



International FORUM on Development Service
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Volunteers: Catalysts for Social Engagement

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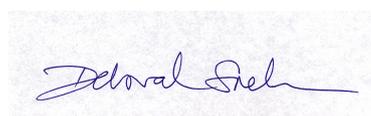
Foreward.....	3
Introduction.....	4
The shape of the paper.....	4
The diverse claims for and expectations of volunteering currently.....	6
Global context.....	8
What is volunteering?.....	10
What are the origins of volunteering in Europe?.....	10
Cultural understandings of volunteering are widely diverse.....	12
The term volunteer covers many quite different approaches and purposes.....	13
There are clearly different methodologies for volunteering.....	14
The thorny issue of remuneration and the challenge to volunteering.....	18
So what is volunteering?.....	19
How are the different benefits of volunteering being realised?.....	20
Conclusions.....	24

Foreword

This is the fifth in a series of discussion papers produced by FORUM, which follows on from our research work on trends in International volunteering and co-operation in recent years. One of the key trends identified in this time has been how the different purposes and potentials of volunteering affects us as International Volunteer and Co-operation Organisations (IVCOs).

This paper aims to consider some of the implications of volunteers as catalysts for social engagement, what we can learn from this and identify some challenges for the future.

The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of FORUM or its members or of the organisations for whom the author works. The responsibility for these views rests with the author alone.



Deborah Snelson, Chair of FORUM

About FORUM

International FORUM on Development Service is a network of organisations engaged in international volunteering and personnel exchange. FORUM aims to share information, develop best practice and enhance co-operation between its members.

FORUM's members include both non-governmental (NGO) and state organisations from around the world.

The main activities of FORUM include the following:

- We facilitate the sharing of information, through our website, news updates, sharing of knowledge and experiences.
- We commission and undertake research, as well as facilitating members' involvement in research into issues around international volunteering.
- We organise an annual conference for heads of agencies known as IVCO. This conference is primarily concerned with issues of change, redefining international volunteering and offering opportunities to learn about new models of activity.

Introduction

Using experiences and materials largely drawn from extensive work with VSO over a number of years I want to explore some of the core questions that have arisen for me about the different purposes and potentials of volunteering for development. The role of the volunteer as a catalyst or facilitator for participation, encouraging change and new ways of thinking, acting to promote partnership across cultures and encouraging social commitment within work places or communities is one that volunteering can do well. However, in the current aid climate the focus is less often on these aspects of volunteering and more on volunteers as skill providers, skill sharers, people bringing in expertise that will enable governments and institutions to better meet their development targets and contribute towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

It is certainly the case that for VSO in recent years the meeting of specific development goals has been the dominant driver; looking beyond VSO I see many other volunteer agency websites promote the primary purpose of volunteering as skill sharing and providing the needed skills for achieving different development aims. Alongside this focus on technical and professional skills (and the increased professionalisation of volunteering is something most agencies are proud of) there are many assumptions - on the websites and in the literature - about the other roles do/will volunteers play and the inherent value of volunteering. This value lies in a strong belief that volunteers are catalysts of social change; how this actually works, which volunteers are in fact able to be (or interested in being) active agents of change, and under what conditions is rarely analysed or explained. There is little information available about how to prepare and support a volunteer to be involved in social transformation and it feels, at times, as if the very fact of travelling to live and work in another context and culture for little or no financial reward leads almost inevitably to powerful social interactions and a chemistry of real change in communities or the workplace.

The purpose of this paper is to challenge some assumptions, and ask some questions to encourage reflection and sharing among the volunteer agencies here about the relationship between different kinds of volunteering and the development process. The focus will be on clarifying the purposes of volunteering and how well programmes are implemented to ensure the purposes are met. The substance of the paper is largely based on VSO and a range of their programmes working with very different kinds of volunteers.

The shape of the paper

The paper begins by looking at some of the claims and assumptions about volunteering and what it is and what it does. Then it stands back to look briefly at the context in which volunteering now work. The world is fast changing, the culture of volunteering is changing in many countries of the global north, attitudes towards external intervention are changing in parts of the global south. What is the context in which beliefs about volunteering are have to be realised? Reflection on the context let to asking a very fundamental question, what in fact is volunteering? Are we all in fact talking about the same thing or are we lumping together widely diverse approaches with different purposes, driven by different values and having different meanings in different cultural contexts under one label? How well is the concept of volunteering articulated and explained and how well understood by those agencies work with? Is there are shared set of understandings and expectations? What are these? It is important to be clearer about what we mean by volunteering and understand its diversity before we say what different kinds of volunteering can or cannot achieve in development. As well as exploring different forms of volunteering currently promoted by volunteer agencies it is important to be clear what the strengths are of these in different contexts. Are agencies using approaches well tailored to the needs in each particular cultural and historical context or is there still a tendency towards a 'one size fits all' approach? And how many of the dominant approaches are actively focused on issues such a promoting democracy and building citizenship, on tackling gender inequality and challenges social norms from new perspectives, on different forms of social engagement and transformational change, and how many rather assume this as a by-product of their skill sharing approach?

Once the purposes are clear another critical issue is how far the programmes are delivered in ways that reflect the values and specific purpose well. How far are the core principles and values that most volunteer agencies espouse, such as partnership and participation, promoting gender equality, addressing the exclusion of the least powerful, and learning from experience, put into practice? Is there time for mutually agreeing agendas, for discussing and agreeing on what volunteer approach is most needed, for listening, learning and sharing in a world driven by time-bound aid funding, strategic plans and promises of expected results made in advance? Who is driving the work, setting the agendas and shaping the way volunteering is done on the ground? Given the way volunteer placements are set up, agreed and delivered, and the nature of the training given to volunteers and their understanding of their role (as development workers, as skilled professional personnel, as change makers) how far is volunteering able to be a catalyst for the social engagement of those who are normally excluded?

Some of these questions are hard to answer because there has been a paucity of good questioning monitoring and evaluation across all development agencies and currently the focus is more on measuring numbers and tangible impacts in relation to the MDGs, rather than asking questions about the role played, how appropriate it was and how well delivered. The yardsticks are rarely how inclusive was the approach, how far did partners drive the work, were the volunteers well enough briefed about their role, did their expectations match those of the partner and community, were they able to

play roles beyond the workplace. There is, unfortunately, no space in this paper for exploring in detail what is currently being measured in the monitoring and evaluation systems of different agencies. Looking at this for your agency though will help to understand what aspects of volunteering you currently favours and what the priorities are. It would be good to hear from agencies who feel they have good systems and methodologies for evaluating the less tangible purposes of addressing inequality, measuring women's empowerment, analysing inclusion, successfully promoting participation, partnership, citizenship and leadership, i.e. creating better social engagement of the poor.

