

IVCO 2019 PAPER

Measuring the collective impact of Forum members & associate members

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Abstract

Forum is seeking to measure the collective efforts of Forum members and associate members (hereafter Forum members) through an annual survey. In 2017, the Forum Board of Directors commissioned the Forum Research, Practice, Policy and Learning Group (Forum RPPL Group) with the creation of a minimum set of measurement data across Forum members. The outcome of this process will be presented at IVCO¹ 2019. As a starting point, the data focus primarily on measuring what Forum members do and how they operate (e.g. how many volunteers are supported and where they are based) with some consideration of outcomes. Over the coming years, it is intended the measurement data will increase in complexity to address the collective impact of volunteering for development on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This paper is intended to enable IVCO participants and Forum members to understand the reasoning and work that has led to the current situation. It will outline the historical context which has led to the current position. It will address both the desire of IVCOs, through the Forum network, to understand and learn from the scale and nature of their collective work and to address what that contributes to development. It also considers the important motivations that resulted in a commitment to generate a collective data set and the challenges faced by IVCOs and Forum in enabling this to happen. The paper traces the different debates on measurement within Forum; how these were resolved within the network; and the challenges the work has involved and may face in the future. It identifies key questions on the future development of the work to inform discussion at IVCO 2019.

¹ IVCO is the Forum acronym for international volunteer cooperation organisations. Here the term refers to the conference to be held in Kigali, Rwanda in October 2019.

Introduction

IVCOs need to measure their impact – both for ‘proving’ themselves (notably to funders and the general public) and also for ‘improving’ purposes, i.e. reflecting on their work and learning how to do better. At the same time, IVCOs note that their work, rooted as it is in interpersonal relationships, is very individualised, context-dependent and longterm. All these characteristics make it hard to measure (Chowns and Rath 2017, p 5).

The quotation from Chowns and Rath from [IVCO 2017 Sub-Theme Paper – Measurement](#) neatly encapsulates a key dilemma faced by individual IVCOs: trying to understand and demonstrate in overall terms what the work contributes, as against the individualistic content of volunteer activity, has been a strong underlying issue for IVCOs for at least the past 20 years. An individual IVCO may find this challenging, but at least within a single organisation there will likely be a shared understanding of what it does and what it is trying to achieve. This in turn provides a basis to explore what it contributes. By contrast in a network of such organisations, as Forum has been for more than 50 years, no such shared assumptions about what Forum members do or seek to achieve can be taken for granted.²

² One dimension is the potential distinction between the impact of volunteering and the impact of IVCOs that may have a varied range of activities.

The journey: what do we measure and how do we do it together?

When Forum grew from a European to a global network in 2000, it did so initially as a virtual organisation where the sharing of information was its key role. While at one time the activities and approaches of IVCOs had been broadly similar, this was ceasing to be the case. German and Baker (2006) cited a range of external pressures that IVCOs faced, including the Paris Declaration of 2005, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and tighter donor accountability. 'As these rapid changes in the global environment impact on bilateral aid programmes and the international development context, International Volunteer Co-operation Organisations (IVCOs) are having to adapt' (German and Baker 2006, p. 3).

How IVCOs were adapting and changing was identified in their five-year survey:

In the past, IVCOs typically focused on volunteer sending. Today however this mould has been broken and IVCOs are now engaging in a wide range of activities including advocacy, public engagement, focusing on South-South co-operation and a range of short and long-term volunteer placements. This evolution can, in part, be put down to IVCOs ability to respond to changes in donor practice and in the wider political environment (Ibid, p. 4).

This was a period when Forum provided networking opportunities to understand what members were doing and to think through how the added value of volunteering could be recognised and measured. This worked in parallel: while innovative (to the IVCO sector) approaches such as social capital were explored as a basis for addressing the distinctive contribution of volunteers, regular surveys of members' activities were undertaken and shared. At one IVCO conference, part of the proceedings were used as a participatory exercise for Forum members to develop a collective understanding of their work. This sharing brought out the different roles of volunteers – especially in relation to service delivery and capacity building – and variations in the practices of IVCOs. The MDGs and donor pressures were focusing IVCO attention on impact, but the diversity of organisational practice was arguably only now becoming understood.

