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# Impacts of International Volunteering and Service

## Individual and Institutional Predictors


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# Impacts of International Volunteering and Service: Individual and Institutional Predictors

*Despite unprecedented recent expansion of international volunteering and service (IVS), there has been relatively little research on impacts. This paper develops a conceptual model for impact research, and reviews existing research evidence. The model suggests that outcomes for host communities, volunteers, and sending communities vary depending on individual and institutional attributes and capacity. How institutions structure and leverage individual capacity influences who participates and how they serve, and shapes the impact of volunteer action. The conclusion offers guidelines and resources for research design on IVS impacts.*

***Key words:*** *international volunteering, civic service, impact research*

The 21st century is witnessing an unprecedented expansion of international volunteering and service (IVS), both in numbers of volunteers and sponsoring organizations (Clark, 2003; McBride, Benítez, & Sherraden, 2003; Smith, Ellis & Brewis, 2005; Randel, German, Cordiero, & Baker, 2005; Lough, 2006; Rieffel & Zalud, 2006; Hills & Mahmud, 2007; McBride & Sherraden, 2007; Allum, 2007; Plewes & Stuart, 2007; Peace Corps, 2007a; Powell & Bratović, 2007). Despite the growth of IVS, there has been relatively little research on impacts (Woods, 1981; Carson, 1999; European Commission, 2004; Hills & Mahmud, 2007; Powell & Bratović, 2007). Proponents suggest that IVS encourages large numbers of ordinary people to get involved in global affairs, and to promote global peace, international understanding, and make tangible contributions to the well-being of people around the world (UNV, 2002a; UNV, 2002b). Critics contend that IVS tends toward imperialism, reinforcing existing inequalities, or at best, is ineffective in the face of grave global challenges (Roberts, 2004; Simpson, 2004; Plewes & Stewart, 2007).

This paper develops a conceptual model for impact research, and reviews existing research evidence on outcomes of international volunteering and service.[1] The model suggests that outcomes for host communities, volunteers, and sending communities vary depending on volunteer attributes and individual capacity, as well as program attributes and institutional capacity.[2] Volunteer attributes refer to socio-demographic characteristics of the volunteer corps. Individual capacity refers to the human capital and motivation that individuals bring to the volunteer experience that affects their effectiveness and ability to meet placement goals and objectives. Program attributes refer to features of the volunteer program. Institutional capacity refers to the context and ability of institutions to leverage individual volunteer capacity and shape volunteer action. Figure 1 (on page 16) graphically

[1] We include studies in English that address each feature of the framework. We cite studies that make conceptual and empirical contributions. Occasionally, we cite evidence from domestic volunteering and service when the relationships are especially revealing and potentially relevant to IVS. This paper only includes impacts addressed in existing studies we review; there are other possible impacts, but we could find no mention in the research.

[2] Costanza and Geudens (2003) spell out the roles of each of these.

depicts these relationships and the following sections analyze them in greater detail.[3] Overall, studies tend to highlight benefits of IVS. Concluding sections propose guidelines for research design and a research agenda.

We define IVS as an organized period of engagement and contribution to society by volunteers who work across an international border, in another country or countries. IVS may be sponsored by public or private organizations, it is recognized and valued by society, and volunteers receive little or no monetary compensation (Sherraden, 2001).[4]

## Volunteer Attributes and Individual Capacity

The demographic profile and human capital of international volunteers affect likelihood of volunteering and volunteer effectiveness (Waldorf, 2001; Greenwood, Vo & My, 2005; Allum, 2007).

### Volunteer Attributes

International volunteers tend be young, educated, affluent, and white (Williams, 1991; ECOTEC, 2000; Jones, 2004; McBride & Lough, 2007; Powell & Bratović, 2007; Powell et al., 2008). Older adults, people with low incomes, ethnic and racial minorities, people with disabilities may have less opportunity to volunteer internationally (ECOTEC, 2000; Davis Smith, Ellis, Howlett, & O'Brien, 2006; Sygall & Lewis, 2006; McBride & Lough, 2007; Peace Corps, 2007b). The composition of the volunteer corps affects volunteer outcomes. For example, older and trained volunteers may bring greater expertise to a project (Mitka, 2006), but they may be less flexible and open to a reciprocal relationship with hosts than younger, untrained volunteers (Waldorf, 2001). Gender of volunteers may affect whether women or men in the host community receive IVS benefits (Cohn & Wood, 1985).

### Individual Capacity

*Knowledge and skills*. The importance of human capital depends on the goals of the volunteer project. On one hand, technical assistance or professional service projects, require volunteers with significant

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[3] This conceptual model borrows from a schema of "productive aging" proposed by Sherraden, Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, and Rozario (2001).

[4] This definition excludes volunteering within national boundaries, as well as mutual aid and military service. Although Sherraden uses the term "civic service", we prefer to use "volunteering and service" because civic service is broad in its conceptualization, and includes mandatory forms of service such as service-learning in secondary and post-secondary educational institutions and national service under some political regimes, e.g., Nigeria and Israel.

Definitions are important, as Virginia Hodgkinson points out because they "have an impact on the collection of data and determining the boundaries" of study (2004, p. 184S; see also Carson, 1999). United Nations Volunteers defines IVS as: actions "carried out freely and without coercion, financial gain is not the motivating principle, and there is a beneficiary other than the volunteer" (2003, p. 2). Corporate international volunteering is defined as service in projects in countries "outside of the company's headquarters country", including local service in which employees serve locally, but outside the headquarters country, and cross-border service, in which employees traverse national borders to volunteer (Hills & Mahmud, 2007, p. 5).

training and experience (VSO, 2002, Daley & Winter, 1978). On the other hand, cross-cultural learning and non-technical projects require enthusiasm, energy, and goodwill rather than specific knowledge and skills. In humanitarian aid projects, for example, unskilled international volunteers may offer few advantages, and in fact may be a liability (Dumélie, Kunze, Pankhurst, Potter, & Van Bruaene, 2006). However, in work camps that construct trails or build latrines, youthful energy and a desire to engage in cross-cultural experience may be advantageous, and may help to prepare volunteers for more technical placements in the future (Thomas, 2001; Dumélie, et al., 2006).

