

Youth International Volunteering and Development:

an opportunity for development, international understanding or social inclusion?
a discussion paper for IVCO 2012

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forum

INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON DEVELOPMENT SERVICE
FORUM INTERNATIONAL DU VOLONTARIAT POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT

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Foreword

This is the twelfth in a series of discussion papers produced by the International Forum on Development Service (Forum), which follows on from our research work on trends in international volunteering and co-operation in recent years.

One of the key areas identified for the IVCO conference in 2012 is the issue of international youth volunteering and how International Volunteer and Co-operation Organisations (IVCOs) do and can engage.

This paper aims to consider some of the implications of current international youth volunteering programs, what we can learn from them 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 which the authors work. The responsibility for these views rests with the authors alone.

Nita Kapoor
Chair of Forum

About Forum

The International Forum on Development Service (known as “Forum”) is the most significant global network of International Volunteer Co-operation Organisations. Forum aims to share information, develop good practice and enhance cooperation and support between its members. Together, Forum members explore innovative practice and research key contemporary issues, focusing on organisational learning and improved practice. This information is shared in person, at conferences and via the website.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of my friends and colleagues, especially those on the Forum Research Working Group, past and present, who have provided me with their encouragement, insights and internal documents to make this discussion paper possible.

I would like especially to thank two people: Christina Jenkins, Forum Executive Coordinator, for her support, patience and understanding as I have tried to produce this and perpetually gone past her deadlines; and Ellie Allum-Marshall, my daughter, who constantly reminds and inspires me of the potential of young people to engage in and change the world and who has taken the time to read and comment on this paper.

I would add that as I researched the various sources for this paper, it became apparent that there are a number of other experiences that deserve better coverage than I have been able to give them in this version of the paper. I apologise for their omission or for the diminished attention they have been given.

The responsibility for the content is, of course, entirely my own and the views expressed are not necessarily those of either the International Forum on Development Service, who have commissioned this, or of Skillshare International, who employ me.

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October 2012

Introduction

In the past twelve years, there has, at least anecdotally, been a resurgence of interest in international youth volunteering. Northern governments and international volunteer agencies have been looking at initiatives that engage young, often northern youth in international volunteering. Some of these initiatives have been short term, others a more fundamental repositioning.

North-South exchanges and South-to-South youth international programs have also been seen as appropriate initiatives. However, there is arguably no consensus on the rationale for program models similar to that which underpinned the long-term international volunteering development model. Consideration of practice has shown in some cases differences not just between NGOs and donors, but also within organisations about the merits and models of youth volunteering. The level of satisfaction of program participants also has indicated that the models may not always fit what they regard as beneficial.

This discussion paper is an attempt to consider some of the initiatives of the past few years, largely but not exclusively northern government-funded, and to address some of the issues that have been raised and reflect and learn on those experiences. It is intended to provide practitioners with an historical framework, a pathway through examples of youth programmes and how they have been evaluated, a discussion of the academic literature and a review of some of the critical areas that need to be considered. At the conclusion, questions have been posed for IVCOs. It is hoped that this will enable practitioners to make informed decisions on youth programmes going forward that can take into account some of the experimental pilots and programme learning of recent years.

The “problem” of international youth volunteering

In 2000, IVCO took place in Melbourne, Australia. Immediately prior to that conference was an international conference on youth volunteering, where Canada World Youth (CWY) presented their work and model.

The conference was attended, amongst others, by Australian Volunteers International (the hosts) who were keen to develop a similar style program (they never did) and also VSO (who developed Global Xchange).

In retrospect, two thoughts occur. Firstly, that the CWY model was highly influential in other youth models that have emerged over the past ten years, including the VSO Global Xchange program. Secondly, that a separate conference on international youth volunteering was held immediately prior to the IVCO conference. The “problem” of how to develop international volunteering programs for youth needed a level of separateness; it was not the main debate within international volunteering agencies at the time.

It is useful to consider when and how youth became an increasing issue for IVCOs. After all, the expansion of international volunteering in the post-1950 period necessarily embraced large numbers of young people volunteering in developing countries.

“About two hundred organisations – national and international, governmental and private, of various inspirations – are now recruiting, training and/or sending medium-skilled young volunteers from North America, Eastern and Western Europe, Japan, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand to the

Third World. Clearly, long-term voluntary service has become a permanent feature of international co-operation among **young** people.”¹

The minimum age of volunteers varied. VSO and Peace Corps were taking 18 year olds in the 1960s, but more normally volunteers needed to be 20 or 21 years.² But over the years, the profile of participation by age in these programs began to show a particular trend – the average age was increasing and those under 25 were increasingly scarce participants.³

The reasons behind this demographic shift are worthy of a longer exploration, but importantly, there needs to be a recognition that the long-term model was seen as an appropriate response at the time of the 1960s, both in terms of supply and demand side factors. However, over time, both changed. The demand side saw increasingly higher demands from local partners for technical skills and experience amongst the volunteers. The emergent economies in the post-colonial era were looking increasingly for technical skills rather than large scale labour inputs and they wanted to develop the skills and abilities of their own people rather than rely on an expat model; agencies themselves also reflected on what was needed on the ground.⁴ The impact was to see a reduced participation in *some* programs by young people.

The supply of young people for the opportunity to engage abroad was scarcely diminished simply because of changes in demand. The expansion of the not for profit and commercial sectors to provide opportunities for young people prepared to pay for an experience (and not necessarily linked to any benefit for the countries or communities they visited) has been well documented and critiqued. If for the youth of the 1960s the opportunity to volunteer was an opportunity to express solidarity with the people of another country, the growth of commercial opportunities has seen this become an experiential commodity that can be bought in the early 21st century; but, of course, only on the basis of the ability to pay.⁵

The levels of disillusionment with international volunteering as a development model in the 1990s have been noted along with the desire to emphasise the professional qualities of volunteers in their in-country contribution.⁶ “Volunteers” from their home countries became “technical experts” in their country of placement. The development focused model was not leaving much space for young people and in some cases this was made explicit.⁷ The conflation of lack of experience or technical skills with young people arguably served to devalue the potential contribution young people could make to development, in contrast to the positive values placed on having young volunteers in the earlier phase⁸. If international volunteering was itself challenged as a serious development model in some quarters, then within international volunteering, the contribution young people could make was not widely recognised and international youth volunteering within the development framework was seen at best as on the margins.

But international volunteering has never been seen as simply about what volunteers do where they are placed in terms of immediate development impact, either by donors or implementers.⁹

¹ Gillette (1968), p.11. Bolding added.

² Gillette (1968), p. 185. Note that the GDS minimum age was 25 years. The VSO decision to focus on 18 year olds was part of their founder’s vision: “it was a deliberate decision to go for the responsiveness of 19-year-olds, unencumbered by family, career, or financial commitments, ready to go anywhere and turn a hand to anything.” Bird (1998), p.16

³ In 2002, in conversation with Tor Elden, then taking over responsibility for FK Norway, I asked why the Norwegian Volunteer Service had been wound up and a fresh start made. His reply: that they had found they were sending the same people in the 1990s as they were twenty or thirty years earlier. The program was no longer enabling young people to participate.

⁴ The days when “we could send a volunteer with a small koala bear off on a boat and tell them to come back in two years having done something useful” may have been an anecdotal story, but it was based on a reality that was changing. Conversation with Bill Armstrong, then Australian Volunteers International Director, 2000.

⁵ “There are as many as 85 specialist “gap year” providers in the UK, which combined place over 50,000 participants in over 90 countries”, Birdwell (2011), p.9

⁶ Allum (2007).

⁷ In the UK, Clare Short, when Secretary of State for International Development, specifically forbade the use of DfID money for international youth volunteering.

⁸ “...more than a decade of experience had amply demonstrated that youthful long term volunteers with medium level skills can make a useful and appreciated contribution to developing countries.” Gillette (1968), p. 178

⁹ See Lough and Allum (2011) for a discussion on motivations of donor governments for international volunteering.

