# A NEW DAWN FOR VOLUNTEERING IN DEVELOPMENT

**Research & Think Pieces
prepared for IVCO 2022**

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# Introduction

IVCO 2022 marked an important moment for the volunteering sector. As we emerge from three years of COVID-imposed restrictions, the theme 'A New Dawn for Volunteering in Development' gave us a lens through which to explore what we have learned, how we have innovated, what the new normal might look like, what we have allowed to fall out of focus, and what comes next. Conversations at IVCO 2022 covered a wide range of issues, including COVID as a catalyst for change and the need to continually innovate, decolonising our practice, diversifying and blending different models of volunteering, and doing more to address climate change.

These conversations were framed and informed by the papers in this collection, which includes a framing paper and thirteen short 'think pieces'.

The framing paper is Nick Ockenden's outstanding A New Dawn - Strategic Pathways for the Future of Volunteering in Development. Drawing on a collective strategy process carried out with Forum's members and the wider volunteering community, the paper sets out the challenges and opportunities facing our sector in the coming years, and offers pathways to help organisations prioritise and effectively navigate the post-COVID environment.

In the think pieces, leading voices from across our sector address the IVCO theme from thirteen distinct perspectives. To highlight just a few, Dr. Rebecca Tiessen of the University of Ottawa re-examines the concepts of prosperity and flourishing and asks what they mean for volunteering in development. In a challenging piece, Ratherford Mwaruta of the Zimbabwe Workcamps Association asserts that international volunteering echoes the relationships and power dynamics of coloniser and colonised while failing to address the root causes of poverty and inequality. In a similar vein, Dr. Alice Chadwick El and Samuel Turay identify a gap between rhetoric and reality on decolonisation and localisation, and call on us to centre Southern expertise and re-imagine the connection between volunteering and development. The Peace Corps' Agnes Lam and Kris Besch share the 'ingredient list' of core attributes that the Peace Corps has identified as essential to their work, Dr. Cliff Allum and colleagues ask whether we are responding to the call for urgent action on climate change, and Helge Espe of Norec asks whether partnership is 'just another buzzword'.

We are grateful to all of the authors for their important contributions to these conversations. The papers in this collection capture the best of our sector's thinking at this important moment, and we are sure that they will continue to inform our thought, and our action, well beyond IVCO 2022.

**James O'Brien**
Executive Director
International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum)

# IVCO 2022 FRAMING PAPER

# A NEW DAWN:

## Strategic Pathways for the Future of Volunteering in Development

Written by: Nick Ockenden
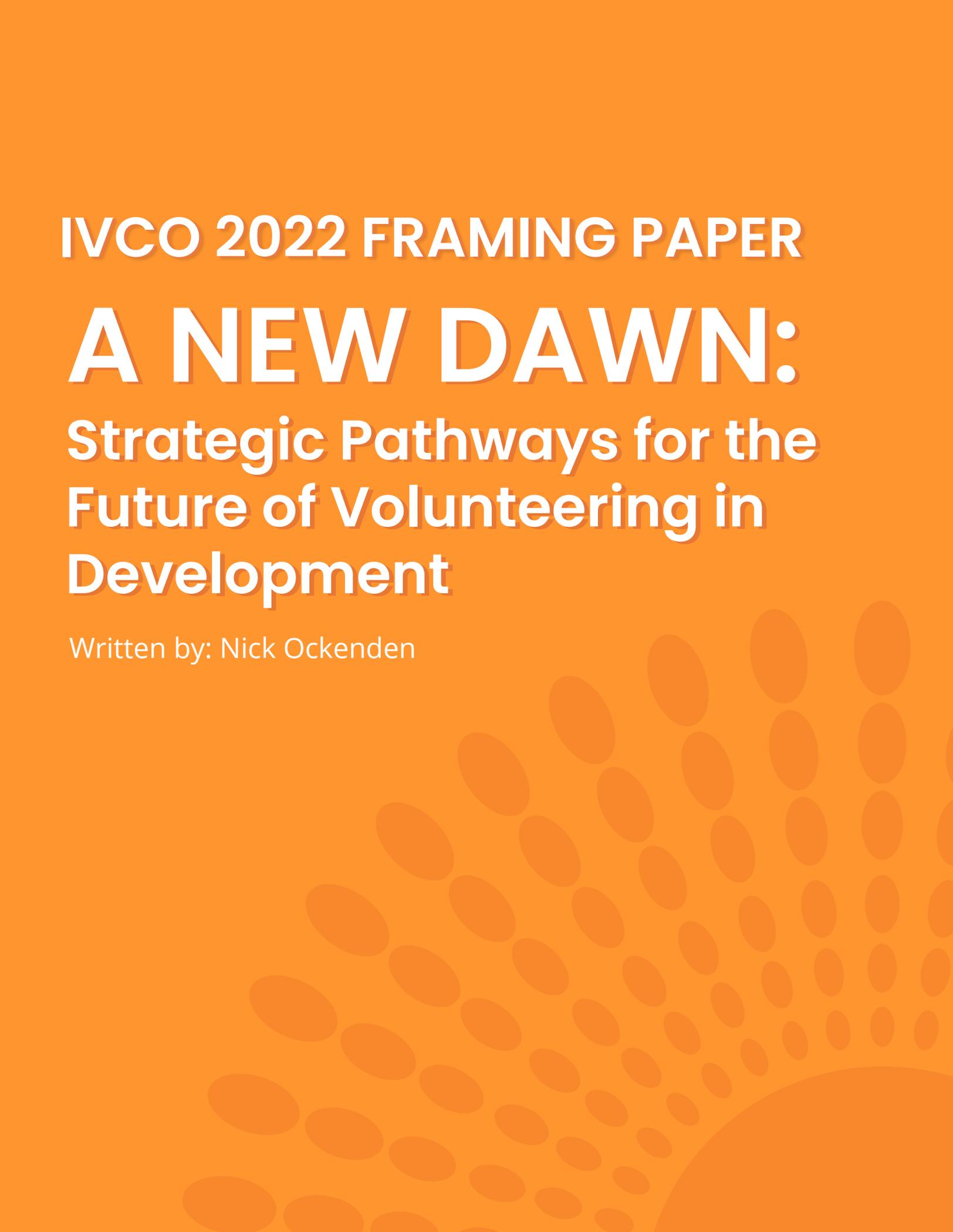
# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about both challenges and opportunities for organisations working with volunteers to achieve sustainable development. Resources have been affected and in-person volunteering disrupted, but there have also been great strides in innovation and agility. This takes place alongside an ever-strengthening global movement for climate justice, greater recognition of the need for localisation, changes in how people volunteer and what organisations and communities need, and much more.

Recognising the multitude of challenges and opportunities this rapidly changing environment creates, the International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) (https://forum-ids.org/) sought to collectively develop a strategy for volunteering in development for the next three to five years, for both its members and the wider sector. It offers possible pathways to help organisations prioritise and effectively navigate the post-COVID environment.

This document summarises the key points and considerations emerging from a collaborative process based on 31 conversations with Forum members and 10 external stakeholders between May and August 2022. It is written by Nick Ockenden, an independent research, evaluation and strategy consultant specialising in international volunteering (www.nickockenden.com).

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The International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) is the most significant global network of organisations that work with volunteers to achieve sustainable development goals. Forum exists to share information, develop good practice and enhance cooperation across the volunteering in development sector. Forum achieves this through convening, research, and standards.

For more information and to join Forum, visit forum-ids.org.

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NOR≡C NORWEGIAN AGENCY FOR EXCHANGE COOPERATION

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# The Strategy

This strategy is structured around five themes:

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| **01** | **Responding to and learning** from the pandemic. |
| **02** | **Addressing** decolonisation. |
| **03** | **Tackling** wider trends. |
| **04** | **Evolving approaches** to volunteering programming. |
| **05** | **Developing** the evidence and knowledge base |

Each section outlines the key issues and challenges facing organisations working with volunteering in development and presents considerations for their future development.

# 1.

# Responding to and learning from the pandemic

## A. RESILIENCE, FLEXIBILITY AND INNOVATION

Numerous organisations have successfully adapted their volunteering provision during the pandemic and learnt a great deal. Frequently, they do not want to return to pre-COVID business as usual and see the changes as part of their evolution and innovation. Not all organisations are, however, thriving and many continue to experience greatly reduced income sources, suspension of activities and uncertainty about volunteer recruitment in the future.

### CONSIDERATIONS:

- Strategically innovate in the future and continue to improve. Innovation is not only for times of crisis but also for periods of stability.
- There is, however, no space for complacency, and COVID-related learning should continue to be built upon and shared.
- Invest in horizon scanning and foresight work to continue to understand the changing environment as best as possible.
- Continue to demonstrate value with donors and do not take for granted their understanding of the work and its changing needs.

## B.  COVID-19 AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

The pandemic forced many to make rapid changes to their programming, most notably by increasing national and South-South volunteering; introducing and expanding e-volunteering provision; forming new partnerships, especially for advocacy work; and focusing on impact and evidence work. Many of these developments had long been in the pipeline but the pandemic provided an urgent reason to introduce them and for donors to accept them.

## CONSIDERATIONS:

- Work closely with donors, especially those who may be sceptical, to help increase their understanding that the changes made in response to the pandemic should not be seen as temporary measures to survive, but as a long-term evolution of how volunteering in development functions.
- Have the confidence to not apply for future donor funding if donor values do not match those of the organisation.

# C. OPENING UP THE CONVERSATION BEYOND COVID

The pandemic is not over, its effects to last for years to come, but those spoken to felt that now is the time to discuss other important topics. There is a real risk that the impact of major trends that pre-date COVID could be sidelined, such as shrinking space, the rapidly changing role of technology, the cost-of-living crisis, anti-globalisation, altering work and leisure patterns, and conflict and migration. This is not about denying the major negative impact COVID has had on many organisations.

