

The State of Youth Volunteering in Africa

Stepping back so that young people can step forward



a discussion paper for the 2011 IVCO conference by [Dilhani Wijeyesekera](#)



Foreword

This is the eighth in a series of discussion papers produced by the International FORUM on Development Service (FORUM), which follows on from our research work on trends in international volunteering and co-operation in recent years. One of the key issues identified in this time has been the state of youth volunteering in Africa and how this affects us as International Volunteer and Co-operation Organisations (IVCOs).

This paper aims to consider some of the implications of the state of youth volunteering in Africa, what we can learn from this, and identify some challenges for the future.

The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of FORUM or its members/Associate members or of the organisations for whom the authors works. The responsibility for these views rests with the authors alone.

Dimity Fifer,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dimity Fifer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large loops and a long tail on the letter 'y'.

Chair of FORUM

About FORUM

The International FORUM on Development Service (known as “FORUM”) is the most significant global network of International Volunteer Co-operation Organisations. FORUM aims to share information, develop good practice and enhance co-operation and support between its members/Associate members. Together, FORUM members/Associate members explore innovative practice and research key contemporary issues, focusing on organisational learning and improved practice. This information is shared in person, at conferences and via the website.

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Introduction

Youth volunteering in Africa is growing in scale, diversity, relevance and demand. International youth volunteering whether promoting North-South, South-South, and South-North exchange for young people continues to play an active part in development in Africa. However, as volunteering approaches grow in scale, and the demand for governments, private sector and development actors to respond to the needs of young people and societies within Africa intensifies, the challenge to volunteering organisations includes:

- Ensuring programs are shaped by the needs and interests of diverse young people in Africa
- Ensuring authenticity to the values of volunteerism
- Proving that youth volunteering in Africa achieves tangible development results
- Offering cost effective and sustainable solutions that a country or community can run with
- Creating space for young people to lead and shape the volunteering agenda with and for Africa

This paper will argue that in fact there already are a significant volume of high quality national and local youth volunteering programs in Africa, which are doing all of the above.

It will argue that youth volunteering in Africa is relevant to young people's needs and interests, but needs to better demonstrate how it can be connected to the achievement of national development priorities to gain further investment and ownership from national actors.

This potentially leaves international and institutional volunteering organisations in an odd space – what is their role in an environment where local and national youth volunteering in Africa is on the rise?

This paper will propose that international and institutional volunteering organisations need to take a step back and re-contextualise their role to focus more on fostering an enabling environment for youth led, youth driven volunteering approaches, led by young people in their own countries, so that we are planning for the future by creating a generation of new individuals committed to volunteerism in their own contexts.

1. Why youth volunteering is relevant to Africa

Young people will change the world. This is a fact. Young people will eventually lead their countries and societies. The questions for us as development actors are:

- How will young people change the world?
- What are the factors which will determine the direction that young people will take us?
- How can we help to ensure the direction that young people take is positive?

Today there are approximately 1.2 billion young people (aged 15-24¹) living in the world². Representing around 18% of the global population this makes it the largest generation in history.

It is estimated that the youth population of Africa stands at 160 million, which is 20% of the total population of sub-Saharan Africa. With 43% of sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 15, we are heading towards a further rise assisted by higher fertility rates and improvements in child survival.

In terms of sheer numbers of young people who will exist in Africa, increasing access to youth volunteering programs which will increase their knowledge, skills and experiences for the future, remains highly relevant.

Most countries in Africa are projected to have more working-age adults per child in 2030 than they did in 2006³. At the same time, family sizes are reducing. A large workforce with fewer children to support creates an opportunity to increase economic output. However, for this opportunity to be realised, there is still need to invest in the knowledge, skills development, and well being of children and young people, so that countries can expect to have a better skilled and healthy population for longer to drive economic growth. From this perspective, there is a clear business case for investing in youth volunteering programs which tangibly improve the skills level and health of youthful populations.

For youth volunteering organisations, the question to ask is whether the programs being run are creating this potential?