*Motivation and effort.* People are motivated to volunteer for different reasons, which may affect participation, volunteer activities, and outcomes (Mueller, 1975; Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1991; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Law, 1994; Carson, 1999; Wilson, 2000; Bussell & Forbes, 2002). Motivation to volunteer may vary by race and ethnicity (Sharma & Bell, 2002). People in different life stages may also have different motives for volunteering. For example, older adults may be motivated to stay active in retirement or to "give back." Youth, in contrast, volunteer internationally to gain a broader perspective on the world, to contribute to society and help others, have an adventure, take a break from school or work, meet people and have fun, acquire skills, enhance a resumé, or get a job (Gaskin, 2004; Jones, 2004; MacNeille, 2006; Powell, Bratović, & Dolić, 2008). These different motives may affect outcomes. For example, volunteers focused primarily on personal benefit may have less to offer host organizations and communities (Anheier & Salmon, 1999; Rehberg, 2005).

*Prior volunteering and international experience.* Prior volunteering and international experience may affect individual motivation and preparation, including volunteer "cultural proficiency" for IVS (Cohn & Wood, 1985, p.170; see also, VSO, 2002; Rehberg, 2005; Gran, 2006). Prior experience may also reduce objections by family and peers, which researchers identify as barriers to IVS (Sharma & Bell, 2002; Gaskin, 2004).

*Time.* Retired adults and youth may have significantly more time to engage in service, while middle-aged adults, who are building careers and raising families, may have significantly less ability to participate in IVS (Davis Smith, et al., 2006, McBride & Lough, 2007). Similarly, unemployed individuals and those with seasonal employment may have time to volunteer internationally.

## IVS Program Attributes and Institutional Capacity

Individual characteristics and capacity matter in the decision to volunteer internationally and also affect IVS outcomes. However, access to volunteer opportunities also has important effects. These are institutional questions. One aspect of the institutional context is "macro" features that encourage IVS, such as tax breaks for philanthropy and low cost international travel. The focus in this paper, however, is at the mid-range level, on the organizations that sponsor and facilitate international volunteering, and the ways that IVS programs encourage, inform, and facilitate participation. Organizations shape the IVS experience, setting the stage for individuals and groups to participate if and when they are inclined. Therefore, individual *and* institutional factors shape motivation to engage in IVS and outcomes of IVS (Meier, 2006). A key to predicting outcomes, for example, is the match between volunteer and program goals (Brook, Missingham, Hocking, & Fifer, 2007).

## IVS Program Attributes

*Type of organization*. IVS programs may be public, non-profit (non-governmental), or private for-profit. The type of organization shapes programs and influences IVS outcomes (Eberly & Sherraden, 1990, Henderson, 2002). Within each of these sectors are many different kinds of IVS programs. For example, governments may operate IVS programs directly or indirectly through subsidies to the private sector. Non-profit organizations operate the largest number of IVS programs (McBride et al, 2003), and vary widely in size and sponsorship, and include secular and faith-based groups. Similarly, for-profit IVS may include some eco-tourism, gap-year, and corporate volunteer programs (Jones, 2004).[5]

There are often several layers of organizations. International volunteers may be sent by one organization (sending organization) and received by another (host organization) that places and oversees service activities (Sherraden, et al., 2006). Sometimes sending organizations do most of the supervision and guidance in the field. In other cases, instead of a direct relationship with community-based host organizations, IVS programs contract with intermediaries that coordinate activities in one or more countries, including selecting local host organizations and coordinating volunteer placement and other logistics. This is the case of many workcamp programs. Corporate international volunteer programs report multiple benefits of using intermediaries, including volunteer coordination, local credibility, and improved cultural insight (Hills & Mahmud, 2007; Vian, Richards, et al., 2007). This arrangement permits broader reach by an IVS sending program and may increase local relevance, but possibly diminishes IVS sending program control and attenuates IVS program goals.

*Program mission and goals*. The organization shapes volunteer recruitment and activities, and influences outcomes. As Steven Powell & Esad Bratović (2007) write, “you get the impact you program for” (p. 42). IVS programs tend to emphasize building international understanding or development aid and humanitarian relief, although in practice, there is overlap between these two types of goals (Woods, 1981; Smith, et al., 2005; Sherraden, et al., 2006).[6] Programs emphasizing international understanding focus on “contact between people” (Randel et al., 2004, 5). The emphasis is on international experience and fostering cross-cultural skills and tolerance, global awareness and international solidarity, civic engagement, personal development, and international peace and understanding among volunteers and hosts (Randel, et al., 2005; Spence, 2006).

Programs emphasizing development aid and humanitarian relief focus on the expertise and experience that volunteers bring to their assignments. Although cross-cultural learning and international understanding also may occur, they tend to be secondary compared to service delivery, and knowledge, skill, and technology transfer. Programs are increasingly adopting a development-centered approach (Greenwood, et al., 2005; Leigh, 2005; Rockliffe, 2005; Werna & Schneider,

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[5] Andrew Jones (2004) defines the gap year as “any period of time between 3 and 24 months which an individual takes ‘out’ of formal education, training or the workplace, and where the time out sits in the context of a longer career trajectory” (p.8).

[6] These are “ideal types” and therefore, relatively few programs will be exclusively one or the other. The point of making the distinction is that programs tend to veer towards one type of the other, with implications for other dimensions of service and, possibly, service impacts.

2006). Theoretically, volunteers may be more effective than salaried employees in development work, because the former have fewer expectations for personal gain and there is greater local accountability (Devereux, 2007; Jedlicka, 1990).

*Program sponsorship, funding, and size.* The type of organizations also has implications for funding levels and program size. Government sponsored IVS programs are less common, but tend to be larger and better funded, compared to non-profits which receive funding from a variety of sources, including government, foundations, corporations, religious organizations, service clubs, donors, and participant fees. Private for-profit programs typically receive little or no public monies. Corporate IVS program are often located within corporate responsibility programs (Hills & Mahmud, 2007; Vian, Feeley, McLeod, Richards, & McCoy, 2007; Vian, Richards, McCoy, Connelly, & Feeley, 2007).