## CONSIDERATIONS:

- Make space for the discussion of other topics but do not ignore the ongoing evolution of COVID, the learning gained to date and the journeys undertaken by organisations.
- Re-engage with major, important and long-term challenges such as shrinking space and think critically about how this will affect volunteering and possible responses.
- Continue to work with and support those who have been especially hard hit by COVID and are taking time to recover.

# 2.

# Addressing decolonisation

## A. CO-PRODUCTION WITH COMMUNITIES

Effectively addressing decolonisation needs to involve challenging and sometimes existential questions: What is the place of North-South volunteering? Why are volunteers from the North often valued differently than those from the South? How can structural barriers to South-North volunteering be addressed? To what extent do Northern organisations need to consider new organisational structures?

Those spoken to in the development of this strategy agreed that co-production, in which the agency of all partners and communities is recognised and facilitated, is the best way to help decolonise volunteering in development. The challenge remains how best to ensure previously excluded voices are heard in a genuinely collaborative process and how to navigate wider structural barriers and power imbalances.

### CONSIDERATIONS:

- Prepare to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Addressing decolonisation and pursuing co-production with communities needs to involve difficult and challenging conversations, some of which may question the purpose of organisations' work and their established ways of acting. This needs incremental change, reflection and learning.
- Continue advocacy with donors and partners in the North to demonstrate the value of co-production with local communities.
- Ensure arguments and discussions are based up-to-date academic thinking and theory but work to ensure they remain practical and deliverable rather than disconnected and remote theoretical debates.
- Northern-based organisations should challenge themselves on how they are structured to deliver their work and their programmes. Pay and organisational structures should be reviewed and adapted where relevant (for example, dual-pay structures replaced by single-pay structures; where and how the organisation is headquartered and whether devolved structures might work better; the balance of Southern staff and voices throughout organisations, especially in senior management).
- If co-production is already taking place, critically ask how inclusive the approach is and whether those currently involved genuinely represent their communities.

# B. THE CONTINUING CONTRIBUTION OF NORTH-SOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Decolonisation, localisation and co-production do not, however, mean an end to North-South volunteering. Where it is based on genuine partnership with communities fully involved in decisions about what volunteers do, it can be highly beneficial.

Voluntourism is one form of North-South volunteering, and those spoken to as part of this work discussed how it contrasted with their programming and had potential to cause harm to communities. There was a desire to sufficiently distinguish placements, especially shorter volunteer placements. There was also, however, recognition that in giving priority to the volunteer's motivations and wishes, voluntourism programmes often present an attractive and marketable offer to prospective volunteers, which could be learnt from.

Many organisations are finding it harder to recruit long-term volunteers from the North. Very low unemployment rates in some countries can make options for paid work more attractive than volunteering, but some people also value flexibility and an ability to dip in and out. The rapid growth of issues-based activism like Fridays for Future, for example, shows how people can 'do good' in ways very different from highly structured volunteering.

North-South volunteering also highlights embedded power imbalances. Large numbers of organisations working with volunteering in development chose to repatriate their international volunteers during COVID as an appropriate response to protect their health, which also shows the privilege at the heart of much volunteering in development – people volunteering from Northern countries are frequently able to be evacuated in times of crisis whilst local communities have little or no choice but to stay.

## CONSIDERATIONS:

- Recognise power imbalances and issues of equity between volunteers from the North and South, even when programmes are designed with care.
- Critically review the need for and value of short-term volunteering placements and whether they may start to blur with more commercial voluntourism opportunities.
- Rather than see voluntourism organisations as adversaries, explore opportunities to exchange mutual learning and good practice between the two fields.
- Consider how North-South models could be embedded within blended models of volunteering and how they connect to volunteers from the South.
- Ensure all North-South volunteering is well-designed and based on co-production with local communities and partners.
- Consider how to link up with and learn from issues-based networks and movements and why they appeal to some people more than longer-term volunteering opportunities.

# C. ACKNOWLEDGING THE SOFT POWER OF VOLUNTEERING

International volunteering programmes funded wholly or partially by governments are a form of soft power. If volunteering programmes are well-designed and delivered – and if there is appropriate trust between the organisation and government, with an ability to speak truth to power and be heard – they can still be highly effective. The soft power does, however, require acknowledging. We need to better understand the motivations, roles and place of large government donors and agencies and the potential of such programmes to influence the policies and practices of other countries.

## CONSIDERATIONS:

- Continue to speak truth to power and invest in good relationships with government donors. This will also involve advocacy and more difficult and challenging conversations.
- Continue to advocate for progressive approaches to government-funded programmes.
- Horizon scan and undertake foresight work to understand how a change of government administration could affect investment and policy direction of volunteering programmes.

# 3.
# Tackling wider trends

## A. THE CLIMATE CRISIS

There are climate contradictions at the heart of much volunteering in development. Flying volunteers overseas, for example, generates carbon, while the notion of sending volunteers from countries that dominate global $CO_2$ emissions to help tackle the climate-related problems of countries in the South can feel problematic to many.

Many organisations have been undertaking reviews and audits of their climate impact and are subsequently taking a more critical view as to who should travel and when. Others have moved to greater reliance on longer-term placements that involve fewer flights over a set period. Others are in the process of further strengthening their climate work, particularly in relation to marginalised communities and groups.

Addressing the climate crisis is not as simple as stopping volunteers from flying. While it would have a positive effect on carbon emissions, it would also bring an end to the people-to-people interaction and solidarity underpinning the sector, which would be an enormous loss. Furthermore, through its programming, volunteering in development has huge potential to positively address many of the worst aspects of the climate crisis.

**CONSIDERATIONS:**

- Continue to examine opportunities to make organisational and programmatic practices and systems more sustainable. This includes critically engaging with a new, more streamlined approach to travel for both staff and volunteers whilst recognising the importance of people-to-people interaction and defending its contribution.
- Further focus on and potentially expand work seeking to tackle the climate crisis in both volunteering programming and advocacy. This should only be done when it fulfils the organisational mission and there is appropriate expertise, rather than risking mission-drift.

# B. TECHNOLOGY AS AN ENABLER AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The increased use of e-volunteering during COVID shows how rapid changes in technology can allow people to participate in different ways. In many instances, this has helped diversify the body of volunteers, opening opportunities to people who were not able to travel due to disabilities or work or family commitments. Organisations are, however, often acutely aware of the digital divide and how technology and e-volunteering can exacerbate existing inequalities.

This is also a broader debate than e-volunteering alone. Wider technological changes in society have a significant – and often rapid – effect on how people get their news, engage with work and leisure, and choose to volunteer. Spending more time online and 'doing good' remotely, for example, may affect people's desire to volunteer physically and whether they feel it is necessary and useful. Technological changes also continue to impact how organisations manage their data and finances or engage with stakeholders. This holds enormous potential to streamline processes and make them more efficient but also creates major risks such as data breaches and online security.

**CONSIDERATIONS:**

- Ensure any e-volunteering programmes are developed with access in mind and an awareness of who can participate and who may be excluded. Practical issues of internet access need to be considered, whether such provision is exacerbating existing divisions in society and how people may want to get involved.
- Undertake foresight work to improve understanding of how people's lives are affected by wider technological developments and how this could impact their decision to volunteer or engage with good causes.
- Ensure online security and data protection policies and practices are up-to-date and effective plans are in place for breaches of volunteer (and other) data.

# C. SHRINKING SPACE, CONFLICT AND SECURITY

Shrinking civil society space has been an issue for many countries long before COVID emerged. Many spoken to saw it as a critical issue for their work, increasingly looking at whether it is safe and impactful for them to continue volunteering in certain locations and examining what forms of volunteering activity were appropriate. Sometimes, it also made it harder to identify partners to work with because NGOs were finding it harder to register with their governments.

In such a context, many organisations described their work with national volunteers. They often mentioned their ability to access more insecure locations to which international volunteers could not travel. While this is a practical issue of who may be able to have the greatest impact and of safeguarding, it again raises questions of power imbalances and differences in how volunteers from the North and the South may be valued.

## CONSIDERATIONS:

- Make space for discussion of the impact of shrinking space and insecurity in the sector and share good practice and solutions to challenges between members.
- Share insight and knowledge on rapidly changing situations in-country between members whenever possible.
- Adopt a holistic approach to consideration of shrinking space, acknowledging it is affecting, albeit in different ways, countries in the North as well as the South.

# 4.

# Evolving approaches to volunteering programming

## A. DEVELOPING A BLENDED APPROACH TO VOLUNTEERING

There was widespread recognition amongst those spoken to that they could not simply offer a single model of volunteering, recognising the diversity of people's motivations and the myriad problems addressed. Offering a blended approach was frequently seen to be a highly effective and desirable alternative.

Despite its valuable contribution during the height of the pandemic, e-volunteering, for example, was often not felt to be enormously beneficial by those spoken to and could not simply replace face-to-face volunteering. Organisations described its real potential as part of a blended model in which some face-to-face volunteering was also provided. In doing so, it could draw in a wider group of volunteers, reach new areas and extend the engagement between communities and volunteers.

Many organisations have also had considerable success offering a blend of North-South, South-South and national volunteering, drawing on the strengths of each as well as promoting the shared ownership of projects. COVID has also helped demonstrate the value of national and community volunteers, who were often able to continue work while international volunteers were repatriated (although these are clearly not new forms of volunteering).

Once again, issues of power imbalances are critical, with organisations discussing the challenge of how to engage volunteers from the South on an equal footing to those from the North, when wider structures and assumptions are frequently set up to benefit the latter.

## CONSIDERATIONS:

- Prioritise a blended approach to volunteering when appropriate, positioning North-South volunteering alongside and complementary to national and South-South volunteering.
- Pursue e-volunteering if it adds value to the volunteering programmes.