¹ Most common definitions of youth used by the United Nations and World Bank defines youth as aged between 15-24, however this age range varies at a national level and in particular in developing countries

² UN (2010) *International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding* UN: New York

³ Ashford, L. (2007) *Africa's Youthful Population: Risk or Opportunity?*, Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau

2. Why young people are motivated to volunteer in Africa

As tempting as it is to assume the possible answers to this question, working for a youth led development organisation in Africa, constantly reminds me that young people will always surprise you. As such with the support of my team, we asked 59 community and national youth volunteers in Tanzania currently placed in rural communities with Restless Development what motivated them to volunteer⁴. The top five reasons cited by youth volunteers were:

- Wanting to make a difference to their communities and country
- A sense of duty to solve the problems created by young people through their own leadership
- To increase their own knowledge and capabilities to protect their health and income
- To gain recognition and respect from the community and society through volunteering
- To gain self confidence and acquire skills for leadership

There is a clear desire for young people to be able to make a difference to their own lives, as well as the lives of others. As such it is essential that youth volunteering programs achieve both – they must invest in young people's own capabilities, as well as impact on the development concerns that young people believe are important to their community and country.

Young people's motivation for impact

A critical question for local and global volunteering organisations promoting youth volunteering in Africa is whether our programs are designed to enable young people to contribute to real impact. There are certainly a number of programs which are doing this, as illustrated throughout this paper. In most examples, programs identified which were delivering clear development impact through young people are often national or local volunteering programs. Their design is not particularly different to good international volunteering programs in that they generally are longer placements lasting between 6-12 months; are competitively recruited; linked to national or local development priorities often involving program design with the communities and stakeholders benefitting; provide intensive training to youth volunteers in their roles; provide young people with clearly defined roles and accountabilities; provide in placement support to the volunteers; provide accreditation and recognition on completion of the placement; and involve young people in leadership of the program (including design and evaluation).

Young people's motivation to lead the change they want to see

A key question for volunteering organisations is whether the change we want to see is the same as the change that the young people want to see. While there will be lots of situations in which our visions will be shared, just as any other group of people in society, young people are not homogeneous and as such will have their own vision for how they want to shape their communities and the world. How do we learn to step back, so that young people can step forward?

⁴ Restless Development is a youth led agency which delivers peer to peer education programs in sexual and reproductive health, livelihoods, and civic participation through youth volunteer peer educators

Case Study One: Slum TV - Youth led community based organisation in Kenya

Slum TV is a membership based organisation in Mathare (Nairobi's second largest slum) in Kenya. It was set up by three young men from Kenya and Serbia. From its inception it has been run on a voluntary basis by young people with the aim of re-defining how slum dwellers are perceived and giving young people living in Mathare to depict life inside an urban slum through their own eyes. Run by a core membership of around fifteen young people, the group trains young people in the community to learn how to use media (film, photography, blogging) to tell their stories. The members come together every month to decide the focus themes of their work each month, develop the stories, which are showcased every month in a public space in Mathare and attract around 500 people from the area who come to watch the films.

Its ethos centres on not being seen as an NGO, or trying to improve development, but simply to re-frame how we look at the potential of young people and the reality of the slum. *Slum TV* has won worldwide recognition after filming live scenes of the post-election violence witnessed in Kenya in 2007/08 and bringing to light police brutality towards bystanders which was shown on the BBC and Al Jazeera. For the month following the elections, the members decided amidst the media focus on the violence and political crisis in Kenya, to document stories and films depicting how people in Mathare were helping each other, to demonstrate that even in conflict, there are individuals and communities committed to peace.

This is an example of passionate and talented young people coming together with little financial resource to create something truly youth led and about fostering social change in the way they see it. It is neither complex nor labour intensive but is powerful because it is shaped by young peoples' own interests as they see it.

Young people's motivation to volunteer as a vehicle to realise their own potential

In the final example below in this section, youth volunteering in Africa can provide a space through which young people realise their own potential and ambitions, and are brought into development as a result of the volunteering experience.

This could be considered the most powerful development outcome achieved through youth volunteering –growing a generation committed to bettering their societies for the long haul.

Case Study Two: Reflections from a development professional and former volunteering working with youth volunteering in Africa

"I'm often talking to volunteers at the annual de-brief [annual review with volunteers after their placement] and many often comment that they hadn't appreciated when they started what difference volunteering would make to them. They had entered because there wasn't much else to do – not enough funds to go to university, few work opportunities available – but not yet recognising that volunteering might expand their horizons. When they finish we (Restless Development) and they find so many changes have happened. Many will opt to go into higher education or vocational training, which they hadn't thought of doing before – perhaps they wanted to go straight into the workplace after volunteering.

