

Our impact

Creating a fair world for everyone
VSO Impact Report 2023/24



Lasting change
through volunteering



VSO creates lasting change by unlocking the power of people. We foster the voice and agency of the world's most marginalised and vulnerable communities to create lasting change. We do this by strengthening grassroots networks of active citizens, supported by a global movement of volunteers.

Our vision
**A fair world
for everyone**

Our purpose
**Creating lasting
change through
volunteering**



Since we started in 1958, we have worked in over 90 countries, deployed nearly **92,000** volunteers and supported almost **85 million** people.

Our strategy in numbers

24.8 million people reached, 4.2 million of them directly, including:



Nearly **3.6 million** through our education programmes



94% being youth, aged between 15 and 24



Nearly **0.2 million** through our health programmes



52% of the people we worked with were women



Over **0.4 million** through our resilient livelihood programmes



3% of the people we worked with were people living with disability

VSO worked with communities in 36 countries

Numbers represent impact achieved in the first two years of VSO's current strategic plan.

Saadia, a 14 year old girl, dropped out of a local government school due to financial restraints and body shaming, Pakistan.



Our values

Collaboration

- Empower poor and marginalised people to take charge of their own development
- Share skills and knowledge to create long lasting, sustainable change
- Build collaborative partnerships that promote innovation, growth and impact

Knowledge

- Lead volunteering for development, setting the standard for ourselves and others
- Use evidence and insight to guide our actions
- Recruit the right people and work where we have the greatest impact

Inclusion

- Stand beside and advocate for those who have been denied choice and opportunity
- Promote diversity and equality throughout our work
- Encourage different, inquisitive perspectives

Integrity

- Commit to safeguarding and take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse and harm
- Treat others with respect, as equals
- Be open, transparent and accountable in everything we do

Welcome

The past few years have been marked by significant global challenges, the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle-East, the escalating impacts of the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. These events have underscored the fragility of our global community. We are all at risk but some are much more vulnerable than others.

VSO's purpose is to create a fair world for everyone. This means every person has an equal opportunity to realise their rights to a safe, healthy and purposeful life. Our commitment is to ensure that no-one is left behind. To meet that commitment, VSO promotes locally-led development using our Volunteering for Development method to increase local accountability, promote inclusion and build resilient people, communities and societies.

We support vulnerable and marginalised people – especially women and girls, the young and people with disabilities – to take action on development issues important to them by building their confidence, capability and voice.

We strengthen civil society by building a culture of volunteerism and civic engagement. At the same time, we build the capacity of governments and service providers to respond to the demands of marginalised and vulnerable citizens.

This is a whole-systems approach which recognises that, for those who are vulnerable, issues of education, health, livelihoods and climate change are all interrelated and cannot be approached in isolation. You can read more about what that looks like in practice in pages 10-11 in this report.

By enabling people, and in turn, their organisations and communities, to play a more active role in development, this locally-led approach provides the means to achieve more sustainable and equitable change. Above all, it inspires and ignites the potential for active citizens everywhere across the globe to step forward and drive the change that will create a fair world for everyone.

In 2023/24 we are proud that we have directly supported over 1m people through our work from places as far apart as Sierra Leone and Mongolia. We also celebrated a significant milestone this year with the deployment of our 100,000th VSO volunteer. Between 1958 and 2013, we have worked with 50,000 volunteers. Despite the challenging funding environment and the disruptions caused by the pandemic, over the last decade we have deployed the same number again and we will continue to expand our volunteer community in the years ahead.

We take particular pride in our efforts to promote volunteering and civic engagement around the world. Civil society space is increasingly under threat in many countries around the world. VSO is committed to working with governments, private sector partners and civil society organisations to promote active citizenship, especially among vulnerable and marginalised people. This is essential if we are to deliver positive, sustainable change for everyone. Details of this work can be found on pages 18-19.

