

IVCO 2018 THEME PAPER

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE FOR WOMEN

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CUSO
INTERNATIONAL
VOLUNTEER,
TIFFANY TONG, IN
THE PHILIPPINES.

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Foreword

This paper has been produced for IVCO 2018, the International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations' Conference. It is one of a series of papers exploring this year's conference theme 'Women and youth: bridging the gap – volunteering for inclusive development'.

A Framing Paper provides an introduction and overview:

- **Inclusive development for women and youth: where are we at?**

Three Theme Papers address specific topics:

1. **Inclusive development policy for women and youth**
2. **Inclusive development practice for women** (this paper)
3. **Inclusive development practice for youth**.

Note on terminology: These papers use the terms volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) and international volunteer cooperation organisations (IVCOs). IVCOs should be understood as a specific group or type of VIO.

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Current evidence on inclusive development practice for gender equality and women

Inclusive development means that marginalised and excluded groups are actively involved in all aspects of development processes. As a ‘pro-poor approach that equally values and incorporates the contributions of all stakeholders – including marginalised groups – in addressing development issues’, inclusive development ‘promotes transparency and accountability, and enhances development cooperation outcomes through collaboration between civil society, governments and private sector actors’ (Oxfam n.d., p.1).

Inclusive development requires commitment to meeting the economic, social and political needs of marginalised and disadvantaged groups, including women’s economic empowerment¹ (WEE). Similarly, gender equality and women’s economic empowerment can be understood as preconditions for inclusive development, involving commitments to poverty reduction and the realisation of fundamental human rights. There have been notable improvements to women’s participation in a number of development initiatives including maternal health and other social programs (OECD 2012). However, women’s economic participation has lagged behind in many regions, limiting their prospects for achieving gender equality and inclusive development targets (UN Women 2015). A gender equality and feminist approach to inclusive development also ensures that all marginalised groups (including LGBTI+² communities, people with disabilities, etc.) are included in the context of gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) initiatives.

This paper explores the opportunities and challenges of promoting gender equality through local, national and international volunteering, and through women’s participation in volunteering for development.

Volunteering for development, specifically in volunteer work related to gender equality and women’s empowerment, can contribute to improving women’s skills, understanding of their rights, and decision-making power. One of the perceived benefits of women volunteers in an international context is the potential for modelling different gender norms, thereby facilitating women’s questioning of their own perceptions of gender equality and consequently challenging preconceived notions of women’s inclusion in development processes (Burns et al. 2015). Case studies and examples provided in this paper demonstrate some of the opportunities for enhancing inclusive development for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

1 There is currently no universally adopted definition of women’s economic empowerment (WEE). The OECD DAC Gender Network defines WEE as women’s capacity ‘to contribute to and benefit from economic activities on terms which recognise the value of their contribution, respect their dignity, and make it possible for them to negotiate a fairer distribution of returns’ (OECD 2011, p.1) and the UN High Level Panel on WEE uses the following definition: ‘women’s ability to succeed and advance economically and their power to make and act on economic decisions’ (UNHLP 2016, p.1).

2 LGBTI+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, plus (queer, two-spirited, and other identities).

Evidence from broader studies on gender and development can also inform our analysis of the risks, challenges, and unintended negative consequences of women's empowerment initiatives. Challenges to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment (both for women community members and for women volunteers) include the gendered division of labour, the disproportionate unpaid care work that women perform, and the impact of this existing workload on women's ability to participate in volunteerism for development. The paper therefore explores a range of opportunities, constraints, and questions for consideration relating to gender equality and women's inclusion in volunteering for development.

The significance of gender equality and women's empowerment to inclusive development

Gender equality is a catalyst of sustainable and inclusive development. Specifically, the promotion of gender equality and women's economic empowerment is key to strategies for building prosperous societies and to economic growth (OECD 2016). For a very detailed analysis of the importance of women's economic empowerment to inclusive development, see CESO (2013). Evidence of the social and economic value of women's economic empowerment and gender equality can be found in indicators of per capita GDP, workforce participation rates, income generation, agricultural outputs, food security, and social gains for women, their children and their communities. A recent World Bank report estimates that closing the wealth gap between women and men would generate \$160 trillion in additional human capital wealth (Wodon and de la Briere 2018).

