forum

IVCO 2017 FRAMING PAPER

Implementation of the SDGs through transformative partnership in volunteering

Dr Peter Devereux Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute
Bonnie Learmonth AVI

**Wordle derived from responses to Forum 2017 survey
on transformative partnerships**

Foreword

This paper has been produced for IVCO 2017 and is one of a series of papers exploring this year's conference theme *Implementation of the SDGs through transformative partnership in volunteering*.

The paper frames the main theme of the conference and considers what transformative partnership means for volunteering for development in the implementation of Agenda 2030 with its challenges and possible innovations. Separate papers consider the sub-themes, *innovation*, *enabling environment* and *measurement*.

Note on terminology: the framing and sub-theme papers variably use the terms *volunteer involving organisations* (VIOs) and *international volunteer cooperation organisations* (IVCOs). IVCOs should be understood as a specific group or type of VIO.

Contents

Introduction

Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an agreement signed by UN Member States, however, it is conceived as needing a multi-stakeholder effort: "All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan" (United Nations General Assembly 2015, p.5).

The objective of this framing paper is to set the scene of the IVCO 2017 conference theme – *Implementation of the SDGs through transformative partnership in volunteering*. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate IVCOs and delegates to think about what transformative partnership means for volunteering for development in the implementation of Agenda 2030 with its challenges and possible innovations. The framing paper will also attempt to provoke thinking with specific questions for consideration. For example, what makes a partnership transformative and/or effective? Can IVCOs measure partnership as means and ends of transformative change? What are the roles of national or regional volunteering in fostering transformative partnership? It will also try to link with past IVCO themes, like exploring how transformative partnerships in volunteering can strengthen the resilience of communities.

The paper starts by setting the scene for why we need a transformative 2030 Agenda and then considers the way partnerships, and transformative partnerships in particular, can not only help us get there but also be a genuine measure of progress in themselves.

The paper includes analysis and discussion of literature on transformation and transformative partnerships as well as survey results from 11 Forum members collected in May and June 2017. It should be read in conjunction with the other papers prepared for IVCO 2017 (Allum et al. 2017; Chowns 2017; O'Brien et al. 2017).

Many of the issues in this paper are not new. For those working in international development, issues of good relationships or partnerships with different actors and ways of working towards transformative development have been a part of the dialogue and debate in different ways and with different language for well over 50 years (Freire 1972; Sachs 1992; Chambers 1997).

Given the long history of partnership discussions, this paper should provoke renewed discussions encouraging the drawing of lessons from IVCOs' diverse experiences with partnerships – acknowledging strengths and weaknesses, and if or how they are transformative.

The more IVCOs can openly discuss and find common ground on these issues and differences, the better chance we have of articulating a strong and powerful collective voice and integrated practice of the power of volunteerism to play a transformative role in Agenda 2030.

Why is a transformative 2030 Agenda needed?

There have been many reports highlighting the need for global transformations in current and recent years, from business, NGOs and the United Nations (Global Compact and Unilever 2011; United Nations 2013). While there is great diversity in the players and their core focus, there is also much common agreement on the need for change.

In 2013, the Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda specifically called for "a universal agenda…driven by five big, transformative shifts" and a "new global partnership", but also warned, "In our view, **business-as-usual is not an option**" (United Nations 2013). However, a July 2017 summary of national reports prepared for the meeting of the High-level Political Forum noted that "many of the activities and achievements were in place before the agenda was adopted, rather than being implemented as part of the SDG response". It said despite the value of these, the 2030 Agenda needs to "be a transformative framework to accelerate progress toward sustainable development" (Ullmann 2017).

One Forum member mirrored the view that business as usual is also no longer enough for IVCOs and their funders:

> I think it is essential to combat the status quo-mentality often found amongst both IVCOs as well as their funding sources. Agenda 2030 requires a bottom-up approach, involving both national and international volunteering as well as the informal sector, within the context of partnerships which embrace change, recognizing it and supporting it.

Two key reasons for the need for change, noted in the second report of the Secretary-General on SDG progress, are increasing humanitarian and environmental concerns (United Nations Secretary-General 2017). The 2030 agenda is about people and planet and their interdependence. It highlights that not only can societies not survive without a livelihood or economy, but also that people's livelihood, health and well-being are inextricably linked to the planet's. For many institutions, including the majority of IVCOs, environmental concerns have not traditionally been a significant and systematic focus and are not well integrated with the rest of their work, though there have been some significant and constructive individual programs and projects. A 2017 report by the World Economic Forum highlighted the increasing humanitarian crisis, which needs innovative responses beyond just the traditional humanitarian sector, with humanitarian needs growing, crises lasting longer and an increase in humanitarian funding requests. It said addressing complex global challenges requires capacities beyond humanitarian alone (World Economic Forum 2017, p.16).

Another Forum member highlighted some of the challenges for IVCOs in the midst of the current global situation and the need for wide-scale change in systems and mindsets:

The global geopolitical climate is becoming more nationalistic/protective, which may lead to certain governments becoming more cautious that IVCO work highlights their own functional inadequacies. By extension, governments are becoming less overtly supportive of international volunteerism and collaborations and seek to control and monitor them (in some way) using their own organs of state. … Making a real change in the world is more than a paper exercise, and involves wide-scale change of systems and mind-sets, not just showing it on paper or through data. …

Governments and corporates are becoming more involved as they realise the importance of partnerships that yield sustainable development. This means more opportunities for volunteering internationally. … As the world becomes more affluent, and more people's basic needs are met, there is a natural inclination for more people to find greater meaning in their lives by helping.

The above challenges can also be recognised in the reality that in the last year, a number of IVCOs have faced serious challenges or ended volunteer operations after many years in the space. The 2016 design document for a revamped Australian international volunteer program highlighted a change in delivery because after considering different implementation options "including delivery through multiple partners; establishing an autonomous entity; and implementing a grants program…. contracting to a single organisation or consortia was deemed the most effective and efficient approach to implementation" (Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2016). Progressio in the UK, which was founded in 1940, closed in March 2017 because, as Martin McEnery, Progressio's Chair of Trustees, explained:

The decision to close Progressio was taken with deep regret and sadness, and it was made despite intensive fundraising efforts and many years of investing to diversify income. Unfortunately, the funding landscape has become increasingly competitive and we were unable to replace the £2 million unrestricted grant per annum from the Department for International Development (DFID) which came to an end in December 2016. (Progressio 2017)

Other challenges faced by IVCOs are outlined in Allum et al.'s paper focusing on innovation, including the bold suggestion of whether IVCO volunteering should be aligned with social movements and active citizenship more explicitly to help realise the achievement of the SDGs as a political rather than a technical process (Allum et al. 2017).

