



FORUM Research Paper

“Emerging Perspectives on International Volunteerism in Asia”

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Research Mandate

- Mapping out current trends and challenges of international volunteer service (IVS) in Asia
- Provide evidence for an informed discussion on the way forward for international volunteer service in Asia

Study Methodology

Literature Review

- Studies and evaluations in English mainly
- Very few studies have concentrated on Asia

Online Survey of Volunteer Sending Organizations

- 80 respondents (out of 246 contacted)

6 Country Case Studies

Japan, Singapore, China, India, Philippines, Vietnam

- In-depth Interviews with 60 key informants in 6 countries (representing 47 organizations)
- 4 Focus-Group Discussions in 3 countries

Research Limitations

- 20 Asian countries covered by the online survey
- Stakeholders all from urban settings
- Survey respondents and FGD participants not randomly chosen
- Host/Sending organizations only from China, India, Philippines and Vietnam
- Returned volunteers only from Singapore and Japan

Highlights

I. Cross Cutting Perspectives

II. Common Challenges

III. Emerging Trends

IV. Implications

V. Q&A



I. Cross Cutting Perspectives

1. Growth of Asia-to-Asia Volunteering

- From the Philippines (e.g. UNV in Vietnam), India, Vietnam and China
- Export of development models based on volunteerism from the Philippines (e.g. Gawad Kalinga in Cambodia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea)
- Pilot programs on volunteer management and regulation in China with VSO Bahaginan (Philippines)



I. Cross Cutting Perspectives

2. New Pathways to International Volunteering in Asia

- Targeting the Asian Diaspora
 - Indian Americans (e.g. Indi Core and America India)
 - CSR and corporate volunteers
 - 2nd & 3rd generation of Filipinos
- Increased awareness about volunteerism
 - Workshops on the role of volunteers in China
 - Civic Youth Engagement through schools
 - Role of Media after major disasters

I. Cross Cutting Perspectives

2. New Pathways to International Volunteering in Asia

- Growing relevancy of national volunteers in short-term IVS activities
 - Preparatory work for specialized teams
 - Support team for short term assignments
- Increased reliance on national volunteers
 - Strong regulatory framework in the Philippines and under development in China
 - ... but lacking for youth volunteerism in Japan

I. Cross Cutting Perspectives

3. Public-Private partnership forms of IVS more predominant in Asia

- Funded by the govt but operating independently
- Nearly 30% of respondents are govt linked
- Antecedents: either emerging from civil society or originally set up by the government
- Impact of shifting priorities by donor governments on sectoral and country focus

I. Cross Cutting Perspectives

4. IVS as a Principal Form of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

- Beyond CSR, focus on sustainability, invest in people
- Radical CSR, involving community spirit, values
- CSR and diaspora volunteers directly linking up with NGOs

I. Cross Cutting Perspectives

5. Growing Influence of the Internet on International Volunteers and IVCOs

- Online platforms for volunteer recruitment, instead of recruitment offices
 - Broadens source of volunteers
 - Less control over quality
- Identify volunteer opportunities, open database

I. Cross Cutting Perspectives

5. Growing Influence of the Internet on International Volunteers and IVCOs

- Online volunteering
 - skilled but lacking in mobility: e.g. Seniors, disabled, low-income group
 - Conflict zones, remote areas
 - But limitations due to regulatory environment (does not involve expense from budget)
- Keeping in touch with home
 - Dilutes experience of 'remoteness' (webcams)
 - More immediate sharing of experience (blogs)