In addressing impact, it was not just the lack of solid data but the available tools to measure it that was a challenge. Under the leadership of the United Nations Volunteer programme (UNV), a group of Forum members worked on the development of an impact

assessment approach³, while an extensive mapping of IVCOs (both Forum and non-Forum members) took place in 2009, generating what was essentially a directory.⁴ This was building a picture of the sector, who we were, what we did and where we did it.

While individual Forum members were commissioning evaluations – or had evaluations commissioned about them – Forum acted to share this information but did not have the resources to commission a more collective approach.⁵ At best, measurement of the collective contribution would be limited to desk-based collation of individual agencies' work – which is where the discussion paper model was of use – but usually it was about sharing the work of different IVCOs.

Individual IVCOs had some success in measuring volunteer experiences and pathways, and this continued throughout the period covered by this paper. Volunteer motivation has been a longstanding area of interest (e.g. Clark and Lewis 2017; Meneghini 2016; Okabe et al. 2019; Tiessen 2012; Unstead-Joss 2008); the development of social skills has been shown as one of the promising outcomes for volunteers (e.g. Cook and Jackson 2006; Kelly and Case 2007; Jones 2005; Lough 2011; Machin 2008; Onuki 2018; Yashima 2010); and post assignment activity such as public engagement has been regularly considered at organisational and program level (e.g. Allum 2008; Jackson et al. 2005; Kelly and Case 2007; Volunteering Matters et al. 2016; Espe 2018; Lough and McBride 2014; Lough et al. 2014; King, 2018).

The measurement of contribution as an in-country development outcome was elusive. IVCO discussions started to focus on the potential of the soon to be developed SDGs, as well as trying to identify different approaches to measuring development contributions. A small-scale research project was commissioned to explore the views of partner organisations on the impact of volunteering as a country-based study, rather than an organisational one (Lough 2012). Another research project commissioned by Singapore International Foundation (SIF) examined SDG 17 – partnerships for the Goals – as an outcome (Lough 2016). Models of potential ways of measuring, some highly innovative, were presented at IVCO conferences (Buckles and Chevalier 2012; Haddock and Devereaux 2015). An exploration of how IVCOs were approaching measurement was also undertaken (Allum 2016).

³ UNV (2011). This took many years to complete and what had initially been a collaborative approach gradually became more focused on the UNV programme. The outcome also referenced the term 'contribution' rather than 'impact' which was not seen as demonstrable.

⁴ Wintle (2009) echoing the work of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in 1966 (see Moyes 1966).

⁵ Devereux (2008) observes that proactive evaluations are the exception rather than the rule. With the exception of the Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) Valuing Volunteering research (VSO 2015) and some of the Norec evaluations (see Allum 2019) donor driven evaluations arguably still dominate.

How to understand and address the distinctive contribution of volunteering for development remained of interest. This discourse moved from an exploration of the application of the theory of social capital into exploring the potential of what became known as the ‘relational approach’ in VSO’s [Valuing Volunteering The Role of Volunteering in Sustainable Development](#) research (VSO 2015). Drawing on realist evaluation and grounded theory, a mixed methodological approach was used to complement the survey methodology (Clark and Lewis 2017).

Collective measurement, the SDGs and the contribution of volunteering

Despite this progress, the question of how these ideas would be translated into a **collective** measurement of what volunteers contributed had not been concluded. How could the activity of volunteering be linked to the SDGs? How could Forum talk of the overall impact of its members or of the work of volunteering for development/SDGs as a whole? Two drivers would potentially take this out of the impasse of several years: the SDG model itself; and the opportunity it presented for IVCOs, through Forum, to engage in ensuring that the contribution of volunteering would be included.

Volunteering had not featured in the MDG processes and there was a determination among Forum members that this should not recur with the SDGs. UNV had built on the International Year of Volunteering (IYV) by holding an IYV+10 year in 2011 and launching what became a series of the *State of the World’s Volunteerism Reports* (UNV 2011, 2015, 2018). In the build-up to the SDGs, the United Nations (UN)-led consultation process was intended to be more open and accessible than with the MDG process, especially in relation to promoting the participation of civil society organisations. This provided a potential opportunity for Forum as a representative network and for its non-governmental members.