Facilitating gender equality and women's economic empowerment means that a range of strategies are required to dismantle the structural barriers to equality, such as discriminatory practices and laws, and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality (Oxfam Canada and IDRC 2018). Systemic and structural change requires focusing on women's fundamental human rights, their dignity and equality of opportunity. Women's own agency is critically important – i.e. building the capacity of women to use their own voices to demand change and to achieve their own empowerment and inclusive development. A diverse set of strategies is therefore required to ensure gender equality and women's participation in development activities.

Volunteering for development can facilitate these opportunities. Diverse volunteerism models offer unique possibilities for involving women and/or promoting gender equality for inclusive development. However, several limitations or challenges must be kept in mind to reduce the negative impacts and additional burdens (e.g. unpaid care work) disproportionately shouldered by women around the world (UNDP 2018).

How volunteers contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment

Volunteerism for gender equality and women's empowerment supports a large number of inclusive development initiatives. It is worth highlighting, also, the strong representation of women volunteers as a percentage of the volunteering for development sector and also the contributions of volunteers to gender equality programming.

WUSC and CECI's Uniterra program, for example, reports that approximately 61% (i.e. 945 out of 1561 volunteers in 2015-18) of their international volunteers are women. Of these, close to 20% serve as gender specialists providing gender equality advice or coaching to partner organisations overseas, including women's organisations. All other assignments, be they as a financial advisor or a marketing specialist, have a minimum of one gender equality outcome in their assignment descriptions and work-plans. Similarly, gender is one of CESO's (Canadian Executive Service Organisation) cross-cutting themes, and all activities consider women's economic empowerment and gender-inclusive policies (CESO 2013).

The United Nations Volunteer (UNV) Programme reports that approximately 75 UNV volunteers serve as gender specialists annually (UNV 2017). In 2016, 116 UN Volunteers were working specifically on gender equality assignments or projects (ibid.). In a survey of 2900 UN volunteers, 691 respondents (24%) indicated that their assignments contribute most to SDG 5, 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' (UNV 2018). The mainstreaming of gender in volunteerism programs reinforces the critical role of volunteerism in transforming gender roles, opportunities and outcomes through the work of partners (UNV 2014) – specifically in the fields of protection, empowerment, women's rights advocacy, and community-centred development.

There are several ways that volunteers and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) can support women's empowerment.

- **Partnering with women's organisations.** Women's organisations can include non-profit, for-profit or cooperative organisations that are led or owned by women. A recent survey conducted by the Uniterra program in January 2018 found that 75% of serving volunteers felt that women's organisations were extremely effective partners for the program (WUSC and CECI 2018).
- **Selecting volunteers.** International volunteering, like many social occupations, has a disproportionately high representation of women participants. Elsewhere in this paper we explore how volunteering can provide a path for women who serve as international and local volunteers alike to enter into occupations traditionally held by men.

- **Training volunteers in gender equality.** For organisations that work through skilled volunteers, the role of preparing and supporting those volunteers is vital, although sometimes overlooked. Most VIOs provide some form of gender equality training for volunteers in order to better prepare them to serve as analysts and coaches on gender equality. Increased awareness of sexual harassment and the responsibility to protect volunteers and partners alike from harassment has led many VIOs to develop training and support for volunteers and stakeholders on these issues.
- **Providing ongoing coaching.** As noted above, not all volunteers are experts in gender equality, nor do they need to be. Many VIOs employ gender specialists who develop tools and provide training for volunteers to use on their assignments. A number of VIOs, including Oxfam Quebec and Uniterra, develop specific assignments for gender equality volunteers overseas, who provide explicit coaching to other volunteers in country as well as training to groups of partners.

While VIOs can do a great deal to identify effective strategies for gender equality and women's empowerment, it is, in the end, the work of individual volunteers working on specific initiatives that makes a difference. Several important examples of the valuable contributions of volunteering for inclusive development and gender equality can be found below.