The recognition that international volunteering has a role to play in international understanding between peoples, communities or even nations has frequently been a feature of the objectives of such programs, and indeed, some programs might offer this without any “development” content. Terms such as “global learning” and “active global citizen” have been harnessed to the international volunteering rationale in recent years. However, also in recent times, the desire to put the objective of development alongside a greater focus on young people participating as volunteers has resulted in some significant challenges.¹⁰

The recent history of models which have been generated by agencies starting from the perspective of placing youth at the centre tends to track back to Canada World Youth (CWY), undoubtedly regarded as an influential agency in this area. Central to this and other similar models (such as Canadian Crossroads International, VSO Global Xchange and FK Norway) is the notion of exchange and equity. As described below, global learning is central to many of the exchange models, though not necessarily in the reciprocity models.

The potential of such programs to thrive sits within the “soft power” model, where donor motivations are critical. For example, from an external perspective, in the Canadian context, the higher profile over the years of the public engagement aspects of international volunteering has been a supportive factor of programs such as those run by CWY. However, the most longstanding example is probably Peace Corps, where the promotion of the American way of life is an objective of the program and the intention that the Peace Corps experience is part of training the next generation of leaders of the USA is apparent. This, however, is a one way model and has great attractions to northern governments, who are often institutionally reluctant to fund the participation of nationals from other countries to come to the North as part of their international development program.

In the past six years, we have seen northern governments argue the case for the participation of northern youth in international development. For example, 2007 brought the *weltwärts* program into the German volunteer program. This was soon followed in the UK by a scaled down and cheaper program called Platform2, and subsequently a larger scale initiative in the International Citizen Service (ICS). Irish Aid have also focused on the development of a similar program. UNV are also now preparing a youth program, where the modalities have yet to be defined.

The motivations for such programs are of interest, as are the expectations. Academic discourse links such programs to part of a neo-liberal agenda which is reconfiguring relationships in the context of international volunteering. International volunteering is seen as

“... part of the broader processes of professionalisation, including those shaping contemporary development practice. Yet the same time, with the increase in international volunteering programs, a focus on professional skills needs in the South is superseded by the growing emphasis on the needs of the individual volunteer and their own personal professional development. This results in the provision of commercialised, short-term and widely accessible international volunteering opportunities for those who live in the global North.”¹¹

¹⁰ This is in contrast to the 1960s model, where young people are connected to “medium-level skills” contributing to that gap between “the Deputy Prime Minister’s ante-chamber to the door of the Village Chief’s hut.” Gillette (1968), p.178

¹¹ Baillie Smith and Laurie (2011), p.550

What recent developments tell us about models for international youth volunteering

Some of these new programme developments are explored more fully and in different ways below. Two main examples are drawn from the exchange tradition and three from the new forms of state intervention. On a smaller scale, some alternative options which embrace approaches focusing on and from the global south are also considered.

Looking across the various international youth volunteering programs, it becomes clear that such programs appear to have multiple objectives and that the balance of these objectives may vary from one program to another. Central is the notion of youth empowerment, but the purpose of empowerment may vary.

It is possible to summarise three key strands which seem to intersect within the different programs:

- 1) **To enhance the life chances of youth volunteers** through the pursuit of economic and social policies in respect of social inclusion, employability and career development. Such objectives appear to be universal programme objectives for youth volunteers from the global north. On one hand this reflects the interests of northern, governmental donors but it also embraces perspectives that move towards a broader based participation in international volunteering.
- 2) **To develop a new generation of social actors.** This focuses on the development of a knowledge base through processes of intellectual and experiential learning which translates as global learning and social action, both in the global north and global south. Again this is a universal component in the programmes, but appears as an area where there is significant scope for improvement.
- 3) **To facilitate a meaningful contribution to the lives of people and communities in the global South.** This may take the form of direct development support, from quite practical hands-on community level activity as additional human resources through to the development of young leaders. The development content of the programmes appear as a contentious issue for many of the stakeholders involved.

Given this multiplicity of objectives it is not always clear whether these recent programmes are (or can be) successful in achieving all of the set objectives. Each type of programme is looked at in turn.

Youth exchange programs: the centrality of global learning to equality of personal and community development - from Canada World Youth to VSO Global Xchange

Canada World Youth, formed in 1971, is arguably the inspirational source for youth exchange programs that have emerged over the last twenty years. The model of a group of young Canadians in an exchange program with a similar group from another country has now been running for many years and remains an aspirational “industry-standard” for youth programs.

A program length of six months with three months in each country was initially developed as a “North-South” exchange mode.¹²

Historically, the objectives and content of the program have placed most emphasis on global learning and international understanding, rather than more tangible development outputs. For instance, in its own self-description, CWY appears to stop short of calling itself a development focused organisation:

“Canada World Youth (CWY) is a world leader in developing international educational programs for young people **aged 15 to 35**. A non-profit organization, CWY is dedicated to enriching the lives of young people that have a desire to become informed and active global citizens. CWY programs are designed to help youth experience the world for themselves, learn about other cultures and diverse Canadian communities while developing leadership and communication skills.”¹³

Other organisations have followed a similar path. The VSO Global Xchange program, which ran from 2005-2012, is directly related to the CWY model. FK Norway and Canadian Crossroads International have also developed exchange programs, some of which focus on youth. FK Norway focuses on both North-South and South-South programs.

There is a body of knowledge which reviews these programs.¹⁴ The CWY review in 2006 indicates its global learning objectives were being well met. The impacts on values and attitudes, skills and knowledge were prominent and not just for the volunteer participants but also for host communities. However, the shortfall on local/global action, how the behaviour of participants had not been impacted upon, resulted in a review of the program leading to the more robust Youth Leaders in Action (YLA) program model. But with the YLA program, this can cover South-South programs as well.

“The Youth Leaders in Action programme is a unique CWY initiative funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). It comprises five different components: Youth Exchanges; Inter-Institutional Capacity Building; Sector Projects; the Youth Leadership Initiative (which provides seed grants to youth-led initiatives); and the Learning Forum. The YLA programme focuses on three key sectors: health, environment and gender equality. It aims to contribute to the realisation of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Canada World Youth in association with its partners in Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa and Tanzania runs the exchanges between two countries: participants from South Africa are paired with their counterparts from Mozambique while those from Tanzania are paired with the Kenyans.”¹⁵

VSO began to run a similar model which became Global Xchange¹⁶, starting in 2005 and concluding in 2012 when it was integrated into the new UK ICS program:

¹² The CWY model has groups of young people alongside each other for the whole program. Some models also use the term *reciprocity* to describe a program where young people travel in different directions between countries, but not coming together on the program in the same way as an exchange program. Furthermore, reciprocity can also have a far wider definition and is applied not just to the youth exchange but to a range of components of the program between the two communities.

¹³ CWY website August 2012.

¹⁴ See for example: Canada World Youth (2006), Canada World Youth Impact Assessment: Synthesis Report; FK Norway (2009), Assessment of Results - FK in Nepal, Norway and Ethiopia: Final Report; YOUTH VOLUNTEER EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES IN SOUTHERN AND EASTERN AFRICA: MODELS AND EFFECTS A study conducted by Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA), March 2012.

¹⁵ Vosesa (2012), Executive Summary.

¹⁶ VSO ran this jointly with the British Council. “The Global Xchange programme run in partnership with VSO came to an end on 31 March 2012 on completion of its current funding cycle. Global Xchange volunteers changed many lives, more

“Global Xchange was an innovative exchange scheme for young volunteers in Central and South Asia and the UK. It provided a unique exchange experience to the young volunteers to live and work together in each other’s countries and experience the diverse culture with issues that young people face in their respective communities.”¹⁷

Specifically, the Global Xchange (GX) program is described in a recent review by VSO, looking back over ten years of development and implementation of the program, in the following way:

“The GX mission is to support partners in the UK and across the world to set up international networks of volunteers and community leaders who work, live and learn together. It does this by bringing together young volunteers from the UK and overseas developing countries to live and work together, in cross cultural teams for three months in each country. During the 6 month programme they live as counterpart pairs, with host families and carry out volunteer work which is of value to the host community and in support of one or more of VSO’s 6 development goals. It is an intense experience that involves living and working with diverse volunteers and communities for 6 months.”¹⁸

Arguably, GX learnt carefully from the CWY model and then took it a step further. It had three goals in its final version: the self-development of the volunteer, community development where the volunteers participate, and the global network underpinning an agenda for dialogue and change. In its intent, the program is specifically distinguished from the “majority” of youth volunteer programs with its equal emphasis on the personal development of the volunteer and carrying out work of value to the community.¹⁹ Central to the philosophy of GX is the long-term engagement of young volunteers in their *own* communities with a strong element of reciprocity on the GX journey.