Forum decided this was the moment to engage in promoting the relevance of volunteering in the design and eventual achievement of the new SDGs.⁶ Forum took on the leadership of a broader network of organisations committed to ensuring that the voice of volunteers and volunteering organisations was heard in the SDG process – both in terms of policy commitment and the relationship to the Global Goals, and indicators of success. This group eventually became the [Volunteer Groups Alliance \(VGA\)](#). The idea of collective measurement garnered a lot of support at IVCO 2015

⁶ This represented the first occasion in the era of a global network that Forum had engaged in the arena of policy influencing. UNV had raised the issue for many years as to why Forum only engaged with international volunteering organisations and had pressed Forum to take on a level of leadership in the wider volunteering sector. This received concrete expression at IVCO 2011 when a discussion paper on the SDGs (Devereux and Guse 2012) resulted in UNV presenting this case in a tangible framework. Forum issued a declaration encouraging other volunteer groups to sign up to the SDGs together (thanks to Peter Devereux for this point).

and hence the [Forum Discussion Paper 2015 Documenting the Contribution of Volunteering to the SDGs - The challenges and opportunities of universal SDGs for IVCOs and volunteer groups](#) was produced to support discussion at that Conference.

This opened up the issue of data. The problem of demonstrating the contribution of volunteering *at scale* remained, which made the connection between the emerging indicators to the SDGs difficult to demonstrate. However, some areas of the SDGs, notably the one concerned with partnerships and the one focused on active citizens holding their own governments to account, offered more opportunity.⁷ The role of volunteering as a potentially effective mechanism of delivering the SDGs – either as a catalyst for change at community level or as part of a mobilisation of citizen voices – offered a way of bringing the distinctive contribution of volunteers into sharper view. But to become influential, Forum needed to have some basic information about members which could be presented as a collective statement. This linked back to the survey models of previous years.

The different elements building towards collective measurement were now coming together. At IVCO 2015, data were presented on the level of volunteering for development which, in the view of some, was both incomplete and understated the picture.⁸ Dissatisfied with the available collective data of the work of identified volunteer organisations, Arbeitskreis Lernen und Helfen in Übersee (AKLHUE), in partnership with Unité and Forum, decided to develop a full survey of IVCOs (both Forum members and non-members) to identify basic data about IVCOs and their activities. This was presented at IVCO 2016.⁹ To take a fresh look at measuring IVCOs' contribution to the SDGs, a sub-theme paper was commissioned that would draw together measurement and the VSO relational model, for IVCO 2017.

⁷ It is useful to note that at the same time, Forum was engaged with UNV and the Center for Social Development (CSD) in developing the Global Research Agenda. This identified measurement as a key area for research.

⁸ Personal discussion between Cliff Allum and Hartwig Euler at IVCO 2015, Lima, Peru. Such concerns were also raised in the session discussing the data. The issue of terminology tends to be more about classification than concepts. 'International volunteering for development or IVD', 'volunteering for development or V4D' denote different ways of defining the work of Forum members and other IVCOs.

⁹ Amongst the recommendations were the following: more detailed work to be undertaken in some areas and follow up surveys to be undertaken. See Euler et al. 2016. [Forum Discussion Paper 2016 AKLHUE-Forum Trends Survey: Understanding the Patterns of Volunteering for Development. An Initial Baseline Survey of International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations.](#)

The Forum Measurement Working Sub-Group

At IVCO 2017, there was a Forum RPPL Group day held immediately after the main conference, which considered the outcome of a research project on measurement.¹⁰ It was decided to give priority to measurement as an area of work and the Measurement Working Sub-Group was set up.¹¹

The sub-group met regularly to identify a way in which Forum could generate effective measurement approaches and tools relevant to the work and activities of its members. The Australian Volunteers International (AVI)-supported research had identified unevenness in the data collected by IVCOs, especially in the area of contribution of volunteering to SDG outcomes. But a basic data set documenting what IVCOs did seemed a plausible starting position.