The diverse claims for and expectations of volunteering currently

A great deal is currently expected of volunteering and each volunteer. The brochures, websites and strategic plans are peppered with statements about the many values of volunteering and what it can achieve, including

- alleviating poverty,
- bringing much needed skills to fill gaps
- improving the core skills of others in poor countries,
- enhancing the achievement of MDGs
- promoting active citizenship or local engagement by communities,
- developing partnerships,
- building inter-cultural understanding,
- fostering global citizenship
- bringing development awareness back home

Whether all these roles can be achieved by one volunteer, whether different kinds of volunteering and volunteers are needed for the different roles, how best to prepare and support volunteers to play such a multiplicity of roles is often unclear. The claims feel wide ranging and ambitious and they are often quite poorly explained. They can feel like statements of belief based on personal experience rather than grounded in a theory of volunteering or a well articulated analysis of the diversity of volunteering.

The reliance on brief statements and stories about the multiple roles and value of volunteering makes it hard to grasp what it is that international volunteering does well, what it actually brings to poor communities and societies, and what enables different kinds of volunteering to work well and in which contexts. There is an apparent lack of critical thinking about what kind of volunteering is a powerful and relevant approach to development. This lack of articulation is problematic and results in different kinds of volunteering and different approaches getting lumped under one label, 'volunteering'. Yet volunteering comes in multiple forms and can have very diverse purposes, 'volunteering is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon the boundaries of which are unclear' Rochester, 2006.¹

¹ Rochester,C 2006. Making sense of volunteering; a literature review. The Commission on the future of volunteering. UK.

Donors have questioned the value of volunteering² and in recent years have been increasingly demanding evidence about the value and impact of volunteers. Their focus has been on the Millennium Development Goals; they want to know how many volunteers are placed, whether they are value for money, and what they achieve in relation to the measurable targets set by the MDGs³. This has inevitably deflected some volunteer agencies, including VSO, from deep engagement with the ‘soft side’ of volunteering i.e. its potential in relation to people to people empowerment, promoting local participation, building cross cultural dialogue, working in partnership and responding to mutual learning. Monitoring and evaluation has focused more on the quality of the skills exported, the levels of government and local government where volunteers have been placed, their work in strategy and policy to ‘scale up’ their impact beyond their individual job, their achievements in terms of their work and how far that work has enabled a country to better tackle the core problems around access to health and education, prevention of HIV etc. Less attention has been paid – although it has not been forgotten – to finding ways to understand the quality of partnerships built, the degree to which the work has enabled shared learning and participation, the role of the volunteer as mobiliser and catalyst. Often these things are assumed to happen outside of work, in the communities where the volunteers live, but increasingly volunteers are placed in towns and capital cities for strategic work and many no longer live among those they work with.

The issues that most closely correspond to concepts of social engagement have been somewhat overshadowed by the consensus that aid is primarily about meeting set targets, raising living standards, ensuring key services and access to these by the poor. There has been a scramble by several agencies to show that volunteering does lead to a reduction in HIV and AIDS, an increase in school attendance and performance (even though few now send teachers for this work), that volunteers do increase access to water, education and other key resources in a statistically significant way.

Yet this focus on what volunteers contribute directly to the global goals sits uneasily at times with the reality that the numbers of volunteers can be measured in hundreds or a few thousand across the major volunteer agencies. The MDGs are national in coverage and the responsibility of governments and while some volunteers work at the government level to promote systems and practices likely to improve the delivery of services to poor communities, their numbers are small. While many volunteers now work on policy and strategy and fewer (certainly from VSO) go into direct service delivery or live and work with the most disadvantaged, there are only a handful of volunteers in each country context. Their impact on national and international goals must inevitably be quite limited.

² With some like Comic Relief refusing to fund any international volunteering at all

³ While these have been widely critiqued as too narrow, excluding rights for poor people and inadequate in relation to tackling issues of gender and lacking an understanding of some of the root causes of poverty (especially inequality and the effects of oppression on the poor themselves) they have become the ‘gold standard’ for assessing the value of aid.

The push to view volunteering as technical assistance, bringing in key skills that are lacking to improve national performance has overshadowed – for some agencies anyway – the other roles for volunteers. The pendulum may now be about to swing back towards roles, that while always valued have perhaps taken a back seat; it has felt at times that there is little room for people to people contact in an aid world now driven by standardisation, professionalism, scaling up, numbers, tight goals, targets and impact. Now could be a good time to ask which approach to international volunteering has the greatest impact, whether volunteering can deliver more when it is primarily about professional skill sharing with the focus on the workplace, or whether it is better adapted to social interaction and social engagement, living and working alongside people and sharing their lives.

Some might argue that all these aims can be delivered in one package; the websites would imply this. This needs to be better explored and articulated but it is unlikely that those appointed for their skills as managers, strategists, planners, working in Ministries in capital cities will also be the right people for working in the slums with deprived children, or facilitating women's groups, or providing role models where they live. It has proved difficult to combine the various purposes of volunteering into one placement in VSO and often the 'softer skills' have been developed in separate programmes. The kind of training, expectations, motivations and support needed by volunteers playing different social and economic roles are highly diverse and it is a rare person indeed who can straddle and provide all the expectations laid out for volunteers in the literature. Indeed VSO have found that many professionals resent not being valued solely for their skills and ability to share those skills; some do not want to be 'development workers' or wider agents of involvement and change. Others who had aspirations to be effective beyond the work place have been frustrated by the lack of opportunities their placement has afforded them to get involved beyond work. Rising rates of early return suggest something is amiss and multiple expectations that do not easily or necessarily fit together or compliment each other clearly make preparation and support of volunteers difficult.

So what is the primary role that agencies want to promote? Is the aim to enable volunteers to be catalysts for social change the primary purpose or is it just assumed to flow from the other roles they play? Is it just one role among many? How far do agencies select, train and support volunteers to be change agents or are they more focused on selecting the people best able to fulfil professional jobs and fill skill gaps, supporting them as employees in their workplace⁴?

Global context

The world in which volunteering takes place in the 21st century is changing fast. In spite of the efforts over many years the MDGs will not be met in several parts of the world, especially in Africa, and there are in fact rising numbers of people in poverty. The current food crisis means there are more

⁴ Volunteers with VSO are now employed by the partner organisation and answerable to that employer for their performance, implying that the work is the core purpose for International Volunteers (IVs)

people than ever in world history who are hungry and even starving. Global inequality has grown as has inequality between rich and poor in every country. Changes in land use and ownership, erosion of the natural resource base and changes in climate all threaten progress. On the other hand, medical advances mean many people around the world live longer, more children go to school, new technology raises crop yields, and the global financial system carries huge rewards for a few. It is complex and contradictory context.