Transformative change is therefore needed to implement Agenda 2030. An essential part of this is system-wide change through transformative partnerships, because of the

complexity and all-encompassing challenges faced. IVCOs face particular challenges, opportunities and constraints in how they, as organisations, can change, and support this within communities through volunteerism. The advantage for IVCOs is that volunteering was explicitly recognised in the development of Agenda 2030 for its cross-cutting role that encourages new areas of stakeholder interaction (United Nations General Assembly 2014). Before we discuss how to go about doing this, we will look at how we might define what transformative partnerships entail, though there is no definitive definition of this, as noted by several Forum members in the survey for this research.

What makes a partnership transformative and/or effective?

Using the language of 'partnerships' as a response to tackling global inequality has been common and well meant for many years. However, partnerships are not always effective in supporting better outcomes. Indeed, partnerships have been heavily criticised as often a thinly veiled excuse for unequal relationships dominated by donors and Northern institutions from governments to NGOs (Fowler 1998; Morse and McNamara 2006; Impey and Overton 2014). The OECD Paris Process to tackle development effectiveness responded to this critique, and noted and encouraged the evolution of a new aid paradigm which implored mutual accountabilities in partnerships rather than just accountability up (Stern et al. 2008).

What, then, might be considered key characteristics of a transformative partnership? It is first important to consider the multiple and interconnecting levels at which partnerships are made. In the Forum member survey, organisations referred to transformative partnerships as largely those formed with volunteer host organisations to design and implement programs. Others focused at the level of volunteers and the partnerships they create with counterparts and communities. A common emphasis was on the benefits of the partnership being sustainable changes for the individuals and communities targeted by the development intervention. Forum members also recognised everyone benefits from the change, for example, in developing "new ways of working, business models, operational or delivery models, organizational practices and performance". Many suggested volunteers were a key example of the change: "a transformative partnership could be defined as a relation between parties which generates change…[including] with respect to transforming the lives and outlooks of the volunteers themselves." However, a veteran IVCO director cautioned a solely volunteer focus: "transformative partnerships might be institutional or in the day to day activities mediated by volunteers." Their instinct was to focus on institutions because "IVCOs are in their comfort zone when talking about the transformative powers of volunteers!" (personal correspondence, 2017).

What all of the above issues raise is the importance of different actors who contribute to

transformative partnerships. In his reciprocity paper, Lough (2016b) highlighted key ones that enhance reciprocity in partnerships as: 1. partnerships between volunteers and local host organisations and communities, and 2. between local host organisations and IVCOs, and 3. IVCOs' relationships with donors. Lough suggested IVCO donor relationships were critical in determining how reciprocal relationships and partnerships could be, but this was hardly highlighted at all in responses to the Forum survey.

A report by the Global Compact and Unilever called for "more transformational partnerships to drive systemic change", with the capacity to transform how the UN, civil society, governments and other stakeholders work with business for faster and more sustained realisation of development goals. Transformational partnerships as those that leverage core competencies of participants are designed for scale and sustained impact, and as a result "deliver transformative impact across sectors and geographies, addressing both public and private objectives through changes in policy, market structure and/or social norms" (Global Compact and Unilever 2011, p.7). This definition touches on a number of elements we will explore, but we can highlight the emphasis on transformative impact across sectors and geographies.

In the IVCO survey, some of these elements were reflected directly in the way many IVCOs work in international development contexts. However, instead of the emphasis on transformative impact across sectors and geographies, most IVCOs focused on the change being within the low-income communities in which their interventions take place. One IVCO reflected a common view when it said: "We believe that a transformative partnership is one that **empowers and enables a positive change in behaviour of our beneficiaries**, leading to sustainable impact at the societal, sectoral, organisational and individual level." This view is, of course, only one reflection on their work, but it does highlight an emphasis that was common among almost half of survey respondents who focused on their work in low-income countries. Given the heart of most IVCO work is explicitly across sectors and geographies, it is strange that this did not come out more strongly, and raises the question for later of whether IVCOs can draw on their deepest historical convictions and experience in this broader field to cast off the more narrow aid context and vista to re-embrace their broadest work in relational approaches and mindset change that should be much more acceptable in the universal SDG era. These issues lend themselves to IVCOs addressing issues that used to be called global education and global citizenship but is increasingly being termed public diplomacy by donors.

Caroline Heider, Director General, Evaluation at the World Bank Group, highlighted in June 2017 the need to transform thinking beyond linear models to ones that better reflect the realities of complex systems and adapting to them (Heider 2017). Adjusting to complex adaptive systems is also the essence of resilience, which was a key theme at IVCO 2016 and will also be the theme of the 2018 State of the World's Volunteerism report. Transformative partnerships are likely to have elements of resilient systems that are connective, self-

organising, diverse, socially cohesive, inclusive, participatory and involve learning (Maclean et al. 2014; United Nations Development Programme 2014; Hauge Simonsen et al. n.d.). One Forum member picked up on this explicitly in the definition of transformative partnerships, including "learning and adapting as you go along".

A 2002 definition of partnerships reflects these elements in keeping with a spirit of transformative partnerships: "A dynamic relationship among diverse actors, based on mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labour based on the respective competitive advantages of each partner…[within which the partners can expect to have] mutual influence, with a careful balance between synergy and respective autonomy, which incorporates mutual respect, equal participation in decision making, mutual accountability and transparency." (Brinkerhoff 2002 p.14, cited in Impey and Overton 2014).

These elements are to some extent missing from but complementary to the Global Compact and Unilever definition, above, which could be interpreted as more unidirectional help than reciprocal benefit. For IVCOs, these elements came out as fundamental to how many of them see transformative partnerships. One succinct IVCO survey input reflected the way transformative partnerships were founded on what it described as its core values of "1. Mutuality 2. Equality 3. Open dialogue 4. Mutual effort towards understanding between cultures and 5. Common impact." Several other members pointed to the need for shared goals and trust between partners. These also resonate with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 16.7, which aims to "Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels." With such operations, partners are equally involved in the selection, allocation and mobilisation of volunteers in agreement with mutually negotiated strategic objectives (Perold et al. 2013).

