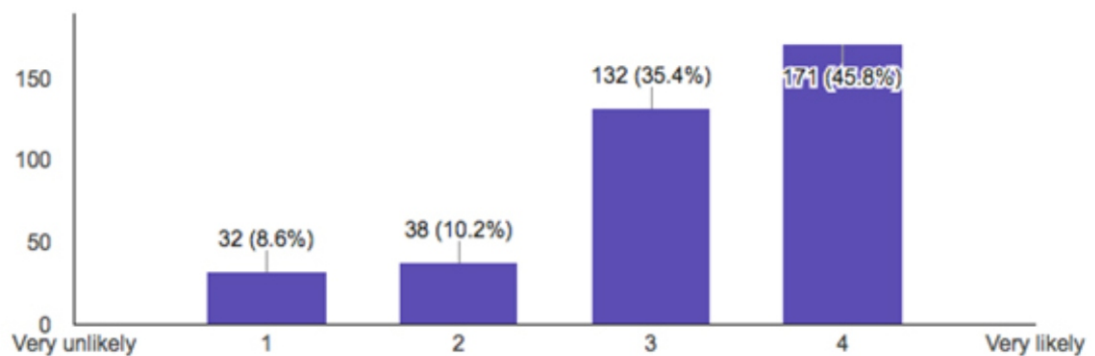
First, we can make information about volunteering opportunities easier to access for more people. This can be done by NGOs through an updated website, the usage of volunteer newsletters, or the recruitment of volunteer ambassadors to raise awareness about volunteering activities.

Second, we can continue promoting volunteering activities in schools, colleges or workplaces, as these have proven to be effective means to engage people in volunteering. These activities, however, should be well designed and carried out, so that the participants feel that they are having an impact. Follow-up activities should also be planned so that volunteers have the time to get engaged and motivated in their project.

A third avenue could be the further development of intermediary platforms for promoting volunteering, which would help bring opportunities closer to the people.

### Would you be more likely to volunteer if an organization acted as an intermediary between you and the people looking for volunteers?

(373 responses)



With these three steps, most of the constraints identified in this research could be overcome, and the number of volunteers would greatly increase. In keeping with India's great volunteering tradition, a large volunteering force could be key in dealing with contemporary challenges, and participate in reducing poverty and inequalities countrywide.

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## About the Author



This whitepaper was drafted by **Gaëlle Perrin**, a French volunteer with iVolunteer. Gaëlle is a young professional passionate about rural development and climate change, with a Master's degree in International Affairs from Sciences Po Paris, working on policy analysis and research in France and abroad. During her first stay in India in 2013, she discovered the power of volunteering while interning with the Association for India's Development in Chennai. Impressed by the impact of her colleagues, all volunteers, and eager to learn more about the country, she came back in the fall of 2016, this time in Mumbai, to work with iVolunteer. In France, she volunteers with an NGO to fight discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation by engaging with middle and high schools students through workshops.



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