This model is therefore constructed in a subtle way. The volunteering experience is contextualised within a body of reciprocity and exchange which ultimately generates active citizens in their own environments. In consequence, the outcomes are not immediate either in terms of global learning, personal development and development impact. Fortunately, VSO have managed to look back over the ten years to identify what has happened.

The survey of GX participants over a ten-year period demonstrates that “young people can develop the necessary hard and soft skills to improve their access to education and employment” and the data “shows no differences between the impact on UK volunteers and those volunteers from developing countries.”²⁰ These findings, as Gordon (2012) points out, are in some contrast to the CWY Impact Assessment in 2006, where the impact on the career and studies is described as low, although there are differences between the participant countries. This may point to the consequences of differential backgrounds of volunteer participants.

In terms of active citizenship, the 2011 survey generated positive results, with 73% “believing that their experience on the programme directly increased or greatly increased their active involvement in charities and their local community.”²¹ The real significance of the survey, however, is in identifying a sustained long-term commitment to active citizenship – 62% of the program participants continue to volunteer in their home community, with 96% reporting a much greater understanding of other people’s cultures. But the source of this is not just the

than 1500 young volunteers from 37 countries gained a deeper understanding of other cultures and their contributions in 2000 community organisations made an impact across the globe.”

¹⁷ British Council website August 2012.

¹⁸ Gordon (2012), p.5

¹⁹ Ibid, p.6

²⁰ Ibid, p.9. Two-thirds said the program helped them get a job and nearly all stated the program had enabled them to increase skills in communications, team work and leadership.

²¹ Ibid, p.9

volunteering experience alone, but the quality of community engagement experienced through the volunteering process.²²

The 2011 survey concludes that positive outcomes are enhanced by focusing both on the personal development of the volunteer and on the needs of the community where the volunteer is placed. This is important, since it challenges any idea that there is a trade-off between personal development and the contribution to the community. Sadly, however, the survey does not engage with the overseas community impact.

But working with the response of participants from all countries in the program does indicate some factors for success. Most important were the team structure, the experience in a different country and living with people from the host communities; these were followed by the diversity of volunteers' backgrounds, ability to work alongside people from the host communities and the support received for personal and social development. On the downside, the least influential was post-program support, which was identified as an area where the program needed to be strengthened.²³

Weltwärts: Germany 2007 “learning by serving”

The *weltwärts* development volunteers service was launched by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in 2007. The model is described as “learning by serving” with three broad categories of objectives: global learning, partner countries and Germany. Its objectives can be summarised as follows:

“This programme is designed to meet young people’s interest in getting involved in development work, while at the same time making an effective contribution to development in the countries of assignment, and to development information and education in Germany”²⁴

This can be further expanded, with a greater emphasis on outcomes: creating an awareness of the diversity of life and development and an understanding of interdependency of people’s lives in a global context; gaining experience for volunteers to enhance personal and career development and engage in development education on return to Germany; contribute to supporting the projects of Germany’s partner organisations; and undertake activities in Germany that boost development information and education work.²⁵

By the end of 2010, more than 10,000 volunteers had started or completed the program, supported by a BMZ budget of €84 million. The numbers have grown each year, with 2010 double the size of 2008.²⁶ Co-ordinated through BMZ, the delivery relied on a large number of implementing partners, some 241 sending organisations, who were given up to €580 per assignment and also expected to contribute towards the cost of the program by meeting at least 25% of the cost.²⁷ Some 86% of the volunteers were placed for between 10 and 13 months across 15 different sectoral fields. More than 40% went to Latin America, 37% to Africa and 20% to Asia. Despite the scale of the program, the ambitions for a program of 10,000 per annum appeared to have been scaled down, closer to 3,500 per annum.²⁸

²² Ibid, p.11

²³ Ibid, p.14-15

²⁴ Stern et al, (2011) p.2

²⁵ Ibid, p.3

²⁶ The review by Stern et al (2011), from which much of the following data is taken, was completed in October 2011 and focuses on the introductory phase of the program, i.e. up until 2010. There is a report summary and also detailed reports on six in-country case studies, plus a case study on Germany. A short summary of the *weltwärts* program can also be found in Birdwell (2011), pp.63-66

²⁷ Stern et al (2011) point out that not all of the 241 organisations are actively involved.

²⁸ Birdwell (2011), p.63

It is worth asking why this program was developed and implemented. After all, the tradition in state-funded German international volunteering has a strong sense of professional and technical co-operation. For instance, the German Dienste in Übersee (GDS) in the 1960s, when international volunteering as Gillette (1968) has described was a youth program, had a minimum entry age of 25. *Weltwärts* in that sense appears to be going against the general direction of decades of state supported international volunteering in Germany.

The opening foreword to the evaluation report is perhaps revealing in its discussion of both the lack of international volunteering opportunities for German youth and the cost of accessing the ones that did exist:

“Increasing number of young people from Germany who have just left school or completed vocational training would like to volunteer for service in a developing country. Until recently ... the number of enquiries being received from potential volunteers was far higher than the number of opportunities that existed. Furthermore, the opportunities that did exist often involved high costs for the volunteers which made it difficult for many young people, particularly those from lower income families, to sign up.”²⁹

This suggests two components of the model: that the key issue was a matter of demand from volunteers, which means the program was essentially supply driven; and secondly, that access would be focused on those leaving school or who had completed vocational training. The reality on the second point proved somewhat different. Despite the scale of the program, the “volunteers belong to a homogenous social group” with university-level entrance qualifications and coming from “well-off middle-class backgrounds.”³⁰ Participants from a range of socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds “have hardly been reached at all.”³¹ In fact, the program seems to result in “a large majority of volunteers (who) see a possible future career for themselves in development co-operation.”³²

On the other hand the programme can claim some success in addressing the potential participation of young women, who were disadvantaged financially compared to their male counterparts who could previously access international volunteering opportunities if they opted out of military service. More women than men participate in this programme.³³

Focusing on the volunteer journey, one feature of the program concerned fundraising on the part of volunteers. There was no requirement on volunteers to meet the costs of assignments, but there was an expectation that they would raise funds, calculated at up to €150 for their sending agency for every month spent abroad by the volunteer. This was linked to an idea that volunteers would set up support groups prior to the assignment as part of the volunteer journey. However, one third of the volunteers exceeded the maximum in their fundraising efforts; and for most volunteers, the funds “are provided mainly by the volunteers’ parents.”³⁴

In summary, overall some supply-side ambitions were met by offering opportunities to 10,000 young people and a targeted participation by women but they were not met on some of the other criteria.

What can we learn about the impact of the volunteer program in its contributions in the country of placement and back in Germany?

²⁹ Stern et al, p.2

³⁰ Ibid, p.6.

³¹ Stern et al (2011), p.6

³² Ibid, p.6

³³ See Birdwell (2011), p.64. Stern et al (2011) do not provide statistics on the level of women’s participation in the program, but do state the “programme achieves its goal of recruiting young people and especially women...”p.6. Birdwell (2011) quotes a figure of 59% female participation.

³⁴ Ibid, p.5

In terms of the contribution to partners, the BMZ evaluation report concludes that the volunteers “provide important support in day-to-day work.”³⁵ Instances of knowledge and skills transfers are cited such as “in the field of data processing, or by calling into question existing procedures and practices, such as traditional teacher-centred teaching methods in schools and violence against children.”³⁶ But more generally, the nature of the program is perhaps revealed when discussing sustainability since most of the activities are “not designed to be sustainable in any direct way.”³⁷

This suggests the volunteers are more an extra staffing resource in the content of their work and it is useful also to look beyond the placement content. The report considers that the staff members of partner organisations “show positive developments with regard to global learning” and there is some suggestion of a wider social capital benefit from the “intercultural exchange with the *weltwärts* volunteers.” This social capital component is also evident in the way in which the program has improved networking and communication between the key actors (partners, sending organisations and volunteers).³⁸

There do appear to be some limitations in drawing out the contribution of volunteers. Around 30% of the partner organisations were identified as not making the best use of the volunteers, reflecting challenges in the selection of placements and local partners as well as the lack of involvement of local partners in the selection of the volunteers themselves. There is also a strong flavour in the report of the lack of communication to local partners about the program³⁹. This is similar to feedback on the other large-scale programs concerning partner selection, preparation and knowledge. It is unclear in the BMZ report if there is a link here to the lead-in time for the program implementation.