For me this is a recognition of a gap in their life that can be filled by education in terms of career, their income, but also in terms of the difference they can make in the world. Why? They also go on into degrees and training which they had not planned to do, and which seem linked to the problems they have found and felt passionate about – social work, community development, education, and finance and business administration. Why finance? Because so many see that a lack of resources and lack of skills to manage what little resources are there is driving the problems in the communities where they have worked. Their future course has been shaped by their experience in the field in a way they hadn't planned for"

Kennedy Oulu, Kenya, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, Restless Development in Tanzania (and former VSO Volunteer Malawi).

3. Is it ultimately about the money?

The majority of young people in sub-Saharan Africa live on less than \$2 per day. Today, youth make up 37% percent of the working-age population, but 60% of the total unemployed⁵. Through volunteering, we may be able to strengthen a commitment to volunteerism as we saw in the last section. However, we also potentially put at risk the spirit of volunteerism through the system of stipends which do provide a new source of income to young people without access to jobs or income.

Youth populations are growing faster than youth employment rates in Africa, and for employers and governments in Africa, having access to a skilled labour force to meet national growth needs remains a priority. Investing in youth volunteering which contributes to skills development targeted to labour needs is essential.

Are the economic benefits the only reasons for governments, the private sector, civil society and young people themselves to invest in youth volunteering in Africa?

There are other important benefits of investing in young people in general, and in particular, through youth volunteering which go back to the original point made, that young people will change the world.

The motivations for doing this are unlikely to be based on altruism, but on a realist's approach. A number of governments are now investing in youth 'volunteering' as a strategy to engage young people in nation building and civic participation. Many see the negative potential of not engaging young people in society as a clear risk which could result in social conflict, and indeed, result in whole governments being toppled as has recently been seen in the Middle East.

Young people are also future voters in a society. With youth populations on the rise, securing the youth vote is a key strategy for securing your party's political future. The same applies to businesses, in that appealing to young people is not only about gaining your future work force, but about gaining your future market.

While it is unlikely that youth volunteering organisations and institutions can control the motivations of key actors who will fund and give space to youth volunteering programs in Africa. Volunteering programs delivered in partnerships with government and the private sector which are planned to provide benefits for young people's development and the development of the community or country, are highly effective. Further, increasing the scale and quality of these programs act as demonstration models for furthering investment, and can change the attitudes of the partners involved making youth volunteering for development in Africa, a powerful tool to shape policy and practice to benefit young people and development needs in a society.

⁵ World Bank (2009), *African Development Indicators: Youth and Employment in Africa – The Potential, the Problem, The Promise*, New York

Case Study Three: Government of Rwanda's Commitment to Promoting Volunteerism for Youth Development Partnerships between International and National Volunteers

In Rwanda, the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture in empowering young women and men to live free of poverty, discrimination and violence, UNV engaged in the joint programme 'Delivering as One to Meet the Development Needs and Rights of Rwandan Adolescents', together with UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Human Settlement Program (UN-HABITAT) and ILO.

The Joint Youth Program increases the participation of youth through volunteerism and enables access to services in an environment conducive to the psychosocial, emotional and physical development of adolescents and youth. Two international and 11 national UN Volunteers serve with the program within the Ministry of Youth and in 15 districts of the country. The UN Volunteers helped build the capacity of the Ministry to rehabilitate the infrastructure for sports and games in youth centres, which are run by volunteers. More than 13,000 youth attended the youth centres on a regular basis in Karongi District between January and December 2010. The breakdown of this figure shows how the project is reaching young people, particularly young women: of the total, there were 3,905 girls and 3,191 boys aged 10-19 years; 1,790 young women and 1,984 young men aged 20-24 years; 876 young women and 1,007 young men aged 25-35 years; and 110 young women and 120 young men above 35 years old. In each district of the provinces, over 1,000 youth volunteers engaged in workshops and discussions on volunteerism, human rights and environmental issues. Around 60 of these youth volunteers are peer educators and carry out sensitisation campaigns on reproductive health, environmental protection, civic education and the promotion of volunteering. About 300 youth also took part in training on entrepreneurship, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health.