We hope you enjoy reading this annual report and discovering more about the impact we have and how we achieve it. We sincerely thank you for your interest in and support for our work. Together, we can create a fairer world for everyone.

Julia Lalla-Maharajh OBE
Chair VSO

Our volunteering for development method

Our Volunteering for Development method recognises the importance of relationships in forging a shared understanding and commitment and building collective action for lasting change. Through teams of community, national and international volunteers, Volunteering for Development brings together a diversity of perspectives and experience to generate insights, innovate ideas and undertake actions that can address the underlying causes to complex problems facing our communities. It inspires and ignites the potential for active citizens everywhere to step forward and drive the change that will create a fair world for everyone. Together we are changemakers

All our programmes address the root causes of marginalisation by focusing on three areas – what we call “core approaches” – that reliably tackle the structures, systems and conditions that make people vulnerable. These core approaches are fundamental to our Volunteering for Development approach, ensuring the people we work with have the confidence and capacity to bring about change in their own lives.

VSO's three core approaches

Social inclusion and gender

Millions of people face discrimination because of their gender, age, disability, cultural background, sexual orientation. VSO aims to dismantle the causes behind exclusion in all its forms.

Resilience

Disasters, disease outbreaks and other shocks and stresses can have a devastating effect on communities. Those who are already vulnerable are most at risk. Our goal is to work with communities and societies to create stronger systems and capability wherever we identify vulnerability or fragility to shocks and stresses.

Social accountability

Many people around the world are denied basic rights that are guaranteed in law, or may be subject to laws that are unfair or unjust. Corruption, fear, and unequal power dynamics stop people from speaking up and demanding a fairer, more just society. VSO works to support people exercising their voice, no matter who they are or where they are from. We also work alongside authorities responding to the needs of people they are there to serve.

What do we mean by primary actors?

Primary actors are those marginalised people in the communities we work with. They are the ones engaging in projects, helping us understand the community's needs, and working with volunteers to build a fairer world. Our responses are driven by demand from the poorest and most marginalised. We always work with local partners who can guide the most effective support.

Why do we use that term?

'Primary', because they are principal contributors to VSO's work and they shape the design and delivery of programmes. 'Actors', because they are active agents. VSO doesn't do development to communities, it works alongside them.

"People First" principles

People-centred

Primary actors are at the heart of everything we do. We dismantle all forms of bias that result from the advantages and disadvantages given by our societies and cultures to certain groups of people and not to others.



Accountable

We are each accountable for the decisions we make, what we say, how we act and how we make others feel.



Reflective in our Practice

We are aware of ourselves, the impact we have on others and the social and cultural context in which we operate. We continuously learn to improve our own practice and encourage others to do the same.



