

FORUM DISCUSSION PAPER 2013: MEASURING AND CONVEYING THE ADDED VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING



Photo courtesy of: Australian Volunteers International (AVI). AVI volunteer and colleagues, Indonesia.

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Foreword

This is the thirteenth in a series of discussion papers produced by the International Forum for Volunteering in Development ('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 2013 is the issue of International Volunteer and Co-operation Organisations (IVCOs) being able to effectively convey the value of international volunteering,

This paper aims to; look beyond traditional technical development approaches; discuss how stakeholders may more effectively measure and convey the intrinsic value of international volunteering; and identify some challenges and learnings 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 for Volunteering in Development 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.

Introduction

The need to document the impact of international volunteering programs has been a concern to International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCOs) for many years. Recently, however, this mandate has reached a critical stage. Core funding to many long-standing IVCOs has been cut in recent years—partly as a consequence of an audit culture tied to development funding, combined with low ability to directly attribute volunteering to development impact (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011; Georgeou & Engel, 2011; Lough & Allum, 2011; Lyons, Hanley, Wearing & Neil, 2012). Based on the core principles of *managing for results* and *mutual accountability* expressed in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Accra Agenda for Action (see OECD, 2008), funders increasingly require that IVCOs concretely demonstrate the impacts of volunteering on development targets. However, because volunteers are only one part of system-wide development interventions, direct attribution to volunteers is challenging (Merkle, 2008; Stern et al., 2012).

In instances where volunteers' measured contributions to development targets are clear, findings may not be provocative enough to entice continued investment from funders or aid agencies. For instance, an IVCO that sends volunteers to rural areas to work as primary school teachers may readily demonstrate that volunteers contribute to universal primary education (Millennium Development Goal 2). However, it may have difficulty articulating why funding international volunteers is a wiser investment than incentivising and supporting local teachers. Without documenting international volunteers' contributions to capacity building and other secondary outcomes, the volunteers' full value is understated. This challenge becomes even more difficult when moving beyond program evaluations to communicate the contribution of international volunteerism to the field of development at large.

In evaluation, outcomes or impacts are particular to an individual program or project and its associated logic model or theory of change. Although discrete examples are abundant (see Devereux & Guse, 2012), analysing international volunteers' contributions to specific MDGs is not highly generalisable in the aggregate because individual IVCOs differ widely in their aims, practices and capacities. Methodologies that combine individual case studies can certainly highlight the overall impact of discrete volunteer programs on a given MDG target; however, they rarely speak to the contributions of international volunteerism *as a theoretical intervention model*. In other words, they fail to explain *why* international volunteerism as a practice is associated with measured increases in areas such as health, education or environmental sustainability. Theoretically, such explanations should transcend individual programs and projects and should apply in principle, irrespective of the specific development goal under observation.

Furthermore, because the priorities of the development landscape are changing, measures of volunteers' contributions should also be adjusted to adapt to these changes. In his remarks to the Global Forum on Development in April 2013, OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría asserted that the post-2015 vision “must look at poverty through a new lens that sees beyond absolute income poverty and consider other dimensions that matter to people. These include the ability to participate in social life, access to justice and community support, and fighting inequality, among others” (Gurría, 2013, para.15). He also highlighted the need to find “new ways to measure well-being and progress”, such as the support of the community, life satisfaction, social inclusion, social capital and social cohesion (Gurría, 2013, para.16). These alternative outcomes may be increasingly important post-2015. For example, social inclusion is reflected as one of the “five big, transformative shifts” identified by the UN High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (United Nations, 2013a, p.7).

With the rapid growth of middle-income countries, the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda also highlighted the importance of South-South development cooperation, including the exchange of volunteers, the sharing of skills and technology, and “peer learning” as a particularly relevant complement to North-South cooperation (United Nations,

2013b, p.16). Effectively conveying the value of international volunteering will require changes in practice, as well as methods to capture North-South and South-South complementarities.

These movements underscore the purpose for evaluating the added value of international volunteerism, which operates on the assumption that “Volunteering for development has the potential of effecting change that goes beyond the generic development outcomes that many international organisations pursue” (Zuurmond, 2012, p.14). Conceptually, international volunteers bring unique and qualitatively different assets to a development initiative. Measuring these complementary benefits in comparison with other development actors supports the notion advanced by the UN Task Team that “the goals and targets of the new development agenda can be met according to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities” (United Nations, 2013b, p.vi).

As a “people-centred” and “relationship-based” development approach (Leigh et al., 2011; Lewis, 2005), prior attempts to measure international volunteers’ contributions against the MDGs have not been highly successful at accurately capturing and conveying its full practical and theoretical value. In addition, key moderating factors that may alter the relationship between volunteerism and development effectiveness (duration of service, degree of immersion, funding available to volunteers, capacity of volunteers, etc.) are rarely measured to understand principles of effective practice across diverse IVCO models.

This study seeks to amplify voices from the Global South to better understand how stakeholders may effectively measure and value international volunteerism. Empirically, understanding the value of international volunteerism is a long road to be travelled, with only a handful of previous studies that can serve as guideposts. This paper collates these previous studies – making a humble contribution towards the ambitious goal of understanding the relationship between international volunteerism and development.

Assessing the Added Value of International Volunteering

International volunteer service is intended to be distinctive from other forms of technical assistance in its means of development cooperation. This difference is reflected in the missions of many longstanding international volunteer service programs. For instance, the goals of Japan’s JICA Volunteer Program are to contribute to the socioeconomic development or reconstruction of developing countries and regions; to strengthen friendship and mutual understanding between developing countries and regions and Japan; and to give back to society the fruits of volunteer-activity experience. Likewise, among the three goals of the US Peace Corps, only one is expressly oriented towards technical assistance.

What many people fail to appreciate, however, is that goals to promote cross-cultural understanding also have substantive value in development interventions. As some scholars argue, “International volunteering can provide tangible contributions to development in the form of skills and other resource transfers, but also, perhaps more importantly, it can promote international understanding and solidarity” (Lewis, 2005, p.16). Research aiming to capture various country perspectives on the future priorities for the post-2015 development agenda found that “In Serbia 1500 respondents cited the need for a culture of inclusiveness, tolerance and responsibility as their fourth most important development objective” (Lucarelli, 2013, p.45). Outcomes such as tolerance, solidarity and understanding are viewed as particularly important to development in fragmented societies and societies with a history of conflict and violence.

While “managing for results” is based on principles of aid effectiveness championed in the Paris Declaration, an unintended consequence may be the undervaluing of international volunteerism as an alternative to technical and market-based global development (Devereux, 2010). Current donor priorities that focus primarily on measuring progress toward the MDGs and other socioeconomic development outcomes have not been able to adequately capture the full value of international volunteer service. Although outcome measures often aim to reflect “hard” development contributions defined by donors, they also need to measure the “soft” contributions highlighted by communities that receive volunteers (Perold et al., 2011; Zuurmond, 2012). Refocusing priorities would help to balance the principles of results management with the principles of community ownership and mutual accountability, as championed by Accra and the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2008; Wood et al., 2011). In addition, recipient-led aid plans mutually negotiated with communities would likely be less reductionist than MDGs (Melamed & Sumner, 2011), and more likely to capture a balanced sense of development as articulated through participatory poverty assessments (Wathne & Hedger, 2010).

The balanced contributions of international volunteering may be particularly useful as stakeholders consider the post-2015 development agenda and the “growing number of development stakeholders [that] recognise the need to put human well-being at the very heart of measuring progress and development” (Devereux & Guse, 2012, p.7). This new agenda emphasises a greater esteem for people-centred outcomes and social progress, which cultivate “a new spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual accountability ... based on a common understanding of our shared humanity” (United Nations, 2013a, p.27). These principles also recognise that community participation and ownership are critical in achieving development outcomes and human well-being (Frecheville & Wheeler, 2013; Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi, 2009).