Using the AKLHUE survey as a guide, the Measurement Working Sub-Group developed an initial framework and approach to a survey that could be repeated periodically, potentially annually, to establish data generation of this kind as a routine activity for the Forum. The Measurement Working Sub-Group enlisted the support of a consultant to assist in the development of an online tool that would facilitate members' responses to the questions. When this process was completed the format was piloted amongst a small number of Forum members. It was rolled out in 2019 and the results are currently being collated and analysed before a report is produced for members to consider (Forum forthcoming).

Initially it had been decided to focus on the apparently simple tasks of counting volunteer numbers, characteristics, program duration, directionality and resourcing, but it soon became clear this was far from straightforward. It was also important to establish the

¹⁰ The Forum RPPL Group is one of the Forum working groups, bringing together Forum members with co-opted academics to consider how to take forward Forum's work on measurement. The Group was informed by a paper by Bess Schnioffsky from Australian Volunteers International (AVI) which 'attempted to draw upon the practice of many Forum members to better understand what we do as IVCOs in relation to measuring the contribution of our work towards achieving the SDGs'. See Appendix 1 for the full extract from the RPPL day report and Forum (2017) for the report on the whole event.

¹¹ The group comprised four people. Two were Forum members – Odette McCarthy and Bonnie Learmonth – and two were co-opted Forum RPPL Group members who had worked in this area – Cliff Allum and Peter Devereux.

foundations for developing the model to make the links to SDGs and public engagement, and it was clear from the earlier AVI mapping study that what members offered in these areas was diverse, unclear or not known.¹² In that sense it was important to scope what activities IVCOs were undertaking; it was thus decided to include a range of open-ended questions on key topics.

Challenges in approaching collective measurement

The 2019 survey identified some of the challenges in the survey process.¹³ These highlighted previous experiences concerning the variation in understanding and approaches of Forum members. Clarity of definitions and shared understanding of terminology has been a barrier in the past and remains a challenge for the future. The level of response is relatively small, securing participation has proved difficult and the timing of the survey competes with other organisational and reporting deadlines. The operational side of the survey – accessing and entering data – could also be improved.¹⁴

These challenges are not that different to the ones faced in the AKLHUE survey. In the latter survey there were 25 respondents (23 Forum members as compared with 18 in the recent survey).¹⁵ The divergence in how respondents generate, retain and publish data did not necessarily align with the survey questions.¹⁶ Furthermore, a number of concerns focused on self-reporting, validation and how the data could be treated.¹⁷ Even in the most basic areas (e.g. volunteer numbers and characteristics) there are variations in practice across the membership of Forum.

¹² In 2018 at the European meeting of Forum members, six European based IVCOs presented on how they had attempted to measure their work. In the overall review of the session it stated: 'Big Data remained a challenge. The focus on SDG 4.7 had been a very strong area during the conference but it remained to see if donors would fund volunteering as a way of contributing towards it. The range of contributions had shown that different organisations had different reasons for focusing on measuring outcomes and taking the necessary steps to prepare was an important factor in having valuable results from any evaluations.' See Unité (2018).

¹³ See Forum Basic Data Measurement Survey (forthcoming) for a fuller account.

¹⁴ These are perhaps not unexpected outcomes of the first attempt. Nevertheless, the feedback that nearly 50% of participants found the survey difficult to use is of concern and may lead to a focus of engaging members on how the survey is intended to work.

¹⁵ Euler et al. (2016, p. 34). 'There are also many organisations that are not included in the survey, despite the efforts of the researchers and Forum.' A fuller extract of conclusions and recommendations is contained in Appendix 2. This issue might be solved by allowing individual IVCOs to submit data they have available and for researchers to code and reduce them into categories possible for aggregation. But this would require a level of resourcing not currently available.

¹⁶ 'Also, the way data is generated, retained and published by IVCOs varies and may not easily align with survey questions in all cases' (Ibid, p. 34).

¹⁷ 'With one exception of a clear mistake that would have materially impacted on the results of the survey, the categorisation used by IVCO respondents in their answers has been honoured in all cases, even where it may be inconsistent with the information provided by other respondents. We have attempted to ensure the validity of individual respondent results and they have been faithfully reported, with the one exception above, in the findings of the survey' (Ibid p. 7).