Attitudes and beliefs are changing, often very fast. The swift rise of global fundamentalisms is challenging liberal democracies, the shifting political landscape in Europe has changed the face of the European Community, the growth of democratic elections in Africa has been heralded and yet not yielded the expected changes. The decline in religion in much of the global north and the rise of religious fundamentalisms across parts of the global south has led to a new gulf between continents. The recognition of women's rights as human rights is continually under threat and continuing violence at the domestic, community and national as well as international levels undermines development for many.

The cultural context of Europe, America, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand (the traditional volunteer sending countries) have also changed, with growing wealth, a rise in materialism and an increasing focus on individual personal satisfaction. The kinds of people who want to volunteer, why and with what expectations have changed, and few now fit the dominant and well known stereotypes of the past. Self sacrifice, philanthropy, and putting others first are less common motivations. International volunteering has grown more professional; it is increasingly 'a job' working for employers rather than a vocation embracing all aspects of life. Volunteers, whether from the north or the south, have to meet increased requirements for hard skills and work experience, and the emphasis is on the work skills. This is so much so that VSO were wary of working with youth for many years for fear of tarnishing their reputation as a professional skills agency bringing high level expertise to poor countries.

At the same time attitudes in some parts of the global south towards external 'expertise' and people bringing answers from outside, especially from richer countries, have hardened. For many these volunteers are now associated with a post colonial legacy, one they now wish to shake off. In some countries they have the skills anyway but lack the resources to employ their skilled people, especially for example in India and many parts of Africa. Both the context and the attitudes in many countries of the global south are fast changing and the sending of volunteers bringing skills sits uneasily with current aspirations and the need to move out of a dependency phase into a more confident, self directed future.

Donors have recognised this shift in a partial way and developed new ways of delivering aid through the Paris Agreement⁵ with its focus on dropping donor

⁵ **The Paris Declaration**, endorsed on 2 March 2005, is 'an international agreement to which over one hundred Ministers, Heads of Agencies and other Senior Officials adhered and

projects and promoting aid harmonisation in order to give direct support to government budgets. Local ownership is part of the Paris rhetoric yet to date the search for impact and demonstrable results seem stronger imperatives leading many countries to say that the donor community still plays a major role in shaping their economies and their use of aid⁶.

Within the current aid modalities every NGO receiving official aid has to show results, i.e. that they have been able to achieve concrete change for the poor, even when the issues they are grappling with are deep rooted, complex and very long term in nature, for example work on peace and reconciliation, promoting more accountable local government or addressing women's inequality. Consequently many INGOs have become involved in 'promise inflation'⁷ claiming far more than they could ever realistically achieve; volunteer agencies are not immune. Numbers of those reached by international aid agencies, how the lives of the poor have improved, how policies and strategies now meet the needs of the poor are found in every report and yet often sit uneasily with the harsh realities of the complexity of development work and the continued reality of deepening violence and poverty in many parts of the world.

The context is contradictory, ambiguous and challenging and for volunteer agencies to decide how best to respond to the needs and where to focus energy to bring transformation and change can be hard amidst the clamour and straight jacket of current aid orthodoxy and aid delivery mechanisms.

What is volunteering?

This sounds like an absurd question but it is one that VSO is re-examining during their current strategic thinking process with good reason. Looking at the INGO literature on volunteering is it clear that it volunteering is assumed to be 'a good thing'. Most current concepts of volunteering are unquestioningly drawn from European culture and the understandings of volunteering which evolved during 'the enlightenment'. Different cultural understandings of volunteerism are largely ignored. Often a whole range of methodologies are lumped together under the term 'volunteering'. Many claims are made for the value of volunteering but with little analysis or exploration around exactly what kind of volunteering is being discussed or how and whether volunteering is an integral part of the development process. The difficult issue of remuneration is usually glossed over in discussions of international volunteering.

committed their countries and organisations to continue to increase efforts in harmonisation, alignment and managing aid for results with a set of monitorable actions and indicators.' See http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en_2649_3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00.html This was further ratified and extended in the Accra Agenda for Action, 2008 in Ghana.

⁶ These issues are discussed in Wallace, T et al, 2006 The aid chain; coercion and commitment in Development NGOs, ITDG, Rigby and during the NGO consultations in the lead up to Accra review of Paris in Sept 2008 by representatives on NGOs from across the world; CIDA, The role of civil society organisations in the Post-Paris aid agenda, Ottawa, Canada.

⁷ A term coined by Comic Relief in late 1990s during their grant assessment discussions

What are the origins of volunteering in Europe?

This is inevitably extremely condensed but reminding ourselves of the origins of the term helps to open up a range of different perspectives. The origins of volunteering in Europe lie originally in Christianity and notions of kindness, 'love thy neighbour'. During the industrial revolution and the break-up of rural societies and families philosophers split around these ideals. Some said man was inherently selfish and competitive and individualism (a new concept) grew as society changed (T. Hobbes, 1651, Leviathan). Others continued promoting the power of *caritas* (kindness, altruism, sharing) and philanthropy (the love of mankind) as essential for binding individuals into the new forms of society (David Hulme, 1741). For some, over time, volunteering became an obligation and showed a willingness to share in the experience of others and identify imaginatively with their situation; this is what makes us human (J.J. Rousseau). For others it became the glue holding together an increasingly fragmented society. But others saw the values of self sacrifice and social duty as part of the 'imperial mission', embracing class and racial superiority, and patronage. For them independence and individualism became the goals and any forms of dependence or inter-dependence were rejected as signs of weakness.

Hobbes' views prevailed in UK and in 21st century many people think self-interest drives humanity and the need to look after yourself, get on, have high individual status dominate. Self-sufficiency is highly valued. Although people often feel isolated, lonely and not part of any greater society/humanity competition not co-operation dominates. Within this paradigm there is limited room for caring for others beyond the nuclear family. While some people still have the ability to 'identify imaginatively' with others and recognise the inter-dependence of people, others see independence as the greatest good. The golden age of free market capitalism led to this rise of acute individualism and competition and many have rejected what they saw as the cant of Victorian philanthropy. Yet inter-dependence has been the concept that has driven most of humanity for centuries, and continues to dominate most societies of the global south especially outside the urban areas. The Enlightenment in Europe that led to individualism is relatively recent and specific to a certain time, and many thinkers have opposed the individualism of capitalism, including Darwin and Toynbee in 19th century.

