Cambodian NGOs’ Perceptions of International Volunteer Agencies

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Cambodian NGOs’ Perceptions of International Volunteer Agencies

Purpose
The purpose of this project was to explore, ‘host organizations’ perspectives of international “volunteering” agencies (Personal communication from Deborah Snelson to Elizabeth and Brian Ponter, 18 January 2008). The inspiration for it came from a paper (Plewes and Stuart, 2007) presented at the Montreal International Volunteer Co-operation Organisation (IVCO) conference which posed a number of significant questions one of which related to the lack of information on the relationship between IVCOs and the organisations that host the volunteers sent by them. This topic was considered here under three headings: the host organization; the host/international volunteer agency relationship and the IVs. These research areas are elaborated below.

Research questions
1) The host organization. What is its purpose? What is its rationale for involving international volunteers (IVs) in its programmes? What benefits do they hope to gain? What patterns emerge? For example, are particular kinds of non-government organisations (NGOs) motivated in certain ways to seek particular benefits from the hosting of IVs. In what circumstances are those benefits realized and when are they not?

2) The host/international volunteer agency relationship. What is the nature of that relationship? How is the relationship established and how is it maintained? What are the perceived benefits to each side of the relationship? Are those benefits realized? What factors influence the development of this relationship?

3) The international volunteers. How effective are they in assisting their host organizations to achieve their goals and those of the communities they serve? How efficient is their use given their high cost? (Comhlámh 2007, p. 5.) Volunteers may have several motivations covering human solidarity, aid and development, personal development and public engagement (Allum, 2007, p.15). A curiosity about the wider world and a search for adventure may also be significant. Do international volunteer agencies and host organizations appreciate these motivations? How can these elements be accommodated and combined into a useful, functional and harmonious experience? What is the nature of the relationships between IVCOs and the hosting organisations? How are they established and maintained?

In summary we set out to find out what we could about Cambodian NGOs and their experiences of IVCOs. The principle findings are presented below. They do not cover all of the questions raised above.

Historical background: civil war
While many countries that receive IVs share certain characteristics, Cambodia is fairly unique among them in having suffered from a most extreme form of political repression under the Khmer Rouge (KR) which left the country deprived of a generation of leaders and intellectuals, through starvation, overwork, murder and flight, who are only now being slowly replaced. After thirty years of civil war, of which the KR period was a part, fear is often a dominant response to challenge. O’Leary and Meas have observed, “Living with uncertainty for a prolonged period of time can result in a lack of confidence and feelings of powerlessness, lack of trust, fear, passivity and lack of initiative” (O’Leary and Meas, 2001, p. vi, quoted from Leng and Pearson, 2006. p.7). Such a legacy, together with the overwhelmingly rural nature of Cambodian society, characterized by patron/client relationships and by poverty, presents a great challenge for Cambodians and for those NGOs, IVCOs and IVs who work with them.

1 These initials are used here to refer both to the international umbrella organization and to the individual member “frontline” organizations, for example, AVI, Peace Corps and VSÖ.
This paper focuses on two aspects of the research: methods and findings. Research methods are given prominence because it is envisaged that this research will be the first of a series to be commissioned by the FORUM that will explore international volunteer issues. In order to assist future researchers the methods used in this research are described and, with hindsight, evaluated.

The second focus deals with the findings: research is carried out in order to reveal facts, relationships, perceptions, attitudes, values that were not known before, or at least not known to the professionals and other observers who are concerned with such matters. The research focus was on the perceptions of senior staff of Cambodian NGOs towards the international volunteer agencies (IVCOs) that provide volunteers to assist them with their work.

**Research methods**

The general dearth of literature on this topic suggested an exploratory, qualitative approach and this was adopted. While a literature review was being carried out a number of Cambodian and expatriate staff of NGOs hosting international volunteers were interviewed. IVCO FORUM Executive Members were also consulted through an invitation to comment on an early draft of the research proposal and of the questionnaire. They contributed several areas of concern to them and the more relevant were integrated into the questionnaire.

From these interviews and from the literature review a questionnaire was constructed in English consisting of 57 questions, two thirds of which were qualitative and one third quantitative. The initial translation into Khmer, the first language of Cambodia, was carried out by a person fluent in both English and Khmer. This was then back translated back into English by another translator also fluent in both languages. This process revealed a number of problems that were resolved through discussion. Some of the subtleties of Western planning strategies, procedures and techniques are difficult to express in Khmer: it has strengths in other areas. Some of the interviewers were not always able to pursue these subtleties in Khmer or translate interviewee’s responses into English. Having another person to translate, not the interviewer, would probably have resulted in other data being lost.

This procedure, predictably, revealed certain difficulties. It threw light on certain concepts with which Khmer speakers were not familiar and for which there are no precise words in Khmer. The use of these concepts occasionally led to lengthy translations that sometimes only approximated the original concepts in English. A few other translation issues emerged during the fieldwork and were resolved as they were encountered. In one case this necessitated some re-interviewing. However, the employment of bilingually fluent interviewers would have been too expensive. In the event we believe that no significant data was lost and certainly there was no systematic error.