The complexity of counting volunteers

Even what might seem the simplest issue is complex. To count volunteers, the data need to be timebound. Over what period of time will the volunteers be counted? Is it useful to pick a specific date? Some IVCOs do not have the facility to provide snapshot information. IVCOs using online volunteers have people moving in and out of their program all the time. While some IVCOs work only through international volunteers, others also involve national volunteers. Some IVCOs do not use the term 'volunteers'.

Depending on the definitions used, different outcomes will arise. Chowns and Rath (2017) talk of measuring volunteer time since counting volunteers on assignments of varied length is problematic, but this is not a model familiar to – or utilised by – all IVCOs.

The potential and challenge of aggregation in collective measurement

The resolution of data generation across the range of Forum members (some of whom are networks themselves) will continue to be an area for improvement. It is likely that more resources will need to be allocated to ensure a higher degree of shared understanding, definitions and organisational practice. Shared definition of a construct being measured is necessary for an aggregation. Nevertheless, due to the range of program models and operational demands, there will necessarily be a compromise between generating collective data and the cost of doing so.

It is also clear that many respondents are trying to address the areas of public engagement and contribution to the SDGs. Data sets do exist, though how they can be aggregated remains a challenge for the next period. The qualitative survey indicates that IVCOs are engaging with the SDGs in a range of ways and the next steps will need to include a fuller consideration of both the scale and nature of the engagement. However if the intention is to produce a collective measurement of the impact of Forum members, the range of activities of those members poses the question as to what this would look like. If the intention is to focus on volunteer contribution, how does this aggregate using different models?

Assuming that measuring collective impact can be appropriately defined even if restricted to Forum members and associate members, can this be achieved by adding together what individual members are doing or achieving? Or does it demand a common process? This question is addressed in the next section.

The way forward: what can be done?

1. Add what members are doing. Experience so far suggests that the ability of Forum to show at least a connection or focus of the work of members as whole to the SDGs is dependent on members recording data in ways that enable aggregation. This would at least enable Forum to address quantitative aspects by connecting member activity to specific SDGs and qualitatively telling the story in a form of case studies.

To an extent this can sidestep the issue of different models since it is possible to set out, for example, that y number or x% of volunteers contributed to a specific SDG, providing the IVCO can evidence a connection. This looks to be the most likely route for the member survey option. A further step would be to conduct partner organisation satisfaction surveys, compiling stakeholder views of IVCOs' work and its contribution. If members were prepared to engage in such a process, then Forum could collate the outcomes as part of the annual survey.

2. Facilitate collective contribution in national government reports. Another way into this issue is to recognise that the reporting processes on SDGs also take place through national governments. In that sense it is the national government that has the challenge of drawing together how development interventions contribute to the SDG achievement. It is likely that IVCOs would be better placed to locate contributions of volunteering at the level of in-country programs than as part of a global report. But it runs a risk that the contribution of volunteering is submerged within every national government report.

Nevertheless, if this is the desired route, Forum could play an important role in facilitating members to work together on common approaches to reporting through national government submissions.

3. Focus on the distinctive contribution of volunteers, the relational element.

This approach addresses the essential value proposition of IVCOs.

If IVCOs were better able to articulate and measure their value proposition vis-a-vis other development organisations (i.e. measuring at the value of relationships, personal engagement, the process, etc.) then they would be able to document their comparative advantage and complementary necessity in national systems of development cooperation.¹⁸

¹⁸ Thanks for Ben Lough for the encapsulation and development of this point. Personal communication July 2019.

In this perspective, IVCOs arguably focus too exclusively on outcomes/SDGs – isomorphic pressures to conform as ‘just another development organisation’ – which squanders the opportunity to highlight their value proposition and distinctive contributions.

If this ‘opportunity’ was taken, the focus would be on both the quantitative and qualitative measurement of impact as perceived by partner organisations, host communities and home communities. For example, there has been a focus on public engagement for returned volunteers. This could be extended to volunteers during and post assignment, including national volunteers.

The potential of this approach could be to engage in SDGs that relate to holding governments to account for SDG delivery or the contribution of partnerships. To an extent this sits in opposition to the approach that focuses on the outcomes that other development organisations embrace, which arguably obscures the distinctive contribution of volunteering and draws IVCOs into competing with the mainstream deliverers of development aid.