Methods

This paper triangulates multiple research methods, including qualitative and quantitative analysis of primary and secondary data. It first reviews previous research studies that assessed community and partner program perspectives as their primary methodology. Findings from the previous research are then compared with the qualitative analysis of primary data from field research conducted in Peru and Kenya with partner program staff and other intended beneficiaries of IVCO projects and programs. The overarching aim is to elucidate the contributions, both intended and unintended, that can be directly attributed to international volunteer engagement.

Literature Review

In order to better understand the value of international volunteerism from the perspective of the intended recipients of service, the researchers reviewed previous studies that were conducted explicitly with host communities and volunteer-hosting organisations. In total, 19 published studies were identified that used primary field research to assess the contributions of international volunteers from the perspective of intended beneficiaries (see Appendix A). Thirteen prominent outcomes were identified. These outcomes were then tallied by category to determine the relative frequency of volunteers’ perceived contributions.

Field Research

Three researchers spent one month each in Kenya and Peru interviewing stakeholders. Using semi-structured interview guides, researchers asked community and staff members of local partner organisations to reflect on the contributions of international volunteers to their community or organisation. The researchers were supported by three local research assistants,

who participated in each interview and translated when needed. English and Kiswahili were spoken in Kenya, and Spanish and Quechua were spoken in Peru.

A total of 36 organisations participated in the study, some of which requested to remain anonymous. Of the 10 participating IVCOs with volunteers in Kenya, the majority are members of Forum and include major secular organisations based in Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, the UK and the US. In addition, 15 partner organisations in Kenya participated in the study. The participating IVCO in Peru facilitates only short-term placements (four months or less) and is not a member of Forum. In total, 10 partner organisations in Peru participated in the study.

In order to triangulate findings and methods, meetings with stakeholders included a combination of structured interviews and participatory workshops.

Research Sites

Peru

The study in Peru took place across five placement sites in a low-income settlement, Villa El Salvador, located on an arid plain in the outskirts of Lima, Peru. Villa El Salvador was originally settled in the early 1970s by 3,000 squatter families evicted from state-owned land. With substantial rural migration to the city, Villa El Salvador has swelled since its founding, today boasting a population of approximately 400,000 (VESM, 2009).

The community partners with a large US-based IVCO that has placed non-expert, short-term volunteers in host organisations in Villa for more than 15 years. Volunteer placements average four weeks duration and range from one to 12 weeks. The majority of volunteers are 25 years or younger (70%), female (79%), and students (40%). Between 1999 and 2012, over 1,800 volunteers served in Villa through this organisation. Volunteers serve in several community-based social service agencies, for an average of 20 hours per week.

The sending organisation tries to match the skills and interest of the volunteers with the needs of the partner organisation. However, because the sending organisation sets no specific eligibility requirements for education, language abilities or occupational experience, matching the supply of volunteers with the requests of partner organisations can be difficult.

Kenya

The study in Kenya is difficult to contextualise because multiple and varied locations were studied. The research occurred at 12 different placement sites across three locations in Kenya: Nairobi (population greater than three million), Kisumu (population around 400,000), and Lari (rural constituency; population around 120,000). Most of the participating IVCOs with volunteers in Kenya have been sending volunteers for more than 20 years. About half of the partner organisations participating in the study host volunteers serving four months or less, while the remaining half host volunteers serving for one year or more. Not all volunteer positions are “demand-based”; however, the sending organisations seek to match the skills and interests of volunteers with the specific needs of partner organisations.

Although the communities hosting volunteers were diverse, participants’ comments clearly reflected the socio-historical vestiges of colonialism. Kenya was a British colony from 1895 to 1963, which began a long process of racial and class divisions within the country (Kyle, 1997). Although Kenya has been an independent republic since 1964, the historic construction of racial, ethnic and class identities in Kenya continues to find many parallels in contemporary global North-South volunteer relations.

Data Collection

Staff member interviews

Interviews with participating organisations took place with staff members who could best speak to the potential influence of international volunteers. Between one to four staff member interviews were completed at each of the 17 placement sites (12 in Kenya and five in Peru), and each lasted an average of 45 minutes to one hour. In total, researchers conducted 38 staff member interviews (24 in Kenya and 14 in Peru) (see Table 1). The age of participating staff members ranged from 20 to 72 years, with an average age of 41 years.

Table 1: Demographic statistics of staff member interviews (n = 38)

	Kenya (n = 24)		Peru (n = 14)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Volunteer placement duration				
Short-term	13	54%	14	100%
Long-term	11	46%	0	0%
Gender				
Male	13	54%	1	93%
Female	11	46%	13	7%

Participatory workshops

Workshops with community members were also conducted to help understand the anticipated and unanticipated outcomes of international volunteers from the perspective of intended beneficiaries.

The workshops were conducted at 12 different placement sites (seven in Kenya and five in Peru). The format of these workshops largely followed the UNV Evaluation Handbook methodology (UNV, 2011). Participating community members were chosen by the hosting organisation based on the frequency of their interactions with international volunteers. In cases where other expats worked in a hosting organisation or with community members, researchers were careful to clarify these relationships in the introduction to the workshops. In only two of the 12 workshops was there some level of initial ambiguity between full time expats and international volunteers.

Local research assistants helped to complete the interviews and co-facilitate the participatory workshops when necessary. Each workshop lasted approximately three to four hours, followed by an interactive lunch discussion. Participating community members also received a short survey at the midpoint of the workshop. In total, researchers heard from 89 community members. The age of participating community members ranged from 18 to 61 years, with an average age of 36 years. Additional demographic characteristics of the community member interviews are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic statistics of community member participants (n = 89)

	Kenya (n = 59)		Peru (n = 30)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Volunteer placement duration				
Short-term	36	61%	30	100%
Long-term	23	39%	0	0%
Gender				
Male	31	52%	11	35%
Female	28	48%	19	65%

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interview guides were developed based on the previous exploratory research studies on the contributions of international volunteers (Appendix A). Draft versions of these instruments were adapted following separate consultation sessions with a handful of staff of volunteer-hosting organisations from Kenya and Peru. Although the interview guides used for each country did not use the same wording or identical questions, they were comparable in their intent to understand the contributions of international volunteers to development and intercultural understanding.

Qualitative Analysis

The aim of the qualitative analysis was to understand the variety of ways that international volunteers contribute to partner organisations and communities.

Two local consultants from each country transcribed and translated digital recordings of all interviews and participatory workshops. Coding of manuscripts was performed using the qualitative analysis software packages *Atlas.ti* and *NVivo*. A coding plan of anticipated codes was initially developed based on the limited number of previous studies on this topic. Although it was intended that the final conceptual schema to emerge from the data would include anticipated as well as unanticipated outcomes, no additional dominant themes emerged beyond the original 13 identified in the previous literature.

Two researchers coded the same data for each country. Each time a specific outcome was mentioned in response to a question on the interview guide, the response was categorically coded and received a value of one. With the coding process, it was possible to generate multiple codes of the same category during a single interview.

To enhance the rigor of qualitative analysis, individual coders triangulated their analysis by comparing concepts, discussed differences to resolve conceptual discrepancies, and revised the coding plan accordingly. Six pairs of codes were renamed and merged based on conceptual similarity, and to maintain consistency with categorisation from the previous literature. The merged categories are indicated in Table 3. To improve consistency, one researcher was designated to review coded data from both countries. In addition, debriefing by a “disinterested peer” took place during data interpretation but not during data analysis (see Barusch, Gringeri & George, 2011). Likewise, member-checking of results was performed by three organisational respondents from Kenya and two organisational respondents from Peru (see Lincoln, 1995).