Evidence Based

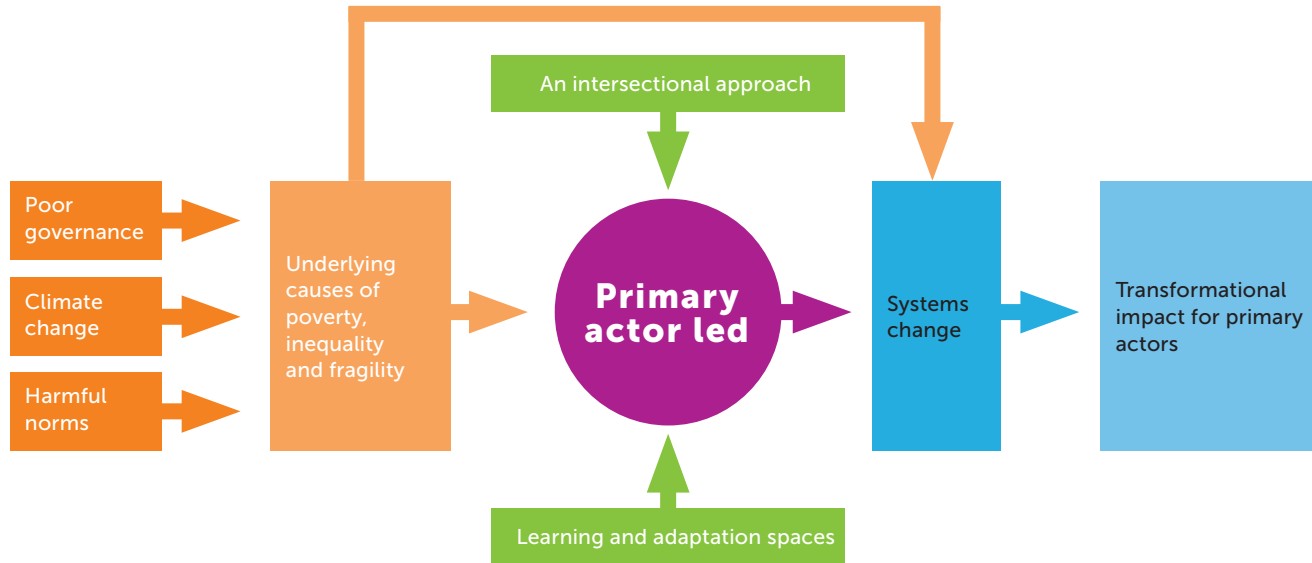
In everything that we do, we base our decisions on research and evidence. We remain conscious that our bias and prejudice may influence our evidencing.



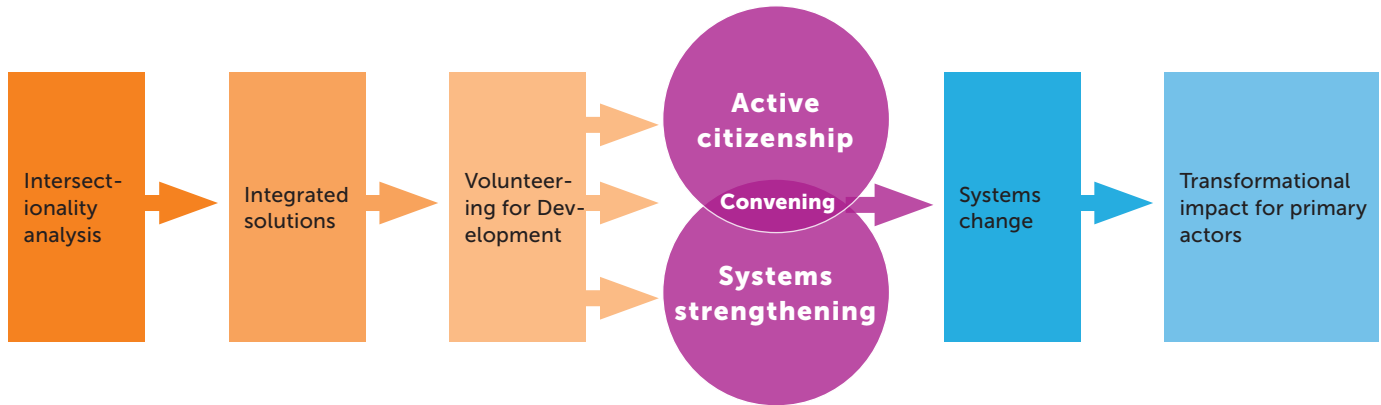
Doing development differently

VSO's volunteering for development method provides opportunity for everybody to bring about lasting change.

The change we want to see... a systems approach



How it happens...VSO's value addition



It does that by focusing first on those who are left out by society – those living in extreme poverty, or with disability and illness, those who face discrimination and violence for their gender, sexuality or social status. These are not passive “beneficiaries” of aid. They are the “primary actors” at the heart of our work. It is from their viewpoint and actions that we seek to define the issues, opportunities, and solutions that deliver sustainable and locally led change.

Pioneering Green Entrepreneurship in Kenya

The IKEA Foundation funded Waste to Work Project in Kenya is designed to reach the most vulnerable youth active in the waste sector. The project is led by VSO and jointly implemented with our private sector partner TakaTaka Solutions and our knowledge partner, International Child Development Initiatives. The project strengthens youth-led, green startups that create decent jobs through waste recovery and value addition.