An attempt to organize a pilot study using a draft of the questionnaire was not entirely successful partly because some IVCOs were slow to respond to requests for information about the location of their volunteers and partly because the original entry strategy selected by the researchers proved inappropriate, see below. Eventually it was decided, under time constraint, to go ahead without the benefit of the pilot results. In fact, though this was worrying at the time, when the pilot interviews came in only two questions needed to be reworded, the problems lay in the translation. These were corrected; the six pilot interviewees were re-interviewed on those questions and the questionnaires included in the survey.

The initial list of IVCOs was obtained from the records of VOLCAM (Volunteer Cambodia), a regular meeting of representatives of volunteer organizations, both national and international, working in Cambodia. All the IVCOs on the list were invited to participate in the research but not all responded. Lists of their volunteers in Cambodia were obtained from those that did. From data available on 12 June 2008 it appeared that most IVCOs placed most of their volunteers with NGOs, only the following percentages of IVs were working in government
departments: 3.4% of Australian Business Volunteers (ABV), data since 2004; 15.2% of Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) volunteers, data since 2002 and 18.2% of Australian Volunteers International (AVI) volunteers, data since 2004. Later it was discovered that approximately 60% of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) volunteers; 90% of Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA) volunteers and all Peace Corps volunteers work in government departments. United Nations (UN) volunteers in Cambodia work exclusively for UN agencies. Given the time available for the research and the fact that gaining permission to do research in government departments is a lengthy process, especially in an election year, it was decided to exclude them. This is a shortcoming of the research.

It was decided to concentrate on mainstream organizations, omitting those that are faith-based on the grounds that the nature of these organizations introduced complicating factors that would be marginally relevant to the mainstream international volunteer agencies. One informant believed that faith-based volunteers may constitute about 40% of all expatriate volunteers in Cambodia (Personal communication from Sr Luise Ahrens, 5 September 2008.) Excluding government hosts and faith-based IVCOs restricted the number of volunteer placements available for inclusion in the research. This meant that there was a smaller number of NGOs to choose from. In future research it is recommended that both government hosts and faith-based IVCOs be included.

Commercial volunteer agencies that bring self-funded volunteers to Cambodia were included in the research because they are increasingly popular worldwide and therefore have serious implications for the mainstream, more traditional agencies (Plewes and Stuart, 2007, pp 4-6). However, we found these agencies generally even more difficult to contact, perhaps because they regard the information we had said we would need from them as commercially sensitive.

It had been intended to interview senior staff in 40 host organizations, 30 NGOs based in Phnom Penh, 5 in the provinces and 5 commercial, self-funded-volunteer agencies in and outside of Phnom Penh. These numbers reflected what we had discovered at the time about the relative proportions of the respective organizations in Cambodia and their locations. A comparison of what was intended in the research proposal and what was achieved is given in Table 1: Sample – planned and actual. The target for the non-commercial NGOs was not achieved because of some lack of response from some IVCOs.

The interviews were conducted by six Cambodian interviewers, three of whom were recent graduates, two were advanced in doctoral studies and one was not a graduate but was more experienced in interviewing. Cambodian interviewers were chosen because we wanted to use the opportunity to build up the skills of local personnel; because they needed the money and because it was felt that they would get ‘closer’ to the almost entirely Cambodian interviewees and because Khmer culture (approximately 92.5% of the Cambodian population is Khmer), inhibits the expression of negative opinion in front of those to whom the negative opinions apply. The maintenance of harmony is a major value in Cambodian society. A non-Cambodian interviewer would possibly have been identified as of the party of the donor or the international volunteer agency and would thus trigger these inhibitions. The interviewers were briefed before beginning their work and debriefed very soon after the completion of each interview, usually the same day. This sometimes resulted in the interviewer being required to contact the respondent again, usually by phone, if clarification were required.

In the original entry strategy it was decided that the fact that the research was barang (foreigner) inspired should be kept in the background for the reasons mentioned above. This was partly responsible for a reluctance of NGO staff to participate and the slow start of the field work. Some wanted to know the purpose of the research. Advice from the interviewers was that they be allowed to say who the principal researchers were; that we were located at the RUPP and that we could be contacted if there were any problems. This revised entry strategy resulted in a speeding up of the interview process.
Two interviews were subsequently excluded.

Lists of Cambodian NGOs that had hosted volunteers over the past three years were requested from IVCOs. Three years was selected because it was felt the institutional memory in organizations would not support a longer period and it was believed that three years would be sufficiently long to reveal trends. However, only lists of current international volunteers were available and furthermore interviewees showed a general tendency to focus on those IVs currently employed and were often not able to remember the names of those IVs who had worked with them the previous year. Were the research to be replicated we would recommend a focus on the current year.

Several problems were evident when it came to drawing a sample of NGOs for interviewing. Necessary information that could only come from IVCOs was sometimes slow to come and often incomplete, lacking contact persons, addresses, email addresses or phone numbers. Further work was then necessary. A longer lead-in time would have been necessary in order to allow for resolving this problem.

It was necessary to get a representative sample of the types of work undertaken by IVs and the location (rural/urban). This posed some problems. Refusals by a few NGO staff to participate added to the difficulties.

Of the 34 interviews completed one was excluded on the grounds that the organisation turned out not to be an NGO but a UN agency and another on the grounds that the director was also an international volunteer so there was clearly a conflict of interests. A third interview did not take place because the director asked for payment for the interview. This report is therefore based upon 32 interviews. The first problem might have been avoided by making a more thorough preliminary check of the nature of the organisation selected for interview. The second problem could only be revealed by a preliminary interview which would have added to the time and expense involved and as only one case out of 34 was involved this would not have been justified.