Quantitative Ranking

After all data were coded, query tools in the analytic software were used to determine the most frequently cited outcomes. In order to compare the frequency of cited outcomes across countries, responses were standardised on a scale of ten. A score of ten was assigned to the most frequently cited outcome within each country. All other categories were ranked proportionally in relation to the highest outcome by country.

Findings

This section describes the findings of the review of the secondary research conducted with host organisations and communities as well as the findings from the primary research in Kenya and Peru.

Previous Studies on the Value of International Volunteers

Review of the previous field studies clearly showed that where measures of development effectiveness focus exclusively on MDG indicators or project performance, they only capture a portion of the theoretical and practical value of international volunteerism to development, as articulated by intended beneficiaries. The majority of the reports reviewed explicitly recommended that future studies take greater pains to capture the subtle and less overt development contributions of volunteers. While some outcomes such as institution-building and capacity development have long gained acceptance as mainstream outcomes of development effectiveness (UNDP, 2001), other outcomes such as innovation, accountability, social inclusion and relational solidarity are still on the fringes.

In the previous studies, the contribution of international volunteers most commonly cited by intended beneficiaries was *capacity building and skills transfers* through interpersonal communication, trainings with staff and community members, and personal example (see Table 3). Reports also mentioned that skills-sharing was mutually beneficial. In fact, volunteers consistently reported that they learned more from the experience than they were likely able to teach. While some volunteers filled gaps in local knowledge using specialist expertise, most skills transfers came in the form of teaching basic skills and promoting general education. Capacity development was found to be particularly helpful in rural areas (see Rehnstrom, 2000). The main concerns cited were cultural insensitivity during trainings, language barriers and attempts to implement “Western” models, practices and values in indigenous contexts.

The next most commonly reported outcomes in the previous field research were the *creativity and new ideas* that volunteers brought to development projects. These often took the form of a particular innovation or suggestion that enhanced the process or product of a development project. As with capacity building, these ideas were not always culturally or situationally appropriate. In some cases, volunteers merely provided *fresh and optimistic perspectives* to otherwise challenging development work. Idea sharing and novel learning were often cited as reciprocal between volunteers and communities. Although these latter outcomes may seem somewhat low in substance compared with hard skills transfers in areas such as health or education, they were frequently reported as a particularly valuable contribution to teams struggling to tackle difficult development challenges.

Instrumental relationships that leveraged resources were the third most frequently reported contribution of volunteers. These relationships were often reported using the terms of “bonding” and “bridging” *social capital* linked to social and economic development. Closely tied to social capital, direct monetary or other tangible *resources* that volunteers brought to the community or organisation were the fourth most commonly reported contribution. Partner organisations also

perceived that volunteers tended to raise the profile of the organisations, increasing the *trust* and *prestige* that other community members or funders had of the local organisation.

Relationship-dependent outcomes including friendship, inspiration and optimism, intercultural understanding, trust, and accountability to local communities also featured in the previous studies. International volunteers also reportedly inspired the participation of local citizens and volunteers, contributing to the growth of civil society. This is a highly relevant outcome considering that a post-2015 target recommended by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons aims to “Increase public participation in political processes and civic engagement at all levels” (United Nations, 2013a, p.31). As international volunteers engage in the efforts of local organisations, they also tend to galvanise interest within the local community about the activities of the partner organisations. Longer-term volunteers living and working in a host community were often seen as building strong rapport with community members and as having more intimate knowledge of local customs and norms.

Table 3 illustrates how frequently each outcome was discussed as a key contribution in the reviewed studies. Each of these outcomes is discussed in more detail in the Findings, below.

*Table 3: Perceptions of the contributions of international volunteers according to previous field studies (n = 19)**

Perceived Volunteer Contribution	Frequency	Percent of total
Capacity building and skills transfers	17	89%
Innovation and ingenuity	14	74%
Social capital (instrumental)	11	58%
Resources	9	47%
Trust	9	47%
UN Millennium Development Goals	9	47%
Civic engagement	8	42%
Prestige and respect	8	42%
Intercultural understanding and diversity	7	37%
Inspiration and optimism	6	32%
Friendship (non-instrumental)	6	32%
Transparency and accountability	3	16%
Human rights awareness	3	16%

* *The frequency of the reported contribution is dependent on the focus of each particular study and therefore should not be interpreted as an absolute measure of its value to partner communities and organisations.*

Because the body of research into the impacts of international volunteering is still relatively under-developed, the studies reviewed in this paper were mainly exploratory—suggesting areas for more in-depth assessment in the future. In addition, many studies countered positive findings by also suggesting potential areas of concern. For instance, a few reports suggested that some international volunteer programs or models are imperialistic, volunteer-centred, neo-colonial, or otherwise ineffective at tackling the real challenges of development. Because the impacts of international volunteer service as a development strategy ultimately depend on whether IVCOs and partner organisations recognise and implement effective institutional practices (see Sherraden, Lough & McBride, 2008; Simpson, 2004), outcomes must be interpreted within the

context of a particular program or project. The mixed method approach employed in this study sought to test these previously identified contributions while potentially discovering additional areas of impact and challenge.

Field Research Findings: Kenya and Peru

Various themes emerged through interviews describing volunteers' unique contributions and exploring how they set international volunteers apart from paid development employees. Table 4 illustrates how frequently each theme was coded using qualitative data analysis software.

These themes highlight that, depending on the model, volunteers invest time to build lasting, meaningful and trusting relationships with local staff and community members, often introducing fresh, inspiring, new practices and ideas. Development volunteers are also perceived as being independently motivated and somewhat removed from restrictive organisational hierarchies. Interviewed stakeholders reported that these unique characteristics of volunteers had resulted in many positive outcomes, such as more appropriately matching resources to community needs, challenging longstanding racial or inter-ethnic barriers, sharing gainful and gratifying skills, etc. As the table illustrates, different volunteering models contribute in different ways, with a greater overall impact from longer-term service models in Kenya than the shorter-term service model in Peru.

*Table 4: Ranked perceptions of the contributions of international volunteers based on primary field research**

Perceived Volunteer Contribution	Kenya (ω)	weight	Peru (ω)	weight
Resources	221	10.0	97	10.0
Capacity building and skills transfers	221	10.0	30	3.1
UN Millennium Development Goals	188	8.5	22	2.3
Social capital (instrumental)	151	6.8	35	3.6
Civic engagement	151	6.8	14	1.4
Intercultural understanding and diversity	132	6.0	46	4.7
Innovation and ingenuity	116	5.2	22	2.3
Relationships (non-instrumental)	89	4.0	44	4.5
Trust	61	2.8	3	0.3
Transparency and accountability	59	2.7	5	0.5
Human rights awareness	49	2.2	18	1.9
Prestige and respect	44	2.0	6	0.6
Inspiration and optimism	15	0.7	12	1.2

* *The relative ranking is dependent on the volunteer programs operating in each country and should not be interpreted as an absolute measure of contribution.*

Securing resources

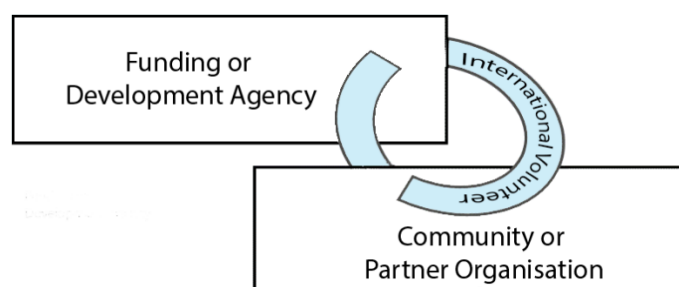
Across both Kenya and Peru, the most frequently cited benefit of international volunteers according to intended beneficiaries was their ability to attract or provide resources. It is important to recognise that associations between resource acquisition and volunteering almost

exclusively referred to volunteers from the Global North. Resource linkages included funds that volunteers pay directly from their own pockets, as well as resources that the organisation may receive indirectly based on their association with a volunteer, such as inclusion in volunteers' personal and professional networks.