# B. FRAMING THE VOLUNTEER'S EXPERIENCE AS A JOURNEY

Organisations frequently spoke about how they did not 'own' their volunteers and how volunteers could dip in and out of opportunities and change their form of engagement. Volunteers are often more fluid than we may expect, frequently engaging with a cause rather than an organisation. Recognising and facilitating moves between organisations, to partners and allies, but also between types of 'giving', can be highly beneficial.

Understanding a volunteer's pathway through their volunteering experience and what their journey looks like can therefore help create a better experience for the volunteer, increase the likelihood of engaging them in the longer term and help co-production with communities. Placing the volunteer's experience in its wider context and as part of a journey can boost understanding of the extent to which factors such as (un)employment, cost of living or wider life events – such as caring for children or parents – can trigger someone to start volunteering or limit involvement, and how these can change over time.

## CONSIDERATIONS:

- Support volunteers along a lifelong journey and seek to better understand the impact and influence of external factors, triggers, barriers and life events on their engagement.
- Examine ways to help connect and link volunteers between different organisations.
- Examine the diversity of the volunteer population and ask who is not participating and why. Understanding the resources required for someone to volunteer and wider structural barriers to taking part can help make volunteering more inclusive.

# 5.

# Developing the evidence and knowledge base

The pause on volunteering during the pandemic meant many organisations took a step back to look at the value of their programmes. Taking stock of and critically questioning approaches was simply not possible before, when volunteers were travelling overseas.

Those spoken to mentioned gaps in knowledge, including the contribution of national volunteers; the motivations of Generation Z; the experience of host organisations; and longstanding issues not recently discussed due to the dominance of COVID, such as the impact of shrinking space and of evolving technology on international volunteering.

This is also about examining why we undertake research and the questions asked. Is, for example, research being undertaken to provide evidence for an advocacy position or to better understand the effectiveness of different models of development? Or to what extent has the historic dominance of Northern academics and Northern volunteer-sending organisations established a particular language and lens through which volunteering is viewed?

This also concerns how research is undertaken. Development research has long since advocated the importance of participatory research, which is undertaken with and not on behalf of communities. While a huge amount of good practice is evident, the voices of practitioners and communities need to be included to a greater extent.

Finally, we need to ask more about who is involved in the research. The North continues to dominate development research, and those spoken in this strategy's development wanted to see a diversification of researchers and more Southern voices and contributors.

## CONSIDERATIONS:

- Facilitate opportunities for Southern voices to meaningfully participate in volunteering in development research on an equal footing. It is crucial to find ways for these researchers to collectively define the research agenda, topics researched and methods used.
- Critically ask why research is undertaken, what its purpose is and who is involved. There are also further opportunities to build engagement in participatory and peer-led research; for example, by facilitating access to capacity-building with local universities.
- Pursue research gaps on topics that have a potential impact on volunteering in development but may have traditionally been considered outside of the sector and its sphere of interest. This will involve new partnerships in different fields and academic disciplines.
- Continue to take stock and ask why members do what they do and adapt programmes and delivery accordingly. This work should take place regularly, not only during times of crisis.

# Conclusion: making a new dawn for volunteering a reality

## 1. CO-PRODUCTION UNDERPINS EVERYTHING

For volunteering to evolve in the most useful and effective way, it needs to be done in genuine collaboration with the communities it works with. This should consider how volunteering programmes are designed and delivered but also how research is conducted. There is an enormous amount of good work already underway, but it is an evolving journey and members need to continue to challenge themselves and each other.

## 2. IT'S ALL ABOUT POWER

Issues of decolonisation, how organisations are organisationally structured, or how volunteers from the South are perceived and valued compared to those from the North are critical issues that affect how organisations working on volunteering in development can practically move forward. This is a process of self-interrogation and reflection for organisations in the sector, much of which will – and should – feel uncomfortable.

## 3. RE-VALUING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF INFORMAL AND COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING

This may be the dominant form of volunteering globally, especially in the South, but our views of what it is, its value and how it can be facilitated tend to be viewed through a Northern lens. There is agreement that informal and community volunteering needs to be an active part of blended models of volunteering for members, but its history and unique nature also needs to be recognised and not formalised in line with dominant perspectives of what volunteering in development looks like.

## 4. NARROWING THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT WE SAY AND DO

Organisations recognise that addressing many of the issues discussed in this strategy require fundamentally new ways of working and thinking. There can be, however, sometimes be a gap between desires and action (i.e., between what organisations say they want to do and what they actually do). None of this is easy. Meaningful responses often pose uncomfortable and existential questions about the value and mission of some organisations, and incremental progress may be more meaningful than reactive and major changes of direction. This may remain the biggest challenge facing volunteering in development – but also its biggest opportunity. There is a genuine desire to evolve, and dialogue is a sound first step. The most important thing at this stage of the journey may be to continue these often-difficult conversations, ensure topics stay on the agenda and work together as a network to hold each other's feet to the fire.

# IVCO 2022
# THINK
# PIECES

# 01

# 'Blended Volunteering' –

## a decolonised Volunteering for Development approach to achieve SDGs

Rebecca Pursell-Gotz & Alok Rath, VSO

When Delavignette (1977, p131)[1] said 'decolonization fundamentally meant rejection of the civilization of the white man' it centred during a time when countries in the Global South were getting liberated in clusters from Western rule. Significant energy and thinking have gone in the 21st century to expand the debate to decolonising the sphere of knowledge and skills (e.g., *Rhodes must fall/Why is my curriculum white?*) That debate and thinking have expanded to the volunteering sector too (IVCO2021). These debates revolve around the dichotomy of 'white-non-white', 'West-East', 'Global North-Global South' and so on.

We argue that the findings from a recently concluded collaborative research study on 'blended volunteering'[2] by VSO and Northumbria University add a new dimension to thinking on decolonisation, particularly within the volunteering for development space.

The independent primary research study, carried out with communities, volunteers, and VSO staff in our Nepal, Tanzania, and Uganda programmes, identifies important considerations for strengthening a volunteering for development methodology to maximize outcomes for the most marginalised communities, and support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Delavignette, R, W.B.Cohen & A.Rosenzweig (1977). Robert Delavignette on the French Empire: Selected writings. University of Chicago Press. Chicago.

2. Volunteering Together: Blending Knowledge & Skills for Development. 2022. VSO & Centre for Development, Northumbria University.
https://www.vsointernational.org/our-work/research-and-evaluations/our-research/blending-knowledge-and-skills-for-development

# BLENDING TO LEVERAGE GREATER IMPACT

For far too long, international volunteering has tended to be the most dominant modality, funded by Global North governments and international development organisations, focused on skills and knowledge transfer to individuals and organisations in the Global South. There was little thinking around recognising the skills and knowledge that volunteers based in their own country and community can add in tandem. This perspective also assumed that skills and knowledge are fixed and pre-determined, and individuals can be placed in a specific role within projects based on where they come from.

The research challenges this parochial assumption through demonstrating the significant **value leverage** of a **blended model**, where different volunteering modalities work together in a planned yet dynamic way, and that the value of combining interdependent knowledge and skills enables far greater impact and sustainability of development results in the lives of marginalised and vulnerable communities. It finds that skills and knowledge are not fixed across modalities. The research also shows that the complex and disruptive development challenges that marginalised and vulnerable communities face today require a well-crafted blended volunteering team as an important programme design element for sustainable development results.

# MOVING THE VOLUNTEERING EPICENTRE

Programmes that privilege technical skills do not recognise the importance of having volunteers in communities that can anchor programmes, can bring an understanding of context, and enable sustainability after the programme has ended. How different modalities come together, especially community volunteers within a blended volunteering model, has a strong influence on project outcomes. Community volunteers add contextual expertise, embeddedness and trust to projects, each of which are crucial to project outcomes. The research also finds that the blend works best when external actors and partners are suitably designed as part of the broader community system. In VSO projects, an ecosystem approach networks primary actors (marginalised and vulnerable people) with community volunteers and partners, along with national and international volunteers.

The research identifies that the biggest risk to the enormous potential of a blended volunteering model  lies in perceptions among volunteers that some modalities may be more important than others. It finds that the widely-held perception of international volunteers bringing 'tangible' technical skills, while community volunteers bring 'intangible' competencies such as embeddedness, contextual understanding, and credibility, presents a risk to decolonising mindsets and unleashing the potential of blended volunteering as a powerful development methodology.

# DECOLONISE THE MINDSET FOR BLENDED VOLUNTEERING TO FLOURISH

For blended volunteering to work most effectively in development projects, two critical factors emerging from the research need consideration. The tendency for top-down volunteer planning and placement must give way to the emergence of a blended model that acknowledges that each modality is as critical as the other, and that a blended model is designed based on an informed understanding of specific primary actor (marginalised community) contexts. This is the biggest lesson we are learning in VSO programmes and, hence, we are inspired by the research outcomes to improve our own programmes.

In conclusion, the value of international volunteers may indeed be better realised when we recognise the value of local volunteers through a blended model of volunteering – a value addition to the volunteering for development methodology for sustainable development.

Dr. Alok Rath is VSO's Global Head of Knowledge, Evidence & Learning function. He strives to focus on research on the complex relationship between different forms of volunteering, development themes, and operating contexts in order to understand patterns and models that may work more effectively for sustainable development results in the lives of the most marginalised and vulnerable communities.

