

VALUING VOLUNTEERING

# THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEERING IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2015





The Valuing Volunteering project was a collaboration between the Institute of Development Studies and VSO.

## VSO at a glance

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## Roles

Danny Burns and Joanna Wheeler directed the Valuing Volunteering project, providing management and methodological accompaniment support throughout.

Danny Burns was lead author on this synthesis report.

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Violetta Vajda and Katie Turner were the VSO project managers for Valuing Volunteering.

Erika Lopez Franco and Thea Shahrokh wrote the literature review. Erika also provided research support in the last 18 months of the project.

## Acronyms

<b>CBO</b>	Community-based organisation
<b>CHW</b>	Community health worker
<b>CWMFMC</b>	Carood Watershed Model Forest Management Council
<b>ECD</b>	Early child development
<b>ICS</b>	International Citizen Service
<b>IDS</b>	Institute of Development Studies
<b>IEC</b>	Information, Education and Communication
<b>INGO</b>	International non-governmental organisation
<b>NDVS</b>	National Development Volunteer Service, Nepal
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>PO</b>	People's Organisation
<b>PSI</b>	Participatory Systemic Inquiry
<b>SAR</b>	Systemic Action Research
<b>SDB</b>	<i>Secretario do bairro</i>
<b>TMO</b>	Tubbataha Management Office
<b>VfD</b>	Volunteering for development

We use the phrase 'volunteering for development (VfD) organisations' to refer to organisations whose core purpose is international development working alongside volunteers such as VSO, Peace Corps and United Nations Volunteering (UNV).

This research project was originally called Valuing Volunteering. Any references to Valuing Volunteering refer to the project as a whole.

### Colours used for quotes

- **Pink** - Direct quotes from research participants
- **Grey** - Observations made by the lead researchers

## Types of volunteer referred to in this report

Throughout this report we have used the following terms to refer to the different types of volunteer. Where we have referred only to 'volunteer' or 'volunteering' in general, we intend that these findings are applicable to all types of volunteer:

Volunteer type	Description
Self-help and mutual aid (informal volunteering)	Traditionally practised within communities in response to an individual or collective need. This is sometimes also referred to as 'informal' volunteering as their activities are not linked to a formal organisation or institution.
Community volunteer	Individuals who are volunteering in their own or a nearby community.  In this study we use the term community volunteers to refer to volunteers that are connected to a formal programme of work that is led by a local NGO/INGO or institution, i.e. community health groups, home-based care schemes, parent teacher associations, youth groups and citizen committee.
National volunteer	Individuals who have been recruited by a national volunteering body or organisation to volunteer for a specific project. They are volunteering within their home country but may have travelled to another part of the country to volunteer.
International volunteer	Individuals who have travelled from their home country to another country to volunteer. This includes diaspora volunteers (individuals going to volunteer in their country of origin) and south-south volunteers (individuals travelling from a global south country to another global south country to volunteer).





# 1. Executive summary

This report summarises findings from the global action research project 'Valuing Volunteering'. The research explores how and why volunteering contributes to poverty reduction and sustainable positive change, and the factors which prevent it from doing so. It looks at both the intended and unintended impacts of volunteering interventions.

The literature review conducted for the research<sup>1</sup> demonstrated that whilst there has been a wealth of research exploring how volunteering affects volunteers themselves, there has been very little research exploring how volunteering actually brings about change for communities on the ground. Valuing Volunteering seeks to address this gap.

The research was conducted over two years in 2012–14 in four countries: Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal and the Philippines. Led by volunteer researchers and drawing on participatory action research methodologies, the research engaged more than 3,700 people including local volunteer groups, community leaders, young people, teachers, health practitioners, community leaders, government officials and staff and volunteers from local, national and international NGOs.

Although the project was commissioned by VSO, its aim is to inform learning and practice across the development sector; four of the 12 case studies that inform this research relate specifically to VSO projects and between them they cover a diverse range of volunteer interventions: from self-help and community volunteering through to formal national and international volunteering programmes supported by different organisations and institutions. The case studies explore the contribution of volunteering across different contexts and issues including: access to education and health, governance and the environment.



Whilst the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) benefited the general population and some of those who were poor, they have barely reached the most marginalised and the very poor.<sup>2</sup> Recent research from the Participate initiative (Burns et al 2014) demonstrated that the biggest issue for the poorest was not necessarily that services weren't there; the issue is that they don't

get access to them. This is because of discriminatory social norms and institutional discrimination, corruption and naked power. What this has taught us is that, in order to be sustainable, international development cooperation must look beyond technical and financial assistance to solutions that are devised from the ground up. A lack of knowledge and understanding about the complexity of the lives people lead and the factors that are driving them into poverty also makes it easier for poverty and injustice to be ignored and causes governments and organisations to make assumptions about the solutions that are needed. There is a need to focus more on how development is done rather than what services are available. Because volunteering is such a relational practice, reliant upon the relationships formed between volunteers and those they are working alongside, it is well placed to facilitate people-centred approaches that are focused on local agency and ownership over development and which can engage with power.



By embedding a strong participatory research process into four countries we were able to show how a detailed knowledge of people's lives and the factors that affect them can offer profound insight into what sort of volunteering is needed.

In this report the research findings have been grouped within the following sections:

- The unique contribution of volunteering to sustainable development
- Looking at volunteering within the wider context; engaging with the complexities of power and politics
- How organisations working with volunteers can reach the poorest and most marginalised

1. Lopez Franco, E and Shahrokh, T, 2014, "Literature Review to inform Valuing Volunteering Literature".

2. Burns, D., Howard, J., Lopez Franco, E., Shahrokh, T. and Wheeler, J., 2013, *Work with Us: How Communities and Organisations Can Catalyse Sustainable Change*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

## The unique contribution of volunteering to development

The research found that it is not just *what* volunteers do but *how* they support change that makes their contribution unique. Volunteers' embeddedness within communities and organisations, living and working alongside individuals in the community and their colleagues, enables them to develop a shared understanding of each other and the challenges they face. Where this works effectively, it creates strong personal bonds and relationships which leads to a different kind of collaboration, based on a mutual appreciation of each other's knowledge, skills and networks. These more informal relationships help to build trust, contribute to the generation of soft outcomes (such as increased confidence, agency and leadership skills) that enable solutions to be owned and sustained at local level and harness networks that enable things to get done. However, the research also found that the unique contribution of volunteers can be diminished when agencies present volunteers as experts to respond to donor and partner expectations. This can perpetuate a one-way relationship in which the volunteer's knowledge is perceived to be more valuable than that of their local counterparts.

The research showed the power of the merging of 'outsider' and 'insider' knowledge as a way of catalysing and supporting local innovation. It also demonstrated the role of volunteers in extending the reach of services to the poorest and most marginalised, their ability to act as brokers and to use their networks within communities to link individuals to public services and information outside of the community. As well as adding in numbers and experience to the existing public service workforce, volunteers helped to ensure these services were relevant and responsive to communities' needs. We also found that by modelling active citizenship, more equal gender roles etc, volunteers could inspire new ways of thinking and being and prompt others to want to get involved. This 'ripple effect' and the ability of volunteering to act as a route to increased active citizenship were most evident where individuals had witnessed the impact of volunteer activities. These approaches illustrate how volunteers have been able to work in ways that are far more effective than more traditional approaches to imparting expert knowledge.



## Looking at volunteering within the wider context; engaging with the complexities of power and politics

Throughout the research we observed volunteer practices as part of a wider system of actors, actions and contexts in order to strengthen our understanding of the different factors that can impact on volunteers' effectiveness. Power and politics was observed at every juncture in all four countries and the consistent failure of international VfD organisations to effectively analyse local politics had a significant negative impact on their effectiveness and limits their ability to carry out their unique contribution to development.

We saw examples where volunteering had been co-opted by local political agendas, to promote political messages without volunteers' consent or prior knowledge, or where entrenched political divisions within communities made it difficult for volunteers to carry out their work. As a result, volunteers' position within communities and whether they were trusted or supported in their work often hinged on their understanding of and ability to navigate these complex local and national politics and power relationships. The research found that tools such as systems mapping – using dialogue and stories to identify and demonstrate how issues are related to each other – could be effective in supporting volunteers to understand the political realities and power dynamics that needed to be overcome in order to be effective.



The research also demonstrated that partnerships are often driven by whether partners appear to have the right organisational infrastructures in place to support volunteers rather than whether they share the same values and understanding of what volunteers are there to achieve as the Volunteering for Development (VfD) organisation working alongside them. It identified a need for greater emphasis on partnerships that are set up based on whether the partner is directly connected to community needs.

## How organisations working with volunteers can reach the poorest and most marginalised communities

One of the core findings of this research was that volunteering can be an effective mechanism for reaching the poorest and most marginalised but the research also highlighted that VFD organisations are not always designing and implementing development programmes in a way that supports this to happen. A common frustration expressed by local actors was that external organisations would come in with pre-defined notions of how to tackle an issue or only consult with local leaders in the community. As a result, the programmes designed in response to these consultations were not representative of the needs and experiences of those individuals most directly affected by poverty and marginalisation. By providing groups of volunteers and local actors with training in participatory research approaches and asking them to define the localised research questions and process they were able to identify and test out locally appropriate development solutions.