Another important element of transformative partnerships is their multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral nature. A World Vision and Partnering Initiative policy paper explained a cross-sector partnership as one involving:

> [O]rganisations from different societal sectors working together, sharing risks, and combining their resources and competencies in ways that create maximum value, in order to simultaneously achieve the partnership objectives and the individual partner objectives… These partners typically leverage their respective core knowledge, skills, resources and assets to create solutions that are more innovative, more transformational, more sustainable, more effective and/or more efficient than partners could achieve on their own. (World Vision and Partnering Initiative 2016, pp.4-5)

The paper says multi-stakeholder platforms catalyse collaboration and partnerships while providing a systematic approach to achieving partnerships at the required scale. One Forum

member defined transformative partnerships as "linkages established or strengthened between market actors and enabling environment actors. Subsector meetings provide a means for …[our] program to support increased collaboration within each subsector of intervention." Another reflected "organizations seek partnerships to add value through combined efforts. Organizations may have different structures and approaches, still they can work together toward common purposes…". They also do activities that convene and align different stakeholders including business, government and NGOs/civil society, and donors around particular themes or geographical areas, and thus can facilitate innovation and collaboration in partnership practices and create enabling environments for effective volunteerism (O'Brien et al. 2017). The International Forum for Volunteering in Development is a good example of such a platform.

Lucia Helsloot identified from her exploratory study into Partnerships for Sustainable Change with Transformative Impact (2015) some key elements of successful partnerships, drawing on work by Drost and Pfisterer (2013) (see Box 1 below).

Box 1: Key elements of successful partnering

1. Clarity of roles, responsibilities and ground rules
Pooling the competences of each partner maximizes the complementary strengths of each sector. A clear description of roles, responsibilities and ground rules enhances transparency and helps prevent misunderstanding.

2. Clear understanding of mutual benefits
The value of cross-sector partnerships lies in the potential to create positive outcomes for each of the partners. Ensuring mutual benefit is required for commitment of the partner to the partnership, but also for creating ownership and sustaining the partnership outcomes.

3. Clear vision of objectives
In successful partnerships, partners define and agree on partnership objectives and develop a strategy on how to reach these objectives. This is important for achieving the desired outcomes of the partnership.

4. Clear communication, shared planning and decision making
Good (participative) partnership governance, including good communication, shared planning and decision making, ultimately leads to mutual understanding of each other's needs and requirements, and shared ownership.

5. Good leadership
Leadership based on the notion of equity between the key partners is based on credibility, brokering, bridging divides and guiding rather than directing.

(Drost and Pfisterer 2013, Helsloot 2015, p11)

Keeping in mind the elements of successful partnerships, it is also worth adding these to the areas that Global Compact and Unilever raised in their report to ascertain if the required characteristics of *transformative* partnerships were present. They emphasised addressing systemic issues that leverage competencies of appropriate stakeholders and capacity for scale and impact (Global Compact and Unilever 2011, p.7).

The literature on environmental sustainability can teach us something about the multi-sector approach to transformative partnerships. Mersman et al. (2014) in their report *Shifting Paradigms, Unpacking Transformation for Climate Action* defined transformational change as "A structural change that alters the interplay of institutional, cultural, technological, economic and ecological dimensions of a given system. It will unlock new development paths, including social practices and worldviews." This highlights system-wide issues and crucial interactions across economic, social and environmental dimensions, but also other key elements like institutional and cultural factors so important in volunteering for development at international, national and local levels. These transformative change elements lend themselves very positively to the cross-cutting role and changes in mindsets that volunteering can achieve in IVCO development work. Volunteering can be the vehicle for transformative learning that fundamentally changes people's points of reference (Mezirow 1997).

Transformative relationships in practice – an AVI experience

AVI has been working for over 65 years in international volunteering for development, committed to achieving economic and social development outcomes across Asia, the Pacific and the world. A recent revision of AVI's terms of reference revealed partnerships as central to development outcomes, the basis of which was tested using long-term monitoring data and evaluative interviews with local host organisations.

Three host organisations working with AVI for varying durations of 6 to 19 years were asked about the key success factors for their relationship with AVI. Their responses emphasised several aspects of transformative partnerships (below), with a focus on relational elements of clear communication, trust and mutual objectives and values:
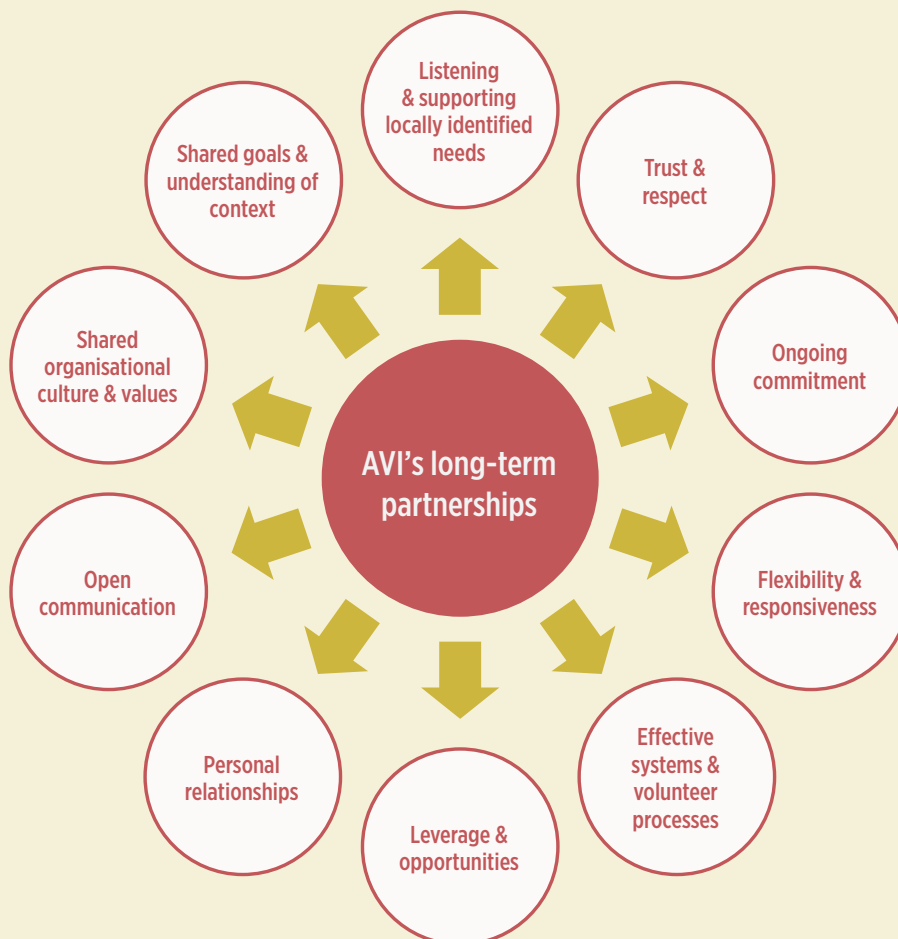
Host organisations drive the demand for volunteers, identifying the need for volunteers with particular skills and attributes that will support them in achieving their development objectives over time and in response to evolving needs.