Ideas around philanthropy and volunteering arose from a specific period in history, at a time of social breakdown and the disruption of extended family and community. The concepts have always been contested and self-sacrifice and duty drawn from religion drove the Victorians and other subsequently to do many 'good works', often as volunteers in the church or orphanages. The rise of philanthropy linked to doing good to others, upholding the poor, showed a commitment to a public spirit and rejected the ideology of self-interest (though many saw philanthropy as a form of promoting the self). Good works and philanthropy for the poor gave way to a stronger focus on the role of government and trade unions to care for the poor in the 20th century and 'good works' were seen largely as paternalistic and moralistic. Government was expected to provide, a concept clearly present now in current aid discourse. Tawney, Titmuss and others sought to fight

inequality through government reform and legislation, on terms quite different from doing 'good work'. There was a commitment to public altruism in the first half of 20th century in politics, stressing the need to confront injustice etc. Politicians that shaped e.g. Health Service were committed to concepts such as 'social conscience'. However, Thatcher overturned this approach completely and turned full tilt to individualism, the market and competition as the rules governing society, 'there is no society' she said. The current government promotes concepts such a social capital, community and the need for volunteering to encourage a range of 'social good' including democratic participation, inter-community understanding, and providing tailored responses to those most vulnerable in the society.

From European and UK history both the positive benefits and the pitfalls of volunteering, and the tensions between individualism and social good, can be seen. Volunteering as something beyond family had resonance as the family broke down; before that inter-dependence between families and communities was the norm. Volunteering ranged from being seen as core to our humanity, through to providing support to the weak, right through to enabling the rich and white to bring goods and services to those in need in ways that enshrined their superiority. The term is contested, reviled and glorified and used in widely different ways, a situation that continues to the present.

How far volunteer agencies are defining themselves in terms of any of these theories of social change and the inherent nature of humanity and society is unclear. Rather the term appears to be used as an undiluted good, without definition or theory explaining what role volunteering should play, why, when and for whose benefit.

Cultural understandings of volunteering are widely diverse

Just recently, in their work around understanding and promoting local volunteering, VSO has undertaken an extensive review of what the term 'volunteer' means in different cultural contexts and whether it has strong positive or negative connotations. The findings are extremely diverse. For some societies volunteering is associated with forced labour under the colonial regime or a centralised socialist government and is not valued, rather it is feared and rejected. For others supporting each other without reward is integral to their survival and the whole way of life; communal working, mutual support, sharing their labour, time and resources are part of their way of life and may be organised beyond family in age sets, communities, clans. In one community a woman said 'we are all life long volunteers' and they work unpaid for the community, the clan, the age set throughout their lives. The break down of social structures of family and community is happening at very uneven rates and some societies where volunteers go still have enshrined in them interdependence and communal ways of surviving.

For others volunteering is a high ideal, a commitment inspired by leaders like Ghandi in order to share the expertise, skills and who you are as a person with others to enhance their well being. A great deal of volunteering takes place around religious events and festivals, political rallies, funerals and weddings, and emergencies, i.e. life changing moments in people's lives.

Volunteering can be about self help, about filling gaps left by government services, about political activism, about mobilisation for a cause. It can be highly valued or despised depending on the cultural, historical and political context.

One interesting current model of volunteering found among several NGOs in India is one where the value of volunteering rests primarily in the quality and character of the volunteer themselves. They are trained and required to learn about and understand themselves and address their weaknesses before they are sent out (or in some cases back to their communities) to work as facilitators or catalysts enabling others to identify and work on issues of real concern for their communities. The focus is far less on specific skills and much more on the values and qualities of the volunteer who then becomes a leader, a role model, a centre of energy encouraging people to see what might be possible and how to tackle problems that are weighing them down and limiting their lives. In this approach it is the community who sets the agenda of what to work on and the volunteer is the person able to guide, advise, initially organise meetings, make the links to external agencies such as local government or service providers, access information and wider networks.

In some models the volunteers are doing what they would probably have done anyway, but with some extra outside support, guidance and a few basic tools or resources, for example women providing home based care for those with AIDS. The lines between what communities do anyway to ensure their survival and the well-being of the group in contexts of extreme hardship and modern concepts of volunteering can become very blurred.

The term volunteer covers many quite different approaches and purposes

This reality can best be illustrated by looking at a recent review and discussions in VSO (which is now undergoing a major strategic planning process) exploring issues arising from a relatively new programme promoting the development and organisation of volunteering within a country using local volunteers. Looking at the role of volunteering within each country and understanding what local volunteers were doing and could do better or more of raised many challenges for VSO:

During a recent review on local volunteering for VSO a number of staff in UK and globally noted that there is no clear and well defined position on volunteering. While VSO use the UN criteria for defining a volunteer (no pay, working beyond the family, not coerced) they have no clear position on why volunteering is a key for development, what kind of volunteering is important and why. Indeed since international volunteers have in recent years been closely aligned to delivering VSO's strategy and objectives many suspect that they are increasingly like employees of VSO. The line between being a volunteer and being employed to deliver on VSO's plans is quite a fine one. Volunteers of all kinds have over the last 5 years been seen as 'tools in the VSO toolbox' for delivering on defined development objectives enshrined in the various plans.

Some staff see volunteers as short term players in a long term relationship with partners designed to address key MDGs; many volunteers however find that role of being a small cog in an on-going wheel difficult. Some staff felt this instrumental view of volunteers has led to a

'crisis' of volunteering for many international volunteers and the staff trying to manage them. For many in VSO the model of volunteering has been one of technical co-operation, people with skills bring these to people who lack them, often in short assignments. For others the issue is more about the life changing experience for the volunteer and those they live and work with (though fewer now live with the communities they work in) and what they will bring back to their home community. There has been, in fact, little follow-up support for Returned Volunteers except in e.g. Philippines where they are seen as a critical resource to continue voluntary work, especially in peace building. This is an issue that Crossroads in Canada places much greater emphasis on. For yet others volunteering is about sharing experience, bringing in a new perspective and working alongside others, with a focus on mutuality, two way learning and respect. This approach is most clearly articulated in the policies of the youth exchange programme in VSO (Global Exchange, GX), even if this is not necessarily the way it is always practiced. Another approach espoused by some staff is based on rights: many women's organisations, HIV and AIDS organisations and disability movements are run by volunteers who are themselves affected by the issues they are addressing. International volunteers coming in to work alongside the local volunteer groups is essential to enable them to build their skills and confidence and have their voice heard. In other words the role of the international volunteers is to be a catalyst to enable these groups to develop their ability for self-representation and improve their access to much needed services through claiming their rights. It is well recognised that often these volunteers (women, the disabled, those with HIV and AIDS) need a lot of support and encouragement to keep them motivated and engaged, given the huge problems they face daily in their own lives and an external volunteer can provide the needed energy, motivation, information, encouragement and skills.