Working Across the System

This project uniquely engages with the entire waste ecosystem. It is in the collaborative efforts of waste pickers, waste companies, VSO, and our learning partner that a foundation has been built for sustainable growth. We have forged strong relationships with local government and municipalities. This recognises that addressing barriers such as access to childcare centres and establishing links with health facilities and social protection services will ensure equity of opportunity for the most vulnerable waste pickers.

Putting Primary Actors at the Centre

Of course, at the heart of the system, and our efforts, are the young waste pickers themselves. Feedback mechanisms and tailored activities reflect our commitment to understanding and effectively addressing their needs and motivations. It is important that the focus on the volume of waste recycled and successful enterprises doesn't overshadow the diverse circumstances and underlying barriers some waste pickers face. Providing diverse pathways for all individuals, including those who may face additional challenges, is imperative.

As VSO navigates this project journey, the dialogue and collaboration that are core to our Volunteering for Development approach will remain at the heart of our efforts to improve the lives of vulnerable young people in Kenya.

Steps to Sustainability for the Planet and for Young People

The project has embarked on a transformative journey, guided by five core interventions:

- Organise and empower: through the Youth for Sustainable Development platform, national and community volunteers organise waste pickers and vulnerable youth into youth business clubs, with support to strengthen their agency, leadership capacity, and livelihood resilience.
- Entrepreneurship support: expert volunteers provide crucial technical support that equips grassroots green entrepreneurs with the tools to start operating new businesses successfully.
- Sustainability and viability: we support the strongest startups to innovate, learn and create more viable and sustainable business models.
- Market access: volunteers facilitate market opportunities through business fairs, meetings, and mentorship, helping to open doors for youth to showcase their businesses and build valuable connections.
- Process and pricing: we enhance the capacity of waste pickers and vulnerable youth to sell, sort and process more waste and secure a better price for their products by connecting them with a diversity of buyers, bolstering their economic prospects.

In its first year we have made significant progress, reaching over 2,000 youth and collecting 2,100 tonnes of waste.



Mike and Kevin, two waste pickers at a buy-back centre, where they collect recyclables from the community and sell them to companies. From VSO, they've been given PPE equipment. They've also received training on waste segregation so they can maximise profits, life skills and financial literacy. Kevin has applied this knowledge to his waste picking group.

A Journey of Agency and Voice For Women's Collectives in Kenya

VSO is committed to building the agency and amplifying the voice of primary actors, particularly women. Our work aims to strengthen rural women's capacity through collective action, fostering a ripple effect of positive change in their communities.

In communities across Kenya, women often lack the confidence and the space to make the changes they want in their lives. Cultural norms inhibit their ability to advocate for themselves and there are few opportunities for them to raise issues with duty bearers. Women are left reliant on men in their communities to provide and support their households. These are the issues the UK government funded, Active Citizenship Through Inclusive Volunteering and Empowerment (ACTIVE) project has addressed.



Creating the Spark: Women Coming Together

Women have clear ideas of activities they want to start and businesses to set up, but lack the know-how, the connections and financial assistance. To address these gaps, VSO volunteers are working closely with women's collectives to train and support them.

Through VSO's entrepreneurship training, women's collectives have become more involved in community savings and loans initiatives and have developed their skills in managing finances, increasing their financial independence. In addition, training and mentorship have boosted women's confidence and enabled them to be actively involved in the development of local government policies and planning

With the support of VSO volunteers, women's groups are now well-prepared to apply for government loans and grants. In Makueni, the Huruma Asili Women's Group successfully submitted a proposal for a modified solar drier to the Agriculture Sector Development Support Programme. This equipment helped the group to sell larger quantities of dried fruit and vegetables at local markets and to diversify their products, enhancing the collective's resilience to changing circumstances and climate change impacts.