*Recruitment policies.* Programs shape the volunteer corps through their recruitment. Eligibility requirements may be highly selective or quite open. Programs aimed at development aid or humanitarian relief tend to require participants with language skills, higher education, and professional skills, while programs aimed at increasing international understanding may only require volunteers to be a certain age and be willing to serve (Sherraden, et al., 2006).

**Institutional Capacity**

*Access: Inclusion and internationality.* Studies suggest that international volunteers tend to originate in wealthier countries (e.g., North America, Europe, Japan, Australia), include majority citizens from those countries, and promote volunteering in other wealthy countries or in poorer counties (Sherraden, et al., 2006; Allum, 2007). These qualities may influence IVS program capacity, including IVS program capacity to achieve an international focus (Pastor, 1974).

A number of factors affect who can and does volunteer, including eligibility, roles, access to information, organizational affiliation, procedures, social protection, time availability, and an appropriate volunteer opportunity (CEC, 2001; AVSO, 2004; European Commission, 2004; Gaskin, 2004; Jones, 2004; Rehberg, 2005; Davis Smith, et al., 2006; Musiala, 2006; Gran, 2006; McBride & Lough, 2007; McBride, Sherraden, & Lough, 2007; Hong, Morrow-Howell, Tang, & Hinterlong, 2007). Studies suggest that IVS increases when programs provide direct access to participation. In a study of corporate volunteering, for example, Dick de Gilder and colleagues (2005) find that "the total number of people and the total number of hours" volunteering increase for "all kinds" of employees when offered access to the opportunity to volunteer (p.150).

IVS programs that actively recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds may be at an advantage over other programs. Inclusive programs are more likely to challenge preexisting stereotypes in host communities (Sharma & Bell, 2002). Likewise, volunteers from disadvantaged circumstances may benefit significantly more from the IVS experience than those from privileged backgrounds (Adams, Dienst, Schroer, & Stringham, 1996; Schröer, 2003; Davis Smith et al., 2006).

*Incentives: Remuneration and compensation.* Economic issues may also affect the propensity to volunteer abroad and the outcomes of service, suggesting the possible influence of incentives. Financial concerns may be more acute in international compared to domestic volunteering, which costs less and can be accomplished alongside work and school. Participation fees and opportunity costs of

volunteering suggest the potential importance of a volunteer social protection package to expand the volunteer pool (Thompson, 1979; Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000; Sharma & Bell, 2002; Jones, 2004; Gran, 2006; Musiala, 2006). Remuneration or compensation, in the form of stipends, academic credit, recognition, or other incentives, may encourage a more diverse volunteer pool and greater volunteer effort in the field (Moskwiak, 2006). Programs that provide minimal salary and accommodation comparable to local wages, may encourage trust and understanding in the host community (VSO, 2002), compared to those who offer perks unavailable to local residents.

*Information and facilitation: Training and support.* Orientation, language training, supervision, coaching, peer and social support, and collective reflection also may affect effectiveness (Dumélie et al., 2006, Eyler & Giles, 1999; Grusky, 2000; CEC, 2001; Costanza & Geudens, 2003; Sherraden & Benitez, 2003; Simpson, 2004; Mutz & Schwimmbeck, 2006; Powell & Bratović, 2007; Hoksbergen & Veenema, 2007). Volunteer placements often require significant cultural adaptation and adjustment to different and sometimes difficult work and conditions. Researchers have also linked post-program debriefing and follow-up for former volunteers to positive outcomes for volunteers (Grusky, 2000; Keesbury, 2003).

*Organizational networks.* Organizational networks can connect host organizations to local and foreign partners for resources. Moreover, vertical networks that include companies, NGOs, or universities encourage participatory decision-making at higher levels, and reduce donor-dependence (Acevedo, 2002; VSO, 2002). Horizontal networks between local residents and organizations, or between host organizations and volunteers' home community organizations may support the growth of civil society in both countries, while increasing knowledge of international development issues (VSO, 2002).

*Resources for IVS.* Even when volunteering is cost effective, it requires significant resources. The ability of sending, host, and intermediary organizations to cover these costs affects the effectiveness of volunteers (SOS, 1999b). Organizations in sending and receiving countries orient, train, supervise, and support volunteers. Volunteers have to be lodged, fed, and, occasionally, nursed back to health. They often require ongoing language training and cultural coaching (Sherraden & Benítez, 2003), as well as post-service support.

*Autonomy and accountability.* Like development programs generally, volunteer programs may be more effective when they are accountable to volunteers, host organizations, and host communities (Cleaver, 1999; Jones, 2004; Engel, 2006; Devereux, 2007). In other words, IVS may be more effective when it is meaningful to volunteers, reflects community priorities, and involves community residents and leaders in projects and decision-making.

Host organizations, for example, may play a minor or major role in determining objectives, selecting volunteers, choosing IVS activity, or supervising volunteers. Compared to IVS programs with low levels of accountability and community involvement, programs that are locally accountable may adjust IVS service to local conditions, gain acceptance and community involvement, and meet organizational and community needs (VSO, 2002). In this model, volunteers do not act as managers and experts, but colleagues and team members, thereby encouraging mutual learning and reciprocity in skill sharing, while minimizing paternalism and reducing competition (Daley & Winter, 1978; Rockcliffe, 2005). However, they may also have less power vis-à-vis outside organizations (Devereux, 2006; Dumélie et al., 2006).

## International Volunteering and Service Action

*Service activity*. Volunteers engage in a broad range of service activities internationally (Pinkau, 1981). Although studies roughly identify IVS activities, none is comprehensive and worldwide. An assessment of 103 international volunteer programs, indicate the main activities are educational services (85 percent), human and social services (80 percent), community development (75 percent), and environmental protection (73 percent) (McBride, et al., 2003).[7] A U.S. Peace Corps study finds education to be the most common volunteer activity (35 percent of total services), followed by health (21 percent), business development (16 percent), and environment (14 percent) (Peace Corps, 2007b). A UK study of gap-year programs estimates the most common types of activities performed by participants are community-based work (37 percent), teaching (15 percent), and conservation and environment (15 percent) (Jones, 2004).

