

PANEL PRESENTATION ABSTRACT
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**VOLUNTEER COOPERATION FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE
21ST CENTURY**

Benjamin J. Lough and Amanda Moore McBride, Ph.D., Washington University in St. Louis,
and Margaret Sherrard Sherraden, PhD, University of Missouri St. Louis;
Panelists: Cliff Allum, Ph.D. Skillshare International; Peter Devereux, Murdoch University;
and Caspar Merkle United Nations Volunteers

Track: Volunteering and Social Capital

Panel Abstract

As an intervention for social development, researchers and practitioners posit that volunteers can accomplish development goals through technology and skills transfers, building local capacity, social networking, advocacy efforts, and other forms of aid (Randel, T., & Baker, 2005; UNDP, 2003; UNV, 2002). Preliminary research suggests that some models of voluntary service may be more effective than others at achieving various development outcomes (CSV, 2005; Hammer, 2005; Keesbury, 2003; Rehnstrom, 2000; Sherraden & Benítez, 2003). How can research on international volunteering and service help catalyze sustainable social change? This panel combines the expertise of practitioners and academics to address the long-standing question about the relationship between volunteering and development.

Cliff Allum of Skillshare International, United Kingdom, opens this panel by questioning whether the traditional role played by international volunteers, particularly in the areas of technical assistance and capacity building, are appropriate given the modern context. The author explores the transition of activities and forms of international volunteering that have gained prominence in the past few years, including advocacy, south-south cooperation, online volunteering, multilateral exchanges, and variations in the length of placements. This presentation of new programmatic models demonstrates the breadth of activities and forms of international volunteering in the 21st century, along with potential pitfalls that need to be considered.

Peter Devereux of Murdoch University, in Perth Australia, continues the discussion of the utility of international volunteers in the modern context using survey data from long-term “volunteers for development”. He discusses whether international “environmental” volunteers can realistically apply the concepts of capacity development and sustainability through immersion and reciprocal exchange. Using survey data from 30 long-term international volunteers, the author analyzes themes that emerge from the volunteers’ perspectives. The paper concludes that international volunteers can effectively complement other development interventions to deepen development concepts, frameworks and opportunities beyond “development as practice” through technical cooperation and one way capacity building.

Benjamin Lough, Amanda McBride, and Margaret Sherraden, researchers from the Center for Social Development, USA, examine the evidence available on effects of international volunteering and service over the past few decades. A thorough literature review and summary of existing empirical data provides evidence upon which practitioners and policymakers develop programs and policies. Consistent with Dr. Allum's concerns, the summary raises questions about positive and negative effects and empirically demonstrates the emergence of alternative forms of service.

Caspar Merkle from United Nations Volunteers, based in Bonn, Germany, reports on the experiences with applying a methodology that was designed to measure the contributions of volunteering to development, and to support learning amongst volunteers and across the organization. The wide range of approaches to volunteering for development raises challenges for measuring outcomes across time and space. This methodology uses participatory validation workshops, structured explicitly to capture the contributions of volunteers to human development goals and to place volunteers' activities and results into the wider development context. As practitioners work toward achieving sustainable social change, this methodology may be an effective evaluation tool for demonstrating the concrete effects of volunteering on partners and intended beneficiaries.

International volunteering has significant potential to enhance social development outcomes. However, in order to design policies and programs to reach this potential, it is necessary to effectively measure the impacts of volunteering. Each of these papers reiterates the growth of volunteering in numerous forms, describes their impacts on intended beneficiaries, and addresses directions for future research in international volunteering and service.

Paper 1
**International Volunteering and Cooperation: New Developments in
Programme Models**

Dr. Cliff Allum, Skillshare International

for the panel
“Volunteer Cooperation for International Development in the 21st Century”

For over forty years international volunteering has been dominated by a model of north-south long-term volunteering which has increasingly focused on the development outcomes of international volunteer placements. This has generated considerable discussion on the value and appropriateness of international volunteering (Cook & Jackson, 2006; Grusky, 2000; Simpson, 2004), a process reinforced by external pressures, and the development of new, innovative models as well as variation on the long standing model.

Recent surveys of international volunteering and co-operation have suggested that volunteer sending organizations in this field are now engaging in a wide range of activities, including advocacy, public engagement, south-south co-operation and a range of short and long term volunteer placements (CSV, 2005; Jones, 2004; Randel et al., 2005).

This paper reviews recent developments in how programme models have changed and developed and analyses key future trends. It considers the development of exchange models, rather than one directional programmes; how programmes are going beyond north-south models; the renewed interest in youth programmes; variations in the length of placements; and the growth in on-line volunteering. It does this by locating short case studies of the practice of different organizations involved in international volunteering in the context of these broader changes. The picture emerges of a sector in transition across the globe.

