

**Moving Beyond the North-South Paradigm?
Innovation and value in international volunteering today**

IVSO 2003 Report

**7th Annual Meeting of Heads of International Volunteer
Sending Organisations**

Hosted by

**International FORUM on Development Service
Hotel Equatoria, Kampala, Uganda
November 9-12, 2003**



**International FORUM on Development Service
FORUM International du Volontariat pour le Développement**

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Purpose of the meeting

- To enable the networking of senior staff of international volunteering agencies.
- To enable the discussion of key contemporary issues in volunteering and development.
- To promote dialogue on good practice in international volunteering
- To enable an interchange between different volunteering traditions

Introductions

Delegates introduced themselves and their organisations, briefly explaining their role and the work of their organisation. Each delegate also stated one key issue currently facing his or her organisation and one key objective they hoped to achieve during the conference. A diverse range of organisations attended the meeting, each with different programmes and objectives. The most common objective for the meeting among delegates was to share and learn. There is a need for increased co-operation and collaboration. With few resources, we must use them efficiently and there is therefore no need to duplicate work, and in particular research, when we can share experiences and learn from each other.

Session One – Current issues and trends survey paper.

Presented by Karen Takacs, on behalf of International FORUM on Development Service.

We are living in exciting and challenging times. The majority of respondents said that governments are changing their programmes and objectives. We are focusing on a main objective - how we can reduce poverty? There have been major internal changes within most organisations, together with increased professionalisation. There is also focus on how we work with partners and how we measure our impact.

New activities and programmes have been introduced including South-South volunteering. Four out of seven respondents believe that global security issues have had little or no impact, although heightened security alerts and practical problems such as obtaining visas make our work more challenging. We have seen a renewed interest in development issues and international solidarity or volunteering.

Delegates worked in discussion groups looking at the following areas:

A number of governments are adopting new approaches to international development (more focused and results based aid, support for SWAPS, bilateral and multilateral aid, and NEPAD for example.) How is international volunteering seen or positioned in this context in your country?

- Acknowledgement of diversity within the discussion group both geographically and in terms of structure. Some organisations are part of a government structure and are more likely to have to follow government policy, whereas others are independent of State bodies.
- There is pressure from governments and local partners for increased professionalisation. International volunteering organisations have to justify how money is spent and prove the impact of their work to donors.
- We need to make links between returned volunteers.
- There was no certainty within the group that we would maintain support of constituencies “at home” if we moved from the current model to local volunteer development.
- Unevenness between organisations because some governments are committed to funding sector-wide programmes whereas others are more interested in their own projects.
- Shifts in government policy. Not all governments are following the same policies and they are not shifting at the same rate.

Innovation in international volunteer programming is a central theme. What is driving this innovation? What needs or issues are being addressed?

- There is a need to match the demand and supply of volunteers.
- Returning volunteers should be regarded as an asset and we should not allow their experience and returning skills gained during their placement to fade.
- It is desirable to have more specialised organisations working together in cooperation.
- South-south programmes. We need to focus on facilitating exchange, rather than providing job security. Limiting terms and conditions offered could ensure this is less of an issue. We need to ensure that we share ideas rather than just have ideas.
- Volunteers are our main tools, but we need to diversify and adopt several different approaches. We need new models to match and reflect changes in development thinking. We are experiencing changes in monitoring and evaluation requirements and other drivers are now taking our principles more seriously.
- It would be good to share our experiences of peace building and international solidarity in more depth.

What is the role of IV in a post-September 11th, war on Afghanistan/Iraq world?

- Shift of resources
- Building bridges
- Raising awareness (linking the micro to macro realities – policies)
- Advocacy – we need to play a role because we are impacted by post September 11 regardless of whether we want to or not.

The group discussed:

- What has changed in the external environment?
- Is international volunteering political?
- How do we define ourselves and our work?
- Are we part of international development or do we sit outside that?

The group noted a shift in resources from development aid. We may also be forced to play a more active role in different political situations. Volunteers are affected by changes in the external political environment. In this context, returned volunteers also have an important role to play in terms of awareness raising and advocacy. Current volunteers have an important role to play in building bridges and enabling cultural exchange because of their knowledge base and cultural awareness.

Session 2: Innovation in International Volunteering

Chair: Cliff Allum

Working with on-line volunteers: the experience of Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)

Dorothy Okello of WOUGNET presented an introduction to the work of her organisation and the experience of online volunteering. The organisation has faced challenges around how to define membership. It is trying to promote the use of ICTs to support sectors such as health and agriculture. Although it may seem expensive because of online access, when useful information is available in advance, it can be used as a preventative measure and additional costs can be avoided in the future.