These local groups brought together a diverse mix of local organisations and volunteers and led to changes in the way volunteer activities were conducted. These included a series of local radio show programmes discussing and providing accurate information on volunteering; plans for piloting a participatory budgeting exercise where local groups can pitch ideas for small-scale volunteering initiatives to their peers; and the recruitment of a diverse range of local volunteers whose combined skills and expertise were able to more effectively support work tackling local environmental issues.

The research also demonstrated that long-term relationships with partners and local actors can aid rather than act as a barrier to sustainability. It highlighted the need for long-term, sustained holistic work in localities where there is endemic poverty and marginalisation. This means exploring ways to move from an overly programmatic structure to one which is based on an understanding of local experiences and knowledge.

Illustration of the people who participated in this research



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**2-2014**  
**IDS**

**PHILIPPINES**  
**MOZAMBIQUE**



**872**  
**PEOPLE...**





## 2. Introduction and methodology

### 2.1 Framing and rationale

The initial hunch of the IDS VSO planning team, which was strongly verified by the literature review, was that while there was a substantial amount of research on how volunteering benefits the volunteer (and the spin-off effects of this in relation to their future careers) there was still limited research on what impact the volunteers had on poverty and in the communities within which they worked.

Some studies<sup>3</sup> have highlighted the fact that volunteering is often the first step to individuals' long-term involvement in development. Smith and Yanacopulos<sup>4</sup> for example argue that "everyday citizens who have come to understand life in the south may provide a key element in the 'public face' of development, which can help to catalyse change in the north". There is no doubt much more to be written about the benefits to volunteers, the countries they come from, and the organisations that they later work in, but this is not what this research focused on.

There are also studies that explore the added value of international volunteering such as Devereux's research<sup>5</sup> that looks at how the role of international volunteers differs from other forms of overseas development assistance and Lough and Matthews' research<sup>6</sup> that assesses the impact of international volunteering on certain less 'visible' outcomes such as well-being and inter-cultural understanding.

Whilst there are aspects of these studies that this research aims to build on, we were also conscious that studies of volunteering tend to be biased towards organisational forms of volunteering rather than community-led volunteering, mutual aid and self-help. The literature review for Valuing Volunteering draws on evidence that shows that whilst international volunteering has yielded significant benefits for host organisations and communities, it has had far less impact on long-term development. It is therefore not only philosophically important to support community-based volunteering but to look at whether this sort of volunteering can potentially generate more sustainable outcomes than other forms of volunteering. A significant part of our research therefore lies at the interface between the two where there is relatively little existing research.



### 2.2 What the research is, and what it is not

The focus of this report is on the ways in which volunteering contributes to sustainable development. The overarching research question that frames the research is "How and why does volunteering affect poverty?"

This study is not an impact evaluation. The research has not sought to assess the impact of VSO or other volunteering programmes on development; instead we have tried to understand how and why impacts come about. What is it about volunteering that enables certain outcomes, which might perhaps be less likely to result from other sorts of interventions?

With this in mind, using the overarching research question "How and why does volunteering affect poverty?" we aimed to provide evidence on three key research questions:

- What are the critical issues facing VFD agencies that seek to achieve development outcomes for the poorest and most marginalised?
- How can volunteering best contribute to sustainable development? And what are the conditions that enable volunteering to have a positive impact, or those that impede this?
- What is the unique contribution of volunteering to international development?



3. Civicus, IAVE, UNV (2008) Volunteering and social activism. Pathways for participation in human development.

4. Smith, M. and Yanacopulos, H. (2004) "The Public Faces of Development: An Introduction". *Journal of International Development*, 16:5, 557–64.

5. Devereux, P. (2008) "International Volunteering for Development and Sustainability: Outdated Paternalism or a Radical Response to Globalisation?" *Development in Practice*, 18:3, 357–60.

6. Lough, B. and Matthews, L. (2013) Forum Discussion Paper: Measuring and Conveying the Added Value of International Volunteering.

## 2.3 Research process

The project Valuing Volunteering started in 2011 and ran over three years to the end of 2014. There have been a number of stages in the project. First we carried out a literature review that helped us to conceptualise the research and determine what it would focus on. We then selected and trained a group of VSO international volunteers as lead volunteer researchers. All of the volunteers had research experience, but they were given additional training at IDS in how to use participatory and systemic inquiry methods and systemic action research (SAR) approaches.



The research took place over two years (2012–14) in four countries: Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal and the Philippines.

The research was carried out across a number of research sites in each country. The local partners and research sites selected were determined by two key criteria:

- active interest in using the research for their own learning
- remit to work with volunteers to support positive change for the poorest and most marginalised.

This led to a broad range of inquiries that explored a range of different volunteer interventions – self-help, community, national and international – and across a variety of development issues – education, health, governance and the environment.

Each inquiry involved coalitions of volunteers, local partners, community members and decision-makers who were brought together and supported to nurture their understanding of the development challenges they faced and the role of volunteering in addressing them.



The lead researchers also created national inquiry groups that included VSO in-country staff, volunteers and other VfD organisations, and representatives from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government who assisted in analysing and validating the research findings.

The foundation for cross-country learning has been a series of in-country accompaniment visits with the research team and research participants, online discussions, and debates with the wider sector. The accompaniment visits took place for the Asia team in Nepal and the Philippines and for the Africa team in Ghana and Mozambique.



In July 2013 we held a workshop to set a framing for the development of the case studies. A further week-long workshop was held in February 2014 to develop a detailed analytical framework from the emerging case study material. Before this workshop researchers had analysed their country data to identify key analytical themes. At the February workshop we explored which strong themes were evidenced across the countries. This generated a set of analytical categories for the whole team to work to, allowing individuals to search their data for more detail, and to corroborate our earlier analysis. Issues that were specific to countries remained within the case studies. Issues that crossed countries were built into the synthesis.

This framework was also used to structure the analysis workshop held in October 2014. This provided an open forum for VSO global staff and academic and development sector colleagues to discuss the broader implications of the findings for volunteering and the development sector. This time, instead of the researchers analysing the data, an invited group of 50 or so participants from VSO and other VfD organisations worked through data packs, which amalgamated the evidence from each of the case studies.

All of the key outputs (including the case studies) were subjected to critical scrutiny through external peer review.

During the two years in the four countries more than 3,700 people were actively involved in collecting data, analysing it and generating action from it. The tables in appendix 5.1 give a breakdown of the large numbers of people who were engaged in this in each country. These figures illustrate that the findings from this research are not based on anecdotes from short research engagements, but on an extensive repository of data generated by large numbers of active participants. Although this was a qualitative and participatory study, the length of time that the researchers were able to spend in country, combined with comprehensive engagement processes, ensured that findings generated are robust.

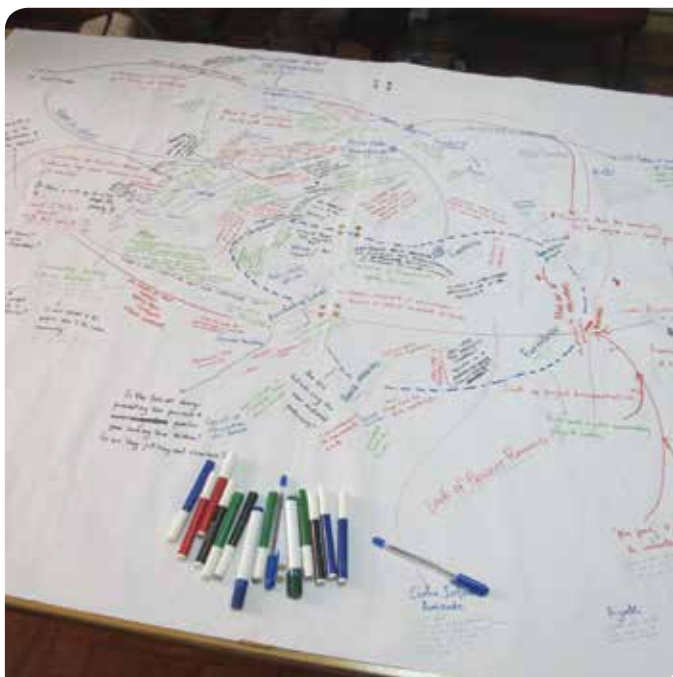


## 2.4 Overarching methodology

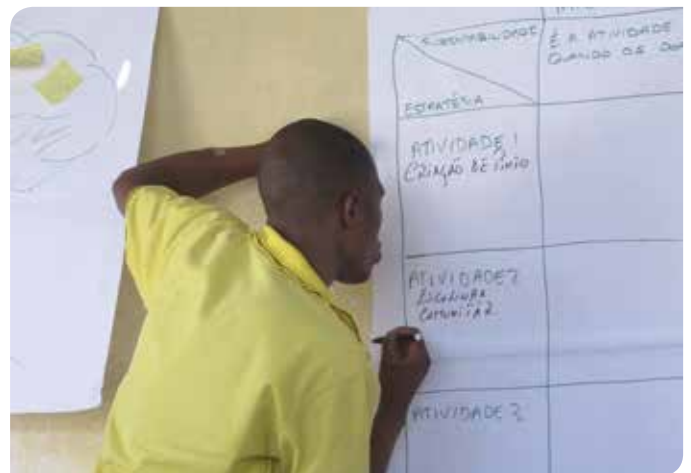
The Valuing Volunteering project used two research approaches to collect and analyse insights about volunteering; Participatory Systemic Inquiry (PSI) and Systemic Action Research (SAR). Both of these approaches enable us to get under the surface of how communities operate and how change happens.