Local staff members reported that international volunteers also “fill in the gaps” where financial-, skill- and information-based resources are lacking. Occasionally, local staff stated that they had not realised that such gaps existed until the international volunteers helped to identify them, such as recognising the absence of an information-rich website or a funder with related interests. The identification of such gaps is a sensitive and potentially gradual process, thus the trusting relationships that international volunteers and local staff often build over time lend themselves well to this course of action. Some local staff shared instances of international volunteers having continued to offer resources and advisory services to the communities and organisations years after their departure. While such contributions are likely helpful in the short term, a few respondents cited examples of how these resource contributions had also been leveraged for sustainable development in the long term.

Perhaps more importantly, resources that accompany international volunteer-facilitated projects appear to be used in qualitatively different ways from other forms of aid. For instance, community respondents indicated that resources from volunteers were often targeted toward community needs that had been neglected as priorities in previous development aid initiatives. The majority of international volunteers in the Kenyan sample were embedded in the community, living with community members and working in partnership with local program staff members. These volunteers also tended to have tangible connections with funding agencies and were often viewed as intermediaries or “links” between a community and development or funding agencies. Being embedded in both institutions, the volunteers were perceived as representing and advocating for community needs while also helping community partner organisations to understand the priorities of funding agencies. In Peru, in contrast, because volunteers in the sample lived together with other volunteers in the city and were less embedded in communities, the linking effect to funding agencies was mentioned far less than were individual resource contributions.

Figure 1: International volunteers as intermediaries



In addition, to the degree that volunteers become personally committed to resolving problems, initial seed investments by funding agencies may be multiplied as volunteers leverage additional funding from their networks or personal efforts. One respondent in Kenya shared that a former volunteer had “gone and come back, has mobilised her whole church [at home]. Now they are offering support every year, they take in more and more students. [This resulted] just from one individual.” A key question for future research is to identify whether these partnerships are sustainable in the long run or whether they perpetuate practices of resource dependency.

In order to meet needs that fall outside of traditional aid and welfare channels, international volunteering also tends to inspire do-it-yourself (DIY) projects and advocacy efforts among returned volunteers (Kristof, 2010; Lough & McBride, 2013). While these projects can be beneficial, there also tend to be high-profile drawbacks such as an undervaluing of local capability, high rates of project failure, and unintended consequences on local economies, political structures and cultures (Algozo, 2010). Although entrepreneurial and DIY-type projects have received their fair share of oft-deserved criticism, they also have the potential to make significant contributions as individuals engage civil society post-service.

Certainly low-income communities could utilise international aid without volunteers. In truth, this may actually be a preferred method when local communities organise together to determine and implement development objectives and priorities. However, many informants stated that they did not view this as the reality of the aid funding environment. From the perspective of many partner program staff members, funders often seem unwilling to fund their organisation without some form of international cooperation or involvement of a representative from the Global North. There may be many justified and unjustified reasons for this bias, including issues of trust and perceived hesitance from agencies regarding the capacity of small organisations and low-income communities to effectively manage resources (Lough, Thomas & Asbill, 2013). For good or for bad, volunteers often assume a bridging role and are identified by community members as being associated with a net increase in resources and aid.

Capacity building and skills transfers

Participants from Kenya cited capacity building and skills transfers as frequently as they cited resource contributions. Capacity building is inherently a relationship-based intervention wherein interpersonal interactions lead to the sharing of skills or knowledge. As such, international volunteering is well suited to the task. Although respondents in Peru also frequently mentioned capacity building contributions from short-term volunteers, it was mentioned less often than other relationship-oriented contributions such as intercultural understanding, friendship and social capital.

In reference to added value, capacity building is not unique to volunteerism; paid development professionals and consultants also engage in capacity building initiatives. However, previous research has identified relationship building as the most important factor contributing to the success of capacity development initiatives (McWha, 2011). Therefore, higher levels of trust and rapport often associated with volunteers may greatly enhance volunteers' efficacy (Lough, 2012).

In addition, immersion and time spent in an organisation may result in unplanned and unintended transfers of culture and knowledge that are unlikely with technical advisors who come in for half-day trainings. One local staff member in Kenya shared that they had "learned by doing" through gradual, one-on-one training sessions with international volunteers in which valuable skills, such as proposal writing or web design, were taught. Although this respondent cited that proposal writing was a difficult skill to learn, the warm relationship he had developed with the volunteer had encouraged him to persevere.

Various other Kenyan partners discussed the impact of international volunteers on youth in the community and young local volunteers over time. According to one staff member, because the international volunteers they host are often young, the volunteers "are able to interact with our own youth volunteers and help them to open up, especially in leadership skills. This gives them a chance to diversify and increase their capacities."

Informants often described learning new ways of thinking from international volunteers as "empowering," particularly when the new skills acquired were not merely accepted at face value. Because the skills and practices that volunteers taught were not always culturally appropriate or relevant, local staff stated that they moulded the volunteers' tools and ideas to meet their local needs, practices and capabilities, thus taking ownership of the volunteers' contributions and

adapting them to their circumstances. As one Kenyan participant commented, “It is not necessarily that we [accept] whatever they [the international volunteers] come up with, but we look at the synergies, what can we borrow, and how can we improvise whatever that they have come up with.”

As with other outcomes cited in the interviews, informants mentioned caveats, in that the effectiveness of capacity building contributions was highly dependent on the volunteers’ skills, competencies and expertise. For instance, informants in Peru were far less likely to cite capacity building than informants in Kenya, and often referenced older, professional volunteers such as nurses, nutritionists or physical therapists. In addition, less tangible attributes such as trust or immersion were also evident in discussions about the reciprocal transmission of knowledge and expertise.

UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Specific contributions to the MDGs were the third most frequently cited benefits of hosting international volunteers according to intended beneficiaries in Kenya. Participants hosting shorter-term volunteers in Peru were less far likely to cite contributions to the MDGs as a significant contribution, despite a comparable interview guide. This is likely because the IVCO in Peru is focused more explicitly on cross-cultural understanding than on other development targets. In cases where contributions to the MDGs were cited by respondents in Peru, they mainly cited volunteers’ “extra hands” to education and health initiatives. In contrast, data from Kenya suggested that volunteers contributed the most to promoting gender equality and empowering women. As these findings suggest, volunteers’ contributions to the MDGs is largely dependent upon the various missions and goals of IVCOs and partner programs under observation.

Social capital

By developing relationships with community members, international volunteers develop networks of support and concrete opportunities for collaboration. These networks are distinguished from non-instrumental friendships and relationships because they are often used to leverage resources while in country and after volunteers return home. Using a circumspect definition of social capital as a resource-bridging mechanism, its benefits are highly associated with resources, discussed above. However, it is also associated with less tangible advantages, such as partner organisations’ power to influence public policy, to connect with other Northern NGOs, and to motivate greater community “in-reach” with partner organisations.

The potential benefits of social capital are dependent upon the people-to-people connections made during volunteer service. Therefore, the networks and bridging social capital developed through volunteering would not likely exist in the absence of volunteer engagement. In this regard, the contributions of volunteers offer a complementary value to technical assistance approaches that prioritise task and outcome over relationships and process. While both are needed, volunteers play a unique role. Previous studies have found that volunteers are viewed as particularly independent and objective, which gives them “a high level of credibility and unusual access to senior decision-makers” (Ott, Guseva & Wein, 2000, p.ii). Although community members often reported bonding well with volunteers, organisational staff sometimes reported that their relationships with volunteers remained distant and aloof—particularly when volunteers were young and only in the assignment for a short time (Perold et al., 2011).