Volunteers: Job descriptions are posted on the Netaid web site. Placements vary in length according to the project. Volunteers produce TechTips which are posted on the web site and circulated to a mailing list. They then receive any queries. TechTips include step-by-step guides and are at a basic user-friendly level.

WOUGNET now wants to build its capacity and increase funding in order to use locally-based volunteers and pay them an honorarium for their work. There are no significant problems in keeping volunteers “connected” to the organisation because the placements are generally short-term. Volunteers may subscribe to the monthly newsletter, be offered a WOUGNET email address or visit Uganda. The current newsletter and mailing list cover all sectors, although WOUGNET would like to develop sector-specific mailings in the future.

The new Norwegian model of international volunteering Fredskorpset

Ragnar Kleiven (Board member) and Tor Elden (Secretary General).

Fredskorpset is a government body based within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. It was established in 2000 when the old service was abolished by the government, having been a young volunteer programme in the 1960s and 70s. Today, the organisation is not able to meet the expectations of all partnerships within the current budget. On their return, volunteers spend

1 month doing information dissemination work in Norway, which is considered to be part of the placement. Both senior and youth programmes are operated.

Partnership Model: Fredskorpset has partners from all over Norway and in all sectors. The organisation facilitates many South-South programmes and priority is given to the media sector. This creates good PR and information dissemination. In future, they are hoping to move towards Human Rights based partnerships. Norway is very gender-focused, but Fredskorpset has managed to maintain a good gender balance (50/50) without actively targeting this aspect. Fredskorpset is now aiming to establish networks throughout Norway

Process of partnership: All partnerships must conduct a pre-study and have specific objectives and terms of reference. Good planning and the administrative capacity to run the programme are essential. The exchange period is 3-5 years and partnerships can be cross-sector. Funding is provided to enable a pre-study to be carried out. Additional time and assistance can be provided if the initial planning is not adequate.

Training: All participants attend a training course, concentrating on cross-cultural communications. Partners from the North and South participate in the training together and visit each other before the placements begin.

Currently there are around 500 partners and 202 undertaking pre-studies. The programme was originally started on too large a scale and funding was not sufficient to meet demand. No marketing has been done in the last year and funding is the limitation to capacity. In 2004, the concept will be marketed in sectors which have lower activity levels. The recommendation to the Board will be to increase South-South partnerships.

Canadian Crossroads International and Computers for Schools Kenya.

Karen Takacs (Executive Director, CCI), Elizabeth Dove (Regional Director, CCI), Tom Musili (Executive Director, Computers for Schools Kenya)

Development was not the original goal of Canadian Crossroads International. Volunteers were not “experts” and the goal was cross-cultural exchange. CCI has since shifted towards developmental goals. In developing a new model, CCI looked at what not to change – what were the key strengths to build on? The quality of pre-departure training was identified as an area of strength to build on because priority had previously been on cross-cultural exchange.

CCI is now driven by the needs of the partners in the South. South-North placements may be as short as 3 months because southern partners often require greater flexibility in the length of placements. CCI and Fredskorpset have very similar models but arrived at them through very different processes. Fredskorpset’s change was driven by the government while CCI’s was driven by its southern partners.

Tom Musili (Executive Director of CFSK) introduced the work of Computers for Schools Kenya and provided the southern partner perspective on the relationship. CFSK uses local volunteers to refurbish computers and receives free software licences from Microsoft. The Kenyan government has no ICT policy to date although CFSK is pushing for one to be developed.

CFSK aims to reach all schools in Kenya, where the government provides all teachers but nothing more and parents finance books, desks etc. Next year’s target is 3000 computers and CFSK also plans to replace older computers in secondary schools, which have already had refurbished computers. These older computers will then go to primary schools.

Recruitment: Placements are designed by CFSK in consultation with the project committee. The partner organisation is usually involved in the recruitment through a conference call during the interviews. Some volunteers are general recruits but are then trained at the Canadian

partner organisation and go to the southern partner on behalf of the Canadian partner. A challenge is that the Canadian government is reluctant to grant visas for unpaid work to southern partners. Volunteers have to raise Canadian \$2250 to contribute towards the placement. During their placements, volunteers live with host families, who supply their food, and receive a living allowance equivalent to a local wage. It is a sophisticated model in which partners share recruitment responsibilities.

Challenges: Some donors only fund participants under 30. Volunteers may opt for a placement with another agency which offers a higher allowance or take a paid job.

Partnerships: It was commented that this model has a higher expectation of partners' contributions than in a traditional model. This could lead to the organisation being pushed into certain sectors and countries or away from higher level strategic objectives and is a challenging area the organisation is currently working on. The mandate of CCI is sustainability and the organisation may have to make a strategic choice in some cases and decide to suspend work with a partner organisation if it does not have a vision or sustainable programme.