One of the organisations interviewed has hosted six Australian volunteers since 2011. The host organisation reported all completed assignments have built capacity of staff skills and knowledge, and four assignments have either fully achieved, exceeded or mostly achieved their objectives.

When asked about contributions to the volunteers' success, the host organisation highlighted characteristics such as willingness to be flexible, "ability to adapt with the organization culture and spirit" and the technical skills offered by volunteers. For volunteers, support and encouragement from staff and management were frequently cited as important for achieving outcomes. These elements reflect those listed by host organisations in regards to their relationship with AVI, strongly suggesting relational elements are important in transformative partnerships.

The importance of mutual benefit was also highlighted by volunteers. They reported on personal and professional benefits from the assignments, including two volunteers changing their career paths as a direct result of their experience and several reporting that they will maintain and build on personal and professional networks developed while on assignment.

The host organisation transformation is evident in the improvement of staff and organisational capacity to communicate in English, which, as an international organisation, is central to the organisation's effectiveness. Volunteers have helped develop organisational tools and activities enabling staff to continue to develop their English skills after they left. The volunteer assignments have supported the organisation to improve publications, extending the organisation's profile and outreach in the host organisation country and increasing the organisation's influence at the international level.

In conclusion, common themes of transformative partnerships outlined above include change across various actors working at various levels of influence over a project or program. They often involve multiple sectors coming together to address systematic change, working towards achieving a common goal in a complex environment.

The institutional experience of transformative partnerships

Unilever earlier gave some guiding queries to ensure transformative partnerships address systemic issues that leverage competencies of appropriate stakeholders and capacity for scale and impact. These elements, along with the partnership points above, lead us to consider more about the institutional experience of transformative practices and partnerships. This section considers institutional elements, linking with the IVCO 2017 Enabling Environment sub-theme paper (O'Brien et al. 2017), which highlights four elements of an enabling environment as contextual, actor-based, relational and system-wide.

There has been relatively little research and writing on the way organisations shape the international volunteering experience (Nelson and Child 2016), but this is a fundamental issue for IVCOs. Nelson and Child found differing measures of success between volunteer facilitating agency, volunteers and host NGOs. They identified the volunteer agency as seeing success in long-term relationships with NGOs that could both host and provide positive volunteer experiences and support "immediately and impactful sustainable development work". Partner organisations, meanwhile, sought strengthening their own institutional capacity and international reputation, while volunteers saw it as hands on direct service to beneficiaries (Nelson and Child 2016, p.534).

This institutions issue was reflected in research on the work of Singapore International Foundation (SIF) on SDG 17 on partnerships. It concluded "Although research on the contributions of international volunteers is growing, research on the *role of IVCOs in building partnership* is largely overlooked. How might recognising the crucial role that IVCOs play in building and facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships alter the narrative?" (Lough 2016a, p.16). SIF's Executive Director reflects on this when she says, "one of the learnings from the recent study…was the need to strengthen relationships (being an effective conduit of sustainable change) both at the individual (volunteer) and institutional (SIF) levels. Arising from the study, we have made mandatory as a project component, study missions/exchanges so as to develop institutional linkages and partnerships, e.g. between two hospitals or educational institutions, that would outlast a project's duration." (Tan 2017).
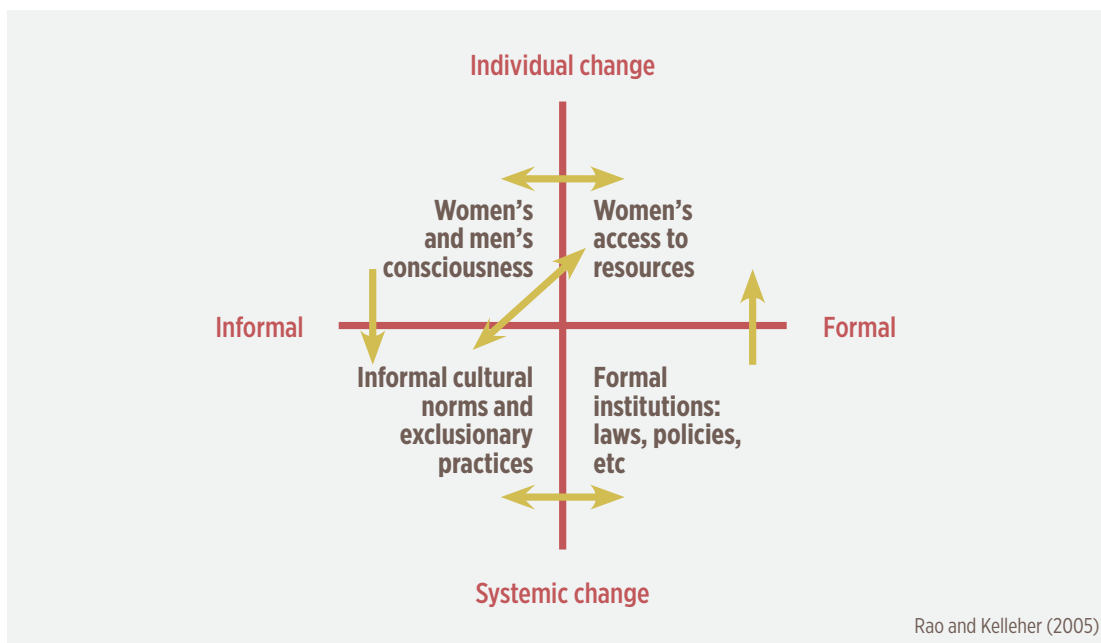
Research about achieving gender equality identified that beyond gender mainstreaming, what was required was institutional transformation. Rao and Kelleher (2005) found that

"transformative goals exist uneasily within large development organisations, as they are likely to be overcome by technical considerations more amenable to administrative practice". They highlight the difference between individual and systemic change and the important potential connections.