International volunteering has a less well-defined impact on bonding social capital. The involvement of international volunteers has previously been associated with social support, integration and social cohesion in communities of practice (Patel, Perold, Mohamed & Carapinha, 2007). As external agents, however, international volunteers may also theoretically dampen in-group trust and community ties founded on mutual solidarity and support. Thus, while social capital has intrinsic value, it also has instrumental value to positively or negatively affect local civic and community engagement. Nearly half of the reviewed studies reported that international

volunteers rally community volunteerism and engender local level participation. Because no informants explicitly reported that international volunteers decreased bonding social capital or community-level helping, this may be an area for future research.

Civic engagement

Civic engagement and a strong civil society are highly associated with the efficient functioning of modern economies and stable liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 2001). Various post-2015 development task groups recognise the importance of civic engagement. As the report of the UN High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons asserted, “Local civic engagement is an important priority leading to peace and participation in political processes ... civil society should play a central, meaningful role to ensure good governance and effective institutions” (United Nations, 2013a, pp.16,50).

Despite institutional theories suggesting that external agents may reduce internal engagement, trust and credible commitment (Nee & Ingram, 1998), according to respondents interviewed, the relationships that international volunteers tend to engage in have a positive effect on local civic engagement. This follows a hypothesis that the “social function” is an important determinant of both volunteering and civic engagement (Clary et al., 1998). The philanthropic and self-sacrificing motivations of volunteers were also cited as important inspirational factors for engagement. Several Kenyan staff members shared that as both a token of appreciation and a commitment to the relationships built with volunteers, they felt that it was their “responsibility” and “duty” to deepen the projects initiated by international volunteers, even after the volunteers returned to their home countries.

Participants cited many examples of how local volunteerism and civic engagement had been directly inspired by the involvement of an international volunteer. Across volunteering models, staff members from both countries reported that community members and local volunteers were more invested in the activities of the organisation when international volunteers were involved. Volunteers tended to inspire engagement among those who had not previously participated in development activities. As one woman in Peru stated, “I never went to school, I have never valued myself, but now seeing everything that the volunteers give us, I say I can give more time to the community, and my time to other people”. In addition, individuals and organisations benefit from engagement by local contributors as more hands are available to complete needed work. According to one Kenyan staff member:

When we have someone extra come on board, that means we've increased the number of people working in the community. We are able to increase the number of activities and programs that are running. We are able to do a lot of work within a given period of time. That has been very critical in our work.

Intercultural understanding and diversity

The influence of international volunteers on intercultural understanding is an often undervalued contribution by stakeholders in the Global North. According to intended beneficiaries in Peru, this was viewed as highly important and was the second most frequently cited contribution of international volunteers among this sample. Many participants stated that their perception of *mzungus* (Kenya) or *gringos* (Peru) changed dramatically as they became better acquainted with volunteers. This allowed them to trust more in volunteer-facilitated development projects and heightened their interest in participating.

Many also placed high importance on the fact that volunteers were willing and able to learn about Kenyan or Peruvian culture. This was viewed as an important contribution to solidarity, peace and understanding between diverse people, particularly by respondents in Peru. In Peru, this was also partly dependent on volunteers' language capacity. Comments describing the importance of intercultural understanding were closely tied to references of trust, cultivated by a willingness to

share new concepts, ideas and practices. As such, intercultural understanding was cited as a prerequisite to developing effective partnerships at the grassroots level.

While a handful of community and staff members cited cultural misunderstandings, disrespect, or even blatant contempt for local practices or customs, these instances were the exception rather than the rule. Informants tended to highlight the many ways that volunteers inspire open-mindedness and respect for diversity in their communities and organisations. Because international volunteers often arrive with a low awareness of historical ethnic, racial and class biases or other long-standing prejudice within communities, they may be more likely to involve marginalised people or minorities who may otherwise be socially excluded. Many participants in the study cited examples of how volunteers had unwittingly increased tolerance and respect for difference between members of, for example, the Kikuyu and Luos tribes in Kenya or between Mestizos and Amerindians in Peru by treating people from all tribes and ethnicities the same. As one staff member remarked, “The kids learn that all Peruvians are human beings. There is much racism in Peru, and from being around different international volunteers the kids see black, white, and brown—that we are all people and we are all Peruvians.”

A staff member in Kenya reported a similar process in which the long-existing racial hierarchy was challenged over time as white international volunteers more frequently worked in his community:

When you see the white people around, it changes the perceptions. Initially when this program started, the community perception was very, very different. Whenever the local saw a white person, it was very amazing. But with time, the perception changed and people see that the white people are the same human beings. We are all the same. They eat the food we are eating. They stay where we are staying. We remove that perception that the white people are special. That brings something like, “we are one in the world”.

On the other hand, white Global North volunteers may also unintentionally perpetuate post-colonial legacies and racial inequities. As a staff member in Kenya explained, deeply embedded racial biases persist in which white Westerners’ knowledge and practices are privileged solely on the basis of race, often resulting in input from qualified Black African volunteers’ being undervalued or overruled. As he shared:

It is a tendency – even with the staff here – to look at volunteers who come from the Western world and elevate them at higher level, regardless of whether the [black] volunteer who has come from Zambia or Malawi is highly skilled and has [university] degrees. [This is] simply because of their race and the way we have been cultured and brought up: “white people usually know more than black people”.

Thus, while the presence of white Western volunteers in Global South communities may challenge racial barriers, it may also inadvertently fuel the fallacy that white Northerners possess superior knowledge. This in turn may perpetuate post-colonial Northern dominance and hegemony. It is arguable, however, that all development and aid organisations are liable of proliferating a similar system – and perhaps at a more severe level if distance is maintained.

Innovation and ingenuity

Related to intercultural understanding and diversity, the innovation and ingenuity that volunteers bring to projects and programs are viewed as significant contributions. Participants cited numerous ways in which international volunteers stimulated creativity and introduced “dynamic” new ideas, both at the organisational and interpersonal levels. International volunteers were repeatedly credited with “opening the minds” of local staff and giving them new tools to “think outside the box”. This was not universally seen as a positive contribution by all informants, as a few ideas led to unsuccessful outcomes or inter-organisational disagreement.

However, the creativity of volunteers was generally viewed as overwhelmingly positive, with an understanding that ideas could be adapted if needed.

At the organisational level, international volunteers led discussions about topics that were not typically addressed, which tended to promote an organisational culture of openness and expression that was often linked to enhanced professional practices. In Kenya, for instance, international volunteers were cited as diversifying fundraising ideas, introducing social media marketing concepts and sharing engaging teaching styles that local project participants later utilised in community projects. The greatest concern from management was that some of the unconventional ideas adopted by staff or community members were not wholly culturally appropriate or viable in practice.

In comparison with other development practitioners, innovation may not be particularly unique to volunteers. However, as one Kenyan project partner shared, “We really appreciate the freshness that they come in with. They come in with a completely different thought process and that just challenges us, and makes us look at things differently and interrogate things in a different way.” This may be a direct consequence of volunteers having access to fewer resources to implement development projects, which requires them to develop inventive and creative practices. Participants also suggested this could be due to international volunteers coming from a variety of backgrounds, professions and educational levels, which allows them to supply a diverse range of ideas and skills. Participants also attributed volunteers’ creativity to their position as organisational “outsiders,” finding their ideas to be fresh, original and unconventional.