Session 3: Southern perspectives on the Management of Aid by NGOs. The Uganda experience.

Chair: Paul Beggan

Presented by Tina Wallace (Oxford Brookes University) and Rosemary Adong (CDRN).

Tina introduced her team and the "Current Trends in aid – good for partnership?" research highlighting the following areas:

- Donor Trends
- NGO Trends
- Some Critical Issues

Delegates made the following comments:

- There is over-dependence on donor money, which means that NGOs and their partners do not set their own agenda and focus may be lost.
- It is important to obtain regular feedback and constantly be thinking about whether we are achieving what we want to achieve.
- We need to address the attitudes of volunteers coming from the North to "do good in the South." More work needs to be done in the North to change attitudes. We need to re-engage with our constituencies in the North.
- People need to feel that they are trusted and are not subject to constant monitoring.

Group Discussion Questions

In the current context what is the power/potential of volunteering to develop new paradigms?

- Diversity of "international volunteering" may imply different paradigms (volunteers and money). The diversity of and therefore different models used within this group was noted. Because of this diversity, the group could not identify one paradigm to move away from.
- Different perceptions of volunteers and money
- We operate in a globalised world, with improved communications and an ability to interchange between different parts of the world. IVSOs have an interface role in which they must listen to beneficiaries and influence policy makers.

How can we be driven by accountability to partners and beneficiaries?

Downwards accountability is a sensible way of ensuring that resources are used correctly. We are all committed to being learning organisations, but does this mean that we focus too much on ourselves and not enough on our partners? The key relationship identified was with partners rather than focusing on the public. We all write reports to account to donors or to impress our public as a form of PR.

What approaches/tools do we find useful in promoting good development understanding and practice?

- Using participatory approaches to identify the needs of communities
- Develop feedback loops (try to avoid the many filters), from both communities and NGOs, both local and international
- Having everybody play their role effectively understanding and playing their roles in the development context
- NGOs playing an advocacy role, for the donors and governments
- Governments to have the ear to the ground for the needs of the communities
- Local NGOs should have close links with government to enhance development programmes.
- Both donors and government should involve international and local NGOs in policy formulation on development issues

Plenary

- Should not under-estimate the significance of long-term relationships outside the aid and development sphere e.g. ambassadorial relations.
- Organisations do not need to be large national players; they can be local groups and organisations.
- PRSP approaches can influence NGOs in to a wider process at the national level. Involvement with PRSP approaches can have a number of different strategies. We can help our partners to assess the process – how participative is this?
- We need to identify where we best influence the national policy process. This does not necessarily have to be at a national forum level and could mean working with small local groups.
- Governments may see IVSOs as aid tools and not as part of foreign policy. IVSOs are more than tools for aid and it is important that this is recognised.
- Decentralisation and localisation is a slow process.

Session 4

Chair: Amanda Khozi Mukwashi

Community relationships: East Timor and Australia

Presented by Dimity Fifer (Chief Executive, Australian Volunteers International)

AVI currently has 20 volunteers in East Timor. 22 polling officers have been recruited for the UN task force. The organisation's role is facilitator rather than a lead player. AVI becomes a broker when a local community needs a volunteer and may only join at the second or third stage of this process. Memorandums of Understanding and Friendship Agreements are drawn up between stakeholders. Partnerships do not only have to be between two participants. They can be between 6 participants in one area. The partnerships provide an opportunity for networking and linking between Australia and East Timor. AVI is unable to use AusAID funds in Latin America and India. The way forward will be to source other funding and volunteer-sponsors.

South-South volunteering

Presented by Mark Goldring, (Chief Executive, VSO) and Assumpta Nabachwa (VSO).

A feasibility study was carried out in 7 countries and followed by a controlled pilot. Volunteers for the Southern Volunteer Programme (SVP) were first recruited in Kenya and the Philippines, followed by Uganda and India. In 2003, approximately 200 volunteers have been mobilised from these 4 countries. The SVP in Uganda focuses mainly on HIV/AIDS due to the success of tackling this at home. This includes work on the prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT).

Pre-departure Terms and conditions are the same for South-South volunteers as for volunteers from the North. The length of the placement is gradually becoming more flexible. Within 2 years of the South-South programme being established in the Philippines, local selectors were used to assess personal skills where VSO selectors had previously recruited volunteers. Pre-departure training is provided and includes skills required for the placement.