The BMZ report is not the only source of information on the *Weltwärts* programme and a recently published book on the experiences in southern Africa of the South African German Network combines a range of theoretical, reflective and case study data, including personal experiences, which inevitably paint a richer landscape, without it seems challenging the basic findings of the BMZ report. For instance, one of the research studies concludes there are “four key ways in which volunteers were seen to contribute to the development objectives of organisations.”⁴⁰ These amount to new ideas and innovation in strategic planning; human resources; the credibility of hosting a white volunteer; and bringing a fresh pair of eyes to a situation.⁴¹

On return to Germany, volunteers get involved with development issues and over an extended period. However, attribution is a problem, since many volunteers were involved in voluntary work prior to their assignment. While the evaluators conclude engagement was “consolidated”, they also note the majority of the volunteers felt that the training and information on getting involved on their return was not sufficient.⁴² In terms of impact, after sending more than 10,000 volunteers over a three year period, the evaluators conclude:

“Given the fact that the *weltwärts* programme has only been running for a short period, it is not yet possible to judge whether or to what extent this has affected acceptance of the need for development co-operation or helped raise awareness of development issues in Germany.”⁴³

³⁵ Ibid, p.6

³⁶ Ibid, p.6

³⁷ Ibid, p.8

³⁸ Ibid, pp.6-7

³⁹ See also SAGE net (2012), p 59 for a similar conclusion.

⁴⁰ SAGEnet (2012), p.46

⁴¹ Ibid, pp 46-47. Instances where volunteers are used because an organisation cannot afford to hire staff are clearly set out.

⁴² Stern et al, op cit, p.7

⁴³ Ibid, p.8. This tends to pose the question as to when it would be possible to do this.

Interestingly, the evaluation is more certain about the impact on sending organisations, who “have been able to broaden their development information and education activities.”⁴⁴

Finally, it is also worth considering the structure of how the program is administered and implemented. In the broadest terms, the central administrative office was placed in DED, now GIZ, with delivery in the hands of the 241 sending agencies, including DED itself. The report focuses on the balance of responsibility between the central structures and the sending agencies and concludes that a greater delegation of responsibility to sending agencies, which they appear to be seeking, would be possible with a strong quality assurance system, which has not been agreed in the pilot phase. This led to extensive references to quality and quality systems in the section on recommendations and one important recommendation:

“Civil society organisations should be given greater responsibility for implementation. In the medium term the aim should be for the BMZ and the *weltwärts* administrative office to no longer be involved in approving placements, but instead to rely on committed sending organisations whose work meets high quality standards.”⁴⁵

BMZ in accepting the recommendations of the report noted the “frequent misunderstandings” with civil society organisations in the pilot phase.⁴⁶ Commitments were made to strengthen the development profile of the program, strengthen work with returnees, improve the training and mentoring of volunteers and to pursue a jointly designed procedure to “assure quality of program implementation.”⁴⁷ Since the report, a new government-owned organisation, Engagement Global, has taken over the *weltwärts* administrative office program from GIZ while GIZ (formerly DED) is phasing out of the program as a sending agency, leaving the whole program within the German voluntary sector. Since the general approach in Germany has been to integrate more fully the volunteer arm, DED, within the government development program, it is perhaps interesting that *weltwärts* appears to go in the other direction.

International youth programs: from social inclusion to development objectives via development awareness – a case study of the UK

In the UK, the government-funded, NGO-delivered long term volunteer development program had not, in practice, been available to young people (under 25s) for decades as the focus on development outcomes and the requirements of local partners for qualified and skilled contributions had seen the age profiles of volunteers get older.

Opportunities for young people were either located in special schemes, specialist youth agencies or in the private sector. These were not necessarily programs with development objectives at their heart, but often experientially focused with the volunteer at the centre.

With the establishment of DfID in 1997 and a central commitment to poverty elimination, there soon emerged a conscious policy decision that UK youth volunteering internationally was not an effective way to contribute to poverty reduction in developing countries. But this did leave the door open for UK youth to play a role in mobilising around development awareness issues, even if funding was not made available for them to be part of the development program. Furthermore, the emergence of the VSO-British Council Global Xchange model in 2005, as discussed above, emphasised the potential of youth volunteering internationally.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.8

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.10. See also SAGE net (2012) pp131-149 for an interesting discussion on quality and IVS

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.12. “The balance between responsible state action and a civil society operating in accordance with the subsidiarity principle was put to the test time and time again.”

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.12

The renewed interest from VSO in the potential of international youth programs was important in getting the UK government to look again at youth volunteering. Effective lobbying of the new Government Policy White paper on International Development saw the insertion of a small sentence of commitment to youth volunteering, which in turn had to be interpreted alongside existing commitments. This led DfID to develop a policy implementation program along the lines of:

“it is particularly important for individuals who may not normally get the opportunity to benefit from a volunteering experience to have a chance to become involved.”⁴⁸

DfID set about addressing this objective by introducing a fresh budget (£10 million over three years) rather than simply discussing with the volunteer agencies about the use of their current grants.⁴⁹ Following a consultation process, much of the centrally positive experience of youth volunteering, notably the reciprocity and exchange elements, were not part of the desired model. The program was put out to competitive tender and somewhat surprisingly awarded to an NGO consortia outside of the volunteer agencies, led by Christian Aid. This reflected the core purpose of the program which despite the contemporary press releases that emphasised the impact in “poorer countries” had at its core:⁵⁰

“Through a program of volunteering on overseas development projects increase awareness in the UK of global development issues among young adults and their communities.”⁵¹

The centrality of development awareness is reflected in both the identified outputs and program model and how it was implemented. Of the four outputs, two focused on global learning and returned volunteer action; one focused on the supply of young adults; and one focused on the development outputs that “volunteers participate in appropriate community-led development projects.”⁵²

The model involved 1,950 young adults (18-25), with 30% from ethnic minority backgrounds, spending ten weeks in one of six countries and then engaging in a development awareness program. During the program, 17 projects were run in six countries. The lead organisation, Christian Aid, focused on the global learning and development awareness program, leaving BUNAC to undertake the selection process and in-country program delivery through local partners.⁵³

Supply does not seem to have been a problem, with 7,000 applicants. Of the successful applicants, nearly 60% were not in work or full-time education and less than 30% had a degree. Selection was through “an intensive 1.5 hour interview process”⁵⁴ and in-country projects were “a mix of classroom/childcare centre-based activities and manual/construction tasks, which accommodated the variety of skills and abilities of volunteers in any one group.”⁵⁵

There was clearly concern about sending this profile of young people and its utility in development outputs. The early return rate gave some indication of the challenges in behaviour and adaptation:

⁴⁸ DfID Website News, 5 March 2007. There is also some suggestion that DfID interest in a youth program was also one jointly shared and discussed with other European governments, notably the German government.

⁴⁹ The original model had £10 million for 2500 places, or £4,000 per head. The subsequent ICS program was set at closer to £7,000 per head.

⁵⁰ DfID Website News, 29 February 2008. The selection of the consortia is also seen as linking to the faith-based agenda of DfID. See Baillie Smith and Laurie (2011).

⁵¹ DFID's Youth Volunteering Programme, 'Platform2' Project Completion Review, p.1 (IOD PARC January 2011).

⁵² DFID's Youth Volunteering Programme, 'Platform2' Project Completion Review, p.v (IOD PARC January 2011).

⁵³ BUNAC is perhaps better known for its role in summer camps and job opportunities. “BUNAC offers a range of exciting summer camp, work abroad and volunteer abroad programmes. BUNAC is the work and travel expert and has been helping young people work and volunteer abroad since 1962. Popular gap year destinations include: USA, Canada, New Zealand, Ghana, Australia, Britain, China, South Africa and many more.” BUNAC website, August 2012.

⁵⁴ DFID's Youth Volunteering Programme, 'Platform2' Project Completion Review, p.5 (IOD PARC January 2011).