Rebecca Pursell-Gotz is a Research Specialist in Volunteering for Development at VSO. Her research interests are in community and blended volunteering, and how the combination of volunteering modalities contributes to stronger project outcomes. She has particular interests in understanding how diverse volunteering models and projects contribute most effectively to the achievement of the SDG

# 02

# Southern expertise in volunteering for development is vital for transformational change

Dr. Alice Chadwick El-Ali and Samuel Turay

The development sector is being increasingly challenged to decolonise. Localisation of development decision-making and delivery has been a long-standing response to shifting power within the sector[1]. However, there are concerns that the rhetoric of decolonisation and localisation does not always translate to changes in power and practice (see Khan, 2021). This same concern is felt within the volunteering for development community. Although COVID-19 accelerated existing efforts to support Southern actors and priorities, it also highlighted inequities in resources and support for community and national volunteers and Southern-based VIOs. In the framing paper for IVCO 2021 the case was made for challenging whose knowledge counts in volunteering for development (Hass and Moinina 2021), whilst the connected think pieces for IVCO 2021 highlighted how the terminology we use can restrict understanding of what volunteering and development mean (Okech, Baillie Smith, Mills and Fadel 2021; Fadel, 2021). In this think piece, we ask what IVCOs can do to centre Southern expertise and re-imagine the connection between volunteering and development to deliver transformational change.

Recent research from [Forum](#) and [IAVE](#), and the 2022 [State of the World's Volunteerism Report](#), all call for support for Southern-led volunteering models, and the global partnerships to allow them to flourish. Building on this call, the four enablers of Southern expertise in volunteering for development presented below came from the insights of 12 African volunteer leaders, alongside the experiences of and research conducted by the authors. These enablers are directed at IVCOs whose funding and philosophical origins lie in the Global North.

1. See the Paris Declaration (2005), the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2011).

# 1. IVCOs should ensure that they shift decision-making at all stages to Southern organisations and stakeholders

Funding or partnering with Southern organisations to deliver programmes is not enough, IVCOs also need to engage with Southern communities and expertise when designing their strategies, and the resulting projects and programmes. Often international partners come with a pre-determined project and agenda, which limits the ability of Southern actors to highlight areas that might not work in a particular context, or to shape solutions based upon their own knowledge. Ensuring Southern representation within the leadership and boards of IVCOs with a development focus in the South can support shifts in decision-making.

# 2. IVCOs should support platforms for South-South collaboration, knowledge sharing and exchange

A crucial role for IVCOs in supporting sustainable volunteering for development practice is enabling Southern leadership and expertise in volunteering for development. This could be through strengthening existing platforms for South-South collaboration and knowledge exchange and/or increasing opportunities for North/South learning, with the recognition that learning from different contexts is likely to support more effective solutions and strategies. Key is that IVCOs do not prescribe what platforms or networks for knowledge sharing look like, but rather engage with networks and partnerships that already exist.

# 3. IVCOS should support the harnessing of technologies and capacities for conducting research in the South

IVCOS should support Southern networks and organisations with the technology and capacity to conduct research on volunteering and development related issues. When Southern organisations can collaborate in equitable partnerships with others or lead their own research into volunteering and connected development related issues, they can contribute to the evidence base on volunteering for development. Research and evidence reflecting Southern perspectives and priorities supports innovation and transformational change in the sector.

# 4. IVCOs should advocate for an enabling environment for volunteering to flourish, supporting Southern investment in volunteering from governments and the private sector

Southern leadership of volunteering for development requires recognition and investment in the volunteering sector from Southern governments and the private sector. IVCOs can support this process by supporting Southern VIOs with advocacy efforts to drive policy frameworks and budget decisions that prioritise volunteering

for development approaches. Through such policy and advocacy partnerships a supportive environment for volunteering can be promoted and awareness raised of the value of investing in volunteering to realise development goals.

In conclusion, IVCOs that have their philosophical origins in the Global North, but whose work is centred in the Global South have the opportunity to become equitable partners in a volunteering for development movement that prioritises the expertise of local and community volunteers, and Southern VIOs and civil society organisations. It is only by working together to centre Southern expertise that volunteering can drive transformational change towards Agenda 2030.

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Dr. Alice Chadwick El-Ali completed her doctorate at the University of Bath, exploring the role of volunteering within development projects in Sierra Leone. Her research interests are in volunteering as a response to crisis and how civil society understands and engages with development.

Samuel Turay is the Africa Regional Coordinator of IAVE-Global Network of Volunteering Leadership (GNVL) and also the National Coordinator of VIONet Sierra Leone.

VOLUNTEERING THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERSECTIONALITY TO ADDRESS INEQUALITIES:
THE EXAMPLE OF VOLUNTEER-GEI FROM THE SOUTH AS AGENTS OF INCLUSIVE SOCIAL INNOVATION

IVCO 2022 THINK PIECE

# 03

# Volunteering through the Lens of Intersectionality to Address Inequalities:

## The example of volunteer-GEI from the South as agents of inclusive social innovation

Ingrid Adovi and Olga Houde,

Le Programme de coopération volontaire Compétences,  Leadership, Éducation (Programme CLÉ)

Faced with the COVIC-19 related constraints, South-South volunteering has taken off.
The Volunteer Cooperation Programme 'Competencies, Leadership, Education' (Program CLÉ), funded by Global Affairs Canada and implemented by a consortium made up of Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie, Éducation internationale and Fédération des cégeps, is no exception to this trend.

This article discusses the benefits of bringing together volunteers from diverse backgrounds from an intersectional perspective, particularly for strategic mandates such as gender equality and inclusion (GEI).

The geographical origin and the cultural baggage of volunteers influence their ability to quickly master certain issues, codes, socio-cultural norms and other realities specific to a host society. This ability may be greater for a volunteer from the Global South, given their cultural proximity to certain communities and organisations in the country of assignment. Volunteers from the South are therefore experts who can easily be involved at the centre of a co-creation process with partners, quickly establishing a climate of trust and mutual respect. They thus contribute to transformational changes that are sometimes more profound and lasting. This is particularly the case when deeply rooted socio-cultural norms, such as those related to gender, are affected in the context of international volunteering.

Gender is another identity factor that can influence a volunteer's ability to act as an agent for social change. For example, a male volunteer from the South can advocate and, in some respects, symbolise positive masculinity by acting as an ally at the heart of a dynamic of social transformation.

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**Ingrid Adovi, gender equality and inclusion volunteer with the CLÉ Program in Bénin, writes -**

*'To see a man, who works for gender equality and inclusion, may seem exceptional, rare, even "Western" behaviour.*

*What to do in a socio-cultural context that is not conducive to the development of girls, women and people who are particularly vulnerable and marginalised?*

*I combine technical knowledge, know-how and above all interpersonal skills with the context. My trick lies in communication, adaptation and the choice of terms used to convey different messages that can facilitate social and behavioural change.*

*It is about starting from the socially accepted model in the communities to deconstruct social norms, stereotypes and prejudices that are both sexist and discriminatory. Beyond the existing legal and institutional framework, I use role-playing games, archetype construction and examples of success stories to demonstrate the positive impacts of an integrated gender approach. I was able to develop close and trusting relationships with people who, at first contact, were resistant. In fact, the deep roots of certain religious and cultural beliefs constitute a major obstacle. The gender approach can be seen as a result of the imposition of Western values and the vision of development from North to South.*

*The change in perception and behaviour arises mainly thanks to the interpersonal communications that I establish once the skill building sessions are over. This strategy has thus far made it possible, for example, to organise discussion panels with partners (ministries and civil society organisations) on various themes related to human rights, women's rights, the education of girls or the empowerment of women. The fact that I am a man particularly allows me to have more open and safe conversations with other men than my female colleagues could have, especially if they come from the North. I am aware of the disruptions that the gender approach can cause. There are, however, undeniable results and observable changes. This impact is achieved particularly thanks to the support of community influencers and focus on gender with partners. As "icing on the cake", I had male attendees who committed, on the spot, to being ambassadors for a more equal world.'*

For the CLÉ Program, recruiting volunteers from the South began in response to a need, but will continue from a decolonial perspective on volunteer cooperation. It is very clear that volunteers from the South, in combination with other identities, are real agents of social innovation, transforming frameworks of reflection and facilitating a change of positions, to contribute to the achievement of capacity building outcomes.

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IVCO 2022 THINK PIECE

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Ingrid Adovi is the Gender Equality and Inclusion Advisor for the CLÉ Program in Benin

Olga Houde is the Gender Equality and Inclusion Advisor for the CLÉ Program at the Paul Gérin-Lajoie Foundation

# 04

# In Time, an Egg will Walk on its Feet!

## The Experience of Ethiopia in building National Voluntary Infrastructure

Wendwossen Kebede, Cuso International Country Representative in Ethiopia

Across societies, it is common to engage in voluntary activities during a humanitarian crisis or in response to natural disasters. COVID-19 showed young Ethiopians to be well-organised, with their own initiatives in support of their communities, advocating for preventive measures and ensuring the practice of hand washing and distancing. Admirably, their voluntary movement really helped to control the spread of the virus within the capacity of the Ethiopian health system. This kind of voluntary movement happens time and again for collective social benefit, such as environmental cleaning, tree planting, etc. Although the social benefit is high, the action is sporadic and fragmented. Ensuring the sustainability of volunteering will play a vital role in harnessing the power of youth to bring about social transformation.

Ethiopia is the second most populous nation in Africa, with 150 million people of whom 65% are youth. While a considerable amount of resources have been allotted for their education, employment remains a challenge for the Ethiopian youth. The plague of unemployment among a growing pool of young graduates is an opportunity to elevate national development, if young people can gain access to structured engagement for social programs targeting people living in poverty. In this vein, creating a viable National Volunteer Infrastructure in Ethiopia has been a fundamental undertaking. The national volunteer program which is under formulation by the Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopian Authority of Civil Society Organizations (ACSO) is worth sharing.

In 2020, ACSO created a new initiative to promote volunteerism in civil society, public and private institutions, and amongst the public. Previous to this, there was limited engagement in fostering volunteerism. Access to formal volunteering opportunities to develop skills and create new connections was challenging, particularly for those in low-income communities. Therefore, ACSO mobilised development actors to develop a standard, locally-relevant

framework that guides the promotion of voluntarism and voluntary management programs in Ethiopia. The main actors involved in the initiative include Serve Global, VSO, UNV, and Cuso International.