This programme was different to the traditional model and has challenged VSO's ways of working. The organisation has faced challenges within Uganda in the recruitment experienced staff to work in other countries. However, the majority of South-South volunteers return home at the end of their placement to work in socially-engaged positions and make a valuable contribution to influencing development thinking.

National Volunteering VSO does not run national volunteer programmes but would support organisations which do work nationally. VSO Uganda is currently trying to get involved in a new programme which involves fresh graduates but is not expecting to recruit nationally itself.

In other parts of the world, VSO is interested in recruiting on the basis of skills rather than by sector. Recruitment has so far been done on a sectoral basis (HIV/AIDS) in Uganda. One challenge encountered is that some partners in the South would prefer a European or Canadian volunteer to a southern volunteer. Next year, VSO aims to reduce the number of international volunteers and increase the number of volunteers on the South-South programme. Support of national volunteers will also be increased.

Ten years ago, volunteers had to be UK citizens. Volunteers were then also recruited from the Netherlands and Canada. Today, volunteers of any nationality can be recruited and are dealt with on grounds of equity and practicality. VSO is open to spending the same amounts of money on each volunteer: although the cost of living is higher in the UK, volunteers from the South often have more dependents and less social-security.

Funding DFID have been supportive of the SVP. They are interested in the results of international volunteering rather than the "sending". There is no distinction between the funding of VSO's South-South or North-South programme.

There is a need for consistency between the international and South-South volunteer programmes.

The promotion of human rights in Uganda through the UNDP "Good governance for poverty eradication" programme

Presented by Dan Temu (Deputy Representative, UNDP), Tapiwa Kamuruko (Programme Manager, UNV Support to Human Rights Project) and Paul Matogo (Programme Officer, UNV).

There are currently 5,300 UNV volunteers on placements throughout the world including about 30 national volunteers in Uganda. Professionals including lawyers, social scientists and development planners are brought together by UNV. There is a good spirit of volunteerism in Uganda and a high level of participation from the local community.

National volunteers are recruited to specific posts with different terms of reference. Particularly in areas of conflict, local volunteer placements are more appropriate because these volunteers will have a better understanding of local issues and languages. Although there may be an advantage to sending international volunteers who have a neutral status, it is easier to deploy nationals to such areas because of security issues and evacuations. In terms of evacuating volunteers, action is taken on the advice of UN Security Monitors and Advisers.

Session 5: Organisational development in international volunteering organisations in the culture of development outcomes.

Chair: Karen Takacs (International FORUM on Development Service)

Developing a quality framework for improved organisational practice: the experience of AVI. Presented by Dimity Fifer (CEO, AVI)

AVI has established a predictable system which allows for innovation. A quality assessment of four volunteer sending organisations was carried out in Australia to identify:

- What is the unique contribution of volunteer sending agencies?
- What are the common qualities?
- What are the key features?
- What are the best practice standards for volunteer sending agencies to work?

The core need of the system is usability. It is not acceptable to create a new system and expect staff to use it immediately. The system must be kept as simple as possible and have an element of predictability. The key is for everyone to have a common and shared understanding of the model.

A timeline produced by AVI highlights the experience of the volunteer throughout the process and has provided input into creating a more customer-service focused framework. This gave AVI the opportunity to look at itself by standing in someone else's shoes. Dimity also discussed the relationship between outcomes and indicators.

Whole system transformation and development outcomes: process improvement in Skillshare International. Presented by Luis Silva (Head of International Programmes, Skillshare International)

Luis gave a presentation on process improvement and whole system transformation and the resulting impact on partner organisations. Examples of the process improvements since 1995 are included in the presentation.

This process is implemented at all levels. Development workers recruited in the UK and all Skillshare International staff participate in a Quality and Continual Improvement workshop, although this still needs to be increased across the organisation. The model contains a high level of theory and requires the management and programme staff to understand and engage in it. Programme staff have to work with partner organisations on this model.

Skillshare International's People and Organisational Development unit is responsible for application whereas in the past staff were just expected to use the system. The system was not designed by individuals but by all involved in the system. Improvements have been made in response to customer feedback.

Looking forward to IVSO 2004 and 2005

The key objective for 2004 and 2005 is to increase participation. The Executive needs to look into the feasibility of Japan for 2005, as discussed at the FORUM meeting (see notes of FORUM meeting held on 11 November 2003).

Added value and social capital research: We need to proactively address the challenges about why we do what we are doing through added value research. Terms of reference have been drawn up and consultants have been contacted. They have expressed an interest in carrying out the research although were unable to do so for this meeting because of the timescale. **Action:** FORUM Executive to ask consultants to submit a proposal detailing timescale and cost.