"These achievements are being sustained by the youth volunteer clubs that were established, 35 in the Rusizi District alone, which are working closely to initiate lasting community development projects," says Jean de Dieu Sibomana from the Rusizi youth centre team. "The Joint Youth Programme became a bridge to pass the volunteerism spirit on to youth and the entire community."⁶

⁶ UN Volunteers (2010), UNV Annual Report, New York

4. How youth volunteering in Africa fits in with national and global development goals

Tanzania has the largest presence of NGOs in the world, a significant number of them work through local and global volunteering programs which purport to make a difference to development concerns in the country. However, there is increasing scepticism of a number of programs which are frequently referred to as promoting 'development tourism' in which volunteers are placed in projects which are unlikely to deliver tangible development results due to their short-term nature and lack of connection to national and local development priorities.

This is not unique to Tanzania, and is a real risk to organisations and institutions delivering impactful youth led and youth focused volunteering programs in Africa. Globally, there is increasing recognition of the significant potential of young people in development exemplified in UN Secretary General's Ban Ki Moon's statement that "We need young people's participation more than ever. Their energy and idealism can help make up for lost ground and achieve our development goals in full and on time".

The examples given below demonstrate a distinct value in promoting youth volunteering in Africa for development ends. However, in most cases, where clear development impact was identified, the programs were being led by national and local youth volunteers. It is not clear whether this simply means that international youth volunteering does not result in a significant impact for development, or whether youth volunteering organisations need to better account for the impact of international youth volunteers.

Conflict prevention: In Burundi young people have been at the forefront of post-conflict reconstruction with youth service initiatives such as Jeunesse en Reconstruction du Monde en Destruction (Youth in Reconstruction of the World in Destruction) cited as having played a crucial role in addressing the needs of communities in the aftermath of war.⁷ From helping to rebuild critical infrastructure, such as homes and hospitals, to dealing with the psychological scars through art and music, such initiatives not only address immediate needs but also contribute to wider goals of national peace and reconciliation. In countries such as Sierra Leone, where young soldiers struggle to re-integrate into normal life service-led programs such as The Reintegration Skills Training and Employment Generation (STEG) have been an effective tool in helping them to develop a more positive outlook as well as develop their identity as young citizens.⁸

Health promotion and HIV and AIDS prevention: In 2007, it was estimated that there are 3.2 million young people living with HIV and AIDS in Africa, and that one in two deaths among young females in Africa is a result of AIDS or AIDS related illnesses⁹. There is significant evidence which demonstrates that volunteer inspired approaches to promoting healthy living, including combating HIV and AIDS, have significant impact on promoting health not only among young people but also within their communities at large and therefore offers benefits for development goals overall.

Case Study Four: Youth volunteering contributing to locally relevant development goals in South Africa

GroundBREAKERS, a leading peer education program in South Africa has played a key role in helping to tackle the problem of HIV/AIDS amongst young people.¹⁰ Training and supporting 18-25 year olds the program has allowed young people to take an active role in addressing one of the issues which affects them and their communities. Such programs

⁷ Chae, S, Taylor, R and Douglas, A (2007) *Service as a Strategy: Post Conflict Reconstruction* ICP: Washington DC

⁸ Chae, S, Taylor, R and Douglas, A (2007) *Service as a Strategy: Post Conflict Reconstruction* ICP: Washington DC

⁹ UN (2010), *Regional Review of Africa – UN International Year of Youth* UN: New York

¹⁰ Alessi, B (2004) *Service as a Strategy: Youth and Community Development* ICP: Washington DC

have been cited as best practise with a recent review of peer-led interventions to reduce HIV risk in youth finding that these programmes demonstrated success, particularly in effecting positive change in knowledge and condom use.¹¹

Case Study Five: Youth volunteering with national and international volunteers improving sexual and reproductive health

An independent external evaluation of Restless Development's peer to peer education program in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania conducted in 2011 and assessing impact of its work between October 2008 – September 2010 which placed 209 national and international volunteers working together as peer educators in 100 communities had contributed to statistically significant reductions in knowledge and risky behaviours in Restless Development placement communities when compared to control communities in the region, including:

Increase in knowledge of HIV prevention methods: Findings show that 94% of young people out of school in Restless Development intervention sites could mention correctly at least 4 ways by which they can get infected by HIV and how to avoid infections, compared with 65% among the controls. Focus group discussion (FGD) on condom use at the control schools revealed that 50% of those engaged had never seen a male condom while 80% had never seen a female condom compared with the Restless Development intervention areas where all had seen a male condom and only 10% had never seen a female condom. These findings are also backed with the fact that 98% of the respondents at the placements had attended SRH education events organised by Restless Development.