Approaching the distinctive contribution of volunteering may demand that all participating Forum members are prepared to use similar criteria and would require a level of resourcing and investment in research partnerships.

4. Approach measurement of collective impact as a research proposition. Defining what collective measurement might look like is one element. Another is how effective collective measurement would take place, especially when focused on contribution. This issue poses the question of the interface between academic research and IVCOs as practitioners. In 2015, the Global Research Agenda was developed as a joint initiative between UNV, Forum and the Center for Social Development (CSD).¹⁹ This addressed the current state of research in the broad area of volunteering for development and identified measurement as one of the key priority areas. However, it also identified the need for improved theoretical approaches, which by definition enhanced the problem of measurement when focusing on contribution.

The outcome has been a growing informal network of academics connected to IVCO practice which is arguably seeing significant progress in research. An increasing presence at one of the major international research conferences, the International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR), is potentially a significant source of improved and focused academic research. And in recent times, Forum has collaborated with academic researchers who have attempted to go beyond individual IVCOs in their research. One study concerned 46 IVCOs where research was conducted

¹⁹ A fuller account of the Global Research Initiative can be found in Lough et al. (2019).

to capture volunteers' effectiveness in various outcome domains (e.g. transferring skills, developing capacity in the organisation, developing international relationships, performing manual labour) assessed by partner organisations. Inclusive categories for types of volunteers were identified by coding the responses of the participating IVCOs.

However, academic research of this kind needs to be effectively supported by practitioners and have sufficient resources. Networking facilitates different collaborations (sometimes commissioned by individual IVCOs) and opens up opportunities for researchers, but to undertake research at scale and in sufficient depth across a range of IVCOs and their activities, requires funding streams. These are not necessarily available from research funders who may not see volunteering as a priority area for their development portfolios. Furthermore, other challenges for scholar-practitioner collaboration remain such as lack of time, communication barriers and managing different expectations.²⁰

Concluding comments

This paper has attempted to locate the current approach taken by Forum to collective measurement in the pathway followed by the network over the past 20 years. Trying to address the effective contribution of volunteering is not a new issue and has its challenges. However, Forum has arguably never been better placed to address this issue. To do this requires consideration of the interface between what different IVCOs have as their priority; a dialogue with researchers on plausible methodology and the outcomes it will generate; and a realistic assessment of the resources available and the role that IVCOs and Forum will play in assisting them to be secured.²¹

The Measurement Working Sub-Group in the meantime can guide a process of collating the data generated by Forum members and potentially develop a picture of contribution based on reviews of evaluations and surveys, which might also provide data for researchers to use.²² But the scope of what can be done will inevitably be limited by resources of time and funds.

In the next section a number of key questions are posed for Forum members to consider in relation to the extent to which they would like to support such approaches.

²⁰ From the workshop on 'Scholar/practitioner collaboration in research on international volunteering for development (V4D)' organised by Rebecca Tiessen at University of Ottawa, Canada, prior to IVCO 2018. This is developed in Cadesky et al. (forthcoming).

²¹ It should be acknowledged that engagement of IVCOs in collective research does not have a strong history of success, flowing from the UNV assessment project through to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) funded research. Understanding why these attempts have not met with greater engagement on the part of IVCOs needs to be better understood.

²² A desk review (Lough et al. 2013) was undertaken to address the deficiency in research data by collating the internal work undertaken by Forum members. Also see Allum (2019) for an example of a desk study of evaluation reports.

Key questions

- 1.** Is there a shared understanding amongst Forum members in respect of the collective measurement of what Forum members do and what impact they make? Are Forum members measuring inputs (e.g. number of volunteers) as opposed to outcomes (e.g. number of patients treated) or impacts (e.g. increased number of patients benefitting from treatment)?
- 2.** In what ways can Forum better engage with members to enable a shared understanding of the concepts and terminology that are being used in member surveys?
- 3.** Is it possible to have a collective measure of impact by IVCOs or are the program models too diverse? Would it be better to aggregate on the basis of program models?
- 4.** Are Forum members motivated and prepared to engage in common approaches to the measurement of impact or contribution to produce a collective data set? Is there any purpose in generating collective data as a network of IVCOs or is it just nice to have? If collected, what will be done with it?
- 5.** Does Forum have a role in supporting IVCOs working together to report through the national government reports, either on the technical approaches or in advocacy engagement?
- 6.** Does Forum see itself as a working partner for large scale research programs? Do Forum members see value in research across different providers and programs, and not simply remaining at the level of organisational evaluations?