Interpersonal relationships

Although the development of non-instrumental relationships is often viewed by IVCOs as a very soft outcome and, therefore, is not typically included in any logic model, host community members reported it as an important contribution. In fact, it was the third highest outcome category cited by hosts of volunteers in Peru. These relationships are distinct from those associated with social capital, which is primarily important for its instrumental value to bridge inequities in resources or power. In contrast, interpersonal relationships are associated with friendship and social support without the necessity for additional benefits. Community members who were struggling with a particular problem or situation reported that seeing that someone from another country cared enough to travel a long distance to work with them helped them to feel validated and important. Many people also noted a greater sense of well-being and respect resulting from the social connections and friendships developed with international volunteers. Referencing domestic workers (housekeepers and maidservants), who are typically of indigenous descent and often discriminated against in Peruvian society, one staff member commented:

The domestic workers’ self-esteem increases merely because of the contact with a foreign person. When a foreigner comes, it is a cultural phenomenon that people think ...“oh, a foreigner, he knows more things, and is at a better level”. So when they come and speak to [domestic workers] as if they were friends then it has a great impact on the workers’ self-esteem.

However, there may also be dangers associated with such ways of thinking. For one, they may undermine self-worth derived intrinsically. They may also create a space for local people to compare themselves to the foreign workers, and even employ a language of self-deprecation. This effect was occasionally detected in the Kenyan interviews, such as when a local staff member laughingly questioned why Global North volunteers would choose to live and work in Kenya, as, if given a choice, he would not. That being said, local staff members typically shared that they saw their relationships with international volunteers as being relatively equitable overall—particularly in comparison with other technical advisors.

Relationships with volunteers may be uniquely different from relationships with other technical advisors in other ways as well. Long term volunteers in particular are perceived as having more

flexibility in the amount of time they often dedicate to working with local staff and communities, and the types of tasks they may engage in—including bonding with staff and community members outside of the organisational setting. This flexibility, alongside the nearly unanimous perception that international volunteers have high levels of generosity and a desire to contribute to their hosting community, helps to foster warm, trusting relationships. The local staff and community members found these relationships invaluable and not easily replaced by technical advisors.

One Kenyan staff member stated that if international volunteers were no longer present in his community, “We would miss out on a lot, especially at a personal level.” He explained that by working one-on-one with the staff members, the international volunteers contributed to the development of the team’s professional *and* personal skills. These relationships supported the staff members’ and volunteers’ capabilities, while also boosting their self-confidence and overall well-being. As the staff member further explained, “Such kinds of things, I can’t quantify, but [without] these experiences that the volunteers bring, we *would* miss out.”

Trust

Trust developed between international volunteers and members of a host community or organisation may be an artefact of volunteerism that has not yet been well captured or understood. Although it is unlikely that volunteers are inherently more trustworthy than other paid development workers, community members reported that volunteers who live within the local community and speak the native language are more likely to represent the needs and interests of the community. Participants in this study related heightened trust to volunteers’ humanitarian motivations, interpersonal engagement and overall commitment to a project or program. Previous research links trust and membership in voluntary organisations and voluntary civil groups for similar reasons (Anheier & Kendall, 2002; Stolle, 1998). Trust appears to be lower in development projects that only involve technical advisors, who were cited by many participants in this study, as well as in other studies, as being somewhat distant and detached (McWha, 2011; Ott, Guseva & Wein, 2000). A staff member in Kenya reflected on this concept:

When a mzungu [an international volunteer, usually from the Global North] comes and lives among you, she is sharing your tribulations. She is sharing the challenges you are facing. It creates that rapport, that confidence. The others [paid consultants] have that big man syndrome, whereby they just engage you through the documentation and then they leave you off. They take their report, then they go back to their ivory towers in Hulingham or Westland’s [i.e. the wealthy areas] until you have another event when you see them coming back.

This sense of trust in international volunteers may be important for engaging communities in participatory planning phases of development projects, as well as for getting buy-in for existing development projects. As Tables 3 and 4 illustrate, the emphasis that respondents placed on trust is notably lower in Peru, where the shorter-term volunteers do not live in the community and rarely speak the local language.

Likewise, a few staff members noted that international volunteers tend to foster distrust between staff of the organisation and community residents. Residents often perceive that organisational staff working with international volunteers have access to higher resources but are unwilling to distribute these resources. As a result, trust for organisational staff by community members is called into question.

While trust may be instrumental to effective program management and implementation (Diallo & Thuillier, 2005), it is also intrinsically desirable as a subjective component of cooperation and societal well-being (Putnam, 2004). This harkens back to the earlier findings that international volunteers tend to enhance local participation and social inclusion, often via a pathway of heightened trust.

Transparency and accountability

Tied closely to the issue of trust, international volunteers are viewed as increasing the transparency and accountability of development projects and programs. This has multiple angles that are worth exploring.

First, international volunteers are viewed as being accountable to the community rather than to large organisational bureaucracies (particularly governmental organisations). Although volunteers are often viewed as having access to funding agencies or development organisations, they are viewed as being more independent than consultants or technical advisors (Keesbury, 2003). As a result, international volunteers are perceived as having “no institutional position that they are expected to represent” (Ott, Guseva & Wein, 2000, p.17). Several Kenyan interviewees echoed these notions, with one stating:

Somebody who comes from the outside helps us a lot in terms of moving forward. They are fresh and do not intermingle with the politics of the organisation. They are able to just focus on the job, move things forward without having to pay due respect to a certain person in the hierarchy. They concentrate on their work.

Second, local staff members reported learning to more carefully manage and document processes and resources from interacting with international volunteers. In part, this was due to volunteers stressing the importance of documenting results. Third, many staff members believed that their organisation was more likely to receive funding from external agencies due to similar perceptions among funders that international volunteer-hosting organisations are more transparent and accountable. Although this perception may not be accurate and was not universally shared by many respondents in the study (particularly from the sample in Peru), it tends to lower transaction costs on both sides of the equation due to mutual trust of volunteers from funding and partner agencies.

Awareness of human rights

A number of comments from participants in this study indicate that international volunteers foster a greater awareness of human rights. This is linked with the more prominent finding of intercultural understanding—that international volunteers tend to model respect for people who are otherwise marginalised due to cultural norms or longstanding ethnic or class biases within local contexts. In Forum’s 2013 position paper, the network expressed concern that, “the major omission from the MDGs ... was the failure to recognise social justice and human rights” (Forum, 2013, p.2). Auspiciously, both human rights and social inclusion may be of greater importance post-2015, as they are consistently highlighted as key pillars in recent UN advisory reports (United Nations, 2013a, 2013b; SDSN, 2013).

Many volunteers serve with the express purpose (via trainings or workshops) to spread knowledge about, and advocate for, human rights issues, including women’s rights, racial equality, rights of indigenous peoples and rights of children, among other human rights issues. Other volunteers inadvertently spread awareness of human rights through example and modelling. As a focus group member in Kenya recalled:

I worked with a volunteer from Japan...she has really made feel like trusting everyone...They are not from the same kind of culture of tribes. They come from different background in Japan; they have something greater. This has made me feel like I am able to take another person the way they are...to share openly and to avoid this culture that I am Kikuyu and you are Luo [conflicting tribes in Kenya]. So it is better to work together. They [volunteers] really emphasise that because when they come to the field they actual don’t know whether you are a Luo or a Kikuyu. They know you are African and a Kenyan. So that helps us to work in peace within the community.

Many respondents explicitly described how the living examples of international volunteers inspired them to change their attitudes or behaviours towards members of a group that is marginalised in their country or culture. As the quote above illustrates, changes in awareness also have implications for reducing conflict and building peace.

Because volunteers occasionally have different norms and definitions of what constitutes a human rights violation, this was cited as one potential complication. In one case from Kenya, the respondent reported on a domestic violence training workshop led by a volunteer from the Global North. The respondent believed that the workshop had been wholly ineffective due to differences in values and practices between the volunteer and the host community, and could have been more effectively facilitated by someone from Kenya or another country in Africa.