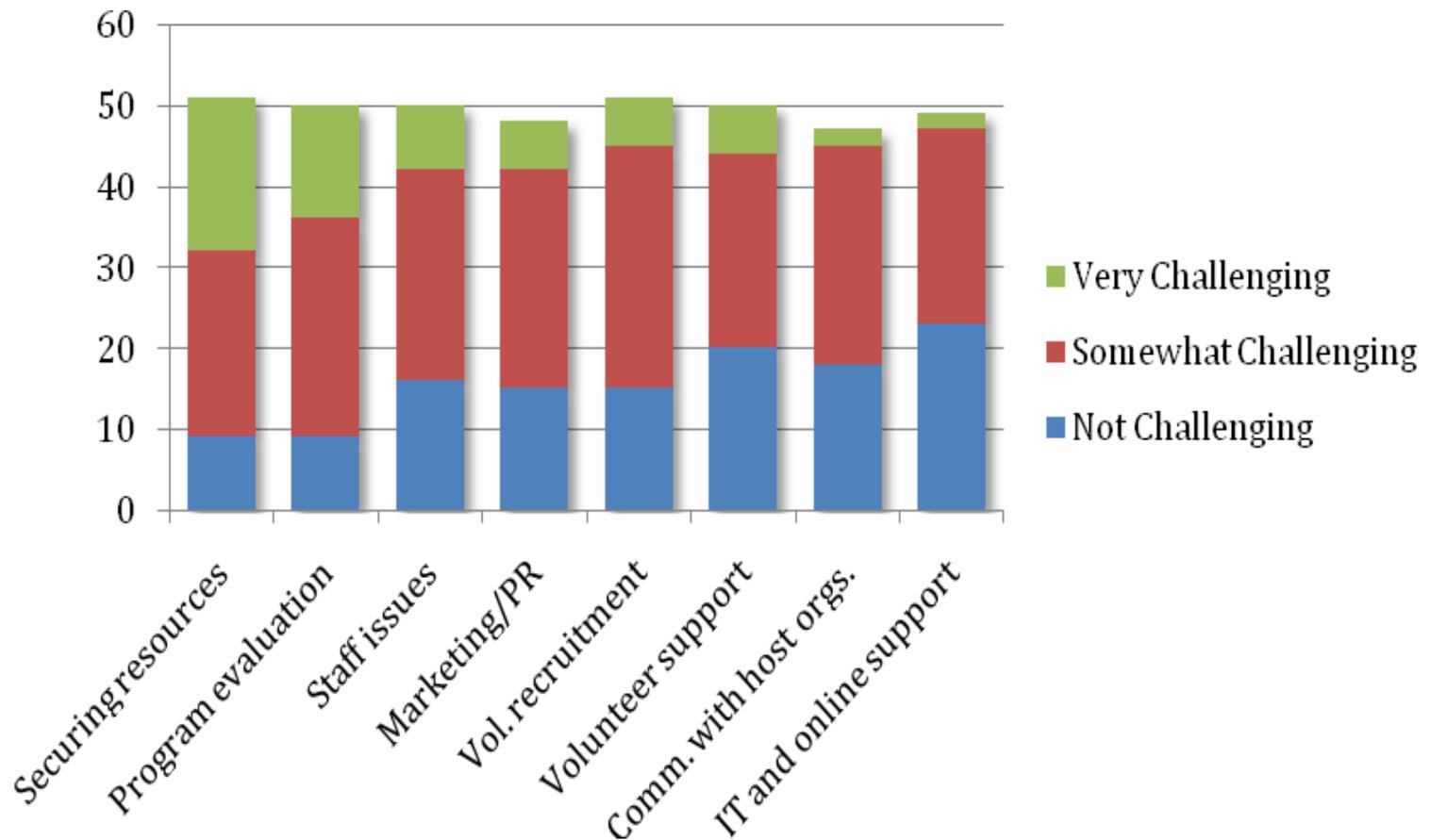
II. Common Challenges

- Financial constraints
- Lack of coordination and communication between sending and hosting organizations, and the related issue of mismatched expectations
 - Lag between identifying and posting volunteers
 - Quick turnover of staff
- Placing volunteers in under-resourced communities
 - Lack of infrastructure
 - Weak local organization and management capacities

