

IVCO 2022 Think Piece

SOUTHERN EXPERTISE IN VOLUNTEERING FOR DEVELOPMENT IS VITAL FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

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The development sector is being increasingly challenged to decolonise. Localisation of development decision-making and delivery has been a long-standing response to shifting power within the sector¹. However, there are concerns that the rhetoric of decolonisation and localisation does not always translate to changes in power and practice (see Khan, 2021). This same concern is felt within the volunteering for development community. Although COVID-19 accelerated existing efforts to support Southern actors and priorities, it also highlighted inequities in resources and support for community and national volunteers and Southern-based VIOs. In the framing paper for IVCO 2021 the case was made for challenging whose knowledge counts in volunteering for development (Hass and Moinina 2021), whilst the connected think pieces for IVCO 2021 highlighted how the terminology we use can restrict understanding of what volunteering and development mean (Okech, Baillie Smith, Mills and Fadel 2021; Fadel, 2021). In this think piece, we ask what IVCOs can do to centre Southern expertise and re-imagine the connection between volunteering and development to deliver transformational change.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Southern leadership of volunteering for development requires recognition and investment in the volunteering sector from Southern governments and the private sector. IVCOs can support this process by supporting Southern VIOs with advocacy efforts to drive policy frameworks and budget decisions that prioritise volunteering for development approaches. Through such policy and advocacy partnerships a supportive environment for volunteering can be promoted and awareness raised of the value of investing in volunteering to realise development goals.

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

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