With only a rough idea of the distribution of IVS activities worldwide, we know even less about the relative benefits of each of these activities. For example, a focus on technology transfer by professionals may backfire if volunteering becomes more like development aid, thus losing the non-monetary advantage and reciprocal relationships that lie at the heart of volunteering (Keesbury, 2003; Engel, 2006).

*Length and continuity of service*. IVS programs range in duration from one-week to one or more years, and although short-term placements are growing (Allum, 2007), the average appears to be six to seven months or more (Jones, 2004; Lough, 2006; McBride et al., 2003). Although research to date is inconclusive, outcomes may vary by length of service. Placements of different duration may accomplish different objectives.

Some researchers suggest that long-term placements have greater development impact (Spence, 2006; White & Cliffe, 2000), including potential for exchange of technical skills, knowledge, and experience between volunteers and local residents (UNV, 2002c; Devereux, 2006; Dumélie, et al., 2006). On one hand, the availability of long-term international volunteers may encourage host organizations to substitute volunteers for local volunteers or employees. On the other hand, long-term volunteers, who have more time to learn about and become trusted by the community, are more able to challenge imperialism, elitism, and the modernization paradigm of development (Devereux, 2006).

Depending on the circumstances, short-term placements can be successful in promoting cross-cultural understanding or technology transfer. Short-term placements benefit volunteers (Purvis, 1993; Jones, 2005; Devereux, 2006), but the benefits to host organizations and communities is less clear, especially when the focus is on volunteers more than host communities (Simpson, 2004; Gilfillan, 2006). Short-term placements may be less cost-effective (Dumélie et al., 2006), and may interrupt continuity of service (Keesbury, 2003; Laleman, Kegels, Marchal, Van der Roost, et al., 2007). However, coordinated and consecutive volunteer placements potentially override some deficiencies in the short-term IVS model. Short-term service may also have greater potential to engage skilled and professional volunteers (Allum, 2007), and may lead to longer volunteering in the future (Dumélie et al., 2006).

[7] Categories in this survey were not mutually exclusive.

*Group or individual placements*. Like length of service, individual or group placements may lead to different outcomes. Individual placements may encourage greater volunteer-host interaction, but require greater IVS program infrastructure. Group placements offer cost savings and increased economies of scale resulting in more volunteer hours, and possibly increasing effectiveness. However, group placements may reduce cultural immersion, meaningful contact, interpersonal relationships between volunteers and local residents, and opportunities for volunteers to learn language and customs (Gilfillan, 2006; Sherraden, et al., 2006). Although volunteers in a group placement may be able to make a significant tangible contribution (e.g., build a school), volunteers and local residents may gain little in cross-cultural understanding.

Ethnic, racial, and national diversity within group placements may overcome some of the limitations of co-nationals serving together in groups. In diverse groups, volunteers develop greater cultural awareness, and they may respond to host communities more effectively and with greater sensitivity and competence than homogeneous volunteer groups (Lewis, 1999; Sharma & Bell, 2002; Peace Corps, 2005a; Spring, Dietz, & Grimm, 2007). Broader representation among volunteers may also have positive effects in the country of origin (sending country) through greater diffusion of IVS effects across society (Peace Corps, 2005b).

*Direction of service*. Geographic direction of volunteering may also affect outcomes. Most programs are unidirectional; in other words, volunteers travel from one country to another to volunteer. Moreover, historically, volunteers have originated in wealthy countries and volunteered in poor or other wealthy countries. As Waldorf (2001) points out, voluntarism "is a fairly easy choice in our affluent society…. [b]ut developing countries cannot afford this luxury" (5).