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.6

“A total of 166 volunteers returned early – 8.5% of the 1950, failing to meet the target of 7.5% indicated in the logframe. 30.7% of early returns resulted from disciplinary issues, 28.9% on compassionate grounds, 22% who felt they were not coping and the remainder (16.9%) on health grounds.”⁵⁶

The issue of behaviour is a strong feature of the evaluation report, balancing the scope of giving young people the chance to experience a new environment with a level of independence with the need to manage the risk of personal safety that was involved. One important factor concerned the low expectations of the program implementers of what the young volunteers could achieve in placement, which resulted in a level of boredom and high levels of downtime:

“... ensuring volunteers were productively engaged with meaningful work was a key factor in reducing risky or poor behaviour resulting from boredom. In the early stages of Platform2, the amount of work that each group could achieve over a 10 week period was somewhat underestimated.”⁵⁷

The initial underestimating of the potential of young adults by consortia members was mirrored in the funders’ view that the “small building projects were not the most effective ‘development’ outputs.”⁵⁸ Interestingly, the evaluators addressed this head-on:

“Given the scale of the inputs and the capacity of the volunteers involved, the ‘development’ outcomes of these projects have been both appropriate and meaningful at community level. In-country evaluations have shown some excellent early results, revealing significant qualitative changes in the communities, including increased local motivation for community development and higher aspirations of the youth.”⁵⁹

Significant sections of the evaluation report focus on risk management. It was this issue that had seen the relatively early withdrawal of Islamic Relief as the third consortia member, who were apparently seeking a tighter approach to managing risk.⁶⁰

In the event, the evaluators concluded:

“the consortium may have underestimated the challenge posed by the combination of the target demographic with a lack of travel experience and their exposure to heightened risk in unfamiliar surroundings.”⁶¹

Some serious events prompted a review of risk management focused on the adoption of a recently developed industry-wide standard.⁶² And the outcome was a far tighter model on behaviour and discipline, with a ban on alcohol consumption in community environments, reduced “down-time” and greater control over what volunteers did in the “down-time”. Furthermore, the code of conduct was strengthened and implemented with a higher degree of severity – volunteers were brought back despite the financial costs.⁶³

The challenges of the in-country program to some extent dominate the evaluation report, while the central program purpose is development awareness. The Global Learning and engagement programs appear to have worked well enough (given the evaluation is taking place before the program had finished). The Global Learning program is seen to have been very successful once it

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.7

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.6. It is reported that some locally recruited program supervisors found the “target demographic difficult to handle”, p.22

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.8

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.vi

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.18

⁶¹ Ibid, p.20

⁶² This was BS 8848 which specifies operational requirements for organisers of adventurous and educational activities abroad including university and academic fieldwork, gap year experiences, adventure holidays, charity challenges and research expeditions. It was published in April 2007 and updated in January 2009.

⁶³ Ibid, p.20

was fully integrated into the volunteer journey and would have been more effective had it been so from the outset.

While the evaluators concluded that the indicators for volunteer engagement all moved in a positive direction, they concluded:

“Defining ‘effective engagement’ proved a real challenge during Platform2. DFID in particular seemed to ‘change the goalposts’ regarding this objective and how it could be measured. Clarity was needed from the outset regarding the scale of engagement desired and its scope and duration. Measuring changes in development awareness among volunteers’ wider communities proved to be equally difficult for much the same reasons.”⁶⁴

Overall, Platform2 was an innovative program where there was significant learning along the way by the consortia partners. However, it was very cheaply funded and represented a significant risk at country level. It looks to have little going for it as a development program, and no doubt informed DfID’s approach to its next youth program.

As Platform2 came to a close, the new International Citizen Service (ICS) also started from a one-line policy commitment, but on this occasion, DfID handled the matter very differently. From the outset, development was to be central to the program. The UK volunteering agencies network, BVALG, was brought into consultation at the early stage and awarded a grant to run a pilot. The lead-in time, however, was politically driven and changed from a policy commitment to implementation in a matter of months.

However, this was not the whole story. This new program was largely driven by a manifesto commitment from the new government as the international dimension of a domestic program of youth volunteering. Despite a process of consultation, the age range for the 1,000 young adults was 18-22, but supported by an older cohort of 250⁶⁵. Also, the young adults would be on the program for 13 weeks, whilst the older ones could be volunteering for a longer period and often in team leader type roles. There was no core program model other than the time on the scheme, with each of the six consortia partners offering a different model of achieving the development outcome. Recruitment and pre-departure training was centralised (but not selection). Returning volunteers were supposed to engage back in their communities, but there was minimal funding to support it.⁶⁶

The ICS program model might easily be understood as a refined version of Platform2. The shortcomings of the development outputs had been addressed by engaging with the agencies that focused on this area (though not necessarily in youth volunteering). Risk management had been enhanced by a greater emphasis on selection processes and pre-departure arrangements, together with engaging organisations with a track record of volunteer program management. Yet the superficial similarity obscures that the central objective of Platform2, development awareness, was virtually absent from the ICS program model, which was largely focused on in-country activities.

One area of continuity concerned social inclusion. Aspirational targets for racial groups had been prominent in Platform2, but in ICS, profiling extended across gender, race, geography and, most controversially, the financial status of volunteers.

Arguably, means testing became the single most dominating issue in the ICS pilot. Unlike Platform2, the new program did not have the objective of offering places to young people who would not otherwise volunteer, but aimed to ensure that the scheme was only available on a free

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.vii

⁶⁵ At a nominal level of £10 million for 1250 volunteers, ICS had twice the funding allocation of Platform2.

⁶⁶ The new UK government had moved swiftly to reduce funding on development awareness.

basis to individuals with a relatively low household income. ICS volunteers might be expected to contribute up to £2,000 for this experience.⁶⁷

The pilot program ran from March 2011 until August 2012. A mid-term evaluation was undertaken only a few months into the program and the full evaluation has yet to report. Yet the decision was made early for this to be rolled out as a full program lasting a further three and a half years with a budget of around £50 million and a unit cost of £7,000 per volunteer, scaling up to 3,000 volunteers in its final year. On this scale-up, consortia membership began to change with new NGOs joining as well as a youth specialist agency – Raleigh International – and two BVALG members dropping out at different stages. With VSO taking a stronger lead, the proposed program model became more prescriptive, emphasising a program that linked national and international youth volunteers at program level, with youth empowerment as a central objective.

Broadly speaking, the pilot program achieved its numerical targets and will likely share with Platform2 the criticism of DfID for not allowing sufficient lead-in time. A supply-driven model is a feature of both programs, as agencies and partners catch up with the funders' priorities. What are unclear at this stage are the development outcomes, which underpin the legal basis of DfID funding such programs. If, as is quite possible, the program demonstrates most success in mobilising community activity or having outputs in the “marginal” territory of sport and development, this will be challenging to some of the conventional models of what comprises development outcomes.

More clear is how the UK experience of such a new program has impacted on the structural relationships amongst the established volunteer agencies. ICS brought BVALG together to deliver programs, but as a volunteer agency network, it is now essentially defunct. The four UK long-term volunteering agencies all repositioned to a greater or lesser extent as deliverers of ICS in a matter of months and it became the major program for two agencies and a dominant one for the third. The start of ICS marked the end of Global Xchange as a distinct program in VSO, who now manage a significant contract with a range of sub-contractors rather than a grant for consortia members.

South-to-South international youth volunteering: from development outcomes to building regional communities

In contrast to recent UK initiatives, it is possible to start from a different place and address the potential of youth volunteering as a contributor to a wider project. One example of this that has been studied focuses on how the development of a regional identity at grassroots level can be fostered through regional youth exchange programs in southern and eastern Africa that support the development priorities of regional integration initiatives such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community (EAC) and the African Union.

In 2011, Vosesa worked with Canada World Youth (CWY) and the Southern Africa Trust on their models and effects of their youth exchange programs. This section draws upon those findings produced in March 2012.⁶⁸ The study focused on two programs. The CWY Youth Leaders in Action (YLA) program has been described above. The second study was the sayXchange program, developed by the Southern African Trust and implemented by AFS Interculture South Africa “following the xenophobic attacks in South Africa during the first half of 2008.” As Vosesa emphasise:

⁶⁷ The means testing model effectively conflated a charge to volunteers for entering the program and the use of fundraising as an integral part of the volunteer journey. Youth volunteer programs often utilised fundraising prior to placement as a measure of creating commitment as well as contributing to the financial costs of the program, especially the in-country component.