Forum members reflected on this in their survey responses. One member noted the power of assumptions and the day-to-day focus in IVCOs: "people tend to assume partnership can naturally create something transformative and that's why we form partnerships, which is wrong. This may be because…day to day tasks may not require an understanding of what transformative partnerships means – it is easy to get lost in the micro world and forget about the big picture, the thoughts on why we volunteer, why we need volunteers and good volunteer programs." Another reflected on the challenges of transformative partnerships as "getting partners to think for the sector they operate in, rather than focusing only on problems and issues they have at hand at organisational level...partners have to agree to look beyond organisational needs only, to additionally think in big-picture terms and have collaborative dialogue to pull resources more effectively". Allum et al.'s paper (2017) also picks up on some challenges to innovation and change within IVCOs.

Another IVCO surveyed highlighted the potential separation between IVCO institutional and volunteer roles: "volunteers do not have a major role in creating and sustaining transformative partnerships for my organisation, as my organisation's role is to run the programs for the volunteers so that they can work in partner countries". This separation between the exchange role of the volunteer and the institutional processes may be a barrier to long-term transformative partnerships because, as some research has highlighted, individuals can be more flexible than institutions but institutional processes will provide long-term sustainable and transformative change (Caplan and Jones 2002). Indeed, Allum et al. (2017) draw our attention to how the changing nature of volunteers from service delivery to capacity building can drive innovation (transformation) in partner organisations.

It is clear, as the diagram below from Rao and Kelleher (2005) shows, that the required systemic change involving institutions is linked to individual change as well as informal and formal elements, but that individual change is not sufficient to achieve systemic change. They identified the dynamic interaction between top down and bottom up forces of change. These are not unlike the work of IVCOs and their volunteers. Here, through mutual learning, volunteers can come some way to equalising power relations that are at the core of inequality and injustice, as can IVCOs – when funding arrangements allow. Mezirow (1996) described this process as adult learning between peers, where the educator was a collaborative learner who contributes their experience to arrive at a consensual understanding. Lough found that contact reciprocity was associated with an increased perception of intercultural competence, suggesting that in international volunteering, "mutually shared goals, combined with perceptions of relative equality, may contribute to reduced in-group and out-group distinctions" (Lough 2011, p.460).

Individual change

Women's and men's consciousness | Women's access to resources

Informal | Formal

Informal cultural norms and exclusionary practices | Formal institutions: laws, policies, etc

Systemic change

Rao and Kelleher (2005)

Aveling and Martin (2013), looking at partnerships for health and community development, compared cases in high and low income contexts and found that programs create their own particular logics for partnership. However, they found that "local-level, **interpersonal relationships** may help to overcome barriers to partnership's transformative potential" (p.74).

They presented case studies from Brazil and Cambodia that shed helpful light on the issues and the problem or deficit model over the asset based community driven (ABCD) model for achieving social change (Mathie et al. 2017) and transformative partnerships. They highlighted that there is a contradiction, common to the current aid system, in the requirement to demonstrate that people are in need of assistance (to justify resources to assist them) and recognition of these same people as capable participants in their own development. This, they said, was a major barrier to achieving transformative partnerships.

They found that to overcome this obstacle required instituting criteria for allocating funds that allocated functional value to community partners who could emphasise their strengths and knowledge. A separate analysis of the data found institutions need to consider how their accountability structures and definitions of 'success' contribute to processes that undermine the potential for transformative partnerships. The conclusion was that given a constant juggle of competing demands, partnership should be considered not only part of the intervention process, but part of what is seen as success (Aveling and Jovchelovitch 2013). This means successful transformative partnerships should be considered both means and ends, perhaps with indicators for measures against the elements highlighted above from the Forum survey of mutuality, equality, open dialogue, mutual effort towards understanding between cultures, and common impact.

This is where IVCOs have an advantage in achieving international development outcomes,

as the nature of working with local host organisations and sending volunteers to work closely with individuals and communities participating in the development intervention lends itself well to reciprocal change and equal partnerships if we, and our volunteers, work to ensure relationships are indeed equal.

In the Forum survey, what came out frequently but not constantly was an emphasis not just on providing expertise but, contrary to most aid interventions, an emphasis on skills exchange by volunteers. One IVCO explained in the survey the way change was achieved not just in one place (the low-income country) or one group (the low-income country people): "Joining hands to search for a lasting solution to a societal problems and in the process actors as well as the contexts are changed. Well motivated volunteers engage with partners through a process that impacts also on their vision of life and values and in turn they bring these changes back to their original contexts where the third phase of transformation should take place." While rarely articulated in detail, this idea of exchange is part of the growing acceptance of reciprocity as part of the volunteer package, and even part of the definition, and certainly something of the value add it is considered to provide (Lough 2016b). This element is also highlighted in the measurement paper by Chowns (2017), who highlights three outcomes to measure: firstly, directly and immediately during the volunteer placement; secondly, through the long-term impact on partners, their organisations, communities and societies; and thirdly, the long-term impact on volunteers, their organisations, communities and societies at home.

In other words, there is growing acceptance of reciprocity in language describing volunteering. Despite this, there is rarely explicit detail on what skills and expertise are provided by local partners. Where this is provided, it can be regarded as the burden of local organisations having to host volunteers (Perold 2011). While this can be a fair critique of unfair exploitation, it can, if taken uncritically, almost re-encourage the paternalistic view of one way giving and receiving. The Valuing Volunteering research (Burns et al. 2015) found that promoting the volunteers as experts, in accordance with donor interests, was common but downplays community expertise and skills. The problematic notion of simple giving and receiving is provocatively expressed by John Steinbeck in his novel *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. The main character articulates it powerfully:

> [P]erhaps the most overrated virtue in our list of shoddy virtues is that of giving. Giving builds up the ego of the giver, makes him superior and higher and larger than the receiver... Receiving, on the other hand, if it be done well, requires a fine balance of self knowledge and kindness. It requires humility and tact and great understanding of relationships. In receiving you cannot appear, even to yourself, better or stronger or wiser than the giver, although you must be wiser to do it well. (Steinbeck 1958, p.lxiv)

In a volunteer context, the explicit 'exchange' or reciprocity emphasis can be used to

remind us that the exchange element is because of the value of learning from local people, institutions and contexts, and this is fundamental for transformation. This is reflected in insightful Australia Research Council-funded research conducted by Flinders University and Scope Global about the Australian Volunteers in Development (AVID) program. It found that international volunteering for development (IDV) enables the practice of global partnership by providing time for building relationships and trust, thus creating a more level playing field instead of the usual North-South aid relationships. They concluded "The concept of 'partnership' implies a view of development as a shared responsibility, while 'aid' is associated with asymmetrical relationships between donors and recipients. In the partnerships that IDV fosters, local development actors take the lead in development interventions with the support of external actors." (Schech and Mundkur 2016).