It is argued that the longstanding model of international volunteering is a specific form of voluntary action and that its ascendancy and success is rooted in the mid-20th century. In the world of the early 21st century, the paper poses the question of the appropriateness of the traditional model. It concludes that in the channeling of international volunteering towards technical assistance there is room for doubt and that it may simultaneously undermine international volunteering. The paper questions whether international volunteering should take this course. While recognizing the greater potential of a capacity building role, it is suggested that there is a potentially clear divide between those organizations providing such resources and those engaged in facilitating partnerships between organizations across national boundaries.

In conclusion, it is also recognised that the objectives of international volunteering and cooperation – solidarity, aid and development, personal development and public engagement – are as evident and contradictory as ever and furthermore, that the sources of emergent international volunteering are diverse. It reflects on the emergent consumerism and enhanced access to information for many potential volunteers of where they may be placed and the organizations for which they will volunteer. This may have a profound impact on the roles of organisations involved in this area, and the paper argues they will need to rethink their added

value if they to play an effective role in the future.

Paper 2
Volunteering for Capacity, Development, and Environmental Sustainability

Peter Devereux, Murdoch University

for the panel
“Volunteer Cooperation for International Development in the 21st Century”

Development is a broad concept that should present a broad vision for ‘positive change’; account for the historical processes of social change as well as the dominant contemporary emphasis on “development as practice” focusing on deliberate efforts at improvement (Thomas, 2000:3-9). The predominant focus on improvement has emphasised a global response to poverty, under-emphasising other elements like interdependence, injustice, inequality, environmental sustainability, consumption and power relations that should be fundamental considerations within a broader vision of development. The strategy to achieve “improvement” has, largely been through technical cooperation but this has been heavily critiqued over the last twenty years resulting in the promotion of the newer concept of capacity development (Eade & Oxfam UK & Ireland., 1997; Lopes & Theisohn, 2003; OECD, 2006b). I argue that capacity development provides a bridge that links practical technical considerations to broader development goals and volunteering for development provides a good example of this.

Capacity development enables learning from, and building on, local knowledge and strengths with external knowledge and support, thus contributing to better and reciprocal change and development. It sits within the broad conception of development and takes us beyond the narrow bounds of simple technical or economic models of sustainable development that have a tendency toward an instrumental view of environmental protection. This broader view of sustainable development can be conceptualised by the more recent, integrated and deeper concept of sustainability (Robinson, 2002). In this paper I will investigate, whether the concepts of capacity development and sustainability can be applied in practice through international “environmental” volunteers’ working with local people to foster development.

The linking of capacity, development and sustainability requires the explicit embrace of reciprocal processes. These not only encourage ownership amongst developing communities but also encourage learning and change in the North through a relational approach to development (Slife, 2004). Such a relational approach to development puts people and their interactions with the environment, institutions and each other as central to successful technical cooperation and partnership. Volunteering for development is a perfect example of a relational approach to development.

David Lewis suggests that international volunteering allows a “humanising response” to the pace and impersonal push of globalization (Lewis, 2005:13,14). The International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCOs) approach to development has been different to most other aid players and NGOs. They have facilitated international volunteers living, working and learning together with local people and institutions in the South, under similar conditions, as a

medium to create development partnerships. These partnerships have provided an opportunity to respond very specifically to current capacity development requirements as well as broader concerns for truly global change through relational development that goes beyond narrow technical cooperation frameworks to stress local accountability and ownership.

This paper presents and analyses survey data from 30 long-term international volunteers. The themes that emerged from the volunteer survey are grouped under the overarching research queries of:

- What features characterise the role of international volunteers?
- Is it possible to achieve shifts in thinking and practice for the volunteers and/or others, as a result of the work together?
- How are international volunteers recognised in the development sector?

On the basis of the themes that emerge, the next step is to consider if other development stakeholders also see the validity of these observations. This is explored through other stakeholder perspectives from interviews in Cambodia and Central America. The resulting conclusions demonstrate opportunities for the complementary use of long-term international volunteers (from North and South) alongside other development interventions and other volunteer modalities ranging from national to local and episodic, short term to electronic and corporate as well as the consolidation of “volunteer infrastructure”. Together, these can potentially deepen development concepts, frameworks and opportunities beyond ‘development as practice’ through technical cooperation and one way capacity building.

Paper 3

The Forms and Effects of International Volunteering

Benjamin J. Lough, Amanda Moore McBride, Washington University in St. Louis, and
Margaret Sherrard Sherraden, University of Missouri St. Louis;

for the panel

“Volunteer Cooperation for International Development in the 21st Century”

Background

International collaboration accompanying the end of the Cold War, along with rapid globalization of post-industrial capitalism have seen an increase in international volunteerism worldwide (Barnett, 2006; Clark, 2003; Kaldor, 2003). Volunteers often serve overseas with intentions to positively effect their own development or the development of recipient beneficiaries and communities. Despite the best intentions, however, the impacts of international volunteering and service (IVS) on different stakeholders are not well known.

