

Outpost

Heat Hazards

Don't get zapped by heat stroke

Canada's
**Champions
of Change**

TAN YOUR MIND. TRAVEL FOR REAL™

CBC news & Outpost
SEARCH FOR CANADA'S TOP VOLUNTEERS

ENERGIZING THE PACE of PROGRESS

Volunteers are lending talent and tenacity to the planet's poorest places. The result?
Positive change like never before

BY DEBORAH SANBORN

YOU'VE HEARD THE TERM a thousand times—international development. Any idea what it really means? Helping the poorest countries—with close to 1.4 billion people—develop stable governments and economies? Yes...but. "Development is more than the improvement of GDP in a country," says Flavia Pansieri, head of the United Nations Volunteers program. "[It's] an expansion of opportunities for all to lead productive and successful lives, with good levels of education, life expectancy and income."

We've all seen the headlines of conflicts and crises. Maybe we think, doesn't it ever get better? Turns out, it—our world—actually has over the last quarter century, in vastly wonderful but under-reported ways. Extreme poverty rates are falling. Democracies are growing. The HIV rate is sliding in the very places it was skyrocketing a decade ago. Mothers and children are surviving in higher numbers. Middle classes are rising in India and China and Africa. Remember how we used to say 'Third World'? Now we say 'developing one.' That's progress.

Yes, there's work to be done—more access to medicines, better governance, more aid, an end to the global fiscal crisis. Yet there's no denying the optimism wafting around the world, or the way can-doism is engulfing its people. How are opportunities being created? By people in developing countries sacrificing for change, and their many allies on the planet, including legions of volunteers accelerating the pace of progress. "Volunteers trigger a ripple effect of ever-more engagement," says Pansieri. "We've seen this in communities, in villages, all over the world. We send volunteers to work with leaders on the issue of, for example, violence against women—and suddenly we have this community engaging to stretch the reach of the message

beyond what one or two persons would have achieved."

Canadians, ever the great travellers, have been lining up to help since the early 1960s, when the idea of travelling for global change spread like wildfire across Canadian campuses. The concept gave birth to CUSO, now a veteran volunteering agency, which sent its first English teachers to Southeast Asia in 1961. Fifty years later, 11,000 Canadians are CUSO alumni.

That was then—now volunteering for international development isn't just a right of passage for the young, but a growing trend for the young at heart. The Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO) has sent thousands of mid-life and retired professionals to lend expertise to countries on the move. Agri-scientists helping farmers, engineers working on sanitation projects. Since 1967, CESO volunteers have worked on more than 40,000 projects in 50 countries, World University Service of Canada (WUSC), which assigns 400 volunteers to projects a year, has a Leave for Change component where Canadians can take job hiatuses to volunteer abroad.

Yet the big shift in volunteering for global change has to be the concept of in-country partnership. "If we want to make a lasting impact," says Pansieri, "we're not going to be in the driver's seat." Developing countries must take the lead in setting their priorities. We can support, advise, advocate. But we can't take over, and we have to build skills. Is this realistic? The Canadian Network for International Surgery sends doctors to Africa not to perform life-saving services, but to train health-care providers on better trauma care. WUSC supports more than 120 partners in 13 countries on projects that cover gender equality, education, health, agriculture and local economic development.

Many of these efforts are supported by

the Canadian International Development Agency, because CIDA says it values the role Canadian volunteers play in helping countries meet the Millennium Development Goals of poverty reduction (see sidebar). Defined purpose is the new mantra.

Yet it's also true many Canadians spend their own capital for the privilege of volunteering abroad. Which just serves to remind how far the world has come. Gone is despair at overwhelming odds of poverty, the fear that workable solutions would never emerge. And while one person, one volunteer, can change the world—Gandhi, Dr. King—a group effort may be even better. "Not even the strongest, most powerful head of state on his or her own can change the world," says Pansieri. But they can absolutely inspire others to do so.

HOW THE MDGs ARE SHAPING THE WORLD

- Launched in 2000 by the United Nations to reduce poverty by 2015, the 8 Millennium Development Goals now guide the efforts of volunteer organizations.
- Eradicate extreme poverty.** By helping farmers pay for tools like fertilizer, Malawi had a 53 percent food surplus in 2007.
- Achieve universal primary education.** In Tanzania, the elimination of school fees led to an enrolment rate of 98 percent.
- Promote gender equality.** In 2008, Rwanda elected more women to its parliament than any country.
- Reduce child mortality.** Studies show progress of declining rates in 13 regions.
- Improve maternal health.** Once more than 500,000 maternal deaths a year, a recent study now puts the number at 343,000 worldwide.
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.** 33.4 million people have HIV. Yet new infections are declining, and more access to medicines means AIDS-related deaths are falling.
- Ensure environmental sustainability.**
- Develop a global partnership for development.**

—Aaron Leaf

Sources: UNDP, World Health Organization, The Lancet

NOMINATE YOUR VOLUNTEER @ WWW.CBC.CA/CHANGE

CANADA'S CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE WWW.CBC.CA/CHANGE @ Outpost >> xv

JULY/AUGUST 2010