The new work of VSO in promoting local volunteering within countries where they work has taken many forms, including promoting volunteering for service delivery (especially for example in delivering home based care), placing experienced and educated volunteers in rural areas to bring skills and act as role models, to fill gaps i.e. by teaching in rural schools which lack teachers, and training youth volunteers to be change agents and work long term as catalysts for motivating and organising communities to start to find ways to address their own problems of poverty. In some approaches VSO sets the agenda for the local volunteer programme, in others the approach enables the young volunteers and communities themselves to identify their problems and think through ways of addressing them. This work is at the pilot stage, is very diverse and is implemented in very different ways. Concepts such as promoting active citizenship, enabling participation, promoting mobilisation are to be found in some of these programmes.

While increasingly VSO works with youth volunteers (GX, Youth For Development, and promoting local volunteering) the overall emphasis has remained on the concept of professional skill sharing. Limited attention has been paid until recently to why working with youth is important, what youth volunteers can contribute to development now and in the future, how best to work with them and how to manage the challenges of youth work. As yet few VSO staff have youth skills though some partner with those who do.

From recent reviews it is clear that VSO has not had a clearly articulated position on why volunteering matters, what it is needed for, its potential nor a typology of different kinds of volunteering for different purposes. It has viewed volunteering in a rather instrumental ways, seeing long and short term volunteers, youth volunteers and now NV volunteers as different 'tools' to achieve the overall goals of VSO. The language of the toolbox has felt disempowering to some and very far from the language of volunteers as change agents or catalysts for social engagement, although clearly of their work falls within that approach. There has been some disagreement about whether VSO is primarily about a skills model, a form of professional technical co-operation seeing outsiders bringing in much needed expertise to improve systems, structures, strategies and policies or about the broader role and influence of volunteers in peoples' lives, which requires investing seriously in identifying the qualities of volunteers, assisting with their own development and enabling them to work in facilitative ways with those normally excluded from the development process.

Summarised from Tina Wallace, *Taking Stock, A review of National Volunteering, VSO, London, 2008*

There are clearly different methodologies for volunteering

The dominant model used by many volunteer sending agencies remains one of taking skilled people, often but certainly not always from the richer countries, and sending them for different lengths of time, from a few weeks up to 2 or 3 years, to do some combination of the following:

- Share their skills
- Share their values
- Share the way of life of the communities where they work
- Experience mutual learning and problem solving
- Bring back their learning to their home country to promote development awareness and commitment

In reality the approaches even to international volunteering vary greatly, from short term placements of specialists going to work in a Ministry or high level organisation to bring a methodology and/or a set of skills to a department that have been identified as needed to enable work to be done more effectively through to long term placements. Long term placements may be working with schools or local government or NGOs in remote rural areas, or (increasingly) at district Headquarters or in capital cities. These longer term placements are expected to include skill sharing (although the idea of counterpart training is no longer promoted); the volunteer is expected to work closely alongside colleagues to develop problem solving, promote cross cultural dialogue and bring an external eye and wider experience into the organisation or community. This interaction between the volunteer and those they live and work with (usually called partners) often assumes almost mystic status in the volunteer literature, leading to mutual respect, eyes being opened, and lifelong changes taking place. In fact far fewer volunteers now live in communities and often the primary focus is on their role and effectiveness in the workplace not in the wider community.

Less is claimed of short term placements which are usually seen as targeted interventions solving a clearly defined problem with specific imported expertise. Little is said about the limitations of this approach, given the highly different cultural and physical contexts of the skills provider and receiver. How effective are systems, procedures, manuals, approaches developed in e.g. Germany, Australia or Japan when taken into the totally different context of rural India, a Ministry in Nairobi or an NGO in South Africa? Can the local organisation make the changes needed to work with the new technology or methodology? Is it even appropriate? How far can organisations really embrace and work with changes that have been delivered in a 'short sharp shock' way whether the 'teacher' comes from an urban area in the global south or from e.g. Canada or Europe?

In relation to long term volunteers there has been little work exploring whether the pre-departure preparation the volunteers have allows them to travel to a new country with the humility to learn as well as share. When they are to live and work in a capital city or regional headquarters they are anyway not likely to mix very much with people in the area outside of work. How many volunteers are properly prepared for their role as employees in Ministries for example or as community development workers living and working in a rural area? These are highly different roles, yet does the training differentiate?

How well does the training deal with the diversity of motivations and expectations around volunteering? Do volunteers believe they are going to share their much needed skills, do they see themselves as going to listen learn and develop shared solutions to problems, do they expect to live alongside those they work with or are they going to do a job, with their free time as their own? How well do volunteer agencies deal with the diversity of reasons for volunteering, including adventure, wanting to change the world, wanting to do a professional job, and needing to upgrade the CV? And how well do they prepare them for playing very different roles depending on the type of placement they have and whether the focus is primarily on skill sharing or more on their qualities as a change maker in the community. What attitudes do volunteers bring and how far do their individual attitudes shape what actually happens on the ground; are the right people being sent to the right places given the widely different contexts? Some fear that the increased focus on bringing sophisticated professional skills and years of work experience to another country have skewed the relationships, giving the volunteer a clearly superior position. If this is the case it would clearly affect mutual learning and undermine the other aspects of volunteering related to promoting good cross cultural relationships and wider social engagement.

As far as I have found little research/evaluation has been done to find out whether the international volunteer bring the right skills and are able to use them in a new and very different context; whether they were able to adapt their knowledge and learn about who they were working with before jumping in. While partner feedback is sought by many agencies, it is unclear how open and honest partners feel able to be about the quality, relevance and usefulness of the volunteer, especially if they want to repeat the experience with a follow-up volunteer. In VSO much more thorough evaluations have been done of their other more experimental approaches to volunteering such as National Volunteering and Global Exchange, which is strange given the continued centrality of international volunteering in their work.