The interviews revealed other IVCOs, ones not originally used to obtain a sample of NGOs, and these were included to give a fuller and more realistic picture of NGO/IVCO interaction. The following sixteen international volunteer agencies were eventually included: American Jewish World Service (AJWS), Australian Volunteers International (AVI); Australian Business Volunteers (ABV); Australian Youth Ambassadors (AYAD); Centrum for Internationelt Ungdomsutbyte; Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED); Evangelischer Entwicklungs Dienst (EED); Fredkorpset; Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA); Mennonite Central Committee MCC); Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA); Volunteers for International Development Australia (VIDA) and Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO). Agencies placing self-funded volunteers included: Star Kampuchea\(^2\), Projects-Abroad, Outreach International and Teaching Abroad (TA).

As this was an exploratory study a statistically random sample was not necessary and would have been difficult to draw without involving central government that, in 2008, being an election year, would have been particularly problematic\(^3\). (All NGOs in Cambodia are required to register with the Ministry of the Interior.)

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location/commercial/non-commercial</th>
<th>Planned sample</th>
<th>Actual sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream IVCOs (Phnom Penh)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream IVCOs (outside Phnom Penh)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-funded IVCOs (in and outside Phnom Penh)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>34*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Two interviews were subsequently excluded.

\(^2\) Star Kampuchea is a Cambodian NGO and is not a commercial organisation. It acts as a broker placing self-funded IVs in NGOs.

\(^3\) The Co-ordination Committee of Cambodia (CCC) which is the umbrella organization for NGOs in Cambodia, does not include all Cambodian NGOs in its membership.
In current circumstances it is difficult to see how this problem could be avoided. The appointment of Khmer-speaking senior researchers would have removed the problem at the fieldwork stage but it would have re-emerged in presentation to an international audience. Closer multilingual contact would mitigate the problem and would certainly have enriched our understanding of the varied nature of volunteering and its applications.

Findings

Background of NGOs interviewed
Basic information about the NGOs was sought such as when they were established; their purposes; the number of employees; the number of hosted IVs and the annual budgets to give some indication of the scale of the organisations being reviewed. Over half of the NGOs were established between 1991 and 2000. Another 38% were established after 2000. A minority (6%) established before 1991 were often established by international organisations and later became Cambodian NGOs.

The purposes of the NGOs whose staff were interviewed, were diverse. About one third had a health function. Seventy percent were concerned with women and children and another 17% with social and community development. Lesser percentages were involved with education and technical and professional services. Most (88%) of the NGOs whose staff were interviewed had between one and 60 full time staff. One had only one and the largest had 475. NGOs with over 60 staff were unusual. Seventy eight percent of NGOs hosted between one and three international volunteers at the time of the survey, July 2008. Five had none at the time of the interview and two had between four and ten. The smallest NGO interviewed, which started last year, had an annual budget of US$10,000. The largest had an annual budget of US$20,000,000. The majority, 63%, had annual budgets ranging between US$20,000 and US$500,000.

The key findings of the research are summarized under the following headings:

1. Who established this IVCO link?
2. Who established these volunteer assignments?
3. NGO accountability
4. Reasons NGOs seek IVCO partners
5. NGO involvement in selection of IVs
6. Issues discussed with IVCOs
7. IVCO dependence on NGOs
8. Positive and negative factors influencing NGO/IVCO relations
9. Understanding of codes of practice
10. How to use IVs to best advantage
11. Benefits and disadvantage of IVs

The findings are presented under the above headings.

1) Who established this IVCO link?
The 32 NGOs which participated in the research had a total of 50 linkages with IVCOs. (Fifty nine percent of NGOs interviewed had links with one IVCO only and 41% with several.) For each, respondents were asked which organization took the initiative in establishing the NGO/IVCO link: the NGO, the IVCO or some other agency.

The results are presented in Figure 1 that shows that IVCOs and other agencies, not the NGOs themselves, were more likely to take the initiative in establishing partnerships. Interviews with representatives of IVCOs working in Cambodia gave the impression that all, or most, links with NGOs were initiated from the NGO side though their needs were often
subject to the IVCO funding policy, often strongly influenced by their governments’ ODA policies. The data show, see Figure 1, that in the opinion of NGO respondents NGO-initiated relationships are a minority: 25% were initiated by the NGOs; 36% by the IVCO with which the link was formed and 34% by some other, third agency.

**Figure 1: What organisation took the initiative in establishing the relationship between your NGO and this IVCO?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>IVCO</th>
<th>Other Agency</th>
<th>Your NGO</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey, July 2008

These other organizations included: international NGOs, officials at a local embassy and faith-based NGOs. The responses to this question may also be seen as a measure of the degree to which Cambodian NGOs are dependent on IVCOs: the linked IVCOs and other agencies and individuals are clearly influential in initiating linkages. Personal contacts are of great importance in Cambodia.