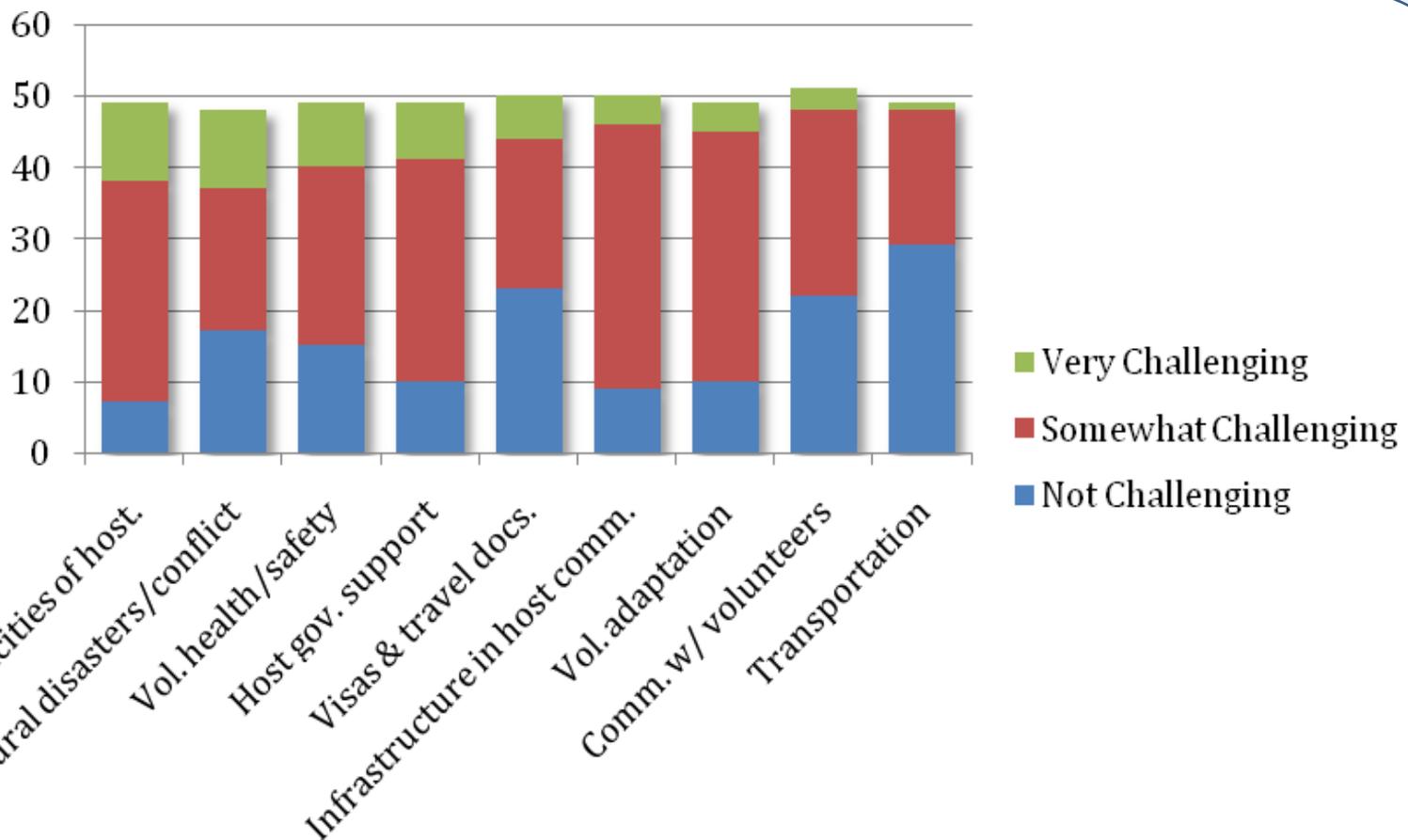
II. Common Challenges

- Effective methods and tools to evaluate the impact of volunteer activities on the host communities
 - Lack of awareness on tools and methods (especially from host organizations)
 - Lack of capacities to conduct evaluation (especially for short term assignments)
 - Monitoring of volunteers and volunteer activities receives more focus than evaluation of impact on host community
 - Few participatory methods of evaluation directly involving host organization/community

Securing Resources and Program Evaluation as Key Organizational Challenges



Host Capacities and Natural Disaster/conflict as Key Challenges with Host Community Placements



III. Emerging Trends

1. Youth Development

- Early exposure to domestic volunteerism through the school system increases awareness about international volunteerism, e.g. Singapore
- Strategy to attract international volunteers from the Asian Diaspora by sending organizations
- Support to returned volunteers to help secure jobs after long-term volunteerism (through subsidies or employment guarantees)