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Appendix 1

Extract from '2017 Forum Research, Practice, Policy & Learning (RPPL) Day Report, October 2017'

Forum Joint Research Project

During 2017, the RPPL group have supported a research project led by Bess Schnioffsky from AVI which has attempted to draw upon the practice of many Forum members to better understand what we do as IVCOs in relation to measuring the contribution of our work towards achieving the SDGs. This initial mapping process was reported to the RPPL Group setting out in summary form the key area in which each organisation measures contribution.

A table summarising each IVCO's current approach was tabled. The RPPL Group recognised that this was a challenging task, but noted that IVCO members primarily focus on:

- 1. Impact of volunteer in-country and home country Australian Business Volunteers (ABV), Australian Volunteers International (AVI), Comhlámh, Crossroads International, Federazione Organismi Cristiani Servizio Internazionale Volontario (FOCSIV), FK Norway, France Volontaires, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), International Service, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Raleigh International, Singapore International Foundation (SIF), Solidarité Union Cooperation (SUCO), Unité, United Nations Volunteer programme (UNV), Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA).**
- 2. Capacity development of the in-country partner organisation (ABV, AVI, Crossroads International, SIF, SUCO, Unité, VSA and WUSC-CECI)**
- 3. Program outputs/outcomes where volunteering is part of the program (GIZ, UNV, VSO).**

One approach is for the IVCOs in each focus area to partner to compare and explore the development of a common approach and tools.

Appendix 2

Extract from ‘Understanding the patterns of volunteering for development. An initial baseline survey of international volunteer cooperation organisations. Statistical overview’ (Euler et al. 2016, pp. 34-35).

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The above survey outcomes indicate the current picture of IVCO led volunteering for development, which is primarily international volunteering funded directly or indirectly from state sources. It embraces a sample of nearly 60,000 volunteers through 25 IVCOs. However, it is recognised there are other forms of volunteering for development and international volunteering that are not included, for example humanitarian relief. There are also many organisations that are not included in the survey, despite the efforts of the researchers and Forum. Also, the way data is generated, retained and published by IVCOs varies and may not easily align with survey questions in all cases. While attempts have been made to identify supporting data from outside the survey, data may exist that we have not been able to include. This means the data should be considered with care and must not be regarded as a comprehensive survey of volunteering for development.

Nevertheless, the survey provides a useful initial baseline as well as a contemporary picture. The key outcomes have been cited previously in section 2, above.

The process of undertaking a survey of IVCOs has indicated some areas where methodology could be usefully improved. These include:

1. A focus on the source of volunteers that is based on wider criteria than self-reported data from the Head Office of IVCOs.
2. Clarity on the distinction between international and national volunteers included in IVCO programs’ reported numbers to provide greater consistency on data generated.
3. Clarity and guidance on the use of the bands used to identify program length, recognising that self-reporting may not always be accurate.
4. Identifying ways in which age bands may be defined to give more precise data.
5. Reduce reliance on self-reporting or have models of triangulation that can validate data generated.
6. A specific model that baselines funding to address the complexity of the costs of volunteer funding.

We recommend that this survey be undertaken at least every five years so that trends can be identified. In terms of comparison, future ‘next-level down’ surveys could be addressed between the major quantitative surveys. Such reviews could address more qualitative aspects, e.g. pre-departure training or post-placement activity. There is also a need for a process to develop a similar baseline that helps triangulate the initial self-reported data with data from other sources, including funders, recipient communities and governments/ institutions, etc.

The results of the survey are compartmentalised, and in reviewing the data, it is recognised some further understanding of the interconnections would be useful. This might be addressed once the issues of main concern are clearly identified. The existing data may have some scope to explore potential correlations between the different aspects explored, e.g. how do age, placement length, gender and country of placement relate to each other, if at all. That is beyond the scope of the current paper but would potentially be a worthwhile exercise that would be enhanced by strengthening comparability and some discussion of how to highlight qualitative issues beyond and behind the quantitative data reflected in the survey at present.