The question, “If it [the link] were initiated by your organization why did you choose this particular IVCO?” produced ten responses from the ten NGOs that had initiated relationships with IVCOs (13 relationships). A range of reasons was given: two NGO respondents said the IVCO was the only one they knew; another two said the IVCO was well known, “for our area of work”, while a third NGO had been supplied with technical equipment and needed a volunteer from the supplying country to provide the technical instruction on the use of the equipment. Other links were made because, “the IVCO had already helped us financially and technically”, “we knew they could support us” (2) and they are “easy to communicate with”. There was also an element of chance, “we met at a meeting attended by both parties” and of reciprocity, “we approach one of two agencies whenever we need an IV, or the IVCO may approach us to take a volunteer.”

**2) Who established these volunteer assignments?**

**Figure 2: Who sets up particular IV assignments?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>This NGO</th>
<th>IVCO</th>
<th>Other Agency</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey, July 2008

Figure 2 shows that NGOs took the initiative in 66% (33) of assignments compared with 22% (11) where the IVCO took the initiative. In 4% of cases a third person or agency took the
initiative. This included: “A friend recommended me to contact (IVCO named)”. On this measure, then, it appears that Cambodian NGOs, are relatively independent.

A comparison of tables Figure 1 and Figure 2 shows that IVCOs are more likely to make the first approaches with regard to establishing an NGO/IVA link but NGOs are more likely to take the initiative in setting up the assignments. This is understandable in the Cambodian cultural context. Cambodians are often reluctant to make contact with new people and organizations but once they have and feel ‘at home’ with them they have no difficulty interrelating.

Figure 3: Who designed the specific job description?

Percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This NGO</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO/IVCO negotiation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO director completed IVCO form</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVCO only</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey, July 2008
Total does not equal 100% due to rounding

Most, 70% of NGO assignments involving IVs, were designed by the NGO staff. This corroborates the findings in Figure 2. The actual officials involved varied, most often it was the CEO or the CEO and the management board or team. In larger NGOs with more specialised management staff it would include a human resources officer or programme or project manager. In 22% of cases the job description was designed by NGO/IVCO negotiation. In one case the job description was done by an NGO director using a form supplied by the IVCO.

The purpose of the question was to discover the extent to which NGOs and IVCOs were responding to the requirements of the needy population of Cambodia that NGOs are thought to be closer to. This may not necessarily be true but if it is, then Figure 3 shows that NGO perceived needs are taking precedence. IVCOs frequently have their own development policies set, at least in outline, by their home governments, often their key financial supporter. This sets a framework that NGOs need to comply with if they are to receive assistance. However, a senior IVCO official may ‘bend the rules’ if they see a worthy project which is not strictly speaking within their guidelines.

No mention was made in the results of the term ‘counterpart’, a local person who is trained, in this context, by an IV to replace that IV in whole or part. Is this still a useful institution? The experience of one of the authors, who had a designated counterpart, was that the person so designated was just as capable and experienced as he was, he simply did not have the time to do all that was necessary and there were no funds to hire additional staff. Some IVs possess high level skills necessary for an organisation but with no local employee educated enough or skilled enough to accept a skills transfer.
3) **GO accountability**

**Figure 4: To whom do you feel accountable for the success of your organisation?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accountability</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donors</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry/ local authority</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO Board/ Management</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner organisations/ NGOs</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey, July 2008
NB Multiple responses allowed.

One particular question here was very salient, “To whom do you feel accountable for the success of your organization?” (see Figure 4). This relates to an issue raised by Fowler (2000): ‘Does outside support of an NGO affect its relationship to its clientele?’

More NGO responses (35%) indicated accountability to their donors than to any other category. Donors may be disappointed by this finding but it is unlikely to change. NGO directors who often have budgets of hundreds of thousands of dollars and employ over 100 staff are going to be very mindful of keeping the donors happy. It should be noted that the 35% represents the percentage of responses not the percentage of respondents which is 65.6%. Donors, of course, have their own accountabilities that they must honor.

The second largest group, 18%, which was significant to NGO respondents was government ministries and local authorities. All NGOs must register with the Ministry of the Interior and with the relevant local government authority of the areas where they work. Third equal, with 13% of responses each, were the NGOs’ boards and managements, partner organizations and NGOs. Colleagues (7%) come in at fifth. Clients (5%) were regarded as the least significant category that NGO respondents felt accountable to. This is worrying but consistent with harsh reality. Without adequate funds NGOs face collapse or a severe reduction in their services. Donors have clout and can be aggressive; clients tend to be passive and powerless.

4) **Reasons NGOs sought IVCO partners**

**Figure 5: Why did you want to involve IVCOs in your work?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We need more experienced staff</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We need English language skills</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource for fundraising/made links to other organisations</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to build staff capacity</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are low or no cost workers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We need them to help with training</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donors have more confidence in us</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey, July 2008
NB Multiple responses allowed
The most common response to the question, “Why did you want to involve IVCOs in your work?” was, “Because we need the skills and experience of IVs” (38%). The second most important reason (16%) was that international volunteers most often had a command of English which Cambodian staff lacked. IVs often find themselves drafting reports, funding proposals and correspondence and editing documents as well as, and sometimes instead of, doing the work for which they were appointed.