Participatory Systemic Inquiries allow a system of actors, actions and contexts to be mapped as a baseline against which change can be assessed (Burns, 2012). When identifying the starting points (our baseline) for a project we might typically record those factors that have an obvious direct relation to our intervention. For example, if our aim is to increase girls' access to education, a 'traditional' baseline might record factors such as school enrolment, attendance and participation. PSI allows us to go deeper and reflect on how people, processes and the environment that they are situated within influence one another and the path to change. Doing this involves asking both broad and detailed questions which take us beyond the school walls and into the complexities of social systems such as, "Are girls supported by their family and the wider community to attend school?", "What are the power dynamics within the community and how might these influence girls' attendance in school?"

This data is then used to determine how different factors affect one another, with the aim of learning about why change is or is not happening. While causal links between each part of a system can be identified, they are frequently not linear relationships. By allowing us to observe volunteer practices as part of a wider system rather than in isolation, PSI challenges our assumption that if we do x it will automatically lead to y and forces us to consider each intervention within the context in which it is taking place. For example, strengthening our understanding of the factors that impact on people's perceptions of volunteering was important in some inquiries to make sense of volunteers' effectiveness. A PSI mapping and analysis might take place over a 2–12-week period and can involve working with many different individuals and groups. In the Valuing Volunteering project we ran many different PSIs at the community, organisational and national levels. Where actors were motivated to respond to emergent findings, PSI formed the beginning of an action research process.



Systemic action research (SAR) is an action research methodology which embeds reflection, planning, action and evaluation into a single process. The core principle behind action research is that we learn as much if not more from action than from analysis. It incorporates iterative cycles of action and analysis, allowing us to reflect at intervals on a particular action or approach and adapting it according to what we have learnt. The action research used by Valuing Volunteering was participatory because it was led by individuals directly affected by or involved in VfD initiatives, and they defined the action research process and questions. It was systemic because we assessed the impact of actions by considering the knock-on effects for the actors, actions and contexts comprising the wider social system. In the action research processes participants assess the maps and other data in order to identify where they can make the most effective interventions. Groups meet regularly to assess the impact of what they have done, refine actions as a result and develop new interventions. SAR typically takes place over a period of 18 months to three years.



SAR and PSI are methodologies which use many methods. These methods include the generation and processing of systems maps; rich pictures; monitoring of workload patterns; surveys; rivers of life mappings, story collection and analysis, immersions, observation and transect walks; participatory photography and participatory video; open discussions and dialogues. All of these and more were used in the Valuing Volunteering work.

More detail on methods can be found in section 3.3 (*Participatory research*) and detailed descriptions of exactly what was done can be found in the case studies.

## 2.5 The content of the research and of this publication

The in-country researchers produced 12 detailed case studies, which have been published in parallel to this synthesis report to ensure that those who need details or want to look at particular issues can do so. They also show readers how the evidence was built up.

This is a synthesis report. It draws on published case studies (listed at the start of this report) and on thinking from the October 2014 analysis event, but it does not replicate the case studies. This report distils the key messages of our research and illustrates them with quotations. We have drawn extensively on quotes from the case studies in order to support our findings. Often we have provided quotes from a number of countries on one subject, to show clearly how so many of our findings are common to more than one country.



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## 3. Findings



### 3.1 The unique contribution of volunteering to sustainable development

#### 3.1.1 Extending the reach of services to the poorest and most marginalised

Volunteering is one of the most significant yet under-recognised means through which public services reach the poorest and most marginalised communities. In many countries there is an extensive infrastructure of schools, hospitals, security services and even social protection schemes, but poor people do not get access to them. Volunteers can play a significant role in helping to bridge this gap; adding in numbers and experience to the existing public service workforce and helping to ensure the relevance of these services to the communities they have been set up for. In Mozambique for example, between 2004 and 2008, the number of AIDS patients receiving Home Based Care provided by volunteers and health activists rose from 17,790 to 99,122.<sup>7</sup>

The Valuing Volunteering research looks at the role of volunteers in extending the reach of services in two contexts: national volunteers recruited through government-led volunteer schemes; and community volunteers who are linked to an institution (local NGO, church, hospital etc) for the delivery of a specific project.

#### Extending the reach of services

Throughout the research we found examples of the ways in which national volunteers and community volunteers were helping to strengthen the capacity of the existing workforce and extend the reach of public services to some of the poorest and hardest-to-reach communities. Often volunteers were themselves from poor and marginalised communities, the implications of which will be explored later in this section.

There were many examples of activities of volunteers complementing existing services, sometimes acting as a bridge between the community and formal services;

**“People in the hospital would have a difficult time because the activists [volunteers] are the link. They are mobilising people to get to hospital because the nurses are not able to go to the community.”**

Hospital staff, Mozambique

When referring to how volunteers were able to fulfil this role, the hospital staff added:

**“They must be a person that people have trust in and that has good behaviour, they have to be able to transmit information to the population and be engaging and credible so people will listen.”**

Hospital staff, Mozambique

7. National Strategic HIV and AIDS Response Plan, 2010–2014, p. 27.

The fact that community volunteers are known to, and have the trust of, community members was cited again and again throughout the research as one of the key reasons that they were able to be effective in reaching out to communities and getting them to trust in and access public services. Volunteers' embeddedness within communities, discussed in more detail in section 3.1.3 *The importance of relationships in volunteering for development*, meant that they were able to build this trust over time by getting to know and understand the barriers preventing community members from accessing formal healthcare and work alongside them to identify ways to overcome these. The volunteers were also able to gain this trust by practising what they preached, for example demonstrating adherence to certain sanitation regimes, encouraging others to follow by example (see *Modelling different norms* in section 3.1.3).

In Nepal, the National Development Volunteer Service (NDVS) mobilises 'technical' volunteers – in health, agricultural development or engineering – who hold qualifications equivalent to those of their colleagues in the public sector with whom they will be working. These volunteers were often deployed to help support existing staff – for example, where a team faced difficult demands or allowed for posts (e.g. a health post) to reopen or increase their capacity to see more patients:

**“Volunteers relieve my workload and mean that I can do more work and take more time with patients... The workload is very high so the volunteer enables people to be seen. The volunteer is hardworking, active and timely. I needed help because I was so stretched, so asked for a volunteer.”**

Community Medical Assistant, health post, Nepal

Because the national volunteers are recent graduates, their technical knowledge is sometimes more up to date than that of the permanent staff members they work alongside. The research suggested that there is potentially an additional but less well-explored role for these volunteers in updating existing practices and learning:

**“Permanent staff do not have up to date abilities. Volunteers have fresh knowledge and skills with which they can serve the community volunteers better.”**

NDVS health volunteer



In Nepal, the shift from communicable to non-communicable diseases, such as respiratory diseases or diabetes, means there is a need for the health sector to update its practices in order to be able to recognise and respond to these changing disease profiles. National volunteers can play a useful role in supporting services to be able to respond to changes.

### Plugging a resource gap

In many cases we found that the line between volunteers complementing existing services and plugging long-term resource gaps had become blurred. In Kenya and Mozambique, community health workers (CHWs) provided support and services that would not otherwise have existed within communities. They carried out roles such as helping to care for individuals in their home, providing childcare and giving counselling to families on supporting family members with HIV/AIDS:

**“We would not have anything... the only ones who help are the volunteers, the others do nothing.”**

Grandparent in household receiving support from a volunteer, Mozambique

**“They give me regular visits, no one else helps and sometimes they will give me soap for washing.”**

Person living with HIV, Mozambique

A similar pattern was observed in Nepal:

**“I think if we (me and fellow volunteer working in same hospital) are taken from here, the Emergency will not be run. Because permanent staff are little and little staying there.”**

NDVS volunteer, Nepal

**“The permanent staff has his own private clinic so the permanent staff member wants to treat patients at the health post as fast as possible so he gives responsibilities to me, so that is why I stay longer than permanent staff.”**

NDVS volunteer, Nepal

**“For me the work is a duty – but I fulfil the work of permanent staff.”**

NDVS volunteer, Nepal

In these examples national and community volunteers are being recruited as a voluntary equivalent to a paid, permanent member of staff. This poses risks to both the communities and the volunteers working in those communities in terms of the level of training and support they receive to carry out these roles, compared to a permanent member of staff, which could compromise the quality of the services delivered. It also raises questions about whether volunteering is being used by government as an excuse to not identify longer-term solutions and tackle issues such as high staff turnover and absenteeism:

**“Permanent staff have lots of privileges given by the law so they really don't like to stay in remote places. When the government sends volunteers to work in the remote areas, because volunteers are motivated from themselves, they are supposed to stay in these places and serve the community better than permanent staff, so this is why the government may deploy volunteers.”**

NDVS volunteer, Nepal

Public-sector cuts, under-resourcing and a low tax base can make it difficult to provide public services over and above the bare minimum. There was a strong feeling amongst community and national volunteers involved in this study that governments must afford better recognition to the volunteers who are helping to plug gaps in public services and infrastructure, by providing quality training and supporting the work that they do. This doesn't just mean legislating for better support but also taking responsibility for how it is implemented. In Mozambique for example, whilst there is a law stipulating that home based care workers should receive 60% of minimum wage, it is generally accepted that this is not given unless the health project is delivered and funded in partnership with an international donor or organisation.