Finally, the authors have not easily managed to make comparisons with other surveys, and indeed, it is beyond the scope of this work. However, we consider it important to consider the comparability, resonance or otherwise between surveys undertaken previously and recommend this as an area for Forum to consider. Such work is not easy but will help provide Forum and its members with important and comparable data for rolling out its Forum Research Strategy.

In summary, we recommend Forum:

- 1.** Reviews the learning on this initial baseline in terms of methodology and approach and considers how to improve the survey model.
- 2.** Extends the survey questions to include intended impact and contribution of volunteer placements that is quantifiable.
- 3.** Repeats this survey every five years, building a long-term comparison of trends but considering a quicker second survey to tweak and consolidate methods and corroborate results.
- 4.** Undertakes qualitative surveys comparing IVCO practices in the following areas:
 - i.** Volunteer preparation and training
 - ii.** Assessing the unit costs of volunteers
 - iii.** The impact and contribution of volunteering
- 5.** Explores the interplay between the different components of volunteering surveyed in this work through further analysis of the statistical data, including models of correlation and regression analysis.
- 6.** Undertakes research to compare these outcomes to past and contemporary surveys.

Appendix 3

Thinking challenge: how do we aggregate contributions of volunteers to the SDGs?

The table below provides two cases of volunteer contributions for SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) which can be measured theoretically across the variables of interests in columns.²³

Which ones are easier, important and effective to measure collectively and aggregate?

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS	INPUTS International volunteers, partners & resources	OUTPUTS Numbers of people served, numbers of goods/ services provided	OUTCOMES Program success as defined by SDGs	IMPACT	DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS MADE	PARTNERSHIPS ESTABLISHED
Community mediation services	2 volunteers 200 hours \$5,000 in costs	800 people served Facilitated 300 mediation cases in 25 communities across 4 developing countries (list)	Peaceful resolution of problem in 250 cases Skills, capacity & confidence of volunteers developed such that they take on new roles Returned volunteers help partners apply for resources & lobby for policy change	83% more people given access to peaceful resolutions of conflict Returned volunteers mobilise \$20,000 in funds Policy change achieved	Building bridges to link diverse stakeholders Monitoring problem-solving performance	With government With non-profit organisations With private business
Advocacy strategies & political engagement training for women	6 volunteers 100 hours \$1,500 in costs	5,000 poor women trained in 50 communities across 7 developing countries (list)	3,000 women reported using a skill learnt in the training Lessons women learned in using skill were shared with others	60% more women engaged in public affairs Policy makers show increased concern for the role of women	Facilitating	With government With non-profit organisations With private business

²³ This is an adaptation of Table 3 in Haddock and Devereux (2015).

Appendix 4

Timeline of some key moments in the Forum pathway on measurement

2000	Forum becomes a virtual organisation and takes on a global role
2000-03	Surveys of Forum member activity
2006	Development Initiatives survey of IVCOs
2009	Forum mapping survey undertaken and presented
2009	Forum Research Working Group formed
2011	UNV publishes assessment methodology
2011	First UNV State of the World's Volunteerism Report
2011	Forum commissions research on stakeholder views of development contribution of volunteers in Kenya – Ben Lough produces paper for IVCO 2012
2012	VCO 2012 has papers presented on impact – Buckles and Chevalier, Devereux and Guse
2013	Kenya research developed into a full paper on valuing volunteering – Lough and Matthew
2015	Tokyo Call to Action
2015	VSO Valuing Volunteering report produced
2015	Formative conference on Global Research Agenda where measurement is prioritised as a research area
2015	Haddock and Devereux present IVCO paper on measurement and the SDGs
2015	Second UNV State of the World's Volunteerism Report
2016	SIF produces research outcomes on added value of volunteers and SDGs
2016	IVCO conference paper on reviewing measurement purpose and practice
2016	Forum-AKLHUE survey undertaken and presented at IVCO
2016	Forum RPPL Group replaces the Research Working Group
2017	IVCO conference paper on measurement
2017	The Forum Measurement Working Sub-Group is set up
2018	Third UNV State of the World's Volunteerism Report
2019	Annual survey of Forum members undertaken and report produced