Prestige and respect

Representatives of partner programs also noted the increase in prestige and respect for the organisation by hosting an international volunteer. Community members often perceive an organisation that regularly hosts international volunteers as more reputable than those that do not receive volunteers, and many in-country staff believe that having an “international face” distinguishes their organisation from other local and national level organisations. Because international volunteers “are considered privileged, and with higher status” their involvement often transfers to the organisation, reinforcing an “image that the organisation is well positioned”.

In comparison with other development practitioners and technical advisors, higher perceptions of prestige and respect for an organisation may not be unique to international volunteerism. Participants typically cited this outcome in relation to the higher expertise, authority and novelty of international volunteer involvement—particularly volunteers from the North. This dynamic could be associated with any development practitioner or “expert” who is endowed with higher privilege and authority (Rossi, 2004). With the exception that development volunteers often participate in community life, there is little reason to believe that volunteerism plays a vital role in determining this outcome. Nevertheless, this was cited as a relevant people-centred outcome of international volunteerism and many believe that funding for an organisation is more likely when international volunteers are regularly involved.

Inspiration and optimism

Finally, discussions about international volunteers occasionally describe how volunteers arouse inspiration and optimism in both community members and organisational staff. This was the least frequently mentioned outcome for development volunteers—though it was relatively higher for short-term volunteers. Previous research suggests that short term volunteers may be particularly optimistic based on the newness, excitement and novelty of the experience working abroad in a new culture. It goes without saying that naïveté also carries with it potential challenges. However, respondents cited how international volunteers boost morale and bring fresh life into a working environment that struggles with difficult issues and problems. As one Kenyan staff member stated, international volunteers show “enthusiasm in carrying out the work. It’s fun to them. To us it is a burden and problem. The volunteers challenge [that] in how they carry out their work.” Their motivations as volunteers are also associated with commitment and energy that many respondents believed to be qualitatively different from paid workers.

Discussion

Although the relative importance of international volunteers' contributions differs between the prior literature and the primary field research, this would be expected given that reported contributions are dependent on the focus of each particular study.

One immediate conclusion is that capacity building/skills transfers, resources, innovation and social capital seem to have received the lion's share of attention in research documenting the outcomes of international volunteerism from the perspective of host communities. With the exception of MDGs, the remaining categories are closely tied to relationships and human engagement. These contributions are reported by intended beneficiaries as highly valuable to the process of development, despite lack of attention to these benefits in traditional monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Notwithstanding the prominence of the MDG framework over the past 15 years, previous research has not done well at capturing international volunteers' contributions to these targets. This is not unique to international volunteering, however, as many development programs struggle with the question of impact. As other researchers have concluded in the past, MDG contributions are often outcomes of a larger development project or program within which volunteers serve (Mattero & Campbell-Patton, 2008; Merkle, 2008; Zuurmond, 2012). While the question of volunteers' contributions to the MDGs featured prominently, respondents expressed difficulty attributing progress on particular MDGs to volunteers in isolation from the larger development program. In addition, impact assessments typically require time frames of at least five years, which is ordinarily longer than IVCO monitoring and evaluation designs allow (Buckles & Chevalier, 2012).

In order to capture adequately the value of international volunteerism to development, volunteers' roles in the *process* and *system* of change must be better articulated and measured (Buckles & Chevalier, 2012; Zuurmond, 2012). A focus on process as well as outcomes may be particularly important in the post-2015 development context. As the 2013 Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals reported:

A conceptual problem with the MDGs was the focus on outcomes, without adequate attention to a process to achieve them...development is a transformative process and cannot be captured in the simplicity of outcome-based goals; goals need to be embedded in a narrative agenda (Appleton, Leone, Offerdahl, Risse & Sharma, 2013, pp 4,6).

Considering the prominence of relationship-dependent outcomes such as inspiration, trust, friendship and cross-cultural understanding, volunteers are an important part of the development process, which is enhanced through relational dynamics. Figure 2 illustrates pathways from international volunteer engagement to the end-goals such as MDGs, intercultural understanding and well-being. As the figure illustrates, causal theories that include relationship-based processes are needed to capture this "narrative agenda" and to more persuasively link volunteer engagement to development outcomes (see Stern et al., 2012).

Figure 2: Capturing the narrative process of international volunteering in development

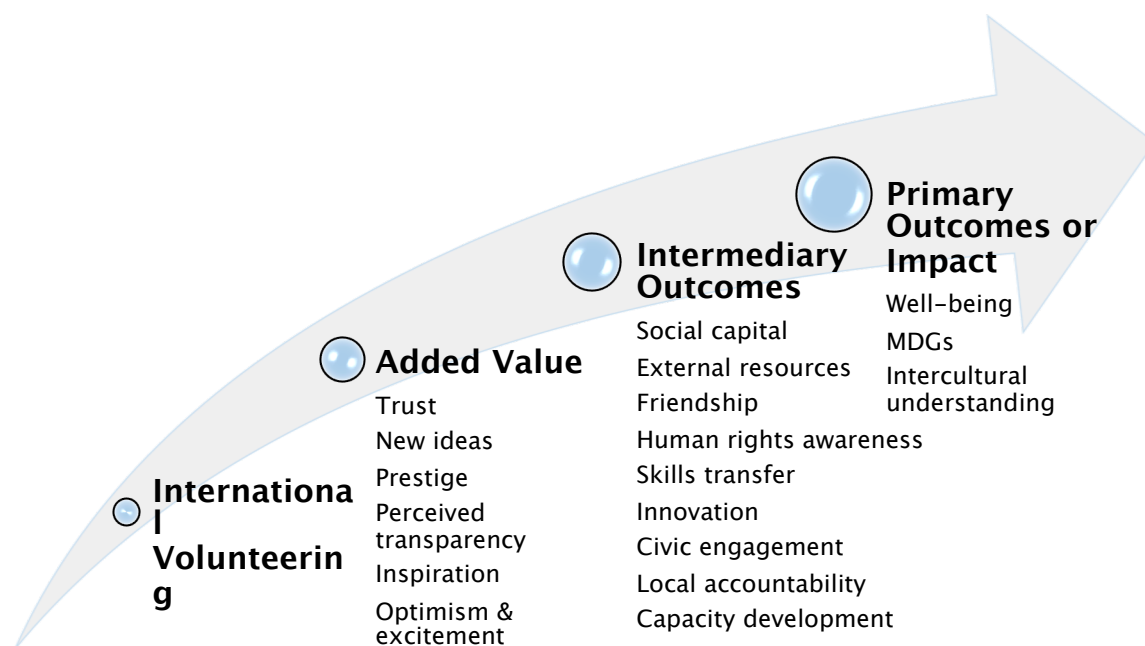


Figure 2 mirrors similar conceptual models proposed by Sherraden et al. (2008) and Zuurmond (2012), which highlight the importance of mediating variables. Going forward, IVCOs and other stakeholders need to re-conceptualise metrics in ways that more fully communicate the contributions of international service to human relationships, solidarity, empowerment and the process of change.

To communicate the added value of volunteers, proposed connections between processes and outcomes need to be tested and shared. Stakeholders can make a stronger case for international volunteering by adapting metrics that measure the pathways from volunteer engagement to development outcomes, including sustainable livelihoods, good governance, environmental sustainability, well-being and other alternative development priorities likely to feature post-2015 (SDSN, 2013; United Nations, 2013a, 2013b). In a 2012 Forum discussion paper, Devereux and Guse outlined many of the potential contributions of volunteering to post-2015 development priorities (pp.31-41). The challenge ahead for IVCOs is to measure the theory-based connections that link these outcomes with the contributions arising from people-to-people connections.

Taking the example of volunteers' contributions to good governance, empirical linkages must first be made between (a) engagement by international volunteers in a community, and (b) higher levels of local public participation and civic engagement, or stronger networks and civil society coalitions. Only by strengthening this linkage can causal jumps be made to volunteers' contributions to the suggested post-2015 development goal of (c) good governance and institution building (SDSN, 2013; United Nations, 2013a). In theory-based evaluations, "data is collected and analysed to test the underlying assumptions about the chain of causality within each step" (Mattero & Campbell-Patton, 2008, p.43). By making these causal linkages, data can demonstrate that volunteers were instrumental in generating desired outcomes.