Organisational Capacity Building

- UNV volunteers in Guatemala have built capacity to deal with gender-based violence in various institutions, including police forces.
- In Sri Lanka, the Uniterra Program, led by WUSC and CECI, has mobilised Canadian human resource specialist volunteers to assist private businesses, including large textiles companies and tourism operators, to develop strategies for women's empowerment, including training on dealing with sexual harassment, and mentorship and promotional pathways for women. The goal was to help companies to improve the position of women within their workforces, and to build more inclusive and equitable labour markets for women (WUSC and CECI 2017).
- A team of seven volunteers from the Québec Sans Frontières (QSF) program travelled to the rural Volta Region of Ghana for a ten-week immersive program aimed at women's empowerment in the agricultural sector. With the support of Crossroads International, the team worked with local partners to expand women's farming practices and to generate supplemental income. Additional volunteer contributions to women's groups in a neighbouring community included business management, marketing and sales, bookkeeping, group constitutions, gender equity and organic agriculture techniques (Anderson n.d.).

Advocacy and Policy

- In Egypt, UNV worked with national partners and other UN organisations to address female genital mutilation (FGM) and promote FGM-free villages, where national UNV volunteers raised awareness and advocated against social pressure on young girls and women (UNV 2017, p. 35).
- In the Asia and the Pacific region, UNV volunteers contributed to a multi-agency regional programme working with boys and men to prevent gender-based violence (UNV 2010, pp. 8-9).
- In Mongolia, Uniterra volunteers have designed and delivered training programs to raise awareness of gender violence, including sexual harassment, victim blaming and gender stereotypes. The programs have been translated into Mongolian and successfully disseminated to various local actors, including private textiles companies, colleges and police units.
- In Nepal, Canadians volunteering with Uniterra have trained journalists and social activists to increase gender awareness and to reflect on the role of the media in changing perceptions. The program also explored the role of investigative journalism in enhancing female representation in the tourism sector.

Promoting Knowledge and Learning

- UN Women harnessed the energy and commitment of 25 online volunteers to help launch the Knowledge Gateway for Women's Economic Empowerment, <http://www.empowerwomen.org>, an innovative online platform that provides women and girls with knowledge sharing and learning opportunities to help them take charge of their economic future (UNV 2016).
- A UNV online volunteer is developing a data collection app, web-based database and interface for results management for the Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction Project. The project reaches over 800,000 households across 23 towns in Bangladesh, and is led by extremely poor women who identify the most important needs in their communities and use grants to create positive change. The data coming from these women will be uploaded to an online database in real-time and allow the monitoring of the project's progress (UNV 2016).

These examples highlight the valuable contributions of volunteers for inclusive growth, gender equality and women's empowerment. Volunteering for development offers a way of empowering both women volunteers and the women and men with whom they partner. It

allows them to show what they are capable of, while acquiring new skills and capacities. International, national and local volunteering also enables women to access sectors traditionally dominated by men, and to take on new roles as leaders and managers. Women volunteers can serve as role models, and inspire others to follow in their footsteps (UNV 2016).

The examples provided above of local, national, South-South, North-South and e-volunteering demonstrate opportunities for the promotion of gender equality for inclusive development. There are many aspects of volunteering for development that contribute to capacity building, empowerment and participatory development. However, structural inequality and discriminatory practices remain important barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment. As such, key questions remain for improving our understanding of the role and contributions of volunteering for development.

Recognising Risks of Women's Participation in Volunteering Programs

As noted earlier in this paper, there are several challenges or risks to women's participation in volunteering for development. In this section, we highlight some considerations for future research and analysis with consideration of risks borne by international volunteers, risks borne by local volunteers, and risks borne by local partners or beneficiaries of volunteer work.

One of the most significant risks for women's participation in international volunteer programs is the already high rate of unpaid care for which women bear the largest burden (Ferrant et al. 2014). Keeping in mind the gender division of labour and the significant demands on women's time, it is important to consider the potential impacts of additional volunteering contributions. Efforts to provide for childcare or other care support to allow women to engage in volunteering efforts in lieu of other unpaid care work might offer incentives for women's increased participation, particularly in volunteering for development initiatives that can build skills, networks and empowerment of women. It is worth noting that many, though not all, international volunteer cooperation agencies provide support for dependants to travel with volunteers on overseas assignments, with allowances for childcare or schooling.