### Duty of care and accountability to volunteers

Gaps in public services frequently affect the poorest and most marginalised people the most. At a community level people have to use their voluntary labour to fill the gaps because they do not have money to buy services. As a result, many of those volunteers who are helping to extend the reach of services to the most marginalised are often the same individuals who are living in poverty. It is a challenge for government institutions and organisations mobilising volunteers to consider this when thinking about their duty of care to these individuals.

Some volunteers cited instances demonstrating that their ability to meet their own and their family's needs had been compromised as a result of volunteering:

**"Sometimes when a volunteer is out working the family is at home asking, 'Where is the Bread?'"**

Volunteer group leader, Mozambique

**"When an organisation says we want to do a project with, for example, orphaned and vulnerable children, we want to give them books and a bag etc they should also be evaluating if the volunteer needs these things too because they have children. They are also vulnerable."**

Volunteer group leader, Mozambique

**"Community health volunteers, especially women, will not even have a good period to breastfeed and bond with the [volunteer's] family. We never go on leave. Say, maternal leave. We are required to leave infants as young as three days old to attend to other people."**

Volunteer, Korogocho, Kenya

Selfless motivations can be exploited. Sometimes volunteers are treated with less care than the 'beneficiaries' yet their socio-economic situation may be as bad as, if not worse than, those whom they are supporting:

**"On 1<sup>st</sup> December 2013 during World Aids Day celebrations, together with some CHWs we went out distributing foodstuffs to our clients who were bedridden. This activity took a whole day. In the end of it all, we were not given a single packet of maize meal flour. We went back to our houses without anything and went to borrow from a nearby grocer shop. He literally denied me, asking how come I was distributing maize meal flour and has none in my home. This set me back."**

Local volunteer, Korogocho, Kenya

The Kenya research highlighted that sometimes the safety of female volunteers is compromised:

**"As a woman, you may volunteer all day and come back and the husband will not understand and beat her. This demotivates and puts people off."**

Member of support group, Korogocho, Kenya

**"Women face more challenges. I once had a client who used to touch me in a suggestive manner yet I went all the way to attend to him. He used to lure me into his home, trying to sleep with me. I had to cut off all ties with him."**

Community health volunteer, Korogocho, Kenya

The findings highlight a very real need for institutions, donors and organisations working with volunteers to recognise the risk of increased vulnerability that volunteers face as a result of engaging in volunteering, in particular those from the poorest and most marginalised communities. Organisations working with volunteers from the poorest and most marginalised communities have a responsibility to ensure volunteers' active participation in the design, implementation and review of programme outcomes, taking into account as part of this process how volunteers' engagement will be supported and sustained.

### Implications

- National and community volunteers can play a valuable role in helping to extend the reach of public services by adding in numbers and experience to the existing public service workforce and helping to ensure the relevance of those services to the communities they have been set up for. They are best placed to do so when they receive the right training and support.
- In some cases national and community volunteers are being recruited as a voluntary equivalent to a paid, permanent member of staff. This can perpetuate cultures of absenteeism and high turnover of permanent staff and be used by governments as an excuse to not seek long-term solutions.
- Volunteers working in some of the poorest and remote areas are often themselves from poor and marginalised communities. It is therefore important to consider duty of care issues, such as ensuring volunteers are provided with the right resources and support to do their work and are not disadvantaged further by engaging in volunteering.
- Development is most effective in reaching the poorest and most marginalised when those living in poverty are the ones stating what's needed and how. Organisations working with volunteers from the poorest and most marginalised communities need to enable their active participation in the design, implementation and review of programme outcomes.

### 3.1.2 Agency, active citizenship and social capital

Active citizenship is often seen as synonymous with community volunteering, but the term is also used more broadly to mean any citizen becoming engaged with the process of change and development. Through the research we want to explore the role of volunteering as an enabler of active citizenship and understand when, why and how an opportunity to volunteer creates more self-directed and motivated individuals and groups.

The research has found that while there may be some intrinsic benefits to individuals and communities (for example feelings of satisfaction, building social capital) from volunteering, volunteer opportunities are unlikely to inspire or sustain an active citizenry unless people see that volunteering has an impact.

This research found that because volunteering is such a relational practice (see section 3.1.3), reliant upon the relationships formed between volunteers and those they are working alongside, volunteers' connection with the work that they are doing becomes personal as well as professional. It is not so much about doing a job, but about providing something for people whom you know and have grown to care about. As a result, volunteers become more altruistic when they feel accountable to real people, and see the impact of what they do on people's lives.

### Building on and supporting a culture of altruism

There are different catalysts for becoming actively engaged in social change efforts. For some, such engagement is instilled through their culture, for others it derives from a feeling of injustice. A culture of altruism can be stimulated through an act of volunteering. For some it starts with a personal incentive but leads to a more collective one, and for some it is always personally motivated. Many who volunteer embody the paradox of these apparently contradictory motivations at the same time.

There will always be people who are motivated to support their communities actively because they want to help their families, friends and communities:

**"We do it because they are our neighbours."**

Activista, Mozambique

**"We feel something in our hearts."**

Volunteer, Mozambique

**"I saw farmers really needing help, I saw government agencies trying to help, and somewhere they just don't connect. I saw how the farmers really needed to bounce back from their current really bad predicaments, because they have no way of competing with the big business farms. One farmer said that he tries so hard to sell his stuff and there are these big guys. I thought that that was unfair, and I saw the government trying to help but there's this disconnect. From that day I really started to think that maybe I should stop thinking about myself for a while because their stories really got to me... For me that's what opened my eyes to another world. I have actually crossed the river."**

Student volunteer at Xavier University, the Philippines

**"I've changed in my thoughts about volunteering. At first I didn't know about it. Now I have the idea that it is about selfless volunteering. The thinking is good because others are concerned about money."**

NDVS volunteer, Nepal

Some participants in the research felt that people had become more individualistic in their concerns and so had less interest in engaging in volunteering:

**"In the early days, if you were building a house, you [would] invite friends who help and you will cook for them. Now people are doing things more on their own, which makes it more difficult to volunteer."**

Village elder, Korogocho, Kenya

To some extent the Philippines is still characterised by the spirit of *bayanihan* (the spirit of communal unity and cooperation), perhaps cemented by the need for a collective response to repeated environmental crises (typhoons, earthquakes). Nonetheless, people in the country still felt that society was becoming more individualistic, and as common assets (e.g. common land) diminished people look to themselves and their families for survival.

Others may require some active engagement to stimulate that sentiment. Witnessing or taking part in activities organised by volunteers can be enough to spark a more collective spirit, motivating people to care and become interested in an issue. It can provide the solidarity needed to tackle more complex issues and use different human resources to bring about change.



The next section describes how the relational nature of volunteering opens up the possibility of new motives and values because people see the effects of their own and others' work on real people. Bonds are formed and people start to feel accountable to each other. Volunteers can model both agency and collective action:

**"When the volunteer came to help, [the local community] think if someone can come to help us we can also help each other."**  
Head teacher, Nepal

This is particularly powerful when volunteering actively challenges the stereotypes of international experts as being the only people who can bring about development. Local people begin to realise that they are just as capable of leading development as anyone else.

### **The opportunity to practise social action and take on new roles**

Some volunteers commented that volunteering gave them the opportunity to take on new roles and responsibilities that they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to explore:

**"I think that I got the opportunity to use my skills. If I wasn't a volunteer I wouldn't be able to use that skill."**  
NDVS volunteer, Nepal

It also provided a safe environment in which volunteers had the opportunity to practise social action and witness the outcomes of their engagement:

**"It [volunteering] has greatly changed my personality. My outlook [on] life. How nice it was to be a volunteer in a project that you can see will help the community in the future and also yourself. It is hard to learn only in the four corners of the room... It opens up your mind. You are given the confidence to talk to many people."**  
Student, Bohol Island State University, the Philippines

The Philippines research explored how the ICS programme generated new experience and relationships that supported volunteers' personal development and enabled them to practise social action. The programme provided volunteers with all sorts of leadership opportunities from running workshops, to engaging mayors and school principals to solicit support for their cause, and organising community events. They were encouraged to practise using their own initiative, creating something from nothing. The development of this sense of self-direction was punctuated by individual supervision, group reflection and team sessions to track progress, deal with challenges and discuss tensions that arise from cross-cultural working. These spaces act like a social infrastructure to support learning.