- Research should be practical and accessible – not too academic and lengthy.
- Ensure the report is geographically diverse with models from each continent.
- Consultants must attend IVSO 2004 to lead a discussion.
- The report produced must be one that can be translated back into best practice.
- Consultants should be familiar with our organisational cultures.

It was recognised that it is a good idea to pool resources like this and share our ideas. International volunteering is common and unique to this group but we could look at international solidarity and the overlap with international volunteering in more depth. Research commissioned by FORUM should be critical and something that we can use. It should not be self-justifying. It was agreed that we would focus on three pieces of research in 2004:

- Added value of international volunteering. This would include returned volunteers.
- Mapping exercise to identify volunteer sending agencies globally, including specialist organisations.
- Enhanced trends survey. This would include a comparison of government positions and a survey of members' views on the conditions necessary for good support.

It was noted that MS Denmark has carried out research on returned volunteers, which is available at www.ms.dk Country studies are available on CD ROM.

Contact details for further details on the conference sessions and presentations

Monday 10 November 2003

Trends Survey

Presented by Karen Takacs (on behalf of International FORUM on Development Service).

Report available at <http://www.forum-ids.org/forumids/login.html>

A copy of the report is also available from Jessica.lowe@skillshare.org

Innovation in International Volunteering

- **Working with on-line volunteers: the experience of Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)**

Presented by Dorothy Okello (WOUGNET)

www.wougnet.org info@wougnet.org

A copy of this presentation is available from Jessica.lowe@skillshare.org

- **The new Norwegian model of international volunteering: Fredskorpset**

Presented by Ragnar Kleiven and Tor Elden (Fredskorpset) www.fredskorpset.no Presentation is

available from Jessica.lowe@skillshare.org

- **Canadian Crossroads International and Computers for Schools Kenya**

Presented by Karen Takacs, Elizabeth Dove (CCI) and Tom Musili (CFSK)

www.cciorg.ca <http://web.accesskenya.com/cfsk/>

Tuesday 11 November 2003

Southern perspectives on the Management of Aid by NGOs: The Uganda experience.

Presented by Tina Wallace (Oxford Brookes University) and Rosemary Adong (CDRN)

Report available at <http://www.forum-ids.org/forumids/login.html> Presentation and report available from jessica.lowe@skillshare.org Further details of research not covered during this session are available from tinawallace11@aol.com

Community relationships: East Timor and Australia

Presented by Dimity Fifer (Australian Volunteers International) www.australianvolunteers.com

South-South volunteering

Presented by Mark Goldring and Assumpta Nabachwa (VSO).

A copy of the presentation is available from Jessica.lowe@skillshare.org

The promotion of human rights in Uganda through the UNDP "Good governance for poverty eradication" programme

Presented by Dan Temu (UNDP), Tapiwa Kamuruko and Paul Matogo (UNV).

www.unvolunteers.org

Meeting of members of the International FORUM on Development Service

Notes available at <http://www.forum-ids.org/forumids/login.html> or from Jessica.lowe@skillshare.org

Wednesday 12 November 2003

Organisational development in international volunteering organisations in the culture of development outcomes.

- **Developing a quality framework for improved organisational practice: the experience of Australian Volunteers International.**

Presented by Dimity Fifer (AVI) www.australianvolunteers.com

Supporting documents are available from Jessica.lowe@skillshare.org

- **Whole system transformation and development outcomes: process improvement in Skillshare International.**

Presented by Luis Silva (Head of International Programmes, Skillshare International)

www.skillshare.org

Presentation available from Jessica.lowe@skillshare.org

Conference Review Session

The Executive invited feedback on what has been good about IVSO 2003 and what we could do differently next time. The following comments were made:

- We should move around the world.
- We should increase the number of participants or have the meeting every 2 years in the future.
- We need ways of sharing our experiences more efficiently. There is not enough time to explore areas in depth and we need to create mechanisms to share between meetings.
- I am new in post so it is good for me to get hear the most recent thinking.
- Networking has been important.
- It is interesting to learn about systems.
- The sessions on South-South volunteering and NGO management of aid were excellent – very exciting topics.
- It would be great to maintain contact between meetings.
- We should circulate the papers in advance next year.
- Lots of thought-provoking issues to take away with us.
- We should have more southern partners engaged and involved in the meeting.
- I thoroughly enjoyed it!
- A fantastic experience, I learned a lot and have made promising contacts. I am now aware of how much more there is to learn!
- This meeting has challenged my thinking.
- I have really enjoyed it.
- The sustained quality of the discussions was great, especially at the strategic level looking at models.
- It was good to catch up and network. We should encourage and enable networking between meetings.
- We should encourage joint presentations between organisations on working together.