Although this study primarily used qualitative methods, it found a clear connection between volunteering and civic engagement, as well as other valued contributions such as innovation, transparency and accountability, optimism, social inclusion and human rights awareness. These are all valued means to enhance the process of achieving development goals. As IVCOs strive to validate qualitative and quantitative measures that demonstrate the impact of volunteers' contributions to post-2015 development targets, they should also aim to measure developmental processes—recognising the systemic nature of change. Incidentally, alternative measures have

emerged in recent years to measure the impact of such factors on social and economic development.

The Declaration that emerged from the 2011 UN DPI/NGO Conference recognises the limitations of market-based measures of progress and encourages replacing GDP measures with other economic and social indicators, including “civic participation and improved well-being” (United Nations, 2011, p.15). The Declaration also explicitly affirms that volunteerism promotes sustainable development, social inclusion, community mobilisation, local capacity, social cohesion and other measures of progress. Recognising that poverty eradication is larger than improving economic systems, Devereux and Guse (2012) highlighted a number of new initiatives that aim to measure human well-being, including the UN High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability, the Institute for Development Studies’ “3D human well-being approach”, the OECD Better Life Initiative, the European Commission’s GDP and Beyond Project, the UK Sustainable Development Commission, the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission, and the Kingdom of Bhutan’s National Happiness Model.¹

While these measures have yet to be examined in respect of international volunteers’ impact, the criteria that these indicators examine are firmly embedded in international volunteers’ functions; thus IVCOs may draw on these measures to illustrate and convey international volunteers’ value to development projects and programs. The impact that international volunteers have on personal indicators (e.g. self-esteem and optimism) and social indicators (e.g. a sense of belonging, social cohesion, or social inclusion) must be examined more closely.

Surveying the effects of building relationships with international volunteers and other criteria specific to IVCOs will provide quantified evidence of volunteers’ added value. During the 2012 IVCO Conference, Buckles and Chevalier suggested a number of innovative methods that could be used to measure process and performance and to demonstrate tangible contributions (2012). Additional studies also describe innovative methods to measure volunteers’ contributions (see Mattero & Campbell-Patton, 2008; Merkle, 2008). These methods can be adapted to strengthen linkages between international volunteering, intermediary outcomes and longer-term impacts.

As one example, one of the “big five” recommendations for the post-2105 targets is to enhance “opportunities to secure good and decent jobs and livelihoods...especially for young people and women” (United Nations, 2013a, p.iv). A primary goal of the UK’s International Citizen Service’s (ICS) Youth Action program is to develop the skills of young people by providing opportunities for youth in the Global South and North to live and work together as volunteers. ICS might take advantage of various measures developed by the OECD Skills and Innovation Initiative. This initiative aims to measure people’s “soft” skills, such as cultural openness, motivation, working in teams and heterogeneous groups, and leadership capabilities, like team building and lobbying capacities (OECD, 2011). Soft skills complement “hard” skills (academic and technical competencies), which can be measured using instruments such as the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (OECD, 2012, p.12). Together, hard and soft skills spur innovation and economic growth, and improve individuals’ employability (OECD, 2011, 2012; Zuurmond, 2012). By adopting these instruments, for instance, IVCOs would be able to gauge not only the technical skills taught through development projects, but also the “human” skills that people acquire, with the latter being developed primarily through interpersonal relationships and engagement. Using existing

¹For more information on these and other initiatives, refer to Devereux, P., & Guse, K. (2012).

tools to link volunteering with intermediary outcomes, such as skill-building, is a necessary first step to claiming volunteerism's impact on employability and, ultimately, improved livelihoods.²

As another example, social cohesion is a prominent indicator of well-being, indicated by behaviours such as engagement in community activities (Boarini, Johansson & d'Ercole, 2006). Social cohesion has been associated with higher per capita income levels and produces feelings of inclusion and belonging to a community. These outcomes have further been linked to overall improved well-being (Boarini, Johansson, & d'Ercole, 2006; Stillman et al., 2009). Measures of social cohesion and connectedness also have positive effects on health outcomes and employability, and have beneficial spill over effects such as the development of trust, democratic participation, and engagement in economic activity (OECD, 2011). Strengthening the connection between international volunteering and social cohesion can help to make a stronger case for volunteers' impacts on these end outcomes.

While indicators of social connections offer promising platforms to assess the effects of international volunteers on host communities, adequately measuring relationships remains difficult, due in part to the complexity and extensiveness of human relationships (OECD, 2011). Nonetheless, including relational and people-centred outcomes in the process of change has the potential to best reflect the needs and interests of those requesting assistance.

Measuring the effects of mediating or moderating variables would also have important implications for IVCOs, funding agencies and standards of effective practice. For instance, respondents indicated that intermediary outcomes such as perceived transparency, heightened trust and new ideas associated with volunteering all contribute to enhanced capacity of recipient institutions to effectively manage and utilise aid. However, because international volunteers are perceived as having less access to development aid and resources than technical advisors (Lough, 2012), they may contribute less substantively in some areas than they otherwise could. As one evaluation concluded, the "acute lack of funding is having a negative impact on the effectiveness of the volunteers and the speed at which they can effect change..." (Zuurmond, 2012, p.30).

The influence of service duration and cultural immersion also appear to affect nearly all areas of volunteer contributions, as has been amply demonstrated in many previous studies on international volunteerism. Quantifying the effect of these and other moderators in "theory-based evaluations" would contribute substantially to policy and practice decisions going forward (Mattero & Campbell-Patton, 2008; Stern et al., 2012).

As causal links are supported, IVCOs can use evidence-based logic to inform policy-making and advocacy for programs that utilise international volunteers. In addition, using non-traditional determinants of well-being, it is possible to demonstrate the full value of international volunteering—and to concretely highlight *why* relationship-building and interpersonal processes are integral components of achieving outcomes of development cooperation.

² ICS has emerged as an exception to cuts in core funding, as have other youth-based international volunteer programs such as *weltwärts*, European Voluntary Service and Canada World Youth. This raises an important caveat that documenting development impact alone may be insufficient; IVCOs may need to demonstrate how they meet multiple government priorities, including development targets, but also active global citizenship and diplomatic aims (See Allum, 2012; Lough & Allum, 2011).

Conclusion

As we look forward to discussions of aid effectiveness occurring in the eve of the post-2015 development era, we anticipate with confidence that goals of well-being, inclusion, human solidarity, governance and social relationships will increasingly be highlighted.

Although international volunteers can contribute substantially to “hard” development outcomes, IVCOs tend to undersell the unique contributions of volunteers because they fail to articulate and measure the less visible contributions of volunteers to the process of systemic change. As the “differentiated responsibilities” of international volunteers and other technical advisors are communicated, stakeholders will gain a better understanding of the complementary attributes and qualities that volunteers bring to development projects.

Just as the MDGs have been criticised for not paying sufficient attention to crosscutting issues and interrelations between otherwise discrete development goals, traditional measures of socioeconomic progress alone have not done well at capturing the theoretical and practical value of international volunteerism to development. If international volunteer service programs are to remain true to their intended missions, we must work to more precisely measure the distinctive gains that volunteers contribute to human development. In the immediate future, metrics and indicators employed to assess the value of volunteers must include more interpersonal, relational and process-oriented concepts, and must link these processes to development outcomes. Without a more comprehensive narrative, the unique contributions of international volunteers cannot be fully appreciated.

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Appendix A

Reviewed studies that utilise primary field research with host communities and volunteer-hosting organisations

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