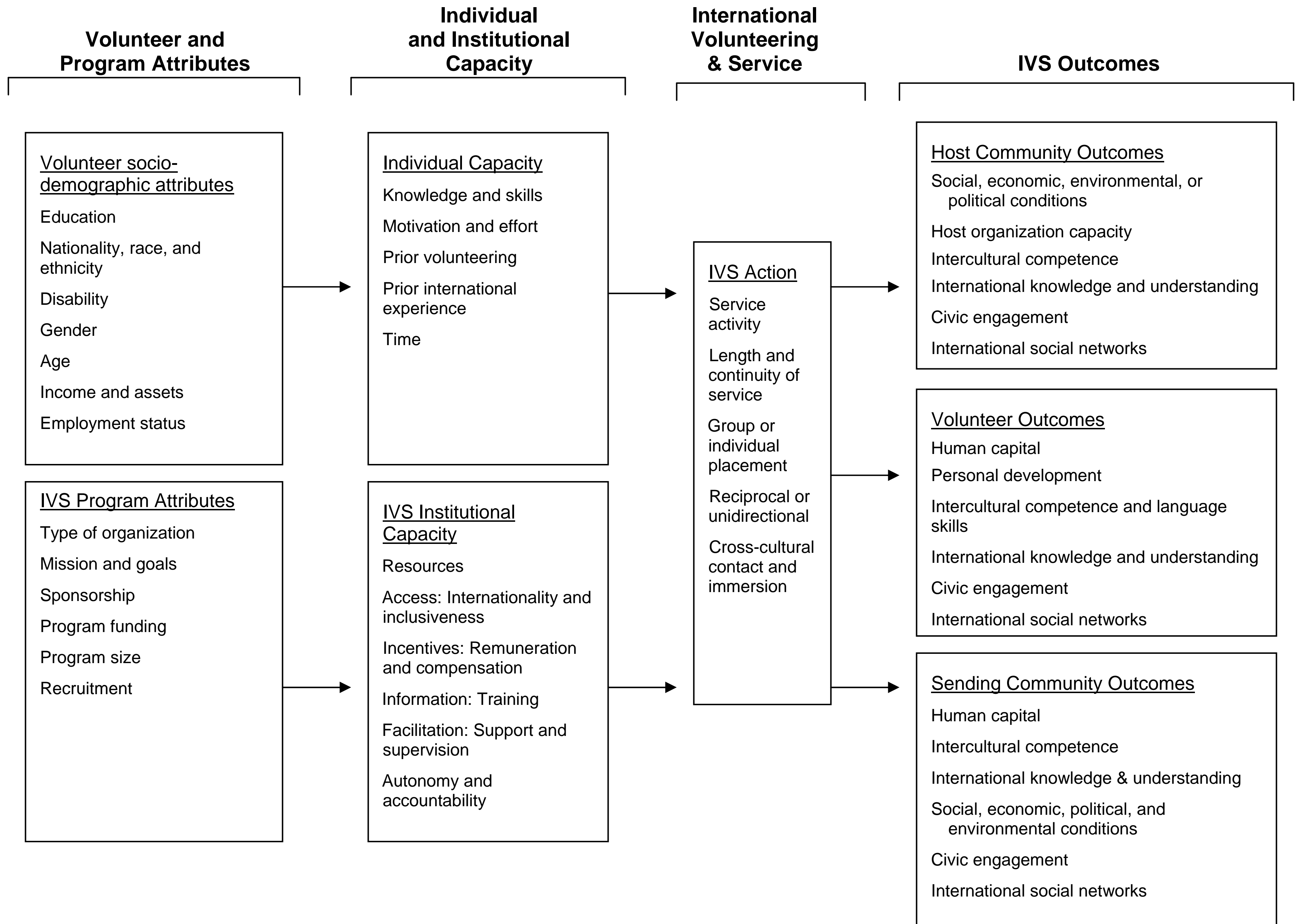
In recent years, however, there are growing opportunities for volunteers from poor countries to serve abroad (VSO, 2002; UNV, 2004; Randel et al., 2004; Rockcliffe, 2005; Smith, et al., 2005; Devereux, 2006; Allum, 2007). Some programs send volunteers from two or more countries to volunteer placements in two or more countries (Sherraden & Benítez, 2003; Allum, 2007).[8] Perhaps best known are Canada World Youth and Swedish World Youth, which send teams of 10 to 16 young people, from two countries, to work and live together for six months or more, first in one country then in the other (South House Exchange & Canada World Youth, 2006).

However, it remains relatively rare for volunteers from poor countries to volunteer in affluent countries (Rockcliffe, 2005; Moskwiak, 2006). This pattern suggests differential access to IVS opportunities depending on country of origin. It also suggests that skill and technology transfers and cross-cultural experiences are largely north-to-south.

*Cross-cultural contact and immersion*. The extent to which the IVS activity creates opportunities of cross-cultural contact and cultural immersion may also influence IVS outcomes. Homestays, multinational volunteer groups, and volunteers paired with local workers may increase cross-cultural contact and immersion in IVS. Immersion also may encourage greater awareness of cultural norms and community needs among volunteers, improve volunteer language development, and provide

[8] Perhaps reflecting their longer evolution, the European Voluntary Service (EVS) defines multilateral as involving four or more countries: "At least 6 volunteers have to participate in these projects which must have a common theme and approach for co-ordination, networking and exchange of good practice between the partners" (1999, p. 12).

**Figure 1. Conceptual Model: International Volunteering and Service Impacts**



psychological support to local residents in high-conflict or oppressed areas (VSO, 2002). In light of safety and security issues, however, immersion may not always be desirable.

## IVS Outcomes

This section explores the range and types of outcomes that might result from IVS activities.[9] Figure 1 presents hypothesized outcomes in host communities, among volunteers, and in sending communities. Most research on IVS, although relying on relatively inadequate research methodologies such as retrospective, case study, and cross-sectional designs, suggests that IVS has positive outcomes for volunteers. We know much less about outcomes for host communities and sending communities (Perry & Imperial, 2001; Davis Smith, Ellis & Howlett, 2002; Annette, 2003; Daftary & McBride, 2004; McBride, Lombe, Tang, Sherraden, & Benítez, 2003; Greenwood, et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2005; Powell & Bratović, 2007). Despite the widespread assumption that IVS results in a positive net transfer of benefits and resources from sending to host communities (Braham, 1999), the transfer may in fact be reciprocal, or possibly one-way in the other direction, from host to sending community (Law, 1994; Simpson, 2004). Overall, a preponderance of positive outcomes for IVS may be the result of studies that are more interested in identifying benefits than challenges.

### Host Community Outcomes

IVS may affect social, economic, environmental, and political conditions; intercultural competence and conflict resolution; international understanding; global engagement and international social networks; and host organization capacity (UNDP, 2003).

Social development outcomes may include improvements in health, nutrition, education, or welfare services in host communities. Residents may gain language skills (Chelikani & Khan, 1990), teaching technologies (Lusk & Rogers, 2001), clinical and work skills (Vian, Richards, et al., 2007), and social services (Smith et al., 2002; Powell & Bratović, 2007). However, volunteers may gain more than hosts on these measures.

Economic development includes direct impacts, such as business and market development, as well as spillover effects for local economies from housing, feeding, and sustaining volunteers. Whether these effects bolster local economies depends on the direction of resource flows. Volunteers could replace or displace local workers and/or volunteers; traditions of mutual aid and self-help could erode; and host communities could become increasingly dependent on volunteers (Musiala, 2006; Laleman, et al., 2007). Unskilled international volunteers could expose communities to security or political risks, unless accompanied by sufficient supervision (Dumélie, et al., 2006). Like traditional development, IVS could be ineffective and even contribute to existing or new inequalities unless programs deliberately address these threats through appropriate training, volunteer selection,

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[9] This paper does not address benefit-cost analysis. Although there are estimates of the cost of sending and maintaining volunteers in placements (e.g., Laleman et al., 2007), value of hours spent volunteering (Hudson Institute, 2007; Lough, McBride, & Sherraden, 2007), value of incremental increases in social capital to host communities (Ironmonger, 2002; Mayer, 2003), researchers have not combined cost-benefit analysis along with impact analysis in order to more closely estimate the total value of IVS and utility compared to other development strategies.

sustained joint partnerships and field coordination, and accountability (Lowther & Lucas, 1976; Cohn, Wood, & Haag, 1981; Telford, Cosgrave, & Houghton, 2006; Engel, 2006).