The third largest number of responses, 11%, was, “They are resources for fundraising” and “They make links to other organisations”. The first reason relates to the behavior of volunteers when they return to their home countries. Many IVs remember their experiences with pleasure and raise funds to send back to the NGO they worked with. The second relates to the fact that international volunteers may have networks through their friends that local people do not have. They can and do use these to assist the NGOs they are hosted by. One NGO respondent gave as one of the reasons for hosting IVs, “because they are rich”. Even when NGOs were not impressed with the work done by the IVs they recognised the fundraising contribution which often materialized after the IVs returned to their home countries.

Fourth, international volunteers are hosted to assist with building staff capacity. The fifth most significant reason was that international volunteers are often free or come at little cost to the NGO. This is changing and IVCOs are now more inclined to pass at least some of the costs on to the NGO host.

Sixth, “We need them to help with training”, either because IVs possess the necessary substantive skills or/and they are experienced in training techniques. Finally, the employment of international volunteers assists with the credibility of the NGO.

5) NGO involvement in selection of IVs

Figure 6: What part does your organisation play in the selection of IVs?

![Figure 6](image)

Percentage

NGO selected IV from CVs supplied by IVCO. 42.9
NGO provided information regarding IV required to IVCO. 30.6
IVCO selects IV and notified NGO 16.3
NGO has telephone or face-to-face interview with candidates. NGO made selection 6.1
NGO and IVCO discussed selection 4.1

Source: Survey, July 2008
Some NGOs used several procedures.

Figure 6 shows that NGOs were involved with 50 relationships with IVCOs regarding the selection of IVs. Initially NGOs provided information to the IVCOs regarding their IV requirements. In 59% (42.9 plus 16.3) of cases (29) NGOs chose the volunteer themselves either after reviewing CVs sent by the IVCO CHECK (43%) or by reviewing CVs and then interviewing potential IVs by telephone, 16% of cases. The second most common procedure, 31% of cases, was that after the NGO had provided information regarding the IV required the IVCO selected the IV and notified the NGO accordingly. There was a strong correlation between the part played by the NGO in selection of IVs and the quality of the relationship with IVCOs, in that those which chose their IVs were generally the more satisfied
with the relationship. While most of the choices were made by the NGO director and/or senior staff, in some cases there was wider staff discussion about appointments. In two cases the choice of IVs was a joint decision by an NGO and an IVCO. In one NGO the selection was made by the executive director and a donor and in another case selection was made, “according to NGO needs”. An interesting example was provided by an NGO that received volunteers from two IVCOs. One of them allowed the NGO to choose the IV following a telephone interview. The second IVCO chose the IV but the NGO persuaded the second IVCO to allow it to make the choice and have a telephone interview with the prospective IV before making a final selection.

None of the NGOs that received self-funded volunteers had any input into the selection of IVs beyond supplying the requirements. Given the short term nature of the contracts, the number of IVs involved and the commercial interests of three of the four agencies involved this is perhaps not surprising. The NGOs involved reported good relationships with those agencies.

6) Issues discussed with IVCOs

Figure 7: Issues discussed by NGOs with IVCOs

Figure 7: Issues discussed with IVCOs, shows that by far the most common topic of discussion, with 36% of all responses, relates directly to the international volunteers hosted: the work they should do, its evaluation and its impact on the NGO. The second most common topics, 10% of issues each, were the policy and planning of the NGOs and “ToR/MOU/Contract”. Fourth place, with five responses, was ‘NGO needs/issues’ and ‘Activities of NGO’. Sixth (4) was ‘Evaluation of Projects’ and finally financial arrangements and grants from IVCOs. Under ‘General problems’ only one problem was specified and that was to do with staff relations. The statements included here referred to opportunities to discuss problems if there were any, rather than any other specific problems. Finally 6% stated that they had “No meetings or discussions with the IVCOs they were linked with”. It is very noticeable that no discussions appear to have taken place regarding the NGOs’ clients.
7) IVCO dependence on NGOs

Figure 8: In what ways is this IVCO dependent upon your NGO?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not dependent</th>
<th>25.8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides experience for volunteers</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructs IVs</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides office space, Internet, Computer</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenses on field visit of volunteer</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support (allowance/airfares etc)</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluations of IVs sent to IVCO</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions to accommodation/local transport</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey, July 2009
NB Multiple responses allowed
Total does not equal 100% due to rounding

Figure 8 shows that in one quarter of NGO/IVCO relationships the NGOs felt that the IVCOs they were linked with were not dependent on them for anything. The one-way dependency implicitly recognized here may be a cause of some embarrassment to NGOs for which they compensate by lack of criticism. The remainder saw a number of dependencies. On analysis, however, these turned out to be ways in which the volunteer was supported by the NGOs when working for the NGO, for example, the NGOs provision of office space for the IV; use of PC and evaluations of the work of the volunteer which are forwarded to the IVCO.

The fact they are listed here suggests that some NGOs did see IVCOs as dependent in some critical ways upon themselves. It is common for IVCOs to be funded by their governments on the basis of the number of IVs they have, or hope to have, in the field, for example, VSA, AYAD, AVI, but there was little awareness among NGO respondents that IVCO’s needed to find placements for their volunteers in order to keep themselves in business. There is, in fact, a very fundamental reciprocity involved here and reciprocity is as significant in the social structure of all ethnic groups in Cambodia as it is universally. IVCOs are occasionally involved in a sudden need to locate placements for an unexpected increase in numbers of volunteers. This has implications for the quality of those placements sometimes resulting in inappropriate or inadequately scoped placements and dissatisfied NGOs and unhappy IVs.