### **Sustaining active citizenship**

However powerful the social motivation to volunteer, volunteering without a clear sense of the outcome it is connected to is a dead end. People can become enthused by the idea, but quickly become disillusioned if they cannot see tangible results.

**"Mindless volunteering is a big barrier to cultivating the sort of active citizenship that will contribute to development. If exposure to community work is not combined with an equal commitment to making that work impactful then the message that is being sent to people is that it matters more that you give yourself to helping than what that helping actually achieves."**  
Aked, J., 2014, "Volunteering for Gown and Town"

This is a complex issue. The Palawan action research<sup>8</sup> managed to create great interest in setting up a cooperative to tackle many of the issues of concern, but because there were no funds or resources to create the cooperative the activity died down. The process may well have created spill-over effects into family and community life, but without a direct impact it is difficult to sustain the learning that undoubtedly took place.

There is a catch-22 in some of this work, as volunteering can help to build strong social capital but people are less likely to volunteer in areas that have low social capital. Volunteering can thus be seen as an indicator of social capital; it is necessary to create an upward spiral (virtuous circle) rather than a downward spiral. People need to see tangible outcomes from the work of volunteers in order to support those activities and continue to engage with them. This requires processes for analysing local situations (see section 3.3.3, *Participatory research*) and generating local solutions, funding streams to enable these solutions to be achieved, and development programmes which support them (see section 3.3)

### **Implications**

- Volunteering was shown to provide individuals with the opportunity to test out new roles and responsibilities. It also provided a safe environment in which volunteers had the opportunity to practise social action and witness the outcomes of their engagement.
- Witnessing or taking part in activities organised by volunteers can be enough to spark a more collective spirit, motivating people to care and become interested in an issue. However, communities need to be empowered to take action themselves (with resources) and to contribute substantively to the development of programmes that affect their localities.
- People need to see tangible outcomes from the work of volunteers in order to support those activities and continue to engage with them.

8. Aked, J., 2014, "When There Are No Fish Left in the Sea: Does Environmental Awareness Translate into Positive Action? Reporting on the Impact of Volunteering for Environmental Education in Coastal Communities of Palawan".

### 3.1.3 The importance of relationships in volunteering for development

The need to navigate complex politics, engage people who are highly marginalised, and achieve results makes the work of volunteers highly relational. The research highlighted that relationships and relationship building between volunteers and their counterparts were as important as technical skills and hard outcomes.

The research reinforced the idea that change is contingent on relationships and it is made much easier when people feel connected to others. We have many examples of how volunteers have got things done primarily through the relationships they build. It was also found that these relational approaches were what contributed to the generation of the soft outcomes, such as leadership skills, communication skills and people management, that led to the solutions identified being locally owned and sustained.

#### Embedding volunteers within communities

The research found that embedding volunteers within communities is crucial to their success. This involves finding ways for volunteers from outside the community to be integrated into the daily life of a community or supporting volunteers from within a community to build the relationships and networks needed to work effectively.

Embeddedness enables communities, people in local organisations and volunteers to be mutually appreciative of the difficulties and realities that they encounter. For example, just watching people struggle with learning a language can invite an emotional response. Embeddedness makes volunteers more human, which builds trust because people in the community realise that volunteers have a role; it opens up a space for reciprocity in relationships.

**At first they didn't trust me. But after interacting with them and attending [local events] they started to trust me and to be more open. It was helpful being in the community because they started to know I was a volunteer. When I started, the community didn't know the difficulties I faced, but afterwards they would bring me vegetables and curries and things.**

NDVS volunteer

Similarly, very simple respect for local cultural norms makes a difference. This can be as important for community volunteers as it is for international and national volunteers; for example, they learn to respect the cultural practices and habits of others in the community that are different from their own.

For community volunteers, having access to and the support of trusted local networks or decision-makers was often seen to be particularly important in order for community members to trust in and assist with their work. A group of community health volunteers involved in the Mozambique research explained how building relationships with local governance structures helped to facilitate their work:

**"It will... help us to get more resources, not just financial, but also human resources, people will be more willing to help us in a practical way."**

Community health volunteers, Mozambique

This links to findings in section 3.1.4 *Getting the right mix of volunteers* that highlight the importance of volunteers being able to connect into established local networks and function as part of a collective local effort rather than in isolation. Later in this section in *Who has access to volunteering opportunities?* we see how the process of community volunteers becoming embedded is not always straightforward as it is dependent on local governance structures' willingness to support and trust in a particular group of volunteers or activity. There may also be trade-offs involved in volunteers having to engage the support of established local leaders; for example, it may be viewed by some in the community as a political rather than practical alliance and therefore risk jeopardising their trust (see section 3.2.1 *Power and politics*).

In Nepal, an international volunteer commented that "personal relationships in [teachers'] homes can give some confidence". She found that it wasn't until she had begun visiting one teacher at home that she realised that progress had been difficult because the teacher lacked confidence. The volunteer was able to create a more balanced relationship by making personal connections with her colleagues, and spending time together in a more informal setting.



The Philippines and Kenya research found the use of host homes to have been exceptionally important for ICS volunteers. Not only did this provide an excellent base for volunteers to learn about the local culture, but it enabled them to build relationships and trust with the local community quickly, as local people were given the opportunity to see and engage with the volunteers at first hand:

**"The structure of the ICS placement strategy makes it easier for volunteers to make and share informal and formal connections quickly. This was not through formal meetings to construct networks deliberately or forums to share contacts. The programme design was enabling of a more emergent process to take hold, which built from people's inherent motivation to connect to those around them. For example, host homes link volunteers to host parents, siblings, cousins and family friends."**

Researcher, Bohol, the Philippines

This visibility of volunteers living in the community helped to build a sense of solidarity and provided volunteers with direct experience of what it was like to live in communities. It also created opportunities to take part in local life – attend festivals, have dinner at people's homes, and so on.



In the Philippines, students in the social work department at Bicol University spend the first month of their three-month community engagement work living as a member of the community. This provides a space for communities and volunteers to get to know each other, and it is only after this period that volunteers develop a programme of work to complement community priorities. This aspect of the volunteer programme was seen as the foundation of a successful placement.

### Explicit network and relationship development

In the Philippines research, Aked describes the way in which “youth volunteers identified that they work by intentionally building relationships” (Aked, J., 2014, “Views from the Watershed: How Citizens and Actors Describe Volunteering for Development”). She highlights the fact that young people seem to be particularly effective at building and connecting with others through networks and that an analysis of social network maps showed how substantially the maps had grown within three months. Those in the fifth cycle of ICS volunteers in Bohol calculated that they had collectively made over 60 new network connections to organisations in the watershed and strengthened a further 30 connections. One volunteer noted that her early connections were initially based on friendship:

**“I noticed that my connections were initially emotional rather than [related to] business. They became friends and they helped with work later on, by linking me etc. Over time they became business connections.”**  
British ICS volunteer, Bohol, the Philippines



This highlights the importance of building in time for social relationships to develop as these become the foundations from which effective work is built. Whereas in the UK there is some hesitancy about using personal relationships in a business context, in other cultures this is seen to be normal and is how things get done. In Bohol a participatory social network mapping process was used as a tool for enabling volunteers to become more aware and intentional about the relationships they chose to build. Volunteers were asked to map out their local networks at the start, middle and end of their placement to review the extent to which they had evolved during the course of their three months.

The research demonstrated that these more informal, personal relationships were crucial contributors to the generation of ‘soft’ outcomes that allowed for solutions to be locally owned and sustained. One ECD facilitator described feeling more able to deal with challenges that she faced in the classroom as a result of the advice and support given to her by the volunteer. On several occasions, including during an action research meeting with the community, the ECD facilitator had been nervous and unable to speak in front of others but said she now felt confident and had a voice. She described an instance where the Tiffin Programme (providing lunch-time snacks) had been stopped in the ECD schools and how she planned to deal with this:

**“Now I feel that I can call the parents about this. But I also need to talk to the head teacher. In the coming meeting I will talk to the SMC [School Management Committee] and parent teacher association. [Researcher asked, ‘Do you feel more able to do that now?’] Ekdam [very much so]. Now, I will ask for it straightaway. Because, for example in trainings, we have to share, prepare and speak in front of others.”**  
ECD facilitator

The ECD facilitator was proud of the change that had taken place during and since the training and support provided by the volunteer, and had gained experience in speaking out. It is these soft outcomes, such as the ECD facilitator’s increased confidence to speak out, that enable the technical solutions – introducing new teaching methods or inputting into school management decisions – to be owned and sustained at local level.

### Modelling different norms

Relationship building is experiential. When people experience the different ways of being and knowing people from other cultures they are often far more reflective about their own. There was some evidence that as a result of being embedded within communities and the relationships they build, volunteers can have a powerful effect on modelling different social and cultural norms.

In Mozambique community health volunteers felt that being role models was important because they needed to demonstrate their proactive behaviour in order to change the attitudes that cause poverty. So, in addition to providing information on health prevention and sanitation, they actively followed the advice they were giving to others. They were able to provide much more practical advice on how to change health and sanitation behaviour as a result.