In order to fill this knowledge gap, research on international volunteering has slowly increased in scope and significance (McBride, Sherraden, & Lough, 2007; Randel et al., 2005). Although some pioneering work has been done to understand the general field of civic service worldwide (McBride, Sherraden, Benítez, & Johnson, 2004) as well as on service research overall (Perry & Imperial, 2001), researchers have not completed a thorough review on the impacts of international volunteerism.

Scholars suggest that IVS not only has the potential to promote development but also to inflict harm on the volunteers and host communities (Brav, McBride, & Sherraden, 2002; Grusky, 2000; Randel et al., 2005; Roberts, 2004; Simpson, 2004). Individual case studies also often contradict each other; indicating that IVS does not always have positive effects on the volunteers, host and sending organizations, beneficiaries, local communities, and the wider society. As an important foundation for substantiating or countering these competing claims, this study thoroughly reviews the literature and summarizes existing evidence of the impacts of international volunteering and service.

Methods

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge regarding the impact of international volunteering and service, the authors have conducted a bibliographic review of recent literature on international volunteering and service. The paper synthesizes the results of abstracts published in academic journals across multiple disciplines. Relevant abstracts were identified by searching major electronic databases, and selected based on their topical application. The summary also includes rigorous practice-based evaluation reports from major volunteer sending organizations.

Findings

Main outcomes areas represent impacts at three levels including 1) community members, 2) host organizations, and 3) volunteers. At these three levels, international volunteering often has a positive influence by increasing human capital for both volunteers and community

members (particularly in the areas of health, education, employment, language, and problem-solving), civic engagement, social capital, organizational capacity, cross-cultural understanding and competence. Studies also indicate problem areas that international volunteerism may engender including cultural hegemony, ethnocentrism, paternalistic attitudes, and resource dependence.

Discussion

As an expansive review and summary of IVS-related impacts, this paper helps close the knowledge gap; providing practitioners, policymakers, and researchers with up-to-date, empirically-based data upon which to design effective service programming. When designed and implemented appropriately, international volunteering can be an effective development intervention. When precautions are not taken, however, volunteers may be unhelpful to the communities they desire to serve. This paper surveys existing empirical evidence, identifies gaps in existing research, and proposes recommendations for areas requiring greater evidence-based inquiry.

Paper 4
Contributions of Volunteering to Development
Caspar Merkle, United Nations Volunteers

for the panel
“Volunteer Cooperation for International Development in the 21st Century”

Background

More and more, development organizations are under pressure to demonstrate that their programs result in significant and lasting changes in the well-being of their intended beneficiaries. At the same time, organizations need to capitalize on past experience and optimize corporate processes of organizational learning. Against this background, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) in 2005 undertook an exercise to develop a methodology that would help to address this need, i.e. measure the contributions of volunteering to development and support learning amongst volunteers and across the organization. This process was accompanied by a steering committee that included the following organizations: Canadian Crossroads International (CCI), Skillshare International (UK), Australian Volunteers International (AVI), German Development Service (DED), Japan Overseas Co-operation Volunteers (JOCV) and Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) New Zealand.

Methods

The methodology that was developed consists of a qualitative, participatory process that asked key questions about results achieved through volunteering, how these results were being achieved and about lessons learned from volunteering. These questions were asked in a series of validation workshops at the local, regional and/ or national level. The results draw on the experiences and perceptions of volunteers themselves, their partners and the intended beneficiaries of volunteering placements and programmes. The methodology was piloted in 12 countries, further refined and was also used by UNV to capture results of UNV volunteers in specific thematic areas such as youth participation, local governance and crisis prevention.

Findings

Experience with applying the methodology so far shows that it helps to place volunteers' activities and results into context, and to link it with higher-level development goals such as improved education, or enhanced health care services. The pilots have also demonstrated that there is a strong capacity-building element in the validation workshops through a structured process of sharing of experiences between volunteers and partners. Pilots have also revealed that some of the results typically associated with volunteers' engagement include behavioral changes, e.g. greater trust between communities and local governments, or a more participatory approach of the agency that the volunteer is assigned to.

Discussion

Among the challenges of the methodology is that depending on the country and the culture, there are diverse perceptions and concepts around volunteering. As with any qualitative research it can become difficult to specify some of the “soft” aspects that volunteering brings to development, such as the commitment and motivation of volunteers.

Based on the experience, UNV has learned a number of lessons that are being incorporated in the further application and fine-tuning of the methodology. For example, for validation purposes the active participation of stakeholders in the workshops is essential. Changes in behaviour or attitudes require careful analysis and the validation by others than volunteers themselves before drawing general conclusions. A good quality documentation of the workshops is key to allow for later aggregation of the workshop results. The workshop facilitators need to be trained well in advance, and tools need to be translated into local language to allow for maximum participation from local partners. Finally, it is recommended to adapt the concepts and terminology used during the workshops to the local context to ensure common understanding and ownership of the results.

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