Over time VSO has added several models of volunteering to their portfolio, to address more of the 'social engagement' aspects of the work. These approaches have raised challenges: one model involving youth exchanges has highlighted the one-way nature of much international volunteering (taking skills and learning one way) and the relative lack of mutuality currently built into that model. It has also brought to VSO's attention how little time has been available - until recently - for supporting returned volunteers to work on development awareness. Yet this is one of the most cited benefits of volunteering, increasing global understanding at a time of real conflict between different world views/civilisations. VSO's most recent focus on promoting volunteering within a country rather than bringing in volunteers has raised issues around the costs of international volunteering, and the relative value of using volunteers who know the language and understand the context and the long term sustainability that can be built using volunteers who live in the communities and will always do so. The very diverse approaches have ranged from those deeply rooted in social transformation and using the volunteering as a key change agent through to using volunteering for basic

service delivery; some of the more transformative approaches have highlighted how little work VSO does with volunteers prior to departure about learning more about themselves and thinking through their potential role as leaders or change agents.

The power of promoting volunteering locally to raise self-esteem, enable communities to work together to address their problems, to build 'social capital' often in slums or poor communities where hope and a sense of being able to change anything has long fallen away, are real. It is in this programme and that working with youth on Global Exchange that VSO articulates clearly the social engagement purpose of volunteering above that of skill sharing and goal attainment.

In stark contrast the swing to short term volunteering, which can be done by someone without changing their job, often enhancing their CV and their position in a company, is quite different. This approach stresses the value of the professional knowledge a volunteer brings to an organisation and/or community and there is little time for cross cultural learning or sharing. This is far more about delivering a product. It is becoming increasingly popular and is often seen as part of corporate responsibility. Again little research appears to have been done about this approach and what it says about volunteering and its purposes; some of the principles held dear by volunteer agencies seem to be by-passed with this approach - mutuality, shared learning, creating lasting change are difficult when the visits are for just a few weeks and the need to achieve concrete outputs is high. Other purposes such as increasing inter-cultural experience, bringing scarce skills to key organisations, keeping the costs down for partners while allowing them access to external expertise are met.

Other agencies have looked at the changing context, the diversity of roles and purposes for volunteering and adapted their volunteer approach in different ways. Crossroads places more emphasis on building development awareness and a recognisable group of Crossroaders after their return to be a force for awareness and change in Canada. FK in Norway has followed a different path and have modified the core model of international volunteer placements into one of exchanges. Currently FK Norway (Fredskorpset) 'arranges **reciprocal exchanges** of personnel between organisations in Norway and developing countries' in order 'to contribute to lasting improvements in economic, social and political conditions in the world'. (FKN website). They, like other volunteer agencies believe that a lot comes from this volunteering, 'when people from different countries meet and get to know each other, this gives rise to knowledge, understanding and empathy... and the world gets smaller. That is why we give ordinary people the possibility to work for longer periods in a foreign country'.⁸

Their exchanges occur in a partnership between two or more organisations (or companies), in ways that will promote the mutual exchange of knowledge, experiences and skills. Each organisation or company both sends and receives volunteers.

⁸ www.fredskorpset.no/en/FK2/

Skillshare supplements its volunteer placements, 51% now south-south, with courses such as leadership training

This innovative programme has been highly valued by the participants for its relevance to their personal development as leaders and for their work with staff teams and colleagues to address processes within their organisations ... There is early evidence that, in most cases, participants are playing more facilitative and enabling roles within their organisations. Most participants have been able to effect changes already that are beginning to embed principles of continuous improvement and team working to good practical effect in their workplaces. DFID evaluation report, February 2000

They also partner with other organisations to deliver coaching in football and learning around integrating development and conflict transformation.

Skillshare and Crossroads place a high premium on working to address gender inequalities in their programmes. Most agencies have clear strategic plans and priority areas of work, ranging from 3-6 or more and these shape where placements are developed and who is targeted. In most cases the numbers of volunteers are counted in the hundreds rather than the thousands, with between 10 and 70 volunteers working for an organisation in any one country, a tiny number in relation to the ambitions of the volunteer agencies to combat poverty, create gender equality, address poverty and promote partnership, well run, skilled organisations, empowered communities and more.

Clearly volunteering has evolved and changed over the years, in response to learning, the changing context, feedback from organisations and volunteers and donor agendas. This continues and the work of volunteer agencies is highly diverse, with a core model for most of volunteer placements built around sharing skills. Yet the diversity is partly masked by the fact that all the activities fall under the one heading, volunteering and it often appears that this generic term 'volunteering' can meet all the diverse aim of these agencies, including skill sharing and social transformation. In relation a more nuanced and sophisticated way of thinking about volunteering and what model can deliver what kinds of benefits is required, and even where this exists internally a much clearer articulation to the external world is required. And choices need to be made about which purpose and which approach has highest value for the organisation in relation to development.

The thorny issue of remuneration and the challenge to volunteering

While the concept of volunteering globally involves 'an absence of remuneration', indeed for many that is the essence of volunteering (doing something for nothing) in fact international volunteers are paid. They earn less than they could at home if they come from rich countries, but for those from e.g. India or Tanzania they may earn more as an international volunteer than they can make working at home. Little systematic work has yet been done to assess how the current realities around remuneration - that international volunteers are paid, have their expenses covered, often earn more than local

staff, may supplement their income with remittances from home and drive cars for example - impacts on either the nature of the relationships built or the understanding of volunteering – both by the volunteer and for the community where they are based. What do volunteers think they are being paid to do?

International volunteering is quite different from volunteering seen across liberal democracies where this approach was developed. Volunteering in UK for example is usually done for no financial return, with only expenses covered. Volunteering can be for a huge range of purposes from improving service delivery through providing an extra pair of hands or an extra service such as a café e.g. in play groups, nurseries, schools, hospitals, old peoples' homes to accompanying people in need, for example in prisons, mental hospitals, care homes. Volunteers are used to build walls, create environmental areas, meet needs unmet by the government for the most vulnerable in society, for running Girl Guides and Scouts, for serving on boards of trustees ...and so much more besides. For many volunteers in the UK people being paid to travel overseas does not fit their concept of volunteering.

This is an issue that requires more analysis. It is a very tough issue because it is one where the extreme inequalities that exist between rich countries and poor countries in the global south are so well highlighted. The contrast in rewards for doing similar work, in access to expenses, in standards of housing and transport, in health care and security is stark. How can this be handled in ways that meet the expectations of professionals willing to travel and those of employers and communities where the person arriving appears so well off and yet is called a volunteer? The challenges of the discrepancies between the standards of living and expectations between young people from UK and those from Africa and Asia can be a real barrier to achieving the mutuality hoped for in exchange programmes and many of these issues, especially around health care and security, insurance and spending money have caused problems for the Global Exchange programme of young people run by British Council and VSO⁹.

So what is volunteering?