Box 2: Transformative partnerships at home and abroad

National stakeholders in fields of youth and volunteering in several European countries joined in the IVO4ALL project led by France Volontaires and agreed that voluntary service and international volunteering are strategic tools to stimulate, educate and empower young people, and contribute to their social inclusion. They also agreed that existing international volunteering schemes mainly benefit young people from more socially and economically privileged households. The IVO4ALL tackled this through mobilising 250 'young people with fewer opportunities', and its accompanying research found, for example, in France, many of the sending organisations developed new partnerships with local organisations who had experience in working with young people with fewer opportunities (Missions locales) (European Commission Directorate-General Education and Culture 2017).

Unlike an older Australian study that found volunteers acted similarly before and after assignments (Fidler 1997), a recent VSO study found that those who volunteer tend to behave and act differently as a result of their placement and have development impacts in their own communities. With more attention being given to the need for global action on global issues, volunteering for development organisations are also realising that their networks of alumni may be more inclined, because of their volunteering experience, to lend support to campaigns and undertake further action (Clark and Lewis 2017).

As Bamber (2014, p.41) concluded from his research with student international service learning volunteers, "there is an urgent need to recognise fully the role of **all partners** in

the transformative process. It is through exposure to the lives of others that students are able to reflect upon their approach to wellbeing and flourishing in their own life…. This demands moving beyond a deficiency view of partners to fully recognising the role of the other in forming the student experience."

However, the Flinders University study also noted that because of the way international volunteer programs were structured, accountability did not always foster mutual accountability and ownership with local partners, but to the volunteer program. It found "The current system of assignment reporting encourages volunteers' accountability to the program rather than the host organisation. Greater ownership by host organisations can be achieved through a reporting structure that involves host organisations more centrally in managing, monitoring and evaluating their volunteer placements." (Schech and Mundkur 2016, p.6).

This section has demonstrated that transformative partnerships require institutional change. IVCOs need to actively listen to and incorporate host organisations and volunteers in how they operate and make decisions. This has governance implications. Similarly, institutionally, not just theoretically, IVCOs need to adapt systems to ensure host organisations and volunteers are encouraged to interact in a truly two-way approach. This is reflected clearly by Allum et al. (2017), who argue "understanding what our 'customers' want – and are going to want – and how we must change to meet *their* aspirations arguably lies at the heart of transformational change. If we do not deeply believe that what we are doing and how we are doing it meets the aspirations of our stakeholders, then we are at risk of being increasingly less relevant."

Measurement, transformative partnerships and changing worldviews

The Flinders University IVCO research found international volunteer impact reporting was too focused on tasks over broader strengths like capacity development and changes in mindsets that could be achieved by focusing more on the relational aspects. This brings up important considerations when considering how to measure transformative partnerships and their contribution to the SDGs. This section will explore some of these considerations, not to suggest solutions but to prompt discussions at IVCO 2017.

> Volunteer programs struggle to substantiate their claims that volunteer programs have significant positive impacts because these impacts are relational and difficult to measure. The focus has been on evaluating the volunteer's achievements of the tasks they anticipated carrying out. A more reflective approach to evaluation that focuses on changes that have taken

place, both planned and unplanned, in terms of building partnerships, mutual capacity development and cosmopolitan orientations would capture more effectively the impacts of IDV. (Schech et al. 2016, p.6)

This broader view of accountability and measurement was also captured by an ODI paper that suggested the combination of high ambition and non-binding nature of the SDGs could increase their long-term impact by enabling leverage. It gave evidence that showed how "Knowledge and monitoring can *drive* progress, not just measure it" because at a national level, dialogue with diverse stakeholders to create a more consensual definition of problems can generate a platform for constructive problem solving. It also demonstrated how, even at the international level, knowledge generation programs can help reduce uncertainty, change political positions and strengthen the effectiveness of environmental regimes (Miller-Dawkins 2013, p.3).

This resonates strongly with Göpel's (2014) findings on 'paradigm shifts & transformational change', which emphasised how the application of a complex system view "emphasises relationships rather than technological-economic facts when describing root causes of system behaviour and the perpetuation of (undesirable) trends". She says, "This is why intentional Transformational Change depends on soft factors like worldviews, beliefs, knowledge and vision in addition to typical sources of influence." (Göpel 2014, p.6).

This is unquestionably the territory of IVCOs, who facilitate changes in worldviews of volunteers while having a development impact through their relational approach. They also measure the multiple changes in multiple actors outlined above (IVCOs themselves, other institutions, local communities and organisations, and volunteers) as a result of their interventions, though most often for accountability up to funders rather than down to partners. Relational aspects of volunteering can contribute to the mind shifts required to convince people and institutions to relatively quickly change course to tackle the human and planetary crisis outlined earlier (Messner and Weinlich 2015; Göpel 2016).

When asked about the distinctive roles played by international or national volunteers in creating and sustaining transformative partnerships, one IVCO surveyed expressed the practical learning and bridging role: "Building relationships and understanding at grass roots. Bridging the gap between local and regional. Helping to overcome language barriers. Investing time and energy in listening, developing shared approaches, cross cultural understanding, etc." These are also the elements that tackle the evident current nationalism, fear and loss of faith in leaders highlighted previously in one of the survey responses. These approaches to transformative partnerships can be as powerful at home as abroad, and need to be.

One IVCO highlighted this powerful home role and the interaction between itself as an institutional network and its members and their former international volunteers:

> [Our network] members are by and large small entities who base a lot of their activities in [our country] on former volunteers who have been abroad and upon returning to their Country take the responsibility to support in different ways the work of their sending organization. So volunteers remain key in establishing a bridge between our members and the hosting societies with fewer resources being available to sustain development activities. The relationship is based in a lot of sharing of knowledge and experience. We believe that international volunteers are playing also an important role now in [our] society in slowing phenomena of radicalization vis a vis the large influx of foreigners into our Country – **making their presence felt in various corners of society**.

Clearly this territory of contributing to human mind shifts for structural, technological, environmental and cultural shifts is important ground where IVCOs and volunteers have a special cross-cutting contribution to make that will improve the resilience of individuals and communities. The importance of relational aspects of volunteering is a theme running strongly through the IVCO 2017 papers, as is the importance of measurement, with a key focus on how we can measure, and then promote, the contributions of volunteering and IVCOs to the SDGs.

The measurement of transformative partnerships needs to consider these relational 'soft' aspects, a complex consideration faced when trying to measure many aspects of volunteering for international development. IVCOs may need to develop more explicit rationales that can explain the benefits to those with a more limited, fixed or technocratic view. Chowns (2017) explores the limitations of measuring IVCOs' contributions to development in terms of relevant SDG indicators, which limit the contribution of IVCOs towards SDG 17 to dollar values and number of countries. She argues that the quality of relationships formed is important but not captured in this approach at the level of IVCOs and volunteer.