Reduction in teenage pregnancies: In the schools visited where teachers' capacity was enhanced, and where peer educators were trained and involved in teaching young people about their SRH needs, teenage pregnancies decreased substantially. In 2010 the number of teenage pregnancies in primary and secondary schools at the 12 placement schools visited where Restless Development is operating was just one in all the 12 schools compared to 8 pregnancies from 8 control schools.

Decrease in risky behavior: Men and women with multiple partners (2+ partners) are fewer in the Southern Highlands (Restless Development operating areas). Findings from the evaluation indicated that the majority of women and men in placements (73%) had one partner, only (17 %) had more than one partner and 10% had no partner compared with the control group from the same Southern Highlands at 64% and 36% respectively.¹²

Role of volunteering: A total of 209 national and international volunteers were placed as partners over a two year period in 100 placement wards across the Southern Highlands of Tanzania to deliver peer education in the classroom and in the community. The aim was to utilise non-formal education approaches where young people train and support other young people to improve their knowledge, skills, and capacities in sexual and reproductive health, and claiming of their rights through action to improve youth friendly facilities in their communities. The volunteers collectively reached directly 23,000 young people directly each year (approximate figures) through classroom and community based events.

Both case study three and four provide strong evidence of how young people in community volunteering, and national and international partnerships for volunteering can achieve very significant development results. However, a challenge identified as part of the evaluation process for Case Study 4 was being able to identify the distinct advantage offered through national-international volunteering partnership to the development results achieved.

Values based leadership and active citizenship: A specific agenda which is relevant in an African setting is promotion of values based leadership, particularly among the next generation who will go on to lead their country's development whether through public service, business, or with the development sector. Many youth volunteering programs include life skills training, but it was difficult to identify examples of programmes led by an anti-corruption agenda for young people – one example of the National Anti-Corruption Volunteers Corp in Nigeria, which includes a Youth Corp as part of a national service program to improve local government accountability and for which 6000 young people were recruited, connects young people's desire and openness to change with national needs – but again there is little information available on the successes of this¹³. In the feedback received from the 59 young Tanzanian volunteers graduating from the

¹¹ Maticka-Tyndale, E and Barnett, J.P (2010) 'Peer led interventions to reduce HIV risk of youth: a review' *Evaluation and Programme Planning* 33(2)

¹² Amca Inter-Consult (2011), *Impact Assessment: Restless Development Peer to Peer Education Program Tanzania* AMCA: Dar Es Salaam

¹³ The Nation (2010), *ICPC Drafts Youth Corp members for Grassroots Anti-Corruption Crusade* <http://thenationonline.net/web2/articles/35287/1/ICPC-Drafts-Youth-Corps-members-for-Grassroots-Anti-Corruption-Crusade/Page1.html>

Restless Development national volunteering program this year, 16 respondents mentioned reducing mis-use of funds or improving development of their communities by holding the government to account. What are the examples of youth volunteering programs in Africa promoting an anti-corruption and accountability agenda?

Case Study Six: Building young active citizens in South Africa (VOSESA)

The groundBREAKERS are young people aged between 18 and 25 who show a commitment to civic engagement in their communities. groundBREAKERS receive training to carry out the 'loveLifestyle' programs and gain experience through their engagement. The groundBREAKER program aims to assist them in developing skills that foster their leadership, to study further or find employment, and implement the loveLife values in their own lives. The groundBREAKER program has graduated over 6 000 young people in six years.

Through a telephonic survey, the employment and educational opportunities, attitudes and behaviours of a representative sample of graduates were assessed in order to understand how the graduates perceive the impact of the program on the development of their ability to be seen as role models, leaders and responsible citizens, as well as on their behaviour and attitudes in relation to HIV and AIDS. Nearly 50% of groundbreaker graduates now have some level of post-matriculation qualification, compared to only 8% who had such a qualification on entry into the program.

This is in contrast to the national statistics which show that only 6.1% of young people have any post-matric qualification (CASE, 2000). The graduates of the groundBREAKER program also have somewhat better employment prospects than the national average. Approximately 60% of groundBREAKER graduates are currently employed; this compares favourably to the national data which show that 36% of youth with matric are employed. Unemployment levels among the groundBREAKER graduates (38%) are considerably lower than the national unemployment figures for youth in the same age group and at the same education level (46%).