A guidance note was prepared in line with volunteering program design and management principles, and colleagues worked with ACSO to publish Standards For National Volunteering. It provides a clear framework from the inception of a formal voluntary service program, through design and management, including appropriate the duty of care for volunteers. Nonetheless, promoting the manual and building the capacity of institutions to follow the guidelines for harnessing impactful voluntary service is not a one-time event. It requires regular monitoring and support until structured voluntary programs are mainstreamed across public and private institutions. Moreover, fostering a culture of structured voluntary service must go hand-in-hand with building the capacity of potential volunteers through an ethos of volunteerism, and ensuring their level of commitment to achieve high-end results. Time and financial resources are vital for this endeavour, yet they are not sufficiently available in the development context. In order to respond to this challenge in a cost-effective and innovative way, ACSO has designed and launched a Volunteer Management Information System (VMIS). The VMIS has facilitated the registration of many people who are interested in voluntarism, though the service was mainly geared toward organisations rather than individuals.

The Ethiopian example underlines the importance of having national-level guidance to regulate the national volunteerism framework, complemented by a tangible system that brings together opportunities and motivated individuals. Placing sustainability at the centre of this design is expected to ensure a high level of inclusive professional development opportunities for young professionals, especially women and people living with disabilities who do not have equitable access to develop their potential by engaging in activities that directly and positively affect their lives. Also, promoting national volunteer programs will help to strengthen bottom-up or home-grown solutions to development challenges. This is the emerging potential of the volunteering sector.

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Wendwossen Kebede is a development management practitioner who has worked as Cuso International Country Representative in Ethiopia since October 2015. He has two decades of experience  in promoting voluntarism to address national and international development agendas through the active participation of volunteers as change agents.

RETHINKING THE IDEA OF PROSPERITY (AS FLOURISHING) AND WHAT IT MEANS IN THE CONTEXT OF V4D AND THE PROMOTION OF THE SDGS.

IVCO 2022 THINK PIECE

# 05

# Rethinking the Idea of Prosperity (as Flourishing) and What it Means in the Context of V4D and the Promotion of the SDGs.

Rebecca Tiessen, Professor, School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa, Canada

The SDGs (or Global Goals) are "a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and *prosperity*". While the 17 SDGs that make up the Global Goals provide detailed information about the 169 SDG targets and tracking across 232 unique indicators, these commitments also warrant closer attention to what prosperity means, to whom, and how it can be measured within the volunteering for development (V4D) sector.

## PROSPERITY AS ECONOMIC GROWTH VERSUS PROSPERITY AS FLOURISHING

Prosperity is often simplified to mean economic growth, and while financial and material stability *can* promote poverty reduction, equating economic growth with prosperity tells us little about the distribution of wealth, offers limited knowledge about how people around the world define wealth or experience wellbeing, and provides insufficient indicators of sustainable development for measuring the 'whole human experience'. So, what might sustainable development mean when a more comprehensive lens of prosperity – understood as flourishing - is used?

Proponents of the Harvard University Human Flourishing Program use the term *flourishing* to measure prosperity along these six domains:  happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, social relationships, and financial and material stability. At its most simplistic level, we can understand flourishing as "a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good". Aristotle considers flourishing and the 'good life' as the achievement of bodily goods such as health, external goods such as food, and 'goods of the soul' including love, friendship, self-esteem, etc. If prosperity and flourishing contribute to our understanding of "living the good life", what role does the V4D sector play in promoting flourishing?

# V4D CONTRIBUTIONS TO FLOURISHING

Previous research on V4D documents the important role this sector plays in the development of social relationships. V4D promotes the 'human face of development' and moves beyond the technical and narrow economic models of sustainable development. V4D also creates new spaces for "equitable and sustainable partnerships" where solidarity and "alliances are forged", facilitating "social symbiosis". Additional research, however, is still needed to more fully unpack the ways that social relationships promote flourishing and sustainable development outcomes, including greater attention to the way that social relationships build trust, result in friendship and promote love and meaningful social bonds. This knowledge is crucial for understanding the 'full complexity' of human experiences. Social relationships built on love and trust can also facilitate mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, and happiness and life satisfaction, among other domains of flourishing that could be more fully incorporated into measures of sustainable development.

Research drawing from semi-structured interviews across 9 countries in the Global South with partner organisation staff shows distinct examples of the role of V4D in creating impactful relationships[1]. Building friendships, developing strong connections, and enhancing social relations were important outcomes of the V4D programmes. Participants in this study referred to their friendships with volunteers as something that was valued and treasured: a relationship comprised of "affective bonds", according to one study participant. Friendships with volunteers fostered a new sense of purpose and meaning as well as increased happiness and life satisfaction. One way that interactions with volunteers forged new social relationships included the mutual sharing of beliefs and values. As another participant noted, the relationship forged is "transcendental", highlighting characteristics of the V4D programmes as unique, special, and meaningful. Another staff member explained how the exchange with volunteers enriched their conversations and enhanced their feelings of meaning and purpose. Several participants shared that the strong bond and expanded social network they forged with volunteers eventually resulted in a visit to the international volunteers' home countries years later. This outcome illustrates how V4D has the power to build reciprocal and meaningful relationships that are maintained over a sustained period of time, and contribute to a sense of prosperity or flourishing outside the scope of normal indicators of wellbeing.

These findings reinforce the importance of broadening research on the SDGs and the measurement of prosperity to consider how flourishing is defined and understood within local contexts and across diverse domains beyond economic growth. Future research documenting the distinctive contributions of V4D could more fully consider the characteristics of flourishing that arise from the social relationships developed in V4D programmes. This information would expand our knowledge of prosperity to include indicators of happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and social relationships (with greater attention to the characteristics that define those relationships, including trust, love, bonds, friendship, spirituality, etc.)

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1. Locally-based researchers in Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, India, Jamaica, Guatemala, Peru and Costa Rica led all interviews and other data collection.

# POTENTIAL AREAS OF FOCUS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH COULD INCLUDE:

- How has V4D contributed to flourishing or wellbeing in your work and/or your personal life?
- What have you learned through the V4D experience that has helped to:
    - Expand your friendships and other relationships and networks?
    - Reflect on the meaning, purpose, happiness, or satisfaction of your work and life?
    - Reflect on the value of character and virtue to your life?
    - Enhance your own mental and physical health, or promote mental and physical wellbeing in your work?
    - Consider how loving relationships, bonds and friendships are formed and sustained over time?
    - Understand sustainable development as a 'whole human' experience that goes beyond economic growth to include psychological, social, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing, as well as relationships to land, the environment, to other humans, to other species, and in your spiritual life?

# 06

# Volunteering for Development and responding to Climate Change

Cliff Allum, Peter Devereux, Rebecca Tiessen and Benjamin Lough

The International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) has actively engaged in critical reflection on climate change and how it relates to Volunteering for Development for the past 15 years, with focused discussions taking place in 2007, 2010 and 2020[1]. The message arising from the Forum conversations is remarkably consistent: an urgent need for climate action. Has this message been heard and actioned by Forum members?

Climate change gained prominence at the 2020 IVCO conference when it was the central theme of the annual event. The main conference paper was supported by a survey of Volunteer-Involving Organisations (VIOs), including all Forum members. Some responses were detailed and transparent about the (lack of) progress VIOs had made on climate change. Overall, the concern was clear.

> *The results concluded that 'nearly half of the respondents indicate a serious concern that VIOs are doing too little, there is also a significant, if smaller, number who consider that VIOs are getting it about right on climate change.'*

Climate change is an existential issue for life as we know it and the impacts are felt most acutely in the Global South, where resources for adaptation are limited, while the causes have been driven largely by the Global North[2]. There has often been an implicit focus on climate action by individual behaviour change, but there is recognition that climate action requires collective action. Volunteers and organisations in the Global North, historically driving volunteering for development (V4D), occupy international spaces where arguably they have not only the responsibility but also the knowledge, resources, and opportunity to work for climate justice.

1. See: Brook, J. (2007). International Volunteering Co-operation: Climate Change. Discussion Paper, International Forum on Development Service: 16. Mulligan, B. (2010). Climate Change: A discussion paper for the 2010 IVCO conference. Discussion Paper. Melbourne, International Forum for Volunteering in Development: 18. Allum C. et al (2020). Volunteering for Climate Action. International Forum on Development Service.

2. This is commonly referred to as climate justice because of the fundamental injustice that those least responsible for causing the problem nevertheless suffer the most and have the least resources to respond.

Achieving climate justice requires International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCOs) to be focused on **mitigation** in the Global North (action to prevent, reduce and resolve the causes of climate change) and **adaptation in the Global South** (action to minimise the damage of climate change already happening).  While both approaches are needed to address the challenges of climate change, adaptation strategies align more with the traditional ways of working of IVCOs. Adaptation strategies tend to take place in the Global South, where IVCOs can support the localised efforts of partner organisations. As we heard in 2010, addressing mitigation takes IVCOs out of their comfort zone, and is frequently in conflict with the priorities of their main donors.

> *At one level agencies could try and impact on mitigation, i.e., reducing emissions. If agencies want to impact on the countries with the highest per capita emissions, then it would need to focus on advocacy in the Global North. (Mulligan 2010 p.8).*

What does this tell us about historical IVCO approaches and how it must change in the future? The conceptual and political separation between these approaches have potentially profound consequences for the focus of VIO programme activity, especially IVCOs.

Are IVCOs prepared to address climate justice by doing things differently? The results of the 2020 survey were not encouraging. Future expectations indicated a strengthening of current VIOs activity on climate change but addressing areas they already covered now. This would mean a continuing focus on adaptive approaches without properly addressing climate justice.[3]

Recognising the injustice and urgency of climate change, more of the same won't cut it. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and 'business as usual' becomes more plausible, where is climate justice on the IVCO radar? What commitments are IVCOs ready to codify in terms of organisational practice, programme approaches and an advocacy/influencing agenda?