8) Positive and negative factors influencing the quality of the NGO/IVA relationship

Figure 9: Positive factors influencing the quality of the relationship

| Percentage |
|----------------|------|
| NGO satisfaction with IVs provided | 29.3 |
| Responsiveness of IVCO | 17.6 |
| Good personal relationships between IVCO/NGO | 17.6 |
| Clear, formal procedure between IVCO/NGO | 16.1 |
| Other | 16.1 |
| No response | 2.9 |

Source: Survey, July 2008
NB Multiple responses allowed
Figure 9 shows that satisfaction with the IVs provided was the single most important positive factor (29%) influencing the quality of the relationship between NGOs and IVCOs. This was closely followed by good personal relationships between the IVCO and NGO and the responsiveness of the IVCO with 18% each. Sixteen percent of respondents considered clear formal procedures between the NGO and the IVCO to be a positive factor.

Those NGOs which were able to have a role in the choice of the IVs posted with them were satisfied with the IVs provided and felt this was a positive influence on the relationship with the IVCO. NGOs which received IVs with the skills and knowledge requested also considered this to have a positive influence on the relationship.

Examples of good personal relationships and responsiveness of the IVCOs were given, “The regular meetings and workshops are the factors influencing the quality of the relationship to be better.” Another respondent commented, “The (IVCO named) manager in Cambodia is so easy to communicate with (IVCO named) [and] is always available at any time.”

Almost inevitably experience with individual IVs had some bearing on the perceptions NGOs had of the supplying IVCO. Seven responses (10%) were more about individual IVs than about the IVCO. All were positive.

Other positive factors influencing the quality of the relationship included the fact that some IVs go back to their home country and raise funds to support the NGO they worked with.

Figure 10: Negative factors influencing quality of relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complaints about individual IVs
Issues concerning IV appointments and contracts
Nothing negative
Insufficient contact with IVCO
Language problems
Other
No response

Source: Survey, July 2008
NB Multiple responses allowed

There were very few negative factors mentioned, see Figure 10. Eight respondents (16%) said there was nothing negative and 14 (26%) made no response suggesting nothing negative. The most significant responses were about IV appointments and contracts (19%) and complaints about individual IVs (19%). Complaints about appointments included: “period of appointment too short therefore inadequate;” “application forms for IVs are complicated and difficult to complete;” “have to wait too long for the IV to arrive;” “Now the IVCO only send to provincial projects. We need a volunteer in Phnom Penh but we can’t get one now” and “Unable to afford IVs.”

Complaints about individual IVs included the inexperience of volunteers: some were not able to do the job they were appointed for; some were too young or too old; they break their contracts; they don’t read documents related to IV requirements; don’t respect time; language problems and other communication problems. One complainant said, “The IV did not listen to the NGO because they [the IV] are professional. Everything they think is best.” When criticized the IV is reported to have said, “If you are so good why do you need me?”
As mentioned above, the lack of negative criticism may well be a reaction to their dependence and to cultural norms that tend towards the maintenance of harmony rather than the likelihood of conflict (VBNK, 2006).

While relationships are reported as generally favourable many Cambodians are reluctant to express a negative response even if warranted. However, an expatriate informant (not on the interview schedule) described a particular IVCO as, “very difficult to work with” though had high praise for the IVs from that IVCO. There is often a lack of understanding on the part of NGOs of the constraints under which IVCOs operate.

9) Understanding of codes of practice

When asked, ‘Does this international agency have a code of practice regarding its relationship with your organisation?’ 80% said “Yes” and 20% “No”. However, supplementary comments made it very clear that few of the respondents knew what a code of practice was. Such comments included: Yes, we have 6 months working contract (1.); contract agreement; “No, but we had condition that they [IVs] had to respect and keep confidential [information about] our institution”; “Yes, [we] discuss the contract agreement”; “Yes, an MOU”; “Yes, [It lists] conditions (level of IV, age, skill, background; what we can offer to their IV and what specific[ally their] IV can offer to us”); “No, we have our own policy for him [sic] including regulation and morality”; “Yes, an MOU”; “Yes, an agreement”; “No, we have an MOU but for policy guidelines we do not have”.

10) How to use IVs to best advantage

Figure 11: How to make best use of IVs

[Bar chart showing the percentage of responses]

Source: Survey, July 2008
NB Multiple responses allowed

Two factors stood out in the responses to this question, being clear about the work to be done and being friendly to the IV, creating a good, friendly atmosphere in the workplace.

Regarding the work plan NGOs considered it important to explain the work of the NGO and set out a good work plan, 47% of responses.

“We explained about our vision and mission, explained the (NGO) works with farmers…get the IV to know (NGO) strategy.” “To set up a good plan, both (NGO) and IV want to achieve our goal.” “Assign relevant tasks; follow up on work with the IVCO.”

A job description and an MOU were mentioned as important by several NGOs. Seven (12%) of respondents commented that the IVs already had a schedule of duties and responsibilities
before they came. Another said, “We encourage them to follow the work plan, compromising [when necessary]. There is intensive extra work. The IV often sacrifices his own time to work.” This IV appeared to do considerable extra work and also to pay some work expenses. The NGO appreciated this extra input.