Employability and human capital: In today's economy, young people in Africa need skills beyond literacy – they need advanced skills and to have been equipped with workplace experiences which enable them to deal with the realities of the working environment. Growing completion rates at primary level, put pressure on the lesser invested secondary school and tertiary education sectors to ensure young people are moving through the system. However, many young people in African educational settings do not learn in school about succeeding in the workplace. Again, youth volunteering when strengthening skills and practical experience in project management, organisational development, finance and budgeting, working with different stakeholders, team work and inter-personal skills, are essential for creating a pool of young people in Africa that employers want to employ.

Case Study Seven: Skilled Zambian volunteer peer educators deliver financial literacy training with private sector partnership

The Partnership: Zambia National Commercial Bank Plc. (Zanaco), one of Zambia's leading banks, aims to give young people an understanding of and confidence in, basic finance. Zanaco's program was started in February 2011 in partnership with Restless Development

The Need: Financial literacy amongst young people can make a drastic difference both at an individual and societal level in less developed countries. Enabling young people to gain broad, basic knowledge of financial skills such as budgeting, and instilling a desire to save has multiple positive effects at every level. Young people are often vulnerable during the transition to adulthood, and without financial literacy are less likely to save or have formal access to finance. This can make them more exposed to the shock of unexpected events such as illness, conflict or natural disasters. Young people can also be more susceptible to fraud or unclear marketing amidst the widespread and rapid expansion of financial products and services in Africa. These factors mean that young people can quickly find themselves in opportunity-crippling debt, massively impacting their other life chances, such as education or starting a business. At a national level, financial literacy is vital to reducing the risks to which banks are exposed, as well as encouraging informal sectors and the "unbanked" population to use regulated services, thus improving tax collection prospects in the long-term. In addition, well-informed consumers are better able and more likely to build national savings, monitor the banking market, demand improved legislation and oversight, and recognise and report bad-practise, compelling companies to be more transparent.

The Solution: The program was jointly developed by Zanaco and Restless Development following a pilot in Lusaka which fuelled public demand for financial education. The partnership provided financial literacy training to young people in rural communities and within teacher training colleges in Zambia.

The Role of Volunteering: 40 skilled volunteer peer educators were recruited through Restless Development's established outreach, application, and selection process, and placed in rural sites and teacher training colleges. The curriculum included financial planning, savings, using bank services, borrowing, and developing a personal financial fitness plan. It was complemented by interactive non-formal education in life skills and healthy living (core peer education goals of Restless Development) utilising dance, drama, and music.

The Role of Zanaco: Zanaco's CSR department played an active role in development of the curriculum, preparation and printing of resources for training, and attendance of workshops to provide advice to the young people attending. Zanaco also supported with an existing comic book aimed at young people on making financial decisions which were distributed to the sites. These are essential for enabling people with limited literacy to engage in learning and making choices who may not be reached otherwise. Zanaco has made an initial financial investment of 5000USD

The Results (so far): The program has been running for four months, and initial feedback is positive indicating – 10,500 young people for financial literacy training including 4,500 student teachers and 6,000 pupils aged 14-16 years in schools; As a result of the programme, Restless Development and Zanaco have been invited to input on the development of the National Financial Education Strategy being led by the Bank of Zambia.

Young women and girls' potential: It is widely accepted in international development that focusing on the development of adolescent girls will go a long way to contributing to poverty reduction and the acceleration of achievement of the MDG¹⁴. Adolescent girls represent a huge untapped potential in Africa (as well as around the world) and if addressed a break in the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Increased female access to and control of resources has been shown to have stronger returns on human capital compared to income under male control. In the case study below, youth volunteering provides opportunities for young women to develop their skills and self confidence:

Case Study Eight: Experience of a Restless Development female youth volunteer in Tanzania (2008)

“The moment I most proud of when I was a volunteer was being able to stand up in a room in front of a 100 people to do my first community session on human rights. There were mostly men in the room, and I could not believe that I could have the confidence to talk in front of people who were older than me and who were men. For me personally, it made me feel for the first time in my life that as a woman I can be an equal to a man. They saw me as an expert, they listened to what I had to say, and came to me after the session to ask questions.” Loveness Sanga, Former National Volunteer, Restless Development, Iringa, Tanzania.

Placement role and support: Nine month placement at ward level alongside an international youth volunteer partner for the duration who worked as team to provide non-formal peer education to young people in schools and out of school, and to work with community stakeholders to support youth participation and development through edu-tainment events such as sports, dance and music.

