Impact of International Volunteering on Host Organisations

Findings from research conducted by Comhlámh
Comhlámh

- Irish NGO established in 1975
- Originally the Irish Association of Development Workers
- Grown into a member and supporter organisation open to anyone interested in social justice, human rights and global development issues
- Supports development workers and volunteers before and after their placement
Comhlámh’s

Volunteering Options programme

- Established in 2004
- Response to changing nature of international volunteering
- Funded by Irish Aid

**Aims** to encourage good practice in the overseas volunteering sector, and to support volunteers in a longer-term commitment to development.
Code of Practice & Volunteer Charter

- VO Programme has included the development of:
  - **Code of Good Practice** for Irish volunteer sending organisations
    - Standards which promote good practice in volunteering (11 principles and indicators)
    - Focus on involvement of 3 main stakeholders: the sending organisations, the volunteers, and the host projects.
    - Peer support model moving to external audit model
  - **Volunteer Charter**
    - Sets out 7 principles
    - Aim to encourage responsive, responsible volunteering
The core values that underlie the content of the Code of Practice are:

- Partnership
- Quality
- Security
- Appropriate volunteer attitudes
- The need to value volunteering
- Sustainability
- Solidarity
- The contribution of volunteering to development

29 Irish organisations have signed up to this.
A number of **resources** have been developed to support volunteers including:

- A website – [www.volunteeringoptions.org](http://www.volunteeringoptions.org)
- Training courses – pre-decision, pre-departure and upon return
- Research into the impact of international volunteering on host organisations
The objectives of the field research were to examine:

- The involvement of the host organisations in the establishment and operation of programmes
- The effectiveness and value of volunteering projects for the host organisations
- The contribution of international volunteering to furthering local development agenda
- Any ways in which the host organisations felt the content of the Code of Practice and Volunteer Charter needed to be amended in order to reflect their viewpoints.
India and Tanzania selected

FRONTERA commissioned to conduct the research.

Host organisations identified

Primary data collected through face-to-face interviews
- 12 host organisations in Tanzania (Dar Es Salaam, Arusha and Moshi)
- 10 host organisations in India. (Delhi, Kolkata)
Further data were collected by conducting 4 focus group sessions in India (Delhi, Kolkata) and Tanzania (Dar Es Salaam, Moshi).

- Two volunteers also participated in the focus groups.

Secondary data were collected from a range of sources including:

- relevant volunteer networks
- consultants to NGOs and INGOs
Research: background

Types of organisations consulted:

- Ranged from community-based organisations to branches of international organisations
- both secular and religious

Variety of activities:

- work with children,
- women’s groups,
- health programmes,
- community development,
- education and training,
- income generation and livelihood programmes,
- drinking water and sanitation initiatives
- capacity building.

- The organisations also varied in their resources and the scale of their operations.
Research findings: types of placements

In both Tanzania and India:

- 80% – 81% of the international volunteers were short-term volunteers, i.e., with placements of less than three months.

- Approximately 11% of international volunteers were medium-term volunteers i.e., with placements between three and twelve months.

- An average of 8% of volunteers were on long-term placements, i.e., over twelve months.
Research findings:
host organisations perception of volunteers

- Host organisations’ perception of volunteers’ understanding of placement on arrival:
  - Tanzania = varied response
  - India = volunteers knowledge was ‘above average’.

- Main difficulties for host organisation = language barrier (Tanzania & India)

- Some of the other problems noted by Tanzanian respondents included volunteers’ lack of contributions to projects with which they are involved.
“We see many short-term volunteers here in Tanzania as it is a popular country to be in with lots of tourist places to see and experience, but the amount of work they actually do is questionable, mainly due to lack of experience and language skills”.

(Respondent from Tanzania)
Research Findings:
Benefits of hosting volunteers

- The main benefits of international volunteering were identified as:
  - ‘skill sharing’
  - ‘improved cultural awareness’.
  - Additionally - financial resources brought by volunteers were seen as very beneficial to the development of work outside volunteer programmes.
Research Findings:

Involvement in programme development

- Involvement of host organisation in **recruitment** of the volunteer:
  - A majority of organisations stated that they had **no involvement** in the recruitment of international volunteers
  - and they agreed unanimously that more involvement is essential.
Research Findings:
Involvement in programme development

- Training of volunteers
  - Structured training for volunteers, with defined objectives based on the needs of the projects and the volunteers, was not common (Tanzania & India)
  - One host organisation in Tanzania delivered structured training for volunteers, while none of the Indian organisations did.
  - In general, only an informal orientation was provided by the hosting organisations. (Tanzania & India)
  - The need for pre-departure training to increase volunteers’ awareness and understanding about the host countries, organisations and their projects was emphasised. (Tanzania)
Research Findings:
Involvement in programme development

- More involvement in the **selection process** and better **communication** between the volunteer, the sending organisation and the hosting organisation would benefit all parties. (Tanzania & India)

- **Longer-term, skilled** volunteers were in high demand among the host communities and projects. However, it was frequently mentioned that such volunteers are in short supply. (Tanzania & India)
“Lately, most of the volunteers have been sent to the host countries more to cater for the demand from the public for volunteer placements, rather than actually sending volunteers to address the local needs for development of the host country. This is also giving an opportunity to the volunteers to make it a holiday trip rather than actually contributing to the host country. This has to be discouraged, and hence it should be the responsibility of both the sending organisation and the host organisation that the volunteers are placed and assigned to appropriate projects with realistic objectives”. 
Research Findings:
Volunteers’ accountability

- Respondents identified a need for themselves to be more involved in evaluating volunteers, in order to encourage volunteers to think about their accountability.

- Suggested that host organisations should evaluate volunteers and share these reports with sending organisations.
Research Findings: Benefits for placement

- The main benefits of working with sending organisations were identified as:
  - ‘Exposure to complementary organisations and people to increase funding for projects’ through further funding from the sending organisations
  - Development of new contacts
  - Direct contributions from the volunteers and the ‘knowledge sharing’ that takes place as a result of placements.
Recommendations

- Sending organisations should ensure the **participatory involvement** of host organisations in:
  - Selection
  - Recruitment
  - Training
  - Development education
  - Evaluation

...of international volunteers
Recommendations

2) Sending organisations should improve the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of volunteering by developing policies that include standardised processes and evaluation tools based on:

- Regular consultation with the host organisations/communities to provide critical input to this process.
Recommendations

3) Sending organisations should **publish case studies** of successful volunteering to guide and motivate new volunteers.

4) Sending organisations should place volunteers with **relevant skills** as required by the host projects.

5) Comhlámh should incorporate the findings from the research with host organisations into the **Code of Practice and Volunteer Charter**.
6) Comhlámh should facilitate the development of a **Code of Practice** to be adopted by the host organisations.

7) **Future research** should be considered on a number of topics, to increase awareness of all aspects of international volunteering. Topics suggested included:

- online volunteering
- intercultural communications in the context of international volunteering.
Finally…

“Having volunteers from a different cultural background has always been an enriching mutual learning experience for us. The perspectives of people from a different background help in understanding problems differently…volunteers also bring with them new perspectives and learning”

www.volunteeringoptions.org