⁶⁸ YOUTH VOLUNTEER EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES IN SOUTHERN AND EASTERN AFRICA: MODELS AND EFFECTS A study conducted by Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA) March 2012.

“the SayXchange youth exchange programme is a home-grown programme developed by Africans for Africans. It is a programme aimed at changing the volunteers’ lives, their families, and communities. The programme utilises a reciprocal volunteering approach in its south-south model of volunteering. The programme runs for five months and involves the placement of volunteers in community-based organisations (CBOs) in the host country. Southern Africa Trust supports the participants through this process.”

What is especially interesting about the Vosesa study is that it compares two different traditions, one derived from the global North and one from the global South, and deserves fuller exposure than this brief review. The impact in terms of the higher-level objectives of the South-to-South programs is clearly stated:

“... regional awareness and the development of a regional identity at grassroots level can be fostered through regional youth exchange programmes that support the development priorities of regional integration initiatives such as SADC, the EAC and the African Union.”⁶⁹

While the two programs have similarities, they also have some differences, particularly in program design and length of placements. These have a bearing on the impacts of the programs. Specifically, the study concluded that in respect of the volunteers, the sayXchange program scored highest on friendships across borders, while YLA scored highest on knowledge and learning. Turning to the impact on host families, which was a common feature of both programs, the study concludes:

“Specifically, the programmes have resulted in friendships across borders, changes in attitudes and values, gaining knowledge and learning and even skills. Perhaps even more important is the appreciation that these exchange programmes have had an impact of rejuvenating the volunteering spirit in these communities.”⁷⁰

The impact on host partner organisations does appear to have shown some differences, which seem to reflect the difference in the program objectives. The YLA program has a high level of alignment between the nature of the work of host partners and the CWY program goal, which concerns environmental issues. The sayXchange program “registers a variety of issues that volunteers and partner organisations work on.” The evaluators conclude “program area alignment between partners is a key variable in explaining the effectiveness impact of such programs.”⁷¹

In terms of how the program could be improved, the findings are in some way quite similar to the evaluations considered earlier: better preparation of host communities and workplace partners, notably having project supervisors with appropriate skills; and greater focus on volunteer motivations on entry to the program and managing their expectations. Perhaps more complex were the observations about power relationships, inequitable resourcing and expectations about behaviour and the shifting of meeting resource demands to partner organisations and host communities.⁷²

In conclusion, the evaluation has a somewhat different note from ones we have previously considered:

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.3

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.5

⁷¹ Ibid, p.5

⁷² Ibid, p.5. “It is inevitable that issues of power relations feature in programmes that seek collaboration between partners from the north and the south. These were manifested to some degree in the CWY programmes in respect of issues of equitable resourcing and expectations of how volunteers should conduct themselves. The risk in southern countries is that the costs of participating in the volunteer exchange programmes may serve to exclude youth who could otherwise benefit enormously from such experience. This makes demands on the partner organisations to find creative solutions to ensure that the programmes can achieve their full potential in resource-constrained communities.”

“Overall, the research results produce new insights in relation to a tension between an old (traditional) order of volunteerism in African communities and the new (modern) emerging forms exemplified by these exchanges. This is specifically due to monetisation or commodification (through stipends) of time. There is definitely an appreciation, even among host families, of new forms of volunteering such as these exchanges, because of reciprocity, mutual benefit, and an appreciation of common humanity. However, further research on these exchanges is required to determine whether the new forms will be fully appreciated for their potential to bring communities together and whether these impacts are likely to be sustained.”⁷³

Review of the case studies

Returning to the key strands outlined prior to the case studies, it is now useful to review some of the important areas that emerge.

Social inclusion: who are the schemes for and who participates?

It is clear from a number of programs that the nature of participants is an important question and that this often embraces an issue of social diversity and inclusion not normally associated with the adult international volunteer programs. *Weltwärts*, Platform2 and ICS all in different ways sought to focus on issues of diversity, as indeed does Global Xchange in respect of the UK volunteers.

The *weltwärts* program sought to address this at two levels. The first concerned providing a program for women to participate, and in this they proved successful. Secondly, the program sought to bring in young Germans who did not have the opportunity to buy such an opportunity and/or who did not have high levels of educational achievement. The evidence suggests this second objective did not work and that the scheme largely engaged more affluent and middle class youngsters.

With the UK programs, while Platform2 consciously attempted to engage young disadvantaged youth through various profiles on Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, the ICS program had profiles across all kinds of demographic characteristics, including gender, ethnicity, geographical location and disability.⁷⁴ Some were met better than others, but minimal lead-in time meant there was little opportunity to plan and construct either a program or recruitment strategy to achieve such a complex arrangement. Indeed, one great surprise was the number of young people who were able to declare a low-income background through the means testing mechanism and so did not need to contribute to the cost of their placement. It is unlikely, however, that a low income for a young person at the point of recruitment for this program would mean they necessarily had low life chances. As with *weltwärts*, many participants came from a high level of educational achievement.

The policy implications are relatively simple to understand, but perhaps harder to implement. If the intention is to source young people from backgrounds where they are not as likely as others to connect to the normal channels of recruitment or respond to the regular selection approaches, then other mechanisms need to be found. This is more than advertising in new places or in new ways, but implementing an effective process of engagement *and* accompaniment at each stage of the program. It will also require significant thought about the nature of placements and how they connect to the skills and attributes of youth volunteers who are being brought into the program.

⁷³ Ibid, p.6

⁷⁴ Platform2 was also seen as building interfaith tolerance post 9/11. See Baillie Smith and Laurie (2011) and Lewis (2006).

However, there are other challenges to the social inclusion model. There is a tension once the intention is made to profile recruitment towards certain groups of young people, since it demands a balance between meeting the criteria of the profile as against meeting the criteria of who would be best placed to contribute to or gain most from the program. Even the better programs struggle to be demand-driven by local communities or partners.⁷⁵ The BMZ review recognised this when noting the significant number of local partners who were essentially disconnected from the process and the 10% of the volunteers who were not really able to contribute effectively. The BMZ recommendation that partners have a greater say over the volunteers whom they recruit seems operationally problematic and may contradict other program objectives.

The exchange programs are also interesting on this point, since the volunteers from the base country may well be selected on a different basis from those in developing countries, who might well be selected on a more careful or strategic basis. The suggestion on the CWY review is that this resulted in differential outcomes for participants on the programs.

But the core question around social inclusion as a model for international youth volunteering concerns the way in which the global South can essentially be the arena for addressing the domestic policy needs of northern governments. As Baillie Smith and Laurie (2011) observed, this “presents an uncomfortable connection with colonial and development histories where the global South is a vehicle for the realisation of UK domestic and other policy needs.”⁷⁶

In this context, the programs that engage in South-to-South volunteering open up a different dynamic, but not necessarily one that would prove to automatically address concerns. Within the Vosesa review, the issue about who might benefit from the program most as against who might contribute most is evident; and furthermore, the issue of power relations between countries and the implications is not simply a North-South issue.

Global learning and youth volunteering

We can see that programs engage in a range of different ways around global learning and emphasise in different ways the significance of awareness raising, learning, social action and active citizenship. It is not an area that is short of varying terminologies and meanings.

What does become clear is that the movement *out* of the community is a critical but insufficient factor. Gordon (2012), for instance, cites the review of the Ghanaian National Volunteer Service in 2008 which concludes that where young people volunteer from their home community or do not stay in the community where they work, the impact in terms of enhanced understanding of development issues or other parts of their country is lost. Some studies looking at socially diverse groups have concluded that simply being away from a home environment is not enough – travel does not always broaden the mind – and demands effective group support and structured learning programs to enable young people to reflect and learn rather than reinforce stereotypes.⁷⁷ The SAGE net study of *Weltwärts* volunteers concluded:

“Although the survey of returned volunteers demonstrates that many returned volunteers were starkly aware of the inequalities that exist within the host countries, there is little evidence that a paradigm shift has occurred in respect of gaining greater insight into the inequalities of international relations and the impact of this on the psyche of Europe and Africa.”⁷⁸

The experience of the CWY program also suggests that what might appear to be a strong program focused on global learning does not always result in the desired level of social engagement. Global

⁷⁵ Compare the practice on long-term adult programs, which are most often matching the volunteers against placement requirements. There is no evidence that this is the same driving force in youth programs.