Training received: Six weeks onsite and follow up training in sexual and reproductive health and rights, life skills, human rights, and facilitation of community development activities including delivering peer education to young people and community members in schools and out of schools. Support included monthly meetings with program officers; follow up training after the first three months; and a final program review in which all volunteers received certificates.

Benefit of national-international volunteering partnership (feedback from Loveness Sanga): “During the placement period, working with Ali (international volunteer partner from the USA) helped me to learn about different people and different cultures, and this has helped me understand and work better with people; She helped me to question about why bad things happen to people; I have a friend for life (we are still in touch), and a network that is helping me with my dreams – Ali’s father is helping me to go to university to do a degree in social work, which I could never have imagined to afford on my own.”

Challenges of national-international volunteering partnership (feedback from Loveness Sanga): “Language is the biggest issue, as you need to speak good Swahili to work in communities in Tanzania. Ali had language training, but I was doing so much of translation and always having to facilitate discussions and activities she wanted to do. This was frustrating for her, and so I wonder whether she felt she really made a big impact. Also, culturally things were so different – it was hard to accept some beliefs and ways of doing things that the international volunteers talked about. Sometimes I felt, they were really from a different world from us. That was sometimes hard to deal with – like when they talk of what they plan to do next after volunteering, or with their lives, so many can just do it”.

In this example, where national and international volunteers were partnered to work side by side, there is a clear benefit gained through cross-cultural exchange which enabled Loveness to think critically about the problems around her, and in this way, a distinct advantage brought by international youth volunteering programs which promote North-South exchange is in strengthening the capacities of young Africans to question assumptions about society and development problems. This is particularly important in African societies which are hierarchical and as a result often do not recognise young people as having valuable contributions to make in decision making.

¹⁴ UNFPA (2010), *Investing in young people as part of a national poverty reduction strategy*, UNFPA: New York

Environment: KENVO is a membership based youth action organisation which works through volunteering. Its mission is to conserve and protect natural habitats and resources as well as to promote the livelihoods of local communities. Its' tree reforestation programs have been particularly successful, and following a pilot in Kereita Forest, has now been replicated in all blocks of the Kikuyu Escarpment. The program led by young Kenyan volunteers, has focused on community mobilisation, training on managing tree nurseries to build access to seedlings, forest management, advocacy on participatory forest management and implementation of environmental laws, and policing to reduce illegal activities.

Social Capital and a Global Society: Providing young people with the opportunity to volunteer also offers benefits to the communities to which they return after their placement with evidence showing increased levels of political and civic engagement, whether international or national¹⁵.

A particular element which can only be gained through international volunteering is development of cultural awareness and fostering a sense of global communities and global citizenship. Volunteering overseas can open young people's eyes to a world beyond their own. Creating space for volunteers from different parts of the world to work side by side with young Africans can help to identify new ideas, ways of working, and connections to help solve familiar problems. However, in a context, where global funding patterns are likely to shift, it is unclear whether the benefits of the global society agenda outweigh the costs of doing it.

¹⁵ Birdwell, J (2011) *"This is the big society without borders..."*: Service International DEMOS: London

Conclusion

Africa has long been seen as a continent in need of support. Today, there exist clear national and international development goals which provide direction and guidance to where efforts should focus.

It is clear that in young people we have a huge resource that needs to be invested in to become the positive agents of change and leaders of society that many would aspire to be given the opportunity.

We should make the most of this resource, exchanging and benefiting our young leaders and our countries, continually importing and exporting our young talent to each other in a way that makes us all stronger. To do this effectively, it is essential that we move beyond attempting to do volunteering and development for young people, and allow young people to drive, shape and do volunteering in their own ways.

This involves taking risks, and stepping back by placing young people at the front of designing and delivering volunteering programs.

For youth volunteering in Africa to be relevant, it is essential we position our programs to contribute to wider development goals beyond personal development so that volunteering is seen to be not just an investment in the individual but an investment in the nation and the continent; it is essential we set the standards to measure the quality and effectiveness of our work in youth volunteering; and put these standards into practice so we better understand what the critical success factors are in youth volunteering programs in Africa which are already delivering results.

Finally it is essential that we demonstrate through evidence and through sharing positive stories that young people are an invaluable resource in development today and we should therefore not wait until they are older and more experienced to engage them in leadership. By that time, we will have missed the opportunity to help shape how some young people will want change this world.