Role modelling is particularly powerful in peer-to-peer relationships. The power of young people working with young people can be particularly effective. The Kenya research found that volunteering can model a 'good life,' steering young people away from high-risk destructive lifestyles that they might be pulled towards:

**"I grew up in Korogocho and faced all the good and the bad that the informal settlement had to offer. During my teenage years, we would do all sorts of things. I got involved in criminal activities and used drugs. I almost became a drug addict. In 2004, [the] effects of drugs were too much on me. A friend invited me to join a rehab group known as Umoja Youth Group. This group was working with drug addicts and those who had left crime. I gradually changed to be a good person and I am currently engaged in a lot of community work. I have been [an] activist with Amnesty International. In 2010, together with other youth groups, we led a rebellion against some trigger happy police officers who were killing suspected criminals at will in Korogocho. They were transferred, one was sent to jail. I also do a lot of mentorship for girls and boys with an organisation [called] Miss Koch."**

Volunteer, Korogocho, Kenya

In the Nepal research there were examples where people who witnessed volunteers model different gender norms had questioned their attitudes towards gender:

**"The thinking changes. Someone from another country is here and she is living alone. You think, if you are well educated then you can go anywhere. Why does our culture stop our daughters from being free to do things?"**

ECD teacher, Nepal

**"Yes, my ideas about the role of women have changed. Last year I thought that we girls are unlucky, we can't go outside, and do what males do. But my thoughts are changed. Now I think that if women get the chance to do something they do it better than men."**

ECD teacher, education case study, Nepal

Volunteers had not necessarily set out to change attitudes to social norms such as gender. Instead their presence and embeddedness within a community had prompted others to reconsider their assumptions about what women could and could not do.

Modelling new social norms, particularly by someone from the West, is fraught with difficulty as it raises the question of the cultural supremacy of the West; for example, is it promoting the idea that the social values or practices of the West are 'better than' those in non-western countries? However, as we have seen from the research, different forms of modelling were witnessed in all types of volunteering and contexts. Modelling a different approach to how we view certain social norms or how we engage in society allows people to see and experience a different way of living and choose whether they want to adopt or adapt to it. By exposing people to new ways of living their choices are expanded. In this sense it is much more congruent with the merging of knowledge approach<sup>9</sup>, which we describe in section 3.1.4.

### **Building trust and countering suspicion and misunderstanding**

It is a cliché that trust takes time to build but can be broken very quickly. However, when we consider that volunteers' ability to be effective is so reliant upon relationships of trust, understanding when and why this trust can be lost becomes particularly important.

The research found that sometimes communities are wary of new volunteers because of a previous negative experience. In Nepal, some of the teachers that had previously worked with international volunteers felt frustrated and let down by the number of volunteers that had left the project earlier than intended:

**"The volunteers take two or three months... [to] become familiar, and then start [properly] for another one month and then go back to their country. We believed in the volunteers so much but now the faith in them has gone. They should come with that feeling that they will be here for 2 years. Not that they come here to visit the tourist places and then leave."**

Teacher, Nepal Education, Terai District, Nepal

The Kenya studies highlighted some interesting observations around trust. When discussing highly sensitive medical issues, especially HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health, people were less likely to trust volunteers (official CHWs were more likely to be trusted than those without formal status), but well-known local volunteers were highly trusted when not dealing with sensitive matters. International volunteers were trusted because they were perceived not to be involved in corrupt practices, would deliver on what they promised, and were not affected by local politics and power relations. However, in Mozambique the trust gap could be bridged:

**"They feel that we are confidential with the information that they share with us. They have trust."**

Community health volunteer, Mozambique

In the case of this example from Mozambique, it is possible that community members were more willing to trust in the volunteers because they trusted in the individuals and institutions that had appointed them, in this case the church leaders and the *secretario do bairro* (district leader).

Examples from the research showed that in some instances trust was not afforded to the volunteers in the first place as people doubted or could not understand their motivations for volunteering or what it is that volunteers do. In Nepal volunteering is sometimes seen as a low-status activity, and therefore is not accorded respect:

**"People see me as 'just a volunteer' so no respect is given. They just see me as someone who was unemployed and couldn't get a job. They don't know about volunteers and their role."**

NDVS volunteer, Nepal Education

In Kenya some communities suspect the motivation of volunteers. It was reported that male volunteers in Korogocho were seen as potential thieves, females as "husband snatchers".

9. Fourth-World University Research Group (2007). *Merging of Knowledge. People in Poverty and Academics Thinking Together*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

The negative perception of volunteering in communities not only disincentivises people from ‘genuinely’ volunteering but also discourages local residents from working and building relationships with volunteers. Communities are trapped in a negative spiral as genuine volunteers are demotivated by the challenge of countering community suspicion and negativity. A respondent in Mombasa, Kenya, commented, “Most communities consider volunteers as time wasters.”

If the starting point for volunteers is suspicion and disrespect, it is all the more important to address the relational aspect of volunteering – building personal relationships. In some countries volunteers are trusted more than local power holders, as volunteers are more likely than local leaders and institutions to treat excluded people with respect and encouragement. The core message is not so much that change work is hard if there is distrust and suspicion, but rather that the capacity to do good relational work built on the insider–outsider status (discussed in section 3.1.4) enables volunteers to build the trust that is so critical to social change.

### One-way expert relationships

The research showed that VfD interventions had been designed and implemented in a way that promoted international volunteers as ‘experts’ coming to provide advice and solutions. This contradicted evidence that suggested that the most effective programmes were two-way learning processes that integrate indigenous knowledge with outside knowledge.

In Nepal, teachers were delighted to have input from international education volunteers. They felt that it was helpful to them in developing curricula and giving them ideas for resources, but some teachers were perturbed by a relationship in which volunteers did not (or could not) ask what they and their culture offered to the education process.

The local people in Nepal implied that there was a need to blend their knowledge with the new knowledge brought by volunteers. They appreciated the knowledge from outside but wanted to collaborate:

**“There is a communication problem so we can’t talk to her very much. The volunteer can tell us things but because of the language problem, we can’t share much.”**

Teacher, Nepal Education, Hill District, Nepal

**“There is a problem because I can understand but not reply. So it is not a conversation.”**

Teacher, Nepal Education, Terai District, Nepal

The lack of adequate language skills was seen to be a critical hindrance to a two-way relationship, and VSO’s language programme in particular was identified as needing to be strengthened.

One volunteer in Nepal described how the assumption that international volunteers were experts was sometimes ingrained into the system:

**“It can be difficult to not ‘tell everyone the answers’ and adopt an instructional approach when volunteers are ‘put on a pedestal’ and seen as the people with the solutions.”**

VSO volunteer, Nepal Education

In discussions with some VSO representatives, it was said that positioning international volunteers as experts is necessary, as this was perceived to be what donors wanted, which is amplified by partners’ explicit requests for ‘cutting-edge’ volunteers. Skilled volunteers who can help to provide specific technical inputs are needed, but the evidence demonstrates that volunteering is most effective when it builds two-way, reciprocal relationships. Therefore it is necessary to think about how to promote volunteers as part of a team of experts (which includes people with local expertise and knowledge) rather than as single operators.

As the Philippines researcher noted, “Behaviour is resistant to change even when knowledge is high.”<sup>10</sup> To create change it is not enough to provide expert knowledge; strong personal relationships have to be developed, and modelling needs to occur at the same time. These are necessary ingredients of success, and cannot be left to chance.

### Implications

- Volunteers work by intentionally building relationships. Volunteers depend on these relationships to be effective in their work and to sustain their motivation, keeping them active and engaged. Volunteering is a social activity rather than an individual one.
- The embedding of volunteers is crucial to relationship building and network development. A number of different factors can contribute to facilitating embeddedness, such as volunteers living and working alongside communities and being seen to be connected to trusted local networks or organisations.
- Volunteers have the potential to model different social norms. Peer-to-peer interactions, i.e. youth-to-youth interactions, could be a strong vehicle for this work.
- Negative perceptions of volunteering can erode community trust in volunteers, which can severely reduce their effectiveness. Community expectations and perceptions need to be managed prior to volunteers starting work in a community or organisation.
- Promoting international volunteers as ‘experts’ can create one-way relationships rather than facilitate mutual learning. VfD organisations need to find ways to communicate the ‘added value’ of volunteers without positioning them as experts.

10. Aked, J., 2014, “When There Are No Fish Left in the Sea: Does Environmental Awareness Translate into Positive Action? Reporting on the Impact of Volunteering for Environmental Education in Coastal Communities of Palawan”.

### 3.1.4 Getting the right mix of volunteers – creating teams across sectors, organisations and communities

The combination of different types of technical knowledge, people with local specialist knowledge, and individuals who could contribute different perspectives and networks leads to the creation of teams that are able to respond to complex problems. However, often the potential for joint working and collaboration was not being fully realised.