⁷⁶ Baillie Smith and Laurie (2011), p.553

⁷⁷ Gordon (2012), pp.10-11

⁷⁸ SAGE net (2012), p.56

Xchange also did not place sufficient emphasis on supporting volunteers returning to their own community, while Platform2 had relative success on development awareness at the cost of a doubtful community engagement element during the placement. The ICS pilot suffered from a distinct lack of resources for engagement of returned volunteers, leaving the global learning journey as a matter of potentially large variation between the sending agencies, while *weltwärts* also had strengthening work with returned volunteers as a recommendation.

So while participants on the various programs might cite the experience as important in their learning, there is a fair body of data which suggests insufficient resources and attention allocated to returned volunteers is not uncommon. One question is whether governmental aid departments or international NGOs are really focused in policy terms on spending funds and resources in this way.

Another question concerns the balance within the program objectives. For instance, Smith and Laurie (2011) identify Platform2 as illustrating international volunteering “reimagined in terms of UK perspectives on global citizenship and social inclusion over development impact in the global South.”⁷⁹ And the engagement of that program in citizenship is connected to the British government’s views of active citizenship for British citizens, something that by extension applies to ICS in its connection to the current UK government’s “Big Society” agenda. Is the consequence volunteering programs that operate within the global South without really addressing global learning that benefits the global South?⁸⁰ Furthermore, if the underlying object is to reproduce a fresh generation in the North committed to a progressive global view, are these models of youth volunteering the most appropriate way to do this?

The issue of development and international youth volunteering

This is perhaps the most difficult question for IVCOs to address. Historically, the energy and the lack of inhibitions in young people mean they are seen as beneficial as agents of change, but in an era of arguably greater sensitivity, the same characteristics are also perhaps seen as more of a problem.

The *weltwärts* program is a good starting point since the evaluation report presents a picture of providing additional staffing to local partners without any real mention of capacity building or any wider reflection on the impact for local communities of this intervention in terms of, e.g. labour displacement. While there is some reference to areas where young people do have skills, e.g. information technology, or experience, e.g. from their own educational process, the general picture appears to be one where volunteers do practical work.⁸¹ This is also echoed in the Platform2 evaluation, which virtually went as far as to recommend the “small-building project” model as appropriate, despite the noted misgivings of DfID staff. Elsewhere, Birdwell (2011) argues that service-learning programs alongside “small-scale community development work” is the model “best suited” to the target group and has benefits for communities.

Reading these and other similar reviews, there is just a hint of desperation in identifying a development contribution in the content of the volunteering model, a need to find a way of coming to terms that placing a young person in another country or community should have some demonstrable benefit and indeed at least “do no harm”. There is something which suggests demeaning of young people and what they can contribute in these approaches. Indeed, in the evaluations themselves there is a regular pattern which identifies the under-utilisation of young people and an under-valuing of their contribution in the programs. The evidence of Catch 22 is

⁷⁹ Baillie Smith and Laurie (2011), p.552

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.553. Their discussion about a returned volunteer event in Newcastle, where Platform2 volunteers are reinvented as artists displaying their work supported by cross-sector partnerships, is well worth looking at.

⁸¹ There is a question as to whether this is indeed a valid picture of the program.

essentially more convincing that “meaningful work placements (are) key ingredients to positive volunteer outcomes and the evidence from international volunteering research is particularly strong.”⁸²

Gordon (2012) also delicately takes to task the rather sad conclusion reached by Birdwell (2011) in the proposals to build on the “success” of Platform2 of desirable placements for young people in a “mix of classroom/child centre-based activities and manual construction/construction tasks”, saying:

“Based on 10 years of GX experience ... VSO would **not** recommend that young volunteers work on construction projects. In addition to taking away potential work from community members it is not an effective use of the skills of the volunteers themselves and, furthermore, is not a sustainable way of contributing towards community development.”⁸³

Gordon’s critique, entirely familiar territory to development-led volunteer agencies, also reminds us that the debate on development impact at some point crosses over into the “voluntourism” debate, where the centrality of the volunteer experience has been placed firmly at the centre with limited regard for the impact on communities. More poignantly, this is not the regular terrain of the mainstream development funders, but the commercial sector.

Any discussion on youth volunteering needs to consider the voluntourism debate, which has attracted academic discourse for a number of years as it connects to discussions on “gap year” programs as well as the emergent private sector engagement, broadening into a wider discussion about international volunteering generally.⁸⁴ The essence of the discussion concerns on one hand the predisposition of Generation Y, “recognised as avid consumers and the emergent gap year industry is fast capitalising on providing a range of travel experiences which appeal to this market.”⁸⁵ This new generation, who in this context appear to be a phenomenon of western Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand⁸⁶, can have an “extended adolescence facilitated by longer financial support from their parents”, access to internet travel services, less concern on the immediate decisions impacting on their careers and “heightened awareness of global issues.”⁸⁷

This new generation is linked to voluntourism, where “volunteer tourists undertake holidays in an organised way that involve projects designed to alleviate the material poverty of certain groups.”⁸⁸ The content of voluntouristic models is seen as more critical than the length of the placement:

“Volunteer projects may be short, medium or long in duration and might include, for example, building infrastructure, business development, environmental regeneration, teaching or journalism.”⁸⁹

Despite the use of such a pejorative sounding term, voluntourism is not in itself a bad idea or practice, but it is critiqued on familiar grounds: the volunteers lack skills or experience and/or do not stay long enough to make a difference and that unless they are “carefully managed”, there is a

⁸² Catch 22 (2011), cited by Gordon (2012), p.11

⁸³ Gordon (2012), pp.11-12. Emphasis in the original. It might also do little either to challenge gender stereotyping.

⁸⁴ It is no surprise that the academic world has focused on this. The evidence is on their doorstep: “... those of us who teach geography undergraduates know international volunteering is a popular topic and dissertation projects often allow more wealthy students to follow up gap-year contacts and experiences.” Baillie Smith and Laurie (2011), p.546. Lyons et al (2012) provide a useful overview of the debate.

⁸⁵ Lyons et al (2012), p.367

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.367

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.368, quoting Pearce and Coghlan (2008).

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.367, quoting Wearing (2001). There is also an older voluntourism market linked to those with severance or redundancy payments.

⁸⁹ Lyons et al (2012), p.367

reinforcement of cultural stereotypes as much as a processing of awareness raising and challenging preconceptions.⁹⁰

The more deep-seated critique, which poses sharper challenges to IVCOs, is the way this model is part of a neo-liberal context, where the market drives the participation of volunteers rather than models of social resistance and solidarity. This focuses on the interplay of the centrality of the skill development and career enhancement, the effective restriction of access to privileged elites, which are exposed in the relationships between volunteers and host communities in the form of power relationships, and the growth of these programs as a commodity to be purchased.⁹¹ If IVCOs, whether governmental or NGO focused, are values or policy based, then the neo-liberal market driven approach is not an obvious starting point (unless that is the policy).

What can we learn from the voluntourism discussion? Looking at the supply side, it is clear that there is a growth in demand for international travel and that some kind of “ethical” tourism is an option that some would like to pursue. But the attribution of motivation to a Generation Y model is not unproblematic since it struggles within the perceptions of older generations of the new emerging younger generation, potentially comparing two *ideal-type* models across generations. Such models need to be very careful in avoiding stereotyping young people individually and generationally.