Fanning the Flames: Women Taking Action

With VSO's support, women's collectives have participated mangrove restoration, fish farming, food production, and table banking. The Kidundu Mtongani collective has successfully mobilized and trained 150 local youth in mangrove planting and restoration efforts, resulting in the planting of 10,000 mangroves every fortnight. The Ecodada collective has collaborated with the County Government, VSO, and sub-county officers to provide inputs to the Climate Change Act.

Spreading the Fire: Strength in Unity

Women's collectives demonstrate the power of collective action and advocacy. No matter what brings women together, the holistic support provided by VSO volunteers to women's collectives has been critical to them addressing the multiple issues faced by women and girls. Through our Volunteering for Development approach, women's collectives everywhere stand a better chance to claim their rights and to ignite change in their communities to achieve the empowerment of women and girls, and gender equality.

Expanding Youth Access to SRHR

VSO, working in partnership with five consortium partners and over fifty collaborating partners, is changing the landscape of access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for young people across five countries in East and Southern Africa (Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and Zambia).

Recognising that young people face multiple, overlapping vulnerabilities in their lives, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs funded Make Way programme takes a progressive intersectional approach to identify and dismantle barriers that hinder marginalised youth from accessing SRHR services.

Building Accountability, Improving Access to Health Services

Drawing from our extensive experience in building healthy communities, strengthening inclusive systems, and promoting meaningful youth engagement, VSO has played a key role in the Make Way consortium.

One of our standout contributions has been the development of the intersectional community scorecard (ICSC). Designed to hold duty bearers to account, this innovative tool empowers marginalised youth to assess, monitor, and evaluate the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality of SRHR services in their communities. It's not just about inclusion – it's about unravelling the complex web of power dynamics that dictate government performance outcomes, challenging the status quo with every data point.

With the support of our dedicated social accountability volunteers, the ICSC has been rolled out across all five countries, igniting change in over 25 health facilities. We have provided technical support to over 50 civil society organisations within the consortium, catalysing the implementation of the ICSC and amplifying its impact far beyond the project borders. The ripple effect is tangible – benefiting approximately 30,000 young people this year alone.



Amplifying Impact, Championing Change

A testament to the ICSC's power has unfolded in Rwanda, where Learn, Work, Develop (LWD), a Make Way partner, has integrated the tool into 110 safe spaces, empowering youth to champion SRHR issues. Through structured dialogue, youth raised critical concerns, including challenges with free SRHR services, lack of accessibility in rural areas, lack of access for people with disabilities and inadequate privacy and respect for young people in facilities. Using this evidence, VSO, LWD, and fellow Make Way partners organised a national dialogue in Kigali, uniting duty bearers and youth advocates in a common cause. The result? A seismic shift in policy, as national health policymakers pledge to enlist younger people as Community Health Workers in targeted districts.

Continuing the Advocacy Journey

Using our Volunteering for Development approach and fuelled by the transformative potential of the ICSC, VSO is continuing to amplify advocacy efforts on local, national, regional, and global stages, giving voice to our primary actors on the issues that affect their lives. It's not just about driving change – it's about sparking a positive revolution in SRHR outcomes, through community volunteer action.

Youth and Active Citizenship: Empowering Change Across Borders

Over the past year, VSO has continued to strengthen youth networks with over 5,000 members in 17 countries to enhance youth leadership in development. These youth networks are a powerful demonstration of the impact of active citizenship. They have been central to advancing inclusion, accountability and resilience within communities, institutions and policies around the world.

Philippines: Building Resilience, Sustaining Peace

In the Bangsamoro Region of the Philippines, persistent challenges of poverty, climate vulnerability and conflict have long cast a shadow over communities, affecting people's access to basic services and economic opportunities. Through the UK government funded ACTIVE grant, youth volunteers are working with other partners in leading the movement to build resilience and sustain peace. These young changemakers are not just catalysts for change; they're architects of hope. They have supported fisherfolk, ex-combatants, marginalised

women, young people and people with disabilities (PWD) to develop income-generating social enterprises, protect natural marine resources and maintain social cohesion.