Making an IV feel welcome makes a difference not only to the IV but to the workplace atmosphere and this was mentioned in 20 cases (33%), “We wanted the IV to participate in all activities such as meetings, social activities and parties.” “Friendly to the volunteer all the time. Admire her for her achievements.” Respect was also mentioned, “respecting them as our advisers.”

One NGO was especially attentive to an IV,

“I think it’s our attitude. We care for him, take care of his safety. The first time he went to Phnom Penh we had our staff accompany him and give advice. When he travelled alone we kept calling him. We gave him orientation …sometimes we invited him to have meals with us. So this way he feels confident and he is happy to work hard.”

One NGO had a different approach to the IVs work, “We provided independence to the IV so that he could work independently. We set up the equipment he required (Internet) made name cards for him so that he could introduce himself to others.”

11) Benefits and disadvantage of IVs

Figure 12: What benefits has your NGO’s gained from hosting IVs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengthened staff capacity, training, organisational development</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language skills, spoken and written</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthened service delivery and policy</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better access to funds, contact with donors, grant applications</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stronger relationship with partners, other organizations, individuals</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate material support</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey, July 2008
NB Multiple responses allowed
Total does not equal 100% due to rounding

All the organisations mentioned benefits; there were only a few reservations. Individual capacity building and organizational development were the most frequently mentioned with 38% of responses. It may be surprising to note that English language skills were so highly rated, with 22% of responses, one half of respondents. Apart from a small number of self-funded IVs placed by commercial agencies to teach English, no other IVs were appointed specifically to teach English or for their English language skills. However, English is becoming increasingly important in Cambodia and is the language widely used for communication among NGOs, donors and IVCOs and is the South East Asian lingua franca.

Donors provide the lifeblood for the continuing existence of NGOs and the services they provide to clients. All the NGOs provide written reports and or proposals of some kind to donors, to government departments and to the IVCOs. For most Cambodians writing such reports in English would be a struggle and time consuming (even to write in Khmer would
present problems for some). Those Cambodians who are competent in English value the editorial skills of IVs (native speakers or those fluent in English).

Cambodians who speak English usually welcome the opportunity to practice and improve their English skills. Comments included, “Helped us correcting and editing texts.” “Enlarged our language ability and communication. “Reports and proposals are better.” “Staff learn English.” “Staff learned a lot of English from them.” “Reducing the work [written work in English] of the Executive Director.”

IVCOs have largely withdrawn from teaching; it does not fit the current development agency models and is seen as someone else’s task. And yet, as one longtime educationalist in Cambodia observed, “English is the only door on the world in Cambodia…and the key to development.” (Personal communication, Sr Luise Ahrens, 27.08.08.)

Assistance with capacity development was rated highly by 12 respondents (16%). (This is not shown separately in Figure 12.) This included staff development and organisational development. “[We] achieve goals with the strong management of some IVs and good advice to Cambodians. [They] trained Cambodian staff to improve skills.” Another commented on the importance of “Capacity building of local staff.” Closely related to capacity development were: the strengthening of service delivery and policy; new skills learned and improved professional expertise and technical skills, all mentioned by seven respondents. Comments included, “They strengthened the quality of service delivery” and “Increasing effectiveness.”

And the ongoing value, “The work on guidelines or policy we can use in the future or when volunteers have left.” “Having a real and professional technical adviser. Having materials for each skill, transferring the skill to the local staff and local people (horticultural skills) and wide cooperation with the NGO.” “We learned a lot from the IV related to the work of producing videos. He opened a training course to teach our staff.”

Building stronger relationships with partners, other organisations and individuals was considered to be an important IV contribution by seven respondents. Allied with this was better access to funding and contact with donors, also seven responses. Comments included,

“More people know about ‘NGO publicity’ and ‘Setting up networking’. [He] also makes connections to people of high rank in government for work.” Having connections in high places would be particularly valued.

When more people know about an NGO because of an IV presence, there is the possibility of attracting funding, especially if the IV is able to extend networks and/or advise on or write the proposals. The Comhlámh research reported similar responses (2007, p.8). IVs “Train/teach staff on how to communicate with donor.” “If we choose the right one (IV) we gain a lot of benefit as IVs help us a lot such as searching for funds for us...”

Three respondents referred to immediate material support. This was provided in the form of teaching materials supplied by self-funded IVs, “IV spent own money and bought stuff for teaching.”

Other responses referred to the wider benefit of hosting IVs. “We gain our prestige; our institutions quality has been up graded.” Low cost was emphasised by another, “they help us a lot and we did not spend much money [as we would have] if we employ foreign staff or consultants.” Another respondent also commented on the low cost and improved service delivery associated with IVs, but added that they did not get the same gain from young volunteers straight from university.
Thirty nine percent of responses indicated no disadvantages. While all the NGOs perceived benefits from having IVs on their staff, for some, there were negative aspects also. There were some minor reservations for example, “sometimes we have problems but nothing serious, about the same as Khmer staff”. Another NGO took pre-emptive measures, “we never encourage them to be our managers as if they become this position they work as a boss, [then] we cannot learn much from them and it’s also expensive”. However, over half the NGOs (58%) expressed some dissatisfaction, the two most significant issues being the inexperience of IVs, (14%) and the personal attitudes and problems of some IVs (14%). There is an expectation that an IV will have some qualifications and experience in a particular field unless it is known that that the IV is a student. Willingness to work is usually an insufficient qualification. “They do not have real skill, expertise or professional technique. But they may learn from us.” “Some volunteers have no experience.” Two NGOs both made similar comments about student IVs, “some have no experience, they are just a student who comes to learn from the Cambodians”. One NGO, commenting on inexperience, said, “Not just a volunteer but a tourist.”