We support earlier recommendations for ways that IVCOs can move forward. These recommendations can be extended to VIOs:

- A focus on carbon footprints and emissions will enhance organisational practices, programme modelling and global education for climate justice. This focus is geared towards an advocacy agenda to influence those with power, especially in the Global North.
- Practising global learning and solidarity as part of an international movement including volunteer groups in the Global South can help tackle climate justice.
- Climate action may also offer new opportunities to develop a collective mentality within volunteer organisations. New ways of conceptualising climate action through a collectivist lens include widening the focus to consider values of extended family, community solidarity, mutuality, and human and nonhuman interrelationships for harmonious, peaceful, spiritual, and material coexistence.

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3. Allum C. et al (2020). Volunteering for climate action. Perspectives from a survey of Volunteer Involving Organisations.

In hindsight, these recommendations sound reasonable but limited success or uptake of these recommendations demonstrates a lack of urgency. That urgency is now more apparent with the impact of climate change also strongly experienced in the Global North, for example with devastating wildfires, heatwaves, and floods. IVCOs have a distinctive advantage in tackling climate change because of their work with volunteers and returned volunteers in both the North and South. This distinctive advantage can imbue volunteers with the lived experience and wisdom of Southern partners with climate change and climate injustice. But it also gives returning volunteers the opportunity to maintain connections that give voice to Global South partners' experience and wisdom with powerful governments and institutions. The expansion of climate change-related impacts and challenges around the world, combined with insufficient mitigation and adaptation strategies, requires innovative models, conceptual frameworks, and culturally relevant, Global South-driven policies and practices.

As we argued in 2020, climate *justice* is central. It is not a programme area; it is not a trade off with other development activities. Climate justice is the context in which programs and activities can be accelerated. In the 2020 survey responses the term 'climate justice' was rarely mentioned. With the expansion of its membership to include VIOs in the Global South, Forum has a fresh opportunity to address climate justice by learning from and responding to the concerns of the Global South through genuine partnership. Future discussions may focus on ways that addressing climate injustice can overcome and move beyond traditional IVCO-VIO power relationships, so they are integral to the ongoing discussions about decolonising aid.

Dr Peter Devereux is Adjunct Senior Lecturer at Murdoch University

Dr. Rebecca Tiessen is Full Professor, University Chair in Teaching, Associate Director/Undergraduate Coordinator and Co-op Coordinator in the School of International Development and Global Studies at the University of Ottawa

Dr. Benjamin Lough is Professor of Social Work and Director of Social Innovation at the Gies College of Business, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

# 07

# Ọmọlúwàbí:
## Rethinking Volunteering Through the Lens of African Communalism

Oluwafunmilayo Taiwo, BeyGOOD x Global Citizen Fellow

The traditional culture of many African communities passed down to this current generation emphasises communalism, a system that not only encourages collective ownership of property but which attempts to ensure that voluntary acts for the good of others are commonplace (Etta et al., 2016; and, Abakare, C. O., and Okeke, V.C., 2018). As in the case of several African tribes today, there is a huge provision for the practice of communalism among one of the largest ethnic groups in the West Africa subregion, the Yorubas (Dada, 2018). The element of goodwill which, in part, characterizes the concept of communalism is significantly embedded within the "ọmọlúwàbí" (public morality) philosophy of the Yoruba people. In addition to virtues of public morality, humility, and integrity, a fellow addressed as ọmọlúwàbí gives to the cause of his fellow man and the community at large. Given this explanation, there seems to be evidence of a consistency between the African culture and volunteering.

Volunteering has evolved from singular random acts of kindness and ethos guiding the society towards a more structured approach on the continent. During the influx of missionaries to African countries, volunteering began to take a new shape, borrowing heavily from Christian belief, which emphasises giving. As many of these immigrants found different expressions for their volunteer causes – teaching, pastoring, healthcare services – community members volunteered their time and resources to aid their smooth assimilation into society. Represented herein is a structure of beneficial partnership.

By approaching volunteering from this perspective, the mindset of volunteers is re-engineered to engage with communities from a place of service, rather than saviourhood. Borrowing from the ọmọlúwàbí ethos, capacity building for volunteers should be incorporated with elements of morality (knowledge of good or bad and the ability to choose rightly), humility (a willingness to learn from anyone in the society), and integrity (to live in line with the commitment made). Like the lifestyle of an Ọmọlúwàbí, volunteering should not be a privilege, and opportunities for volunteering should be democratised to accommodate local populations. An example of how this is being successfully implemented is through platforms where young Africans can register community-led projects and also volunteer for projects that interest them.

Another important component of West African culture is respect for the experiences of older populations and a willingness to learn from it. To carry this forward, organisations should institute platforms for intergenerational collaboration that can serve as a funnel to aid the transition of youth volunteers into development experts.

Following close examination of the Ọmọlúwàbí ethos in addition to the evolution of volunteering, I believe these can help ensure the strengthening of volunteers and communities alike. Suffice to say that communalism in African cultures, when deployed towards achieving the SDGs, is capable of reshaping social good for the larger population.

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Oluwafunmilayo Taiwo is a 2021/2022 BeyGOOD x Global Citizen Fellow who worked as a part of their policy team in Nigeria. She is passionate about advancing the health and development of young people.

# 08

# International Voluntary Service Praxis: A vehicle reinforcing colonial legacies?

Ratherford Mwaruta, General Secretary of Zimbabwe Workcamps Association

The historical context of International voluntary services (IVS) incorporates the previous forms of travel by missionaries, explorers and colonisers. Dann (1996), Simpson (2004), Roberts (2004) and Tubb (2006) assert that missionary activities increased during the period of colonialism and imperialism (Simpson, 2005, Roberts, 2004). It is important to point out that even present-day travel by long-term volunteers is influenced by colonial history. It can be argued that imperialism and colonialism provided both the possibility and the rationale for this travel. Colonialism was not just about conquering the world, but also a conquest about the way the world was known. As colonialism itself has been dismantled and criticised, however, the constructed colonial gaze lingers on, influencing destination choices for long-term volunteers.

International Voluntary Service (IVS) operates within an arena of global power politics (Tubb, 2006). According to Simpson (2005), these power politics play a crucial role in IVS, because most of the power is invested with the organisation in the Global North. Organisations in the Global South have less power on exchange programs for long-term volunteers, and most decision are taken in the Global North. This scenario complicates the partnership arrangement, because some partners are more equal than others. Some partners in this relation have very limited power to influence decisions which impact them either positively or negatively. The main thrust of IVS is 'doing development', a notion that reinvents the thinking of the colonial era through its framing volunteers' relationships and encounters with the visited others. According to Tubb (2006), 'doing development' has two major goals – personal growth and helping others. The others in some cases are perceived as poor, and they need to be liberated from poverty through deploying (oftrn young) volunteers from the Global North.

According to Tubb (2006), Simpson (2004) and Robert, (2004), IVS is a vehicle used by the North under the powerful influence of development experts intervening in the Global South, offering a bridge between modern and the traditional ways of life. They will be doing this under the auspices of helping 'others'. This approach has failed to

address the root cause of poverty and global inequality; instead it has only served to limit the participation of people in the South to address problems of development as they see them, and to navigate their own paths of change (Mwaruta,2011)

Roberts (2004) asserts that post-colonial development theory has been framed in the language of charity, technical expertise, civil engagement, civil services and volunteerism. This language reinforces a colonial legacy, through the liberal position of wealthy nations in the Global North exercising a moral obligation to assist poor countries in the Global South. Inherent in this position is the assumption that countries in the Global South are willing to receive the assistance. Even in this age of globalisation, the Global North still perceive the Global South as weak and poor. The notion of IVS reinforces this ideology of the North-South divide through texts and images from the South which reinforce a colonial legacy. This discourse encourages a particular notion of other, masked behind celebrated connotations, influenced by the colonial legacy. The discourse, therefore, is blinkered to suit the needs of the voices from North, potentially at the opportunity cost of the destination in the South (Roberts 2004, Griffin, 2004)

Post-colonialists argue that these systems remain today between the former coloniser and the colonised even though official control has ceased (Simpson, 2005, Williams and Chrisman, 1993). It is difficult to draw a line between colonial and post-colonial discourse because of the power relations which still exist after decades of independence (Simpson, 2004). The colonial representation remains important in understanding the contemporary perception. Some volunteers prefer to do voluntary work in a country where they have some historical ties, such British volunteers preferring go to Kenya, Uganda and Zambia, while German nationals prefers Namibia and Tanzania and Spanish volunteers prefer Latin America. In this case, IVS is controlled by the past colonial legacy which perpetuates the traditional travel patterns of the missionaries, explorers, and colonisers, hence the dire need to deconstruct this trend through breaking the existing power structures which reinforce neo-colonialism and climate colonisation.

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Ratherford Mwaruta is a student of International Voluntary Service. He has worked as a volunteer (both long- and short-term) in a number of countries around the world, especially in East and Southern Africa. He is currently the serving as the Intern President for the Network of African Voluntary Organisations (NAVO), Executive Committee Member for The Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Services (CCIVS) and Chairperson for Southern Africa Workcamps Cooperation  (SAWC).

# 09

# The Key Ingredients in the Peace Corps Recipe for Success

Agnes Lam and Kris Besch, Office of Global Operations, Peace Corps

Seismic events are fueling monumental shifts in societal norms: COVID-19 has turned the world upside down, climate change has impacted our lives in unprecedented ways, poverty and economic inequality are on the rise, international conflicts have increased, and global outcries against power inequities have resulted in new ways of thinking about relationships. We long for a return to normal but realise that the new normal may bear little resemblance to the past.