IVS could contribute to sustainable development through environmental projects and environmental education. In contrast, IVS could contribute to environmental degradation through negative environmental impact on local resources, and increased emissions from increased international air travel (Brook, 2007).

Political development may result from IVS community organizing, advocacy, and human rights and peace work. Interactions between people from different parts of the world through IVS may generate greater understanding and awareness of global inequality and differential power (Devereux, 2006). This may result in increased grassroots empowerment and could attract attention of national and international policy makers. In the private sector, companies engaged in social responsibility, including volunteering, might help "'jump start' the development of civil society" in former communist and developing countries (Logan, no date), although others suggest that the political benefits accrue to sending countries more than to host communities (Windmiller, 1970).

Constructive interaction among people from different countries and cultures may increase intercultural knowledge and skills, and may lead to increased tolerance in the community (CEC, 2001; South House Exchange & CWY, 2006; Fantini with Tirmizi, 2007; Powell & Bratović, 2007). This may contribute to community efforts to reduce cultural tensions and promote cultural integration.

Similarly, IVS may also result in greater civic engagement and growth of civil society in host communities, although some question if the model of civic engagement promoted by many IVS programs is culturally relevant in other contexts (Canada World Youth, 1993; South House Exchange & CWY, 2006; Plewes & Stuart, 2007).

Community leaders and residents may gain greater international understanding and global awareness, thus contributing to their ability to act effectively in a global world (South House Exchange & CWY, 2006; Powell & Bratović, 2007; Sherraden, 2007). IVS programs may offer a model of global civic engagement and promote greater international cooperation (ECOTEC, 2001; Randel, et al., 2004). Host communities may also expand their international social networks, possibly leading to opportunities for social and political development (Woolcock, 1998; Spence, 2006). Development theory suggests that "coproduction," or the process of using inputs from external actors to create goods or services locally, has the potential to create significant community change (Ostrom, 1996). Volunteers may increase demand for local goods (Rodrik, 1999), and personal relationships between volunteers and local residents may contribute to broader international social networks, which could leverage and attract resources and recognition from international donors and others (Comhlámh, 2007, p.8). Integration into transnational advocacy networks could contribute to local political reforms (Fox, 1996). Contact with international social networks could encourage emigration, with a range of potential positive and negative implications (e.g., remittances, family disintegration, and brain drain) for the host community.

IVS may also affect organizational capacity in IVS host organizations (SOS, 1999b; Sherraden & Benitez, 2003; Smith et al., 2005). On one hand, IVS provides additional resources (volunteers) which may increase the quality, efficiency, or volume of services provided by the host organization

(Vian, Richards, et al., 2007), and add to cross-cultural skills and knowledge in host organizations. They could expand their networks of support including, in some cases, creation of new partner networks (Vian, Richards, et al., 2007). On the other hand, hosting volunteers may deplete the organization, diverting resources away from service delivery. Poor selection and training of volunteers could also diminish an organization's capacity to deliver service and potentially threaten its reputation.

**IVS Volunteer Outcomes**

There is more research on volunteer outcomes, although most uses cross-sectional or pre-and-post rather than experimental designs. Overall, these studies suggest that IVS offers volunteers a way to build knowledge, skills, and experience that prepares them for living and working in a knowledge-based global economy (ECOTEC, 2001; Thomas, 2001; Brook, et al., 2007). IVS may build volunteer human capital, including "higher order" skills and abilities that contribute to increased capacity to generate income and economic growth (Thomas, 2001, 7; see also, Grusky, 2000; Jones, 2004, 2005). These may include technical skills (SOS, 1999a; Schröer, 2003); language, communication, and problem solving skills (SOS, 1999a; CEC, 2001; Sherraden & Benítez, 2003; Hammer, 2005; Universalia, 2005; Moskwiak, 2006; Kelly & Case, 2007; Brook, et al., 2007; Fantini with Tirmizi, 2007); and leadership, organizational, human relations, and team building skills (Grusky, 2000; Thomas, 2001; de Gilder, et al., 2005; Jones, 2005; Vian, McCoy, et al., 2007). IVS may help individuals develop critical thinking skills, "due to the ways in which culture, language, religion, and beliefs are under constant challenge in foreign settings" (Kraft, 2002, p. 308; Brook et al., 2007). Moreover, learning may occur quickly and seem relatively effortless because "it is centered on practical activities and everyday life experiences" (Mutz & Schwimmbeck, 2006, p. 60). In contrast, some forms of IVS could contribute to views of the third world as "binaries of us and them" (Simpson, 2004, p. 690). "Fluent fools," as Gudykunst (1998, p. 3) has labeled some, may learn a new language but possess little understanding of culture.

Similarly, IVS may contribute to employability, including helping volunteers qualify for more lucrative and interesting international positions in private and public sectors (Jones, 2004; Mitka, 2006; Moskwiak, 2006; Powell & Bratović, 2007), although longer-term volunteering may be necessary (Powell et al., 2008). IVS may also provide opportunities to broaden horizons and explore career directions (Powell & Bratović, 2007; Bell, 1994). Some employers, who sponsor international service among employees, may believe that international service builds confidence, breadth of experience, and ability to manage diversity on the job (Cook & Jackson, 2006). Other employers may not recognize the human capital skills gained in an international volunteering experience (Thomas, 2001; Smith et al., 2002; Brook, et al., 2007), and some may not know how to utilize employees' new skills (Vian, McCoy, et al, 2007). At the same time, IVS can potentially put employees out of touch, interrupting their education and employment, and interfering with promotions and other advancement opportunities (Cook & Jackson, 2006; Rolles, 1999).