Ethiopia: Fostering Dialogue, Amplifying Voices

Straddling the Kenya-Ethiopia border, marginalised youth in the fragile Moyale and Miyo regions of Ethiopia live at the sharp end of the devastation caused by drought, food insecurity, vulnerable livelihoods and inter-communal conflict. Through the Austrian government funded Integrated Development Peacebuilding and Humanitarian Efforts (IDPHE) programme, youth network members have been facilitating and leading dialogues with young people to understand the links between their limited livelihood opportunities, their lack of engagement in effective decision-making mechanisms and the cycle of conflict in their communities. VSO volunteers have recommended livelihood interventions that could reduce the conflict in this region. They are also amplifying the voices of youth

in conflict affected areas in national advocacy platforms and in their engagement with government decision makers on health, education and livelihoods.

Cambodia: Mobilising for Policy Change, Tackling Environmental Challenges

In Cambodia, VSO-supported youth volunteers are mobilising to effect change at the district policy level, advocating for improved waste management plans and getting local authorities to commit to those plans. Their tireless efforts and unwavering dedication are reshaping policy landscapes and driving tangible impact in communities. From grassroots activism to policy advocacy, they're proving that youth voices are not just heard; they're heeded.

Sustaining Momentum: A Journey of Lifelong Engagement

For many youth volunteers, joining a youth network is just the beginning of a lifelong journey of active citizenship. In Myanmar, research conducted by VSO showcases that over 60% of volunteers continue to be engaged as active citizens in their communities, promoting environmental protection initiatives, and fostering community resilience. In volatile contexts like Myanmar, their enduring commitment underscores the sustainability of this investment in young people and the transformative power of youth engagement in building more resilient societies.



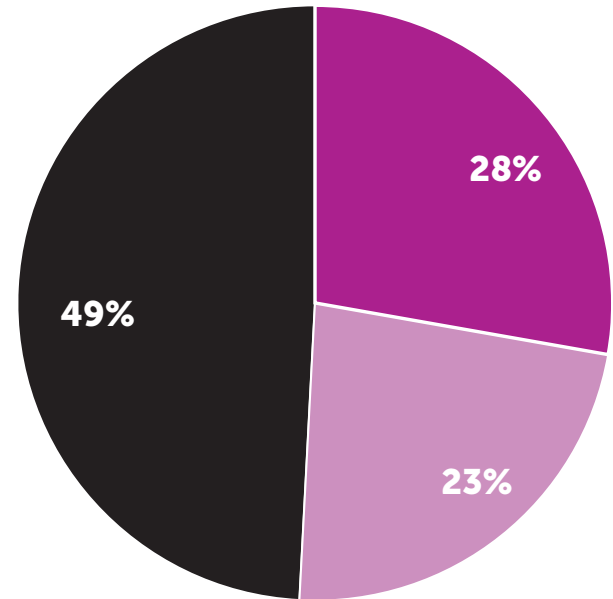
Women Empowerment Movement - Rural Improvement Clubs members attend an interface meeting with VSO staff from the UK, in Mindanao, Philippines.

Where our money comes from

In 2023/24, VSO's total income was £32.1 million. The money came from generous individuals, trusts, corporates and institutions.