While inexperience maybe inconvenient and perhaps costly, negative and/or disruptive behaviour/attitudes of IVs may be more problematic. Overbearing IVs, volunteers who, “think they are the boss, not an adviser”, or the IV who was said to, “want our organisation to follow all what they need just like a boss”, can have an undermining effect in the workplace. Attitudes of a small number of IVs towards cultural matters were mentioned by three respondents. One commented, “Volunteers need to learn how to adapt to our culture, they don’t want to learn, think they are right”. Two respondents thought that volunteers had caused trouble in their organisations, while another described an IV as short tempered. A display of temper in the work place is likely to cause, at least, embarrassment, as harmony is highly valued in Cambodian society and outbursts of emotion are frowned on.

An IV who does not follow or complete a prescribed task, (11%) of complaints, may be inconvenience and possibly disruptive to the organisation, and at most may be costly. One respondent reported, “The IV worked with us for a while then wanted to change project, not respecting the agreement, just claimed the job was boring. We wasted time and at last we hired consultants to do [the work] again such as data collection and analysis.”

Recruitment issues were a problem for three respondents who mentioned issues previously commented on in Section 4, the IVCO role in the selection of IVs. Two mentioned the waiting time for an IV after a request had been submitted, while another felt a choice of IV had been made with insufficient information, “so it was not beneficial.”
One ‘Other’ comment raised an issue not mentioned at all by any other respondent, that female IVs are more expensive [than males] because they need more protection than males. “Can’t go on motos [small motor bikes used as taxis, general means of transport] for security reasons.” and added that there was no car for field work.

The advantages of having volunteers generally far outweighs any disadvantages but for those NGOs which have had a bad experience with an IV that experience may adversely affect an NGO/IVCO relationship for some time.

**Conclusion**

The research method used for this research was basically a qualitative one. We would recommend that this continue to be the dominant approach until such time as a body of exploratory research has been established. Government IV hosts and faith-based IVCOs were excluded. In future research on a similar topic we recommend that they be included.

Staff of the Cambodian NGOs interviewed generally held very favourable views of the IVCOs they worked with but there was possibly a reluctance to express negative opinions as NGO staff would not wish to lose favour with the IVCOs they enjoyed a partnership with. Mutual dependence between NGOs and IVCOs was not widely recognised by NGOs.

While NGO staff speak of partnership with an international agency the relationship often appears to be that of patron/client, which reflects the structure of Cambodian society. It would be naïve to expect that a partnership in which one partner is heavily dependent on another for the execution of its work would be an equal relationship. However, greater recognition of the reciprocity which does in fact exist would add meaning to the term partnership.

In addition to the manifest, official functions of IVs declared in job descriptions, contracts, ToR and MoU there are also latent functions which from the perspective of the host organizations may be as significant as the manifest ones or even more so. Such latent functions include applying their usually superior English language skills, raising the status of the host organisation, facilitating linkages with other Cambodian-based institutions and fundraising when they return to their own countries.

The most satisfied NGOs were those that had the greatest input into the selection of IVs. Those IVCOs that do not involve the NGOs in selection to any extent may find it beneficial to consider greater NGO involvement in the IV appointment process.

NGOs appeared to be unaware of the constraints that IVCOs work under in terms of supplying and funding volunteers. It would be beneficial to both parties if NGOs had more understanding of these issues. To this end IVCOs might assist NGOs with forward planning in order that requests for IVs are included in the planning process. Some volunteer positions are not easy to fill, particularly if they require special skills.

Currently there is a strong interest among IVCOs to introduce codes of practice with regard to relations between IVs and IVCOs and between IVs and host organisations. The findings here strongly suggest that such innovations will need to be preceded by some educational work with the IV hosts on the meaning of codes of practice and what can be expected of them.

The NGO respondents see some IVs as ill-prepared for their assignments. Given their cost and the roles expected of them greater attention needs to be given to their preparation for their assignments and also to assist hosts to make efficient use of them though this latter point is not a finding of this research. This needs to include language learning, culture and management styles. Cultural instruction needs to include more than the social behavioural
niceties and include the essential elements of cultural values and something about their origin – those things which locals themselves are commonly not aware of regarding their own culture. This would give IVs a store of generalized in-depth knowledge from which they could begin to predict appropriate cultural values and strategies for their work.

The NGO respondents placed great value on knowing the IVCO personnel personally. This suggests the need, in some cases, for more regular face-to-face meetings with IVCO staff.

While IVCOs will be concerned to uphold their own objectives when placing IVs these may not always coincide with the plans of the NGOs. There should be room for some flexibility.

Finally we would repeat that most of NGO respondents interviewed were, overall, happy with the service which IVCOs and their IVs provide.
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