Against this backdrop, there is a palpable sense of urgency to chart a new course. Before embracing this new future, many international volunteer sector organisations, including the Peace Corps, have used the pandemic pause as a time for introspection, taking stock of who we are, both as individual organisations and as a wider field. The first step in effectively planning for the future is an honest evaluation of what we have to offer and how we can address our shortcomings.

The Peace Corps developed a Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 to 2026 Strategic Plan to provide a foundation for addressing this shifting context while also looking at new service models using a 20-year time horizon. A team was tasked to determine the attributes that make up the essence of Peace Corps service and are core to our Agency's identity, brand, and success—the secret recipe that leads to transformative and impactful experiences for Volunteers and the communities they serve. A literature review, interviews with Agency stakeholders, and 20 focus groups, with roughly equal numbers of American and host country staff and partners, were conducted. The team found a strong consensus amongst all groups and identified six foundational themes that are the hallmarks of Peace Corps service.

**Authentic Relationships:** The life-long connections developed between Volunteers and local community members are deep bonds among ordinary people, outside the realm of international business, development, and politics. These relationships build solidarity and empathy among diverse peoples, fueling a shared desire to make a positive difference in the world.

**Grassroots Development:** Peace Corps programming reflects an approach grounded in a deep understanding of the local context and community-driven priorities. Volunteers are not external 'experts' with all the answers; they are listeners, facilitators, and connectors. They work hand-in-hand with partners to best support communities.

**Social Capital:** This refers to the Peace Corps' indirect role in developing a strong community of American and host country citizens who can more sensitively and collaboratively address challenges in their communities and countries as well as internationally.

**Broadened Worldview:** The Peace Corps provides both Volunteers and host country communities the opportunity to get out of their comfort zones, challenging and then transcending assumptions about other places and people.

**Language and Culture:** The Peace Corps' strong emphasis on language and intercultural learning enables Volunteers to meaningfully bridge cultural differences and integrate into host communities. Both Volunteers and local community members benefit from an improved ability to understand differing viewpoints while respecting diversity.

**Commitment to Service:** The Peace Corps emphasises Volunteer service to, and partnership with, communities where they are invited and where there is a need. It is about people giving back, caring about one another, and working for the public good within and across borders.

As the Peace Corps considers new volunteer service models, these key ingredients will need to be intentionally incorporated into their design to ensure that the Peace Corps' recipe for success remains intact. At the same time, the Agency must enhance its operations to address issues most mentioned during the Agency's research: 1) power inequities inherent in a service model sending American Volunteers overseas; 2) improved sustainability through increased empowerment of host country partners; and 3) the need to better define, measure and tell the story of Peace Corps' impact.

Though we are still moving through this process at the Peace Corps, we have found that there is a lot to learn, much to preserve, and exciting opportunities to embrace in the future. Only by better understanding ourselves and asking difficult questions can we move forward, confident in who we are and what we will contribute to this changing world.

# 10

# Volunteering by and for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

Andrée Ménard, World University Services Canada, Durable Solutions for Refugees Specialist

We are living in a time of escalating conflicts and rapidly increasing numbers of forced displacements. At the end of 2021, more than 1% of the world's population was forcibly displaced. The need for innovative solutions and shared responsibility is greater than ever. Recent years have seen increased support for refugee solidarity movements, including from within the Volunteering for Development (V4D) sector, whose response has included the expansion of international volunteering opportunities in conflict-affected and refugee contexts. Where the sector has continued to fall short, however, is in too often overlooking the role that refugees can and must play in the global refugee crisis response, and in failing to value the actions already being taken by refugees themselves in their host communities. Refugees actively contribute to their own communities and to their host communities through diverse volunteer activities, whether through sharing information, skills and knowledge or through advocating for social and political change.

The V4D sector can play a critical role in responding to the global refugee crisis through fostering an enabling environment for refugees to engage through volunteerism to support the realisation of  more systemic, policy-based solutions through focusing on the three durable solutions available to refugees: i) local integration, ii) resettlement and iii) voluntary repatriation. There is no simple and direct link between volunteering and these durable solutions, most of which require deep systems changes. However, focusing on the meaningful participation of refugees within V4D programs is one means through which our sector can tackle the global refugee crisis. We propose three pathways through which VCAs can promote volunteering to support meaningful refugee participation, which include:  i) supporting resettled refugees who volunteer in their own communities with both newcomers and more established populations; ii) supporting the forcibly displaced and former refugees to volunteer internationally through emerging solidarity networks; and iii) supporting refugee led voluntary organisations that support improved integration, especially those operating in first countries of asylum.

First, examples of local volunteering can be seen across any and all communities that host large numbers of refugees and former refugees. The Global Compact on Refugees holds that refugees should be given the chance to contribute to the development of the communities hosting them. Inspiring individuals such as Syed Hasnain, founder of UNIRE, the first national network of refugees living in Italy, provide support to refugee integration and advocacy for policy change. Through WUSC's long-standing Student Refugee Program, resettled refugee youth exercise leadership in supporting new cohorts of young refugees to arrive in Canada, and engage other student communities in learning together about the issues faced by refugees and other marginalised groups.

Second, a key role that V4D organisations can play is to mobilise refugee networks as a source of volunteer recruitment, creating programs specifically designed for refugee volunteers, who have deep expertise to offer and who need specific forms of support. WUSC's online International Seminar in 2021, for example, targeted refugee youth as volunteers in collaboration with peers from around the world. Moving back to physical, in person, volunteering creates new challenges, including travel permits and visas for refugees who often lack documentation. But the potential of enrolling refugees as volunteers to support networks of solidarity is too great not to tackle these challenges head on.

Third, V4D organisations should seek to support initiatives led by refugees and to partner with refugee-led organisations (RLOs, especially those operating in first countries of asylum. Supporting RLOs as partners and hosts to international volunteers can mobilise much of what V4D organisations do best. At the same time, we must recognise that RLOs are often amongst the most marginalised of organisations, and may lack the systems and structures that we often seek from partners. We will need to be flexible and adaptive in supporting RLOs from the ground up.

Through supporting meaningful participation of refugees, and continuing to keep our eyes on working towards durable solutions, the V4D sector can become a better ally to refugee communities and their organisations. None of these proposed pathways alone can achieve durable solutions for the refugees. But refugees are demanding that development organisations begin to shift power and invest in the refugee leaders, networks and organisations as a first step towards durable solutions.

Andrée Ménard is WUSC's Durable Solutions for Refugees Specialist. In this role, she supports the expansion, implementation and development of initiatives that increase durable solutions and improve education and economic opportunities for refugees globally.

# 11

# Time of Crisis Leadership for Volunteering and Community Resilience

Nichole Cirillo and Wendy Osborne, International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE)

The pandemic changed the way we live our lives, creating fear, uncertainty, instability, a lack of momentum, and a sense of isolation. These same issues also affected the volunteering community, including national volunteering leadership organisations.[1]

The International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE)[2] research report "Leadership for Volunteering: the COVID-19 Experience"[3] examines how COVID-19 impacted the strategic role of leadership for volunteering organisations in advocacy, development, and volunteer mobilisation. It collected data from seventy organisations across sixty-seven countries. It is clear from the research that the pandemic increased the complexity of the volunteering environment; it created challenges for volunteering, yet also created opportunities for development and innovation.

Key findings from the research indicate that in the context of the pandemic, the increased use and development of technology have been key factors. The national volunteering leadership organisations created portals and websites to help manage the supply and demand for volunteering. They developed more online opportunities and quickly adjusted their communication and support for volunteering to virtual.

For many organisations, moving to more online activity was a necessity. This notable change also had to be thoroughly resourced and managed. It is equally important to note that the world has many digital divides, across continents and within countries. Using and maximising technology as a resource presented a challenge for organisations where consistent, affordable connectivity is a problem.

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1 IAVE describes national volunteering leadership organisations as "operating at a national level or a strategic regional level to promote and support volunteering, having linkages and/or active relationships/partnerships with volunteer-involving organisations, government, and corporations, as well as institutions such as United Nations Volunteers when appropriate."

2 IAVE—the International Association for Volunteer Effort—is a 501(c)(3) organisation whose mission is to create a more just and sustainable world by enabling leaders, leadership organisations and environments that empower volunteers. www.iave.org

3 Jacob Mwathi et al., "Leadership for Volunteering."

Another key finding of the research concerns the importance of partnerships and coalitions. In several countries, national leadership for volunteering organisations strengthened their volunteer-based partnerships with government. New coalitions with volunteer-involving organisations have also been developed to support volunteer mobilisation.

While volunteering activity has both increased and decreased at different times and in different countries during this pandemic period, the report's findings indicate that organisations engaged a wider diversity of volunteers and that most of the national leadership for volunteering organisations see inclusivity as a key feature of future volunteer mobilisation strategies.

# THE LEARNING...

The engagement of individuals through volunteering is vital to building resilient communities that will help all of us prepare for the next crisis. This includes reenergising existing volunteers, recruiting younger generations, and developing volunteer leadership. We need to adapt to create space for both formal and informal volunteering—to create a volunteer movement in solidarity with itself. It also means being mindful of diversity and inclusivity as the hallmarks of our volunteer strategies.

Leadership for volunteering organisations understand that the effective management of volunteers maximises impact and that during the pandemic, a wealth of good practice has been developed. Networking and the global sharing of information, experience, and expertise are important to maximise use of available resources and enhance effectiveness. IAVE's Global Network for Volunteering Leadership (GNVL)[4] is an example of this in practice. IAVE believes it is imperative that others also recognise that information and knowledge-sharing enable volunteering to flourish worldwide.

COVID-19 has been a disruptive force that challenged volunteering leadership and the entire global volunteering family. It continues to create a sense of uncertainty and unpredictability about what the future will hold. Within this maelstrom, there is one important hopeful reflection: "Volunteering is a fundamental building block of civil society. It brings to life the noblest aspirations of humankind—the pursuit of peace, freedom, opportunity, safety and justice for all people."[5]

Nichole Cirillo is the Executive Director of the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE). Wendy Osborne is IAVE's Senior Consultant for Volunteering Leadership.