International volunteer cooperation organisations (IVCOs) involving and supporting women volunteers in international development activities must be aware of the safety and security-related issues women can face, including the risks of women travelling alone (World Bank 2010) or other needs specific to gender norms in the communities where they work (Wemlinger and Berlan 2015). This need to offer protection and safety from harassment and abuse encompasses international volunteers, local volunteers and partners, and beneficiaries and community members. Recognising and responding to

the responsibility of IVCOs to provide an environment free from harassment and sexual violence is one of the most pressing issues currently faced by the sector.

Other barriers to participation in local volunteer work that women may face include lower levels of literacy, inability to pay for transport, limited access to communications technology (such as phones), and lack of support from male members of the family to engage in work outside the home (Wemlinger and Berlan 2015).

Research has also documented the potential risk of violence faced by women engaged in gender equality and women's economic empowerment work (Jatfors 2017). International development interventions targeting women's empowerment and gender equality can have unintended negative outcomes, such as increasing levels of violence toward women or generating higher workloads for women (Eves and Crawford 2014), particularly when other responsibilities are not reduced or conflicts within families arise over appropriate roles for women (IWDA 2016; Oxfam 2017). These studies suggest that barriers can be overcome, and the potential for violence reduced, through educational campaigns (particularly for men and boys) on the value of women's empowerment and gender equality.

International volunteers might also pose challenges to sustainable gender equality efforts and create new forms of tension, conflict or even violence by promoting values or social norms that are not widely accepted in the volunteer-receiving countries. Volunteers from the Global North may see themselves as role models, mentors and advocates of women's rights on behalf of local women. International volunteers may then encourage behaviour or practices that are accepted or tolerated for foreigners but not considered appropriate for local women. Encouraging local women to stand up to the boss or male authority figures might seem like a realistic option for privileged international volunteers, but may be entirely unrealistic for local women who may suffer consequences of these actions after the international volunteer leaves (Tiessen 2018).

Women international volunteers are often permitted to transgress gender norms in host societies since they are seen as foreigners and often as 'de facto men', accorded similar rights and privileges to men in host communities because of their (real or perceived) status as foreign, educated, privileged, white and/or wealthy. International volunteers need to consider the consequences of their mentorship roles and the implications of their empowerment efforts in the face of deeply held cultural norms and/or religious beliefs that may prevent local women from enjoying these same privileges. Working closely with local women's rights organisations to find culturally appropriate strategies to mentor women through volunteering for development programs will help reduce some of the risks associated with the (real or perceived) imposition of Western values or gender norms in international contexts.

The examples noted above highlight some of the risks, challenges or unintended impacts of women's participation in volunteering for development initiatives that must be more carefully documented and examined. Understanding these risks is a first step towards finding effective strategies for inclusive development for gender equality and women's empowerment. To date, much of the reporting on volunteering for gender equality and women's empowerment has highlighted the positive role that the volunteerism sector can play. Examples provided in this paper highlight some of the significant gender equality gains made through volunteering for development including new training opportunities, partnership formation, rights-based education, and expanded development projects that involve women as active agents in their own empowerment strategies. Future reporting would benefit from balanced reflection on the benefits, risks and challenges of volunteering for development by documenting how and to what extent gender equality and women's empowerment are realised through inclusive development efforts.

Questions

1. How can volunteering for development promote gender equality by tackling the root causes of inequality and/or systemic barriers to equality?
2. How can the enforcement of legal protections ensure women's empowerment, and what role can volunteers and local community organisations play in monitoring and evaluating these strategies for inclusive development?
3. How can future research better document the mitigating factors that contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment through volunteering for development, beyond anecdotal evidence?
4. What efforts have been made to mitigate the challenges and risks that women volunteers experience in relation to their workload and/or safety?
5. What more needs to be done to ensure women's already heavy workload is not further increased when involving them in volunteering for development activities?
6. How does an intersectional gender analysis help us better understand the different experiences women volunteers have and the diverse contributions that volunteering for inclusive development can make? How might socio-economic, cultural or religious barriers prevent some women from participating in volunteering for development programs and deny certain women (and certain men, members of LGBTI+ communities, and/or individuals with disabilities) opportunities to gain valuable skills and work experience to achieve inclusive development?

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