In the Forum member survey, when asked to describe measures to demonstrate if and when a transformative partnership is successful or not, there were mixed replies. Some IVCOs lacked any way of measuring partnerships and only two explicitly pointed to a consideration of the relational aspects of partnerships. Many acknowledged that consideration of relational aspects is important. But often the responses to questions throughout the survey included a focus on numbers of partners, which is important but not enough to reflect the transformative nature of partnerships at the core of international volunteering for development.

Allum et al. (2017) highlight the place for both quantitative and qualitative measurements when considering innovation. They suggest there are two potential sources of transformative

partnerships in contributing to innovation: "quantitative, where partnerships can be established that enable scale of delivery to better meet those objectives than organisations working on their own…[and] qualitative, where a partnership enables the development of an approach that is beyond the scope of an IVCO and enhances what is being delivered". This paper has argued that even the former may have a transformative impact on the organisations involved, through adaptations to business strategies, for example. One Forum member raised an important point: "I think there may be a lack of consideration in the field in differentiating the characteristics of volunteer sending organisations (e.g. send volunteers to communities? NGOs? Government agencies? UN agencies?) or volunteer programs (short-term vs. long-term, area of expertise etc), and making this distinction may be important in reaching an agreement in defining or measuring transformative partnerships." Perhaps, then, when talking about measurement of transformative partnerships, the objectives of the partnership need to be the focus of measurement.

One member summarised a challenge: "Making a real change in the world is more than a paper exercise, and involves wide-scale change of systems and mind-sets, not just showing it on paper or through data. It is possible to describe but difficult to measure actual qualitative impact of the sustainable development goals."

While seemingly frustrating, it might also open up new ground for constructive engagement in multi-stakeholder environments with new potential stakeholders. Agenda 2030, which emphasises the interconnections and synergies of the SDGs, is starting to provide avenues to explicitly recognise the interconnections (International Council for Science 2017).[1] As one IVCO highlighted in the survey:

> The major challenge is a technocratic vision that undermines the importance of people in the transformation of society both at home and internationally. This promotes a culture of individuality and de-responsabilization towards wider systemic issues. … At the same time the awareness that issues are transversal to all Countries is growing. This awareness helps to promote an understanding of key issues of the Agenda 2030 as they touch people's life wherever they are. The development of a global consciousness which is needed to solve global problems is still slow to develop and state boundaries are still a central element in people's thinking.

This case might be seen in an evaluation of FK Norway's civil society work in 2016. The evaluation congratulated FK Norway on an impressive mutual exchange program that

---

1 "Making interactions explicit and understanding the full impacts of policies and actions across goals, stimulates important knowledge gathering and learning processes and has very concrete and tangible value for achieving efficiency and effectiveness in goal implementation, for driving meaningful multi-stakeholder partnerships, and for country-level monitoring, evaluation and review." (International Council for Science 2017, p.239)

makes a positive contribution in developing future active citizens. However, the report challenged FK Norway on how it saw civil society, and suggested that FK Norway lacked a sufficiently explicit understanding and definition of civil society. As a result, the report concluded "FK's strategy and approach are not optimal and sufficient as a basis for developing and strengthening civil society in developing countries." (Tjonneland et al. 2016). It suggested that FK Norway should select partners and participants for specific purposes after analysis of what the civil society in each country needs. FK Norway responded, "For FK Norway 'civil society' is not limited to NGOs, but defines all processes that include participation in decision-making and implementation of social change that is not initiated by governmental or commercial stakeholders." (Tjonneland et al. 2016).

Conclusions

This paper has tried to capture the system-wide nature of global issues and partnerships that Agenda 2030 responds to. A complex systems understanding suggests the unpredictable nature of future events requires mind shifts to respond appropriately in order to be resilient in the face of disruptive innovations.

This paper has discussed why transformation is needed and what transformative partnerships look like. When considering institutional change, the paper raised issues that typically challenge institutions, in an attempt to get IVCOs to reflect on their transformation in response to volunteers and local partners. The concluding section picked up on the importance of relational aspects in transformative partnerships and began to explore directions for measurement of partnerships.

To achieve the transformation required at global, national and local levels, IVCOs are well placed to respond because of their work through volunteers across boundaries, cultures and geographies. As one IVCO explained in the survey, "We have a new and growing partnership with local government, voluntary sector, police, Health Service, Universities etc… around the Global Goals implementation. The SDGs give us a great opportunity for high impact transformative partnerships and bringing the global and local together."

IVCOs have good experience with partnerships, mostly in low-income countries but with some examples of cross-border translation of these possibilities. Presently, the work is mostly through the vehicle of volunteers, but the individual transformations in volunteer behaviour and understanding have yet to be harnessed to contribute to broader scale institution and system-wide change beginning from within. This is done explicitly when volunteers work in low-income countries but has yet to be fully rolled out as a transformative tool across sectors and geographies, including high-income countries. Then it will contribute to the transformative partnerships that can build the necessary but currently lacking engagement, understanding and changed mindsets and practice of the universal 2030 Agenda.

Questions for consideration

- Based on your IVCO experience, who are the key actors in transformative partnerships and how can IVCOs strengthen the distinctive role of each of them across sectors and geographies?

- Given institutional innovation is challenging (Allum et al. 2017), is your organisation open to transformative partnerships that change your organisation? What are constraints on institutional change to achieve such partnerships, keeping in mind the needs of volunteer hosting organisations, implementation partners and donors, and the nature of volunteer contributions?

- How do you currently measure transformative change? Who is the audience for this measurement and do they appreciate the role of volunteerism in achieving transformative partnerships?

- What catalytic role could Forum play in encouraging IVCOs' transformative partnerships for Agenda 2030 across sectors and geographies?

References

Allum, C., et al. (2017). IVCO 2017 Sub-Theme Paper – Innovation. International Forum for Volunteering in Development. **http://forum-ids.org/2017/08/ivco-2017-sub-theme-paper-innovation/**

Aveling, E.-L. and S. Jovchelovitch (2013). "Partnerships as knowledge encounters: A psychosocial theory of partnerships for health and community development." Journal of Health Psychology **19**(1): 34-45.

Aveling, E.-L. and G. Martin (2013). "Realising the transformative potential of healthcare partnerships: Insights from divergent literatures and contrasting cases in high- and low-income country contexts." Social Science & Medicine **92**: 74-82.