#### Volunteering as a team endeavour

Throughout the research there were examples of volunteering being recognised and implemented as a team endeavour. In the Mangingisda study (Aked, J., 2014, *“When There Are No Fish Left in the Sea: Does Environmental Awareness Translate into Positive Action?”*) Aked highlights the example of the Tubbataha Management Office (TMO), whose staff had brought together different types of volunteer into multidisciplinary teams:

**“Different volunteers bring their own strengths to the change effort, hence the value of having multi-disciplinary volunteer teams. By mixing different educational backgrounds, cultural perspectives and life experiences, [we] were able to increase our chances of finding a solution that worked.”**

Researcher, Palawan, Philippines

For example, Aked observed that in order to explore the question of environmental awareness and declining fish stocks it was necessary to engage various types of volunteer:

- people who knew about marine sanctuaries (e.g. TMO; the World Wide Fund for Nature)
- people who could carry out ecological checks for livelihood assessments (e.g. TMO, Western Philippines University students conducting reef checks)
- people from agencies who knew about the livelihood projects available (e.g. in city government)
- people with local knowledge (e.g. about tides, tourist initiatives)
- experts in community organising, livelihoods and financial management (e.g. national volunteers)
- facilitators who could sustain community momentum (e.g. international and local volunteers)
- people who knew about volunteer management.

The formation of a multidisciplinary volunteer team was achieved in the action research process, but there were few examples of multi-volunteer co-working in the case studies. It is not necessarily the case that all the individuals that make up these teams are volunteers. The important factor is that volunteers work as teams with people who have different types of knowledge and a good understanding of the local context. As Aked observed in the Bohol study<sup>11</sup>, it is only when volunteers work as part of a team, alongside an existing workforce, that they are able to effectively build capacity, rather than simply plugging a resource gap.

Sometimes organised volunteering programmes in Bohol in the Philippines were contingent on ‘pop-up volunteering’. This term was used to describe incidences where individuals spontaneously gave their time, knowledge and skills (e.g. translating, providing agricultural knowledge, preparing contact lists, preparing events) to fill resource gaps that surfaced unexpectedly in project designs. These efforts were not scheduled, supported or recognised by Carood Watershed Model Forest Management Council (CWMFMC) or VSO Bahaginan and yet they were central to realising change objectives. One facilitator of local youth volunteering commented,

**“No matter how much we plan there is always a loophole in the logistics. Sustainability is with the community.”**

Staff, Bohol Island State University, the Philippines

The Kenya research (Lewis, S., 2015, *“Community Volunteering in Korogocho”*) also highlights the potential that lies in collaboration between formal and informal volunteering:

**“Crucially, opportunities exist to combine formal and informal volunteering in a complementary fashion. Findings suggest that formal volunteers and development organisations can facilitate the establishment and functioning of more informal support and self-help groups. A critical component of such an approach is ensuring that members feel ownership of the groups and gain strength and a sense of solidarity from fellow members.”**



The Kenya and Philippines research demonstrated that effective and sustainable contributions from volunteers depend on complementary volunteering by people living in poverty. Volunteering programmes that can inspire local action through the relationships people forge with one another make a valuable contribution to the change process. They can be strengthened when the design of structured or formal volunteering programmes encompasses the creation of viable, meaningful and celebrated avenues for local people to participate.

11. Aked, J., 2014, *“Views from the Watershed: How Citizens and Actors Describe Volunteering for Development; Reporting on The Impact of Volunteering for Natural Resource Management in Carood Watershed, Bohol”*.

## Insider and outsider relationships

The ability to merge insider and outsider knowledge is crucial to sustainable impact. Volunteers are able both to bring in and connect people to outside knowledge but also to embed themselves within communities in a way which connects them to inside knowledge. This is something that they are often uniquely positioned to do. An insider is someone embedded in the community, who has knowledge of that community and has strong local networks, and an outsider is someone who is not from that community who may have skills to offer and external networks to connect to. By acting as intermediaries, they can broker access to information, networks and resources within and beyond the community, encouraging new forms of collaboration and strengthening local action.

Committed outsiders can bring energy to a change process which can kick-start it or help local efforts to gather momentum. In the Philippines the presence of the British and Filipino International Citizen Service volunteers and the activities they took part in, like tree planting and conducting IEC sessions, helped to raise awareness about new environmental regulations and provide the impetus for others in the community to want to get involved in waste clean-up efforts:

**“The project [waste clean-up] would have still been realised. We invite volunteers for people to have a drive.”**

Local community officials, Philippines

ICS volunteers were able to contribute new skills, proving to be effective peer educators for school children and young people in the community, and inject new enthusiasm into existing efforts. The community's ownership over the project and their local commitment and expertise were the driving force for the project but the ICS volunteers provided one of many 'support systems' that they could access to support this work.

In Nepal, the combined experiences and perspectives of returned migrant volunteers and local actors provided the opportunity to identify new ways to address issues of food security and migration:

**“There are organisations that are recognising the impact of changing migration trends and responding to these. Local NGOs in the Hill District have found that returned migrants are eager to volunteer in community-development projects; they have broader experience, new skills and knowledge, which can be used to, for example, set up model farms and give advice on farming techniques to other villagers. As well as sharing technical skills, the volunteers share experiences with young men who have not yet migrated, providing a realistic picture of life overseas. These young men are also given access to micro-finance schemes so that they can invest in small-scale farming in their own community, rather than feeling that the only option for a more secure livelihood is in India or the Gulf States.”**

National volunteer, Nepal

In Mozambique, community health volunteers were able to use their dual insider–outsider role – simultaneously embedded within the community but with access to networks and information 'outside' - to broker better relationships between the community and the staff in the local hospital.

**“We are together now. Now they [volunteers] understand because they live our problem in the hospital’ (Hospital Staff, Mozambique). The interviewee then gave an example: ‘In the time of the health strikes, the committee explained to the community what the situation was and this stopped the community getting angry or attacking the staff.”**

Hospital staff, Mozambique

In Nepal, international volunteers used their links in the community to lever funding or support from local NGOs, or to alert the district education office if allocated funding had not been received. This led to tangible improvements to the infrastructure of some schools and increased access to education resources:

**“The main positive change at this school is that feedback goes to other organisations so they are ready to help us.”**

Head teacher

The initial connections that had been made by the volunteer were passed on to the school, widening the school's social networks in the long term.

Some international volunteers found that as they were not connected to local politics and power relationships they were sometimes perceived to be neutral observers. The Valuing Volunteering Kenya researcher noted:

**“The ‘outsider’ status... aided in gaining access to key stakeholders and my perceived neutrality also meant that I could engage with sensitive issues such as ethnic affiliations and politics without being seen to be taking sides.”**

Researcher, Kilifi case study, Kenya

This perceived neutrality of volunteers considered 'outsiders' was also observed in the Philippines research. A people's organisation that looks after a community-based forest management area in Carood watershed was approached by a Chinese investor who was interested in buying their land to cultivate cash crops. The People's Organisation (PO) sought advice on organising financial systems from the diaspora volunteer from the US who was involved in capacity-building work. The volunteer was able to see from the memorandum of agreement that there was no clause that benefited the PO as a whole. She then coached the PO representative in how to go to the bargaining table with the Chinese. The chair of the PO reflected:

**“It is an eye opener for us not to sign the contract without counselling from others... We have volunteers helping us, looking at the contract. Because of the volunteer maybe the Chinese were afraid. If ever he has a plan to fool with us... he learned this organisation [the PO] cannot be fooled.”**

The diaspora volunteer and members of the PO were able to work together to come up with a combined solution. The PO representative thought that the presence of the volunteer helped to add weight and an additional threat to his refusal to sign the contract, with the investors possibly afraid that the volunteer's interest in the issue would generate unwanted attention.

Sometimes the process of socio-cultural exchange that took place as a result of this merging of insider and outsider knowledge was one of the most powerful factors in prompting others to reflect on and have confidence in their own agency and ability to find solutions. In Nepal, one volunteer, previously known as 'America Miss,' gave an example lesson during training about the history of her country. The lesson highlighted similarities between the history of Nepal and that of the volunteer's country, including the relatively late achievement of democracy and the level of poverty experienced in the last 50 years. Six months later during an observation of a school where many improvements had been made to the school environment and teaching methodologies, the head teacher discussed the most significant changes. He referred to the model lesson and the change in perspective that this had brought:

**"The main thing is responsibility. The volunteer said that [her country] and Nepal got democracy in the same year. I loved that comparison because this community is like her country, and yet her country has done a lot of development. Like this community [now]. It comes to my mind every day. Teachers have to take responsibility... if not nothing will happen."**

Head teacher, Nepal

These socio-cultural exchanges can offer fuller and more realistic narratives about developed countries, which may lead to a change in perspective about what development means, and a reappraisal of communities' resources, natural assets and capacity for collective action.

There are two ways in which this insider–outsider relationship was observed: firstly where outsiders work with insiders, and secondly where outsiders are embedded within communities and so begin to access the knowledge and understanding held by insiders. While they are unlikely ever to be regarded as insiders they can come to be regarded as friends of the community. In the latter case, the fact that volunteers are embedded within communities and institutions yet have a separate identity can be key to the change process. The embeddedness of volunteers puts them in a position where they are more able to build trusting relationships which support local people to feel confident to put learning into practice.