III. Emerging Trends

2. Climate Change

- IVS host organizations raise concerns about their lack of knowledge about climate change issues at the technical & managerial levels
- Lack of awareness of the impact of climate change is the most critical challenge
- In disaster relief, there is a clear trend towards ensuring greater professionalism (hiring professionals or undergoing international standard training)

Emerging trends in Japan

- Japan Ministry of Education provide incentives for long-term volunteerism
- Direct contact with local Japanese universities to recruit prospective international volunteers
- With greying population, senior volunteers turning from volunteering abroad to taking care of the old in their families
- Still little recognition of the value of volunteer experiences in the professional world
- Youth prioritize finding jobs at home rather than volunteering abroad and limitations in communication due to the relatively low English skills of Japanese youth

Emerging trends in Singapore

- More attention paid on sustainability and measuring impact on host community on short term assignment, especially youth development
- Training offered to start up organisations involved in IVS
- ‘Voluntourism’ on the rise
- Youth development issues : short term stints, “elite” students, “bundling” schools for continuity
- Increased use of intermediary service providers (such as tourism agencies) to facilitate short-term volunteerism raises concerns about quality of projects, sustainability and impact on host communities and



Emerging trends in China

- Some governmental organizations are piloting IVS projects with Western-based organizations
- Increased contact and partnerships with IVCOs has led the Chinese government to consider developing a regulatory framework
- Relatively low capacity for volunteer management from local host organizations
- Lack of information and coordination among IVS sending organizations
- Changes in regulations in specialized fields can also affect the types of volunteers sent to China

Emerging trends in India

- Some Indian NGOs beginning to work with the corporate sector to target members of the Indian Diaspora to bring them back as volunteers (e.g. Indi Core & America India)
- Use of the Internet and technology is having a significant impact on management of IVS (e.g. mapping volunteer opportunities using Global Positioning System instruments)
- ‘Voluntourism’ seen as an additional support to lighten heavy logistical requirements and cost of hosting short-term international volunteers
- Indian government is very selective on sectors in which they allow international volunteers to work

Emerging trends in Philippines

- Some Filipino NGOs are targeting second and third generation Filipinos diaspora as source of volunteers
- Recent 'export' of an indigenous model of development using volunteers (e.g. Gawad Kalinga)
- Country no longer priority for some bilateral donors because of the growing economy so IVS NGOs to strategize to exit within next four to five years to search for new types of partnerships
- Need to search for new types of partnerships to ensure long term sustainability of programmes

Emerging trends in Vietnam

- The Vietnamese Diaspora is being targeted by IVCOs as well as by the host organizations themselves as a source of volunteers to Vietnam
- Vietnamese volunteers are beginning to take part in IVS activities in other Asian countries
- As Vietnam prepares to join the ranks of middle-income countries, donors are slowly phasing out
- This places greater pressure on IVCOs to ensure the sustainability of IVS activities



IV. Implications of Findings on IVCOs

Asia-to-Asia volunteering

1. Is growth of South-to-South volunteering in Asia a reflection of the desire to have more Asia-to-Asia volunteering (closer cultural and geographic proximity), or for other reasons?
2. If given an opportunity, would IVS programs and volunteers like to see more South-to-North volunteering (across the globe)?



Youth Development

3. Are cultural aspects within Asian communities a major factor in facilitating understanding and reinforcing Asia-to-Asia IVS?
4. What are the impacts of providing long term volunteers with increased financial support (or establishing employment guarantee schemes) on their experience and overall assignment?

Shifting Demographics & Developments

5. What are the implications (both positive and negative) of the following trends on IV:
 - An ageing population
 - Growing affluence of developing countries

Internet Technology

6. How will internet technology impact the role of IVCOs in future?

Disaster Relief

7. How can volunteer sending organizations best address the impact on climate change through volunteer assignments, given the high level of requirement of knowledge, skills and professionalism?

Further Research

8. Given sampling and selection bias in this survey, is it truly the case that international volunteer sending organizations focus on economic development over poverty eradication and disaster relief?



Q & A



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