IVS may contribute to personal and human development through heightened maturity, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and independence (Cross, 1998; SOS, 1999a; Wilson, 2000; CEC, 2001; Thomas, 2001; Schröer, 2003; Poole & Davis, 2006; Brook, et al., 2007; Powell & Bratović, 2007). It may offer an important "psycho-social moratorium," encouraging reflection and personal growth (Stein, 1966, p. 238). Some suggest that IVS replaces traditional rites of passage (Powell & Bratović, 2007). Often, volunteers are living outside of their country and culture for the

first time, possibly learning another language, interacting with people who are different from themselves, and engaging in demanding, yet fulfilling, work. The potential is high, therefore, for IVS to be a transformative experience in the lives of volunteers (Starr, 1994; Grusky, 2000; Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Fantini with Tirmizi, 2007).

IVS volunteers benefit in different ways. For example, some research suggests that IVS offers particular benefit to the economically and otherwise disadvantaged (Adams, et al., 1996; EVS, 1999; Stopforth, 2001; AVSO, 2001, 2004; Davis Smith, et al., 2006; Powell & Bratović, 2007; Spring, et al., 2007). Disadvantaged volunteers may develop greater self-reliance and autonomy, and be able to disassociate themselves from negative labels and stereotypes because of the new experience (Davis Smith, et al., 2006).

Exposure to and interaction with people who are different may increase intercultural competence, considered essential for full participation in contemporary society (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005). International volunteers may develop greater open-mindedness (South House Exchange & CWY, 2006). Intercultural competence may result especially when IVS programs emphasize it (CEC, 2001; ECOTEC, 2001; McBride et al., 2003; Schöer, 2003; Sherraden & Benítez, 2003; Fantini with Tirmizi, 2007; Hammer, 2005; Universalia, 2005; Powell & Bratović, 2007; Powell, et al., 2007). Intercultural competency includes knowledge and skills that enable people "to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different" from themselves (Fantini with Tirmizi, 2007, 5; see also Gillert, 2000). Building intercultural competence may result especially when volunteers and community residents have equal status, shared goals, and sanctioned activities (Allport, 1954). In this way, some forms of international volunteering may result in greater awareness and tolerance, lessen prejudice and ethnocentrism (Pitner, 2007), and even celebration of cultural differences.

IVS may also result in greater knowledge and understanding of social, economic, and political issues in global context (Hayward & Siaya, 2001). For instance, volunteers report better understanding of other countries, minority issues, immigration, and inequality (Law, 1994; Grusky, 2000; South House Exchange & CWY, 2006; Sherraden, 2007), and an enhanced global perspective (Purvis, 1993). Global understanding from an IVS experience may also help transform volunteers into global citizens, in the ethical sense, who feel a shared identity with others outside of their own country (Dower & Williams, 2002; Sherraden & Benítez, 2003), which may contribute to national security (Rieffel & Zalud, 2006), although some studies suggest this shared identity can be superficial (Powell & Bratović, 2007).

Finally, volunteers gain civic values and skills, and volunteering encourages future civic engagement (EVS, 2001; Davis Smith, et al., 2002; Brown, 2005; Rehberg, 2005; Rockliffe, 2005; Jastrzab, Giordono, Chase, et al., 2006; Mutz & Schwimmbeck, 2006). Some research on short (two-week) workcamps finds that civil attitudes are not improved, suggesting that changes in pro-social attitudes require more time (Powell, et al., 2008). IVS may also promote a heightened sense of responsibility for improving the common good worldwide (Williams, 1991; Purvis, 1993; SOS, 1999a; Sherraden, 2001, 2007; Jones, 2005; Universalia, 2005; Fantini with Tirmizi, 2007; Powell & Bratović, 2007). Volunteers may find greater involvement enriching, but also may benefit personally from international social networks with global contacts for future employment and global influence.

### Sending Community Outcomes

Large numbers of returning volunteers may also impact sending communities and countries. However, there are few studies that measure possible outcomes such as enhanced human capital formation, capacity for cross-cultural interaction and conflict resolution, ability to contribute to development, global civic engagement, international social networks, and public policy support for IVS.

As a group, returned IVS volunteers could contribute to aggregate increases in human capital, and lower levels of risk behavior and social exclusion, in the country of origin (ECOTEC, 2000), possibly leading to economic and social development. Volunteering abroad, like domestic volunteering, may lead to future volunteering (Manitsas, 2000; de Gilder, et al., 2005; Rockliffe, 2005; Universalia, 2005; VSO, 2006b). For instance, public officials in Singapore deliberately pursue IVS to develop civic society, a sense of inclusion, domestic volunteerism, and national pride and identity, in this case "self development" by government (Krishna & Khondker, 2004, p.32). IVS could contribute to returned volunteer mobility, fuel internal migration, and add to numbers of ex-patriots living abroad.

Returned IVS volunteers could improve cross-cultural relations and resolve social conflicts at home. They may bring a more nuanced understanding and broader perspective of the concept of development (Fuchs, 1967). Moreover, they could help to dispel myths about foreigners, spark dialogue about disadvantaged populations, explain the importance of local and global interdependence, and encourage global action by others (VSO, 2006).

Global awareness among returning volunteers and sending organizations could enhance capacity to solve domestic and international conflicts, and encourage support for development aid (Universalia, 2005; Plewes & Stuart, 2007). Large numbers of people engaging in IVS could increase access to global networks for their own communities and countries. With these ideas in mind, some IVS programs promote continued involvement in global advocacy, such as the "Make Poverty History" campaign (Devereux, 2006).

IVS sending organizations may also benefit from added cross-cultural expertise, expanded organizational reach, more information, and improved status and reputation (SOS, 2000; CEC, 2001; de Gilder, et al., 2005; Smith, et al., 2005). Although some organizational constituents may not support IVS efforts and believe that resources should be invested at home (de Gilder, et al., 2005), there also may be a positive feedback effect that leads to more support and advocacy for foreign aid and IVS policies and programs.