However, there is more to be heard on the program side. The work of Sin (2009) is interesting in identifying a stronger desire to travel over a desire to contribute amongst Singapore “volunteer tourists” where volunteering is a way of gaining cultural capital for themselves.⁹² This sense of self advancement is also picked up by Callanan and Thomas (2005), who link the length of the placement to motivations: volunteer engagement in the shorter-length projects are more strongly connected to self-interest and destinations, while the longer-length projects are more connected to altruism and project focus.⁹³ If the neo-liberal model generates a cohort of the “better off” providing aid to the “worse off”, then this creates an unequal relationship and one where the giver might appear as superior to the receiver, potentially, amongst other things, reinforcing negative stereotypes. Taken a step further, this might be seen as a relief of guilt on the part of the giver, but does not change the reality.⁹⁴ Others argue that social justice is increasingly absent from the cultural capital arising from volunteer tourism.⁹⁵

Finally, is having the volunteer experience as a commodity a problem if it still works? Lyons et al (2012) address, or at least pose, this question in the context of an expectation that the market for volunteer tourism may soon be taken over by the major players in the tourism industry (which may of course result in protests against the state-funded, free-at-the-point-of-access programs). But the conclusion overall is that the research is not there to demonstrate or conclude beyond a fairly limited area. The impact of voluntourism, they conclude, is largely unknown.⁹⁶ However, it does seem clear that the purchase of a commodity of volunteering will generate a different relationship between the volunteer, the sending agency and the host community than has previously operated. And that the new youth volunteer programs, especially where the volunteer contributes directly to the cost of their placement, have the potential to change that outside of the market-based model.

This, in conclusion, poses interesting challenges for IVCOs. On the one hand, it seems possible that they will be drawn increasingly into an engagement with the neoliberal, market based model, with the centrality of the (northern) volunteer as either a supply driven, donor funded participant or a purchaser of an experience they expect, as a consumer, to be delivered; or they will need to address the challenge of unequal power relations between volunteers from different global

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.368

⁹¹ Ibid, p.369

⁹² Sin (2009), quoted in Lyons et al (2012), p.370

⁹³ Callanan and Thomas (2005), quoted in Lyons et al (2012), p.370

⁹⁴ Sin (2009).

⁹⁵ Simpson (2004).

⁹⁶ Lyons et al (2012), pp. 373-374

contexts, the consequent risks of reinforcing rather than challenging stereotypes and the importance of addressing power relationships with host organisations. As Graham et al argue, commenting on the *weltwärts* programme, but clearly with wider application:

“It is critical that international voluntary service be approached as a tool capable of enhancing global social capital and fostering development. For this potential to become a reality, there is need for more favourable conditions which enable host organisations to play a much more strategic and proactive role in the IVS landscape.”⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Graham et al in SAGE net (2012), p. 59

Conclusions and discussion questions

In this final section, some of the key questions are set out that IVCOs might wish to consider:

- 1) Is the rationale for a youth program clear and deliverable? Are the objectives of youth and development programs clearly understood and shared by all parties? Will donors make a long-term commitment to fund youth programs?**

Where IVCOs and donors start from a development oriented agenda, with increasing demands on effectiveness, value for money and outputs, can international youth volunteer programs really deliver against this requirement? If not, then any youth programs are heavily dependent on the “soft power” agendas that may prove unpredictable both in terms of the model and in terms of funding. If the agenda for youth volunteering is based on international understanding and cultural exchanges, what are the prospects for funding in the current global climate?

Ultimately, it is vitally important for IVCOs to fully recognise the nature of the youth programmes they intend to implement and ensure the rationale for the various programme components are appropriately balanced and integrated. The starting point is that even the exchange models are relatively new and there is clear opportunity to build programmes that genuinely engage all stakeholders with recognisable benefits and challenges.

- 2) Is it possible to have a youth program consistent with development objectives?**

There is a real question as to whether there is any substantial evidence to suggest that youth programs are consistent with what might be seen as mainstream development objectives. As Demos have raised:

“Our review of research suggests there is still a significant gap in knowledge about the best way to involve young people without specific skills in broader development related outcomes.”⁹⁸

In consequence, do we need to reflect on how we define *development* and how young people can contribute? Do we need to have a greater consideration of the way young people define those issues as distinct from policy-making forums dominated by older generations?

This demands some radical thinking by IVCOs and perhaps a departure from the inherited orthodoxy. The young people who volunteer across all countries deserve high quality programmes and IVCOs need to engage with the focus of the young generations, where youth volunteering can be seen as a process of defining development, not just an output of an existing paradigm. Underestimating the potential contribution of young people and a lack of engagement and support for local partners, both instanced in some of the programmes studied, are not a strong basis for quality development interventions.

- 3) Does engagement in youth programs impact on organisational reputation for implementing agencies who focus on long term development? Do NGOs run any risk in terms of organisational vulnerability in engaging with youth programs?**

⁹⁸ Birdwell (2011), p.60

If the models are “top-down” driven, then IVCOs may have values-based challenges. Such developments may essentially be a contractual offer that cannot be refused by NGO IVCOs. But for all providers, the emergence and subsequent potential decline of substantial funding for youth programs poses credibility issues in terms of the development impact of such programs or of their volatility in policy and funding support.

Policy changes are themselves always of interest and the models of intervention raise interesting questions for international volunteering agencies and for donors. Arguably, they pose challenges for IVCO agencies in terms of the relationship of youth volunteering to their existing work and in their relationship to donor agencies.

This is a stark question in many ways for INGOs and also government departments. The fear of bad behaviour is one that links back to stereotypical views of young people, but is something that many organisations would not want to be associated with. Reputation is an issue. A more sophisticated variant is that youth programs that do not deliver effective development outcomes will undermine the other work the organisation undertakes in development.

This might prove especially acute where the offer of young volunteers replaces the offer of long term older volunteers, which has in practice been a feature in some contexts.⁹⁹ Fundamentally, any new program that is not a good program will impact on reputation, whomever it involves. The challenge with some of the programs concerns their quality rather than the participants. As Lough (2012) observes:

“The age of volunteers seems to matter slightly, but usually in conjunction with project activities and the duration of service. Young Volunteers were often perceived as more open to change, including changes in ethnocentric attitudes and “assumptions that their way is the best way”. In contrast, older volunteers have likely completed educational degrees, and were often thought to “act more mature”.”¹⁰⁰

There is, however, a bigger question. Smith and Laurie (2011) picked up on the introduction of Platform2 in the UK, arguing that “contemporary international volunteering is producing and being produced through new dynamics between the state, the corporate sector and civil society.”¹⁰¹

This restructuring of the relationships between key development actors, as Georgeou and Engel (2011) note, is part of a wider picture, linking the move in the thinking of the Australian government on social policy away from a rights-based model to one of a performance culture, resulting in a market-driven, competitive tendering approach. Core grants have been replaced by contracts. The impact for NGOs is a rebalancing of power towards the state.¹⁰² Such an approach “promotes disengagement from a rights-based humanitarian understanding of development, a move that is incongruous with the original motivations for establishing volunteer sending programs.”¹⁰³ Or, put another way, the construction of a commodity focused model normally associated with the private sector might also apply to the NGO with a consequent implication for motivation to run the program, or to the state sector, especially with regard to the impact on host communities when the decision to end the program is taken.¹⁰⁴

The reconstruction of relationships between state, NGOs and the private sector is, interestingly, a strong feature of the countries where the large-scale youth programs are being introduced. The

⁹⁹ Lough (2012) in the study of international volunteers in Kenya found “Perceptions about the utility of volunteers for skills differed significantly between shorter-and longer-term volunteers. Nearly 85 per cent of community members interacting with long-term volunteers agreed that volunteers taught new skills, while only 56 per cent of those interacting with short-term volunteers agreed with this statement.” p.2 Differences in partner organisation responses also vary along the lines of short terms volunteers “following their own agenda” and levels of creativity, *ibid* p.5

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.9

¹⁰¹ Baillie Smith and Laurie (2011), p.546

¹⁰² Georgeou and Engel (2011), p.304

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p.305

¹⁰⁴ Lyons et al (2012), p.372

sheer scale of the interventions of government driven programs has structured and influenced not just the shape of the program but also the voluntary infrastructure that delivers it, which impacts beyond youth programs themselves.

Summary

- The 21st century has seen significant developments in international youth volunteering embracing different models.
- Some of these approaches are based on longstanding values-driven models focused on equity, international understanding and cultural exchange, which also embrace a development agenda.
- More recent approaches appear to have been largely donor and supply driven, rather than based on any identifiable demand from the countries where volunteers are to be placed. This is especially the case with the German and UK government initiatives.
- With interest from other agencies, this development is likely to broaden but may not, in all cases, be sustained or long term.
- There are significant challenges ahead which may pose reputational or dependency challenges, especially for NGO providers but in part for statutory providers, and which may contribute to a substantially different understanding of volunteering in the years to come.

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