What can be drawn from the complexity and diversity of understandings of volunteering and the various approaches being used? I would suggest that some of the learning emerging from exploring these complex questions include:

- A very specific cultural context gave rise to the ideas and definitions of volunteering that have until recently dominated international volunteering. The implications of this have not really been unpacked and looking at other definitions and approaches to volunteering could impact on the way international volunteering develops in future
- The inequalities between volunteers, especially from richer countries and urban educated backgrounds, and those they go to work with tend to be brushed over, and yet may have a profound impact on how

⁹ These issues are discussed in a review of the Global Exchange programme, Tina Wallace with Joe Joseph, British Council and VSO, 2007

people understand volunteering and the relationships built between the volunteer and those they work with

- The term volunteer covers so many very different activities and ways of working and there is a need to unpack the different models and to become clear about when which model will be most effective and where. The models includes exchanges, a focus on youth, encouraging local volunteering, prioritising women and gender equality, training as well as international volunteering, both south-south and north-south, long and short term. They have very different characteristics and are suitable to achieve very different purposes; some of these relate to social engagement, others do not
- Volunteering currently is said to achieve a wide range of objectives, including skill sharing, contributing to countries and governments meeting the MDGs, changing people, increasing understanding and empathy, building cross cultural understanding, developing local activists and global citizens, increasing democratic spaces and enabling people to find their own voice, and more. Which kind of volunteering in which kind of context achieves which purpose? Being clearer about what each approach can and cannot achieve would help to understand better what volunteering is and what it can do to bring positive change
- There is a tendency for most volunteer agencies to retain a core model of international volunteering that is relatively unchanged and applied in each country. Some of the challenges of the model such as remuneration, its one-way nature, the reality that the volunteer sending agency usually sets the agendas through its strategic plans, and the impact of this approach on local understandings of volunteering need to be more clearly articulated and questioned. Is this model appropriate now across the global south? When can it work and when is it 'past its sell by date' given geo-political and development realities? How far can it deliver on expectations around social engagement as well as professional skill sharing?
- The purposes, definitions, understandings and practices of volunteering are hugely diverse; what is important is to understand what kind of volunteering works well where, when and under what conditions and what kind of training and support best enables each kind of volunteer to do a good job and perform well. The specific requirements of training and supporting volunteers to be catalysts of change have been relatively overlooked in some agencies, the strongest articulation of what approaches a volunteer might use to bring real change were found in India.

How are the different benefits of volunteering to be realised?

One issue that agencies often gloss over when assessing their value and contribution to development is how well did we do our job? The focus in monitoring and evaluation is almost always on how well the partners, communities, women and men responded to external inputs and stimulus. Probing questions are rarely asked about whether the agency did a good job.

For volunteer agencies some of the core questions around agency (not individual) performance would be: was the right model of volunteering chosen for the task identified? Were the right kind of people recruited? Was the training 'fit for purpose'? What is the quality of the partnerships developed and how far were local organisations able to articulate their needs or how far did they have to meet the parameters set by the strategic plan and operating principles of the volunteer agency? What were the expectations of the volunteers and were they appropriate? Do the partners really know what is being offered and how much it will cost them in terms of time and money? How are the issues of inequality in the relationships (in terms of access to both information and resources) handled? How are agendas set and are they appropriate to the needs identified in each context? Is the support given to partners and volunteers good enough to enable them to work well together? What follow-up is available for volunteers and partners and communities to enable any changes to become embedded?

The issue of the quality of the implementation of the process is critically important to achieving that elusive concept 'impact', and yet so often the spotlight is not on the HQ of the agency and how it undertakes the work but on how well volunteers and partners perform on the ground to bring about positive change. Some of the core components include selecting and training well the right kind of people, providing adequate support for partners and volunteers, and good partnership. Often these are poorly defined, and an amazing number of INGOs that work in partnership have no policy or guidelines about what that means in practice. Minimum standards of behaviour, recourse for partners, complaints procedures are often lacking, as are shared approaches to developing strategies and plans. How to manage the power inequalities are rarely overtly discussed; indeed partners are usually seen as the beneficiaries of the relationship. It is unclear whether any of the issues around wider social engagement or transformation are discussed with partners, whose focus is often on skills delivery, although promoting inclusion, voice and participation are part and parcel of some placements, such as working with women's or disability networks, HIV and AIDS volunteers, young people. How far Ministries or local governments want the volunteers they employ to do wider work on activism is currently unclear.

One issue will be highlighted here because of lack of space to go into all the multiple issues around providing good inputs to enable the volunteering process to work well. And that is the issue of partnership. What follows is an extract from a review of the Global Exchange programme where concepts of mutuality, respect for the community, changing power relations are watchwords. Yet the realities of working to a strategic plan set by the implementing donor agencies (BC and VSO), in line with the multiple donor requirements for measuring impact and achieving demonstrable change in the short term, and the limited time for building initial relationships meant that actually the way the programme was delivered (in this example in communities in the UK) fell far short of the ideals of working 'in partnership'. This in turn had implications for how far this work could in any way be a catalyst for change within the community.

Our visits to the four communities (they are 'the partners' to the programme in this approach) in UK were the first contact with BC/VSO that local people had experienced and it was the first time they had been asked by anyone, except the GX team, to talk about their experiences. While it is the case that those running the programme (programme supervisors) are required to visit and talk to host homes and work placement staff to get 'community feedback' on the work, there has, in reality, been little time for listening to the community. The primary focus of discussions in the community has been what the community has learned/benefitted from GX; there is little room in the reporting forms for community members to comment on the value, quality, and relevance of the GX programme for their community. Supervisors have so much to do for the youth volunteers because for them the volunteer experience is 'centre stage'; they have limited skills, time or motivation to get good feedback from the community. BC and VSO staff has never visited to evaluate what happened in each community.

Yet, members of the communities provided a rich source of strategic and practical information. Most of those interviewed had given freely of their work time, their homes and free time to engage with the programme and had a great deal to say. They had insights that would have helped GX to improve the running of the programme over the past three years: they identified strengths to build on and challenged some of the 'pillars' of the programme with clear evidence.

The lack of community monitoring is identified as a serious gap in GX; this omission is repeated in the overseas programmes. Indeed, the M&E mirrors the 'supply driven' approach that currently characterises aspects of GX (and much of volunteering more generally) where communities are chosen, targets set and numbers and outputs defined by GX or BC/VSO. They are set without discussions/ interaction with either the volunteers or the communities they are intended to serve. The tensions created by working to a tight timetable, having set formats and ways of working, and clear targets on the one hand while wanting to build local relationships and engage local people are felt by staff and communities and often by volunteers who identified many contradictions within the GX approach. Some volunteers were especially concerned about the lack of proper engagement with communities; they saw GX operating in a top-down way while wishing to challenge existing power relations and ways of working. They felt that 'partners' in UK and overseas were treated more as agents for delivering GX than partners and the way the agenda is driven by VSO/BC strategic plans undermines some of the core principles GX stands for. Certainly overseas partners who attended a meeting in 2008 talked the language of sub-contractors more than that of partners, and many said they felt donor rather than locally led.