## Research: Toward Understanding the Impact of IVS

The research evidence presented in this paper suggests that there is now a critical mass of descriptive information about IVS, including its various forms, the institutional context, and intended outcomes. Nonetheless, there is not a clear understanding about how and why particular forms of IVS and different contexts lead to certain outcomes. As Hodgkinson suggests: "Essentially, there is much rhetoric but little hard research and data to support civic service as important to citizenship (national or in other groups) or its impact on public benefit (whether to community, nation, region, or world)" (2004, p. 192S). In order to build an evidence base, the field must adopt common

terminology and definitions, research questions driven by theory, and rigorous research designs, data collection methods, and instruments that allow for comparison and the counterfactual.

As for terminology and definition, the very definition of who is an "international volunteer" is contested (Carson, 1999; UNV, 1999; Dingle, Sokolowski, Sazon-Harrold, Smith, & Leigh, 2001; Merrill, 2006; Devereux, 2007; Powell & Bratović, 2007). While uniformity would promote comparability, it may not be realistic at this stage due to perceived differences in voluntary action worldwide. However, we can aim for transparency in how we conceptualize and measure international volunteering and service. Beyond the actual act itself, there is a range of characteristics that are likely to have impacts, from volunteer capacity to institutional capacity in sending and host countries. Theory should inform which characteristics we measure.

Formal theory is largely absent from existing research on IVS, but ask practitioners and they can give you their theory of change, and their idea as to how and why the program affects community members and volunteers. It is important to articulate these ideas; from them come testable research questions and hypotheses. Based on our knowledge of the field and a review of existing research, we believe that the most productive questions address impacts across the four primary stakeholder groups, including sending organizations, volunteers, host organizations, and community residents.

The tools of social science research already assist the field with development and implementation. For example, needs assessments and capacity assessments inform policy and program design, directing volunteer efforts to areas of greatest hardship. Implementation assessments by IVS programs track volunteer activities, community resident involvement, and stakeholder satisfaction. These methods help to lay a foundation for effective programs, but they also form the knowledge base required for impact assessments. We cannot know the impact of an IVS policy or program unless we understand the volunteering context and volunteer actions. This requires systematic data collection by all stakeholders (volunteers, supervisors, host organizations, community members, and sending organizations) (IVR, 2004).

Regarding research methods, the overwhelming majority of research is based on case and cross-sectional studies (Powell & Bratović, 2007). While these have contributed enormously to what we know about the field, they do not permit us to draw conclusions about the impact of IVS on volunteers, host communities, and sending countries. Impact assessments require comparative designs that permit researchers to compare the target of change (an individual, organization, or community) with a similar target, but one that does not have an IVS program. Comparisons are difficult to achieve. Comparing volunteers in service to those on a waitlist is one possibility. Another is to compare a representative sample from a larger population that matches this sample as well as the program's volunteer profile. Research respondents can also serve as their own comparison group. Using a pre-test/post-test design, researchers can compare a group or community prior to service and after. In the most rigorous form, an experimental design, or randomized trial, researchers assign respondents randomly into an IVS program or a control group, and compare differences. Although this design is the gold standard, these field experiments are rarely feasible due to ethics, logistics, and cost. With good impact measures, the field will be able to conduct accurate benefit-cost studies. However, the key to such studies is accurate measurement of tangible and intangible benefits, as well as costs.

Data collection methods must match research questions. Methods may be quantitative or qualitative or both. Qualitative methods can gauge impact; they also can clarify quantitative findings and discover new issues, but findings cannot be generalized beyond the individuals and group studied (Shalayeva, 2005). Quantitative methods allow for inference and statistical assessment of impact, but offer little insight into meaning. Increasingly, researchers employ both qualitative and quantitative methods in one study, or use methods such as concept mapping that integrate the two approaches (Poole & Davis, 2006). In interview, focus group, and close-ended survey studies, however, the IVS context may drive what questions can be asked and how. For example, in some cultural contexts it may not be appropriate to implement in-depth interviews with children or women without elders present.

The quality of particular data collection methods will be contingent on research instruments. A number of volunteer measurement toolkits have been developed that inform participatory appraisals and program evaluation, although in order to build a comparative evidence base, standardized instruments implemented across IVS programs and contexts are needed (Daniel, French, & King, 2006; Dingle et al., 2001; IVR, 2004).

To be sure, the kind of rigorous research discussed here is costly, but so are ineffectual policies and programs. The field will benefit from investment in organizational infrastructure to collect impact data, as well as investment in researchers to conduct projects across IVS forms and ideally, across countries. It is also important that we look for and report negative and/or neutral results and introduce methodological controls on respondent and researcher bias. For IVS to achieve scale and become as effective as possible, a few key impact studies would advance knowledge greatly.

## Conclusion

The key research question is the benefit to volunteering and service abroad for volunteers, host communities, and sending communities. Does an overseas volunteer experience make unique contributions, compared to, say, domestic volunteering? Because of the significantly higher cost of IVS, the field must establish unique and important contributions. This will not be simple. There is wide variance across IVS programs, volunteers, and community contexts. Identifying impacts and generalizing findings beyond individual IVS programs will be challenging.

Existing research suggests many possible outcomes, both positive and negative. IVS may lead to improved international understanding and cooperation across borders. IVS may lead to greater cross-cultural competence, including language and communication skills; greater international understanding; enhanced ability to solve conflicts; widespread and democratic participation in global affairs through global civic society organizations; and growth of international social networks among ordinary people. In this scenario, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, an outcome where benefits accrue to volunteers, host communities, and contribute to the global greater good.

In contrast, IVS may do little to improve global relations if it reproduces or reinforces existing inequalities (Mohan & Stokke, 2000). If IVS is largely limited to volunteers of means from wealthier areas of the world, it may give these privileged volunteers an international perspective, and a career boost, but it will do little for people and communities who currently lack access to IVS. Those who volunteer will continue to reap the benefits of IVS, using host organizations and host communities as a rung on the ladder of personal advancement, without making lasting contributions and

providing avenues for advancement to those who are "served." In this scenario, benefits accrue in a lopsided fashion, providing greater advantage to volunteers and sending communities than to host communities, contributing to the status quo in global relations instead of providing opportunity in both directions and building international understanding and cooperation across borders.

Without more rigorous research into promising models of IVS, we will not be able to say with certainty which direction we are going.

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