Where our income came from 2023/24

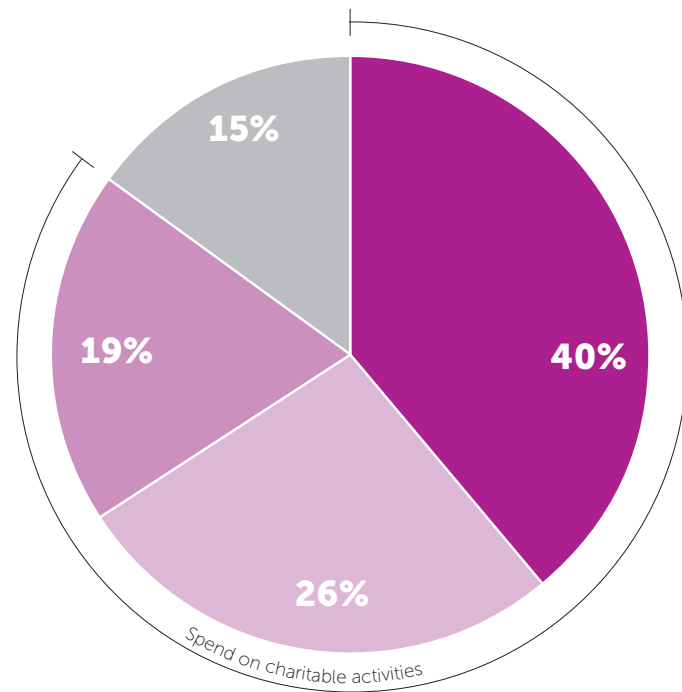
- Institutional Grants: 49%
- FCDO ACTIVE grant: 28%
- Other donations: 23%



**TOTAL
INCOME
FOR THE YEAR
£32.1m**

How the money was spent 2023/24

- Inclusive Education: 40%
- Resilient Livelihoods: 26%
- Health: 19%
- Raising funds: 15%



**TOTAL
EXPENDITURE
FOR THE YEAR
£34.5m**

Thank you

Our work wouldn't be possible without the dedication and support of thousands of people, partners, and organisations. From the volunteers who share their time and skills in our programmes around the world, to the partners who work with us on programme development, delivery, research and fundraising. From the staff and supporters who work tirelessly on our behalf, to the people and organisations who donate the vital funds needed to support our work. The change is being felt by over a million people around the world, right now. Together, we're working towards a fair world for everyone. Thank you. Here are just some of the individuals and organisations who made a vital contribution to our work in 2023/24.



African Union • Austrian Development Agency • Avert • British Council • Civil Society and Indigenous People's Mechanism of the Committee on World Food Security • Deaf Child Worldwide • Education Cannot Wait Consortium • Education Development Trust • European Commission • Eriks Development Partner • Errol & Glynis Pereira • Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office • Global Affairs Canada • Global Campaign for Education • Global Partnership for Education • GSRD Foundation • Hempel Foundation • IKEA Foundation • Imagine Worldwide • International Civil Society Centre • International Forum for Volunteering in Development • International Health Coverage • Johns Hopkins University • KfW Entwicklungsbank • Lego Foundation • Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of Cambodia under the loan of Asian Development Bank • Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands • Norwegian Refugee Council • Onebillion • Palladium • Pan African Climate Justice Alliance • Population Services Kenya • Randstad • Robert Carr Fund • Civil Society Networks Fund • Royal Norwegian Embassy • Save the Children International • Southern Africa Network of Prisons • Standard Chartered Foundation • Thammasat University • The Worshipful Company of Grocers • UCL • UNESCO • UNFPA • UNICEF • UNGEI • UNOCHA • UN Trust Fund • UNV • UNWOMEN • USAID • Weeshuis der Doopsgezinden • Wees een Kans • Wemos • WHO



Global Affairs
Canada



IKEA Foundation



The LEGO Foundation



We are deeply grateful to the supporters who left a legacy to VSO through gifts in their wills. These generous legacies will provide valuable funding of our work for generations to come. We extend our sympathy and heartfelt thanks to their loved ones.

Andrew Baillie, Brenda Bray, Bryan Clark, Anthony Corcoran, Marjorie Corcoran, Pauline Davies, Christine Eastmond, Joan Glass, Anne Hazelton, Mary Mundy, Rosalind Norris, Brian Raper, David Simpson, Fiona Scott, Richard Tunstall.

**If you would like to know more about VSO's work
worldwide, visit www.vsointernational.org**

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