4  International Association for Volunteer Effort, "Global Network of Volunteering Leadership," IAVE, accessed 2021, https://www.iave.org/gnvl/.

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# 12

# We Need to Talk:
# Hosting conversations on climate change and unsustainability

Chris O'Connell and Sive Bresnihan, Comhlámh

*This think piece is based on reflections and processes currently underway within Comhlámh, an Irish association supporting international volunteers and volunteer sending agencies.*

'Life now is so complicated, it's impossible for anyone to be good enough for The Good Place. These days, just buying a tomato in a grocery store means that you are unwittingly supporting toxic pesticides, exploiting labour, and contributing to global warming'.

So concludes Michael the Architect (Ted Danson) in the Netflix comedy 'The Good Place' upon discovering that (SPOILER ALERT) no human has gone there for 521 years. The reason? No matter how ethically the characters behave, they are implicated in a system that is unjust and unsustainable.

## EXPLORING ROOTS

Michael's timeline is not random: rewinding 521 years locates the problem at a highly significant moment in human history – the conquest of the Americas, globalisation and the birth of the 'modern/colonial system'. This is the system Michael is alluding to.

The violent, extractive nature of colonialism/coloniality and its core beliefs – the separation of humans from Nature; and the 'superiority' of some over others – has fuelled a Western prosperity based on what sociologist Stephan Lessenich calls 'externalisation'. The price of this 'progress', he observes, has been continually relocated to other parts of the world (2019).

The idea of 'modernity' has enabled this violence and externalisation. Framed as 'civilisation', 'progress' or 'development', it has presented inequality and unsustainability as phases to be worked through on the way to the good life/place. This belief continues to be so dominant that climate change is itself externalised, with modernity offering 'solutions'.

When the 'solutions' fail, blame gets apportioned: to 'criminally negligent' political leaders; the global North (Hickel, 2020); Wall Street; fossil fuel companies (Buse et al, 2022); etc. While this approach represents a welcome corrective to dominant individualistic narratives and acknowledges unevenly distributed climate burdens, is it yet another way to avoid talking about root causes? Another instance of 'them', not 'us'?

## UNWITTING OR UNWILLING?

For those of us investing in and deriving security and comfort from modernity's promise, there is much to consider. Stein argues that we enjoy a 'modern/colonial habit-of-being' that is 'ethically harmful and ecologically unsustainable' (2019: 198). Are we willing and able to grasp this?

While the inter-connectedness of violence and prosperity may appear 'self-evident', Lessenich believes it is overlooked because it can be: those who live well enjoy 'the power of not having to know' (2019: 136).

Nevertheless, as Lessenich also observes, 'knowledge on its own is by no means enough' (2019: 146); we are adept at obscuring inter-connections. Indeed, it is 'far easier to consider modern promises as broken but viable and fixable than to consider that they were always false and harmful' (Stein, 2019: 204).

The above disavowal may have persisted up to now (at huge cost to Earth and to people's lives) but we are at the point where it is no longer holding. The climate crisis makes it 'increasingly difficult to externalize the true costs of modernity's promises' (Stein, 2019: 202). We need to face these truths.

## TOWARDS IMPLICATION

As Comhlámh, an organisation with roots in international volunteering and development, we have been trying to engage with these threads. Earlier this year, we began deliberating on a core organisational value: 'ecological sustainability'. At the very least, we wanted to pay attention to instances where, on questions of unsustainability, we might find ourselves skirting around interconnections and reaching for familiar, feel-good fixes.

In this work, we have found Audrey Bryan's (2022) application of the concept of 'the implicated subject' helpful. Bryan draws on Rothberg's (2019: 31) view of 'implication' as occupying a 'hard-to-pin-down position between victims and perpetrators that make them "transmission belts" of domination'. The implicated subject may not be the author of injustices but provides them with continued passage.

This approach raises difficult questions for us:

- Are we able to consider the ways in which 'development', 'international volunteering', 'partnership', etc. serve to normalise and reproduce unsustainability and inequality?
- What is our vision of a 'good place' beyond modernity for all?
- Are we afraid of the uncertainty this kind of visioning presupposes? Of what might come undone?

What we have learnt is that exploring implicated-ness requires more than conversations among colleagues. It requires tuning into the intellectual but also affective engagement in the room (uncertainty, defensiveness, discomfort), and methods which encourage honesty and authenticity.

There are no blueprints here and much of this is about trialling things. We therefore offer the following orientations tentatively, and based on our experiences to date:

- Find ways to start from 'depth' and expansiveness
- Find ways to slow down whilst considering the question 'who pays the price for the pace of my learning?'
- Open space between yourselves and the ideas that hold up unsustainability. Social cartographies are helpful: 'The House that Modernity Built' and other work by the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective (2019) offer entry points into colonial-modernity.
- Be open to the possibility that explorations could be the undoing of how we have been seeing and doing.
- Pay attention to the affective engagement in the room. Implicated-ness doesn't offer absolution through an 'alternative way'.

We are indebted to the references, such as the work of below, which have supported our internal processes to date.

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Dr Chris O'Connell is the Volunteer Quality and Capacity Building Project Officer at Comhlámh, and is the convenor of its Code of Good Practice Safeguarding Working Group.

Sive Bresnihan has been part of Comhlámh's Training and Education team since 2016. As part of her ongoing work in Comhlámh, she explores decolonial pedagogies and how they can be mobilised for transformative learning and, ultimately, more justice.

# 13

# Partnership – Just another Buzzword?

Helge Espe, Norec (Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation)

Partnership is essential in today's world of volunteering. Volunteering agencies, organisations, and businesses cooperate for different purposes such as sending and receiving volunteers, finance, research, advocacy, and events.

Through partnership, one can take advantage of the complementary skills and resources of several actors, and achieve together what we could not do on our own. Volunteer leaders must be able to bring together a variety of different parties and make them work together effectively.

## PARTNERSHIP – A LACK OF CONCEPTUAL CLARITY

In the recent report Partnership – Just another Buzzword? (written by Jon Lie of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs in Oslo for Norec), it is stated that partnership has in some ways become a buzzword which covers a range of relations. More often than not, the precise meaning is not defined.

For example, SDG17, Partnerships for the Goals, has become a sort of banner for general support to international cooperation, even with emotional overtones – the expression of feelings, commitment and common ground, rather than an operational goal. There is a lack of conceptual clarity.

## FAIR AND EQUAL PARTNERSHIPS

In the current discourse on decolonisation, important aspects of partnership include equality, reciprocity, and fair distribution of power between the parties. This is not only a moral imperative but also a more effective way to create ownership and, in turn, sustainable results.

Knowledge of how to facilitate, support and maintain a fair power balance between partners will be a crucial volunteering leadership skill for the years ahead. How can a partnership take advantage of the strengths of each actor, build a complementary network, and maintain values such as respect and equally shared power?

# TEACHING AND LEARNING

The traditional narrative and operational framework for international volunteering has been one of skills and knowledge transfer, especially from volunteers from the Global North to people and communities in the South. But who is really the teacher and who is the learner?

In the English language, to teach and to learn are two different words. This may perhaps lead us to think that in a partnership, teaching and learning are two different roles. However, in my native tongue, Norwegian, 'teach' and 'learn' are the same word. This could in a nice way indicate that in real life, we cannot distinguish one of these roles clearly from the other. It points to a concept of knowledge that is less of a package to be handed over, and more of simultaneous, interwoven processes, which are facilitated through dialogue in a partnership.

The practical implication is that everyone in a partnership has the potential to bring knowledge to the table. In order to secure ownership and sustainability, the value of that knowledge has to be recognised.

# ARE GOOD INTENTIONS ENOUGH?

One might think that the principles of equality and reciprocity are held especially highly in the civil society sector, with its activist and spokesperson NGOs campaigning for causes, many with a decolonisation agenda. But interestingly, the report mentioned above finds that civil society volunteers from Norway, more or less as a matter of course, assumed the role of teacher, while their Global South counterparts naturally slid into in the role of learner. The same was not found with corporate volunteers.

It seems, therefore, that good intentions are not enough to achieve equal and reciprocal partnerships. Competent volunteering leadership is required as well, and a key skill of volunteering leaders today and tomorrow will be an ability to facilitate and bring out the relevant knowledge that everyone possesses.

# MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

There are many advantages of embedding volunteer exchange into deeper and thematic-based home-host partnership with multiple dimensions, as opposed to more one-dimensional partnerships.

The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Centre (WEEE-Centre), based in Kenya, recycles electronic waste safely for sustainable development. They have formed a partnership with a similar company, Vohitra Sarl, in Madagascar.

Utlilising volunteer exchange, the companies together improve their practices in e-waste management. They also work together on research, innovation, and policy inputs for the adoption of relevant regulations by the respective national governments. And they campaign together to inform the public about the environmental and health risks posed by electronic waste.

Over a period of three years, each of these companies has sent six staff members to volunteer with the other on one-year placements. Each volunteer shares their knowledge with the host partner, and brings home what they have learned. In this way, both agencies serve as both home and host partner, and benefit from what their volunteers learn abroad. This ensures the appropriate application of knowledge, better outcomes and more sustainable results. The knowledge gained and exchanged is embedded in the respective companies, so it doesn't go away when each volunteer ends their placement.

The model of a multi-dimensional partnership proved resilient to the COVID pandemic. Partnerships could keep their cooperation going using means other than physical volunteer visits.

Such partnerships place high demands on volunteering leadership, who need the skill to pull together thematic diversity and manage equal and multi-dimensional partnerships. These are key skills for volunteer leaders to develop and perfect so that we can make volunteering relevant and effective for the 2030 Agenda.

Helge Espe is social scientist and a senior adviser at Norec (Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation).

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