Edited extract from GX review, Tina Wallace with Joe Joseph, 2008.

This example is deliberately taken from the UK because if agencies find it hard to work as equals, listen and sharing with peers in the UK how much more likely is it that 'partners' in the global south should be in fact more honestly described as contractors to volunteer agency programmes. Talking to VSO staff in overseas offices it is clear that they are often torn by the requirements of VSO to meet targets and fulfil plans developed in UK on the one hand and to build open and mutual relationships with partner organisations in the countries where they work. Partner needs often do not neatly match the concepts and definitions developed thousands of miles away, funding timelines may be too short, the asks of partners may be more than they are able or willing to give and the room for manoeuvre is often small.

The quality of the relationships built varies and is, of course, dependent on a range of factors including the flexibility allowed from HQ, the agreements made with donors and how far these are preset or can be 'filled' in through

discussions with partners and even communities, on the personal qualities of the staff involved and their ability to balance the top down requirements and the bottom up needs and views of their partners. However, many of the relationships follow trends that have been widely identified in the INGO world:

*The international NGO is our funder and that almost predetermines the way we relate in decision making. As partners in our programmes, the INGO participates in deciding what programmes we should do and not do. This is not bad, however there are situation where we feel we ought to carry out certain programmes, but if these are not within the thematic areas of the INGO we are compelled to drop them. In financial decision-making we are to a large extent guided by the INGO in certain cease, we just have to go by what the INGO decides since they hold the purse anyway. **Case study from Uganda, T. Wallace et al, The aid chain, p.142***

From this research, that included but did not focus on volunteer sending agencies, the conclusions were clear. High staff turnover, lack of time, sometimes lack of real respect and superior attitudes, the organisational dependence and anxiety about keeping the funding and relationship of receiving agencies meant that strong open partnerships were often the exception.

*The lack of honesty and transparency and distortions in communication that now characterise many of the relationships was seen time and time again. So too was the anger and resentment that came from the perceived overvaluing of INGO and donor skills, procedures and resources and the undervaluing of local skills such as language, cultural knowledge, lifelong involvement with the issues and understanding the local concepts of change. **Ibid, p145***

There are, of course, examples of strong relationships and good partnerships but the current pressures on INGOs from their trustees, donors and managers often militate against the time and flexibility needed to develop these in depth.

Each agency here will know how well their 'partnerships' work and whether they are mutual relationships guided by shared learning or whether they more closely resemble instrumental relationships for ensuring volunteer placements happen in line with global strategies. Certainly VSO places a high value on partnerships and undertakes annual participatory partner reviews and in some countries works with strong advisory boards of partner agencies that do feel they are part of setting the overall country focus and agenda and participate actively in agreeing placements and the overall purpose of the work. In other countries staff aspire to that approach but find the pressures of volunteer management, responding to UK requests, meeting the terms and conditions of their plans and budgets and the focus on proving results against clear goals can militate against the time needed to build these kinds of relationships.

In implementing the Global Exchange programme there are many others elements where VSO aspires to practicing what it preaches about the programme, trying to ensure issues such as mutual respect, volunteer learning, shared activities, and promoting the formation of active citizens

among the volunteers. In every exchange 9 from UK and 9 from a country in Africa and Asia, stay for 3 months in each of the home countries. While there is a lot more to learn about working effectively with young people from different cultures and with managing UK youth and their range of expectations and behaviours, it is important to note what is done to promote real social engagement, within the group and after they return. The core elements include living and working together with others from another culture for 6 months, learning days where small groups introduce a topic or issue and develop activities for shared learning, keeping a diary of experiences and analysing what has been experienced and learned, running community days in the communities where they work and the requirement to do development awareness workshops or events after return home. Many of these elements could be introduced to other forms of volunteering to increase the likelihood of the work experience becoming something more engaging and ensuring involvement on return home.

The way projects are run, volunteers are introduced, plans are made for their work all affect the quality of the relationships and what is likely to be achieved during a placement. How far volunteers are willing and able to engage beyond the workplace may be an issue for the partners, it may not, but the way in which the volunteer agency work reflects (or not) the values and beliefs of the agency. This in turn affects the behaviour and commitment of the volunteers and how well they understand the full range of activities and relationships they can develop. Nevertheless for some doing a good professional job at work will be enough, for others they will want a wider and more exciting engagement with local people and for yet others their placement will engage them directly in social action and engagement with those they work with, especially in the fields of peoples' movements and communities learning to find their voice.

Conclusions

This paper is ambitious and inevitably glosses over some of the complexities of managing volunteers, defining their role, supporting them and working in the multiple relationships that volunteering requires. Some points will not apply to some agencies and probably people will be busy distancing themselves from several of the issues raised! Some need more thought and deeper analysis, others are more complex than presented.

However, it is hoped that this look across the landscape will help people to ask themselves difficult questions and provide space for thinking afresh about the different purposes of volunteering and the different approaches to delivering it. In the current context it is possible that the power of volunteering could certainly lie in the people to people work, in solidarity, in mutuality and in social engagement, things often missing from current activities and debates.

Whatever decisions are made about which aspect of volunteering to promote, what kind of volunteering to commit to, whether to encourage local or international volunteering, whether to focus on exchanges, youth, work or community, there is a need to more clearly identify the special benefits of

volunteering and consider how to ensure they are part of the programme of work. Depending on who is selected and how they are trained they have the potential for role modelling and leadership; to encourage and inspire individuals; to be catalyst for discussions and promoters of confidence, voice and representation; to be accompaniers, sharing in experiences and building partnerships. Many of these elements appear to be currently assumed by some agencies and not specifically articulated or addressed. But they do not 'just happen'. Ways to ensure they can be addressed have to be implemented at every stage from advertising for volunteers through to selection and training, support, implementation and in monitoring and evaluation. Enabling volunteers to work around changing attitudes and behaviour, addressing cultural constraints, building confidence and helping other find voice are all critical components of development (quite different from skill sharing work):

development can be understood as helping people with less power, who are liable to be victims of oppression, to engage more confidently and effectively with the institutions that govern their lives. In other words there is always a political element to fighting poverty- it is rarely only about giving people things or knowledge. Paraphrased from David Ellerman, 2001, Helping people help themselves. World Bank Policy Paper, 2693. Washington.