Bamber, P. M. (2014). "Becoming Other-wise." Journal of Transformative Education **13**(1): 26-45.

Burns, D., et al. (2015). The Role of Volunteering in Sustainable Development. London, VSO International, The Institute of Development Studies.

Caplan, K. and D. Jones (2002). PARTNERSHIP INDICATORS Measuring the effectiveness of multi-sector approaches to service provision. Practitioner Notes Series: Business Partners for Development Water and Sanitation Cluster.

Chambers, R. (1997). Whose reality counts?: putting the first last. London, Intermediate Technology.

Chowns, E. (2017). IVCO 2017 Sub-Theme Paper – Measurement. International Forum for Volunteering in Development. **http://forum-ids.org/2017/08/ivco-2017-sub-theme-paper-measurement/**

Clark, J. and S. Lewis (2017). Impact beyond volunteering: A realist evaluation of the complex and long-term pathways of volunteer impact. VSO.

Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2016). Australian Volunteers Program 2017-2022 Design Document. Canberra.

Drost, S. and S. Pfisterer (2013). How to make cross-sector partnerships work? Critical success factors for partnering. Rotterdam, Partnerships Resource Centre.

European Commission Directorate-General Education and Culture (2017). International Volunteering Opportunities for All experimentation: Final evaluation report.

Fidler, J. (1997). Impact of the Overseas Experience on Returned Volunteers in the AVA program. Melbourne, REARK Research.

Fowler, A. (1998). "Authentic NGDO Partnerships in the New Policy Agenda for International Aid: Dead End or Light Ahead?" Development and Change **29**: 137-159.

Freire, P. (1972). Pedagogy of the oppressed. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.

Global Compact and Unilever (2011). Catalyzing transformational partnerships between the United Nations and Business.

Göpel, M. (2014). Navigating a New Agenda Questions and Answers on Paradigm Shifts & Transformational Change. Berlin, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy GmbH.

Göpel, M. (2016). The Great Mindshift How a New Economic Paradigm and Sustainability Transformations go Hand in Hand. Berlin, Springer.

Hauge Simonsen, S., et al. (n.d.). Applying resilience thinking: Seven principles for building resilience in social-ecological systems. Stockholm, Stockholm Resilience Centre.

Heider, C. (2017). "Conversations: the Future of Development Evaluation." Retrieved 28.6.2017, from **https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/news/conversations-future-development-evaluation**.

Helsloot, L. (2015). Partnerships for sustainable change with transformative impact. Rotterdam.

Impey, K. and J. Overton (2014). "Developing partnerships: the assertion of local control of international development volunteers in South Africa." Community Development Journal **49**(1): 111-128.

International Council for Science (2017). A Guide to the Interactions: From Science to Implementation.

Lough, B. J. (2011). "International volunteers' perceptions of intercultural competence." International Journal of Intercultural Relations **35**(4): 452-464.

Lough, B. J. (2016a). Global Partners for Sustainable Development The Added Value of Singapore International Foundation Volunteers. Singapore, Singapore International Foundation.

Lough, B. J. (2016b). Reciprocity in International Volunteer Cooperation. Oslo, Fredkorpset.

Maclean, K., et al. (2014). "Six attributes of social resilience." Journal of Environmental Planning and Management **57**(1): 144-156.

Mathie, A., et al. (2017). "Asset-based and citizen-led development: Using a diffracted power lens to analyze the possibilities and challenges." Progress in Development Studies **17**(1): 54-66.

Mersman, F., et al. (2014). Shifting Paradigms, Unpacking Transformation for Climate Action. Berlin, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy GmbH.

Messner, D. and S. Weinlich, Eds. (2015). Global cooperation and the human factor in international relations. London, Routledge.

Mezirow, J. (1997). "Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice." New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education **1997**(74): 5-12.

Miller-Dawkins, M. (2013). Global goals and international agreements: Lessons for the design of the Sustainnable Development Goals. London, Overseas Development Institute.

Morse, S. and N. McNamara (2006). "Analysing institutional partnerships in development: a contract between equals or a loaded process?" Progress in Development Studies **6**(4): 321-336.

Nelson, K. and C. Child (2016). "Adding the Organizational Perspective: How Organizations Shape Service Work Abroad." Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations **27**(2): 525-548.

O'Brien, J., et al. (2017). IVCO 2017 Sub-Theme Paper – Enabling Environment. International Forum for Volunteering in Development. **http://forum-ids.org/2017/08/ivco-2017-sub-theme-paper-enabling-environment/**

Perold, H. (2011). Introduction. International Volunteering in Southern Africa: Potential for Change? S. Net. Bonn, Scientia Bonnensis.

Perold, H., et al. (2013). "The colonial legacy of international voluntary service." Community Development Journal **48**(2): 179-196.

Progressio (2017). "Progressio to close after 76 years." Retrieved 9.3.2017, from **www.progressio.org.uk.**

Sachs, W. (1992). The Development dictionary: a guide to knowledge as power. London New Jersey, Zed.

Schech, S. and A. Mundkur (2016). Cosmopolitan Development: The impacts of International Volunteering Project Findings Part 4. Adelaide, Flinders University.

Schech, S., et al. (2016). " Building relationships and negotiating difference in international development volunteerism." The Geographical Journal.

Steinbeck, J. (1958). The log from the Sea of Cortez. London, Heinemann.

Stern, E. D., et al. (2008). Thematic Study on the Paris Declaration, Aid Effectiveness and Development Effectiveness. Oslo, Development Assistance Research Associates.

Tan, J. (2017). Learnings. Personal correspondence.

Tjonneland, E. N., et al. (2016). Chasing civil society? Evaluation of Fredskorpset. Oslo, Norad Evaluation Department.

Ullmann, M. (2017). Voluntary National Reviews: What are countries prioritizing? A review of 'main messages' from volunteer countries presented for the 2017 Session of the UN High Level Political Forum, Together 2030.

United Nations (2013). A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development. The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. New York.

United Nations Development Programme (2014). Human Development Report 2014: Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience. New York, UNDP.

United Nations General Assembly (2014). The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet: synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. New York, United Nations.

United Nations General Assembly (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New York, United Nations.

United Nations Secretary-General (2017). Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Report of the Secretary-General. New York, United Nations Economic and Social Council.

World Economic Forum (2017). The Global Risks Report.

World Vision and Partnering Initiative (2016). Delivering on the promise: In-country multi-stakeholder platforms to catalyse collaboration and partnerships for Agenda 2030.