There is an important underlying theme here. Outsiders bring new knowledge and access to networks of influence etc. Insiders have local knowledge and access to local networks of trust. The combination of the two can be very powerful.

### When different types of volunteers remain disconnected

The research found that simply placing volunteers to work together on an intervention did not automatically result in effective teams. A member of a partner organisation in Nepal reflected that although the project she was working on had been designed to include inputs from local and international volunteers, language barriers made it difficult for them to work together effectively:

**"It would have been good if ALF [accelerated learning facilitator] and international volunteer roles were closer, because the ALFs know everything in the community: why people aren't coming to school, the type of people etc. But language meant that the relationship was never developed."**

Sometimes the management of programmes that involved multiple interventions and volunteers was not coordinated:

**"So, someone is responsible for youth volunteers, someone for diaspora volunteers, someone for long-term volunteers, someone for national volunteers... So if you want to know what is happening with secure livelihoods you have to go and talk to each of these people... What we need is someone with oversight."**

VSO Bahaginan staff, the Philippines

### The perceived value of different types of volunteers

Race and class issues were evident throughout the research. The findings showed that at times there were differences in the way in which international, south–south and local volunteers were perceived and valued. In the Nepal education case study (Hacker, E., 2014, "Education and Volunteering in Nepal: A case study from the hill and Terai regions") Hacker writes:

**"First, the [south–south] volunteers felt they were treated differently from the white volunteers. Teachers wanted the latter to come to the schools for the kudos. The south–south volunteers felt the schools only wanted them there if the European volunteers also came."**

North–south VSO volunteer, Nepal Education

**"The head teacher looked disappointed when he saw me. Why? I guess it was because I don't look foreign and the [north–south] volunteer [who did the orientation] was white... I remember when [another north–south volunteer] visited the schools for the first time, one of the schools was very excited when they heard where she came from... They just sort of ignored me for a while."**

South–south VSO volunteer, Nepal Education

There were good examples from the Nepal work of reflective individuals who had deliberately challenged their positioning. One volunteer felt that closer links between different types of volunteers is exactly what would challenge these perceptions:

**“If you had a Nepali and a foreigner working together in a district the impact would be better because (a) [it helps with] the translation and language problems and (b) it breaks the elitism and shows people that they can do what foreign people are doing.”**

VSO volunteer, education case study, Nepal

More generally the poorest volunteers in the case studies were often the “most undervalued in the change effort, both in terms of financial support and in their assessment of their own capabilities.”<sup>12</sup> Action research in Bohol showed how working with young people to enhance capacities and demystify ICS volunteers between volunteer placements helped to shift local identities and rebalance power dynamics. The local youth themselves recognised how they could use the favourable perception of volunteers among local power holders to further the group’s aims to raise money and political support for a public toilet on the beach, which could be used by local residents (not just by holidaymakers in the private resorts).

### Who has access to volunteering opportunities?

One of the biggest inhibitors of collaborative working is dependent on the factors that decide who gets to volunteer in the first place. In Mozambique the selection of community health volunteers was often dependent on whether volunteers were known to and had the support of influential individuals in the community:

**“The selection of activists was described by volunteers as a closed process, where access can often rely on the recommendation of key individuals (e.g. church leaders) in the community. Often church leaders base this recommendation on whether they believe an individual is motivated, and the degree of acceptance the individual has in the community. This relatively closed process can make it difficult for some individuals to access activist opportunities.”**

Researcher, Mozambique

The Kenya research highlighted that women’s access to volunteering opportunities could be restricted for a number of reasons:

**“I want to volunteer but I have three kids to take care of so I cannot.”**

Female resident, Kongowea, Mombasa, Kenya

**“People especially women would love to volunteer but responsibilities hinder them.”**

Female resident, Kongowea, Mombasa, Kenya

**“A man married a lady who used to volunteer in a youth group, then [forbade her] to continue volunteering for the reason that their religion does not allow someone’s wife to engage herself in activities not related to her husband’s.”**

Volunteer workshop participant, Korogocho, Kenya

The tendency to see certain volunteer roles as gendered also restricted the types of volunteering opportunities that men and women could access. At a community level, men and women are expected to carry out certain types of work. In Korogocho, for example, research participants noted that men were more likely to play lead roles in responding to emergencies such as putting out fires or providing security when violence erupted; women were more likely to engage in informal volunteering near their homes, such as cleaning shared spaces and helping neighbours. Lewis reports that 90–95% of 450 CHWs recruited across Korogocho, Kenya, were thought to be women.



**“Most men would prefer being masons to working as a CHW. Being a CHW doesn’t pay much so the men will not take it up easily. But women will do it for no matter how little the allowance is.”**

Local community member, Korogocho, Kenya

**“Women will do more caring roles like looking after sick people. Women are more soft hearted and compassionate.”**

Female member of a local self-help group, Kenya

**“Women have a very soft heart, so if anything happens, they run there to volunteer a lot quicker than men... Women are more patient. They can’t start something and leave in the middle.”**

Male member of a community-based organisation (CBO), Kenya

**“There are questions a man will not ask but a woman will.”**

Female CHW, Kenya

So gender stereotypes act to push and pull men and women towards particular gender roles. There are real tensions here. On the one hand, recruiting male CHWs might represent a small step toward modelling new gender relations; on the other, it is much harder for the male volunteers to actually deliver their work.

12. Aked, J., 2014, “Riding the Waves of Change: The Challenges of Volunteering in Highly Complex Poverty Contexts; Reporting on Action Research Among Volunteers in Mangingsida, Palawan”.

Across the four countries there was also evidence of hierarchies that had emerged between formal and informal volunteers. Typically, formal volunteers have access to stipends and training, and the formalisation of their role can also give status. In Kenya, a number of volunteers cited examples of wanting to volunteer in order to gain skills and access to networks that could then lead to paid employment.

**“I hope to know how to work with my community from my placement, e.g. communication skills, and be able to secure a job from any given non-governmental organisation.”**

ICS volunteer, Kenya

In Mozambique there is a division between the *activistas*, who typically receive a small stipend and training, and volunteers in the community who do not. This led to animosity amongst some volunteers and community members who felt the *activistas* were only volunteering to receive the stipend:

**“The *activista* is always led by money.”**

Pastor, Mozambique

**“*Activistas* don’t work from the heart like the volunteers so people get tired of their insincerity.”**

Representative of local NGO, Mozambique

**“When the subsidy stops, so does the *activista*.”**

Member of volunteer group, Mozambique<sup>13</sup>

In Kenya, volunteers in many local CBOs did not see volunteering as something that could be done for free. There is a dilemma here. Some feel that paying stipends kills the spirit of volunteering. Others feel the opposite:

**Motivating volunteers [through allowances] will keep the spirit of volunteerism rising.**

Member of local CBO, Korogocho, Kenya

However, the research produced countless stories of people who could not afford to volunteer. Where there is no basic compensation, only wealthier people can afford to volunteer. This makes it difficult for others to be involved in volunteering and active citizenship and perpetuates the unequal distribution of social, intellectual and economic resources that keeps people in poverty. But this is not straightforward. For example, research has shown that when compensation is introduced for volunteer CHWs the positions previously occupied by the poor (usually women who gain respect, dignity and a feeling of worth) tend to be co-opted by better-off women in the community, and by men, which highlights the need for managers of VfD agencies to understand local power dynamics.

A similar situation applies between VfD agencies where some agencies pay very high stipends. Lewis describes how in Kenya this can create competition between agencies for volunteers within local communities, with the large agencies winning out and smaller community organisations being undermined. There is often competition between volunteers for opportunities as well, which leads to defensive behaviour to maintain opportunities, and cronyism as volunteers try to keep future opportunities within family, friend and tribal groups.

## Implications

- Volunteering needs to be seen as a team endeavour within which people from different organisations and between organisations and communities can interconnect.
- Effective and sustainable contributions from volunteers depend on complementary volunteering by people living in poverty. Volunteering for development programmes can be strengthened when the design of structured or formal volunteering programmes encompasses the creation of viable and meaningful avenues for local people to participate.
- Volunteers have the ability simultaneously to be on the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of a community in a way that few other development practitioners are. The combination of insiders who have access to strong local networks and outsiders who come with access to skills and external networks allows effective and culturally sensitive innovations to take place.
- Simply placing volunteers to work together on an intervention did not automatically result in effective teams. Volunteers need to be managed as part of a team, rather than on an individual basis, and supported to overcome challenges such as language barriers, in order to be able to work together effectively.
- Differences in the way in which international, national, south-south and local volunteers are sometimes perceived and valued can challenge volunteers’ ability to be effective. Organisations working with volunteers need to consider their role in terms of supporting the volunteer and challenging perceptions about particular types of volunteers.
- The tendency to see certain volunteer roles as gendered can restrict the types of volunteering opportunities that men and women are able to access. Organisations working with volunteers need to challenge their own and local actors’ gendered attitudes to volunteering and consider ways in which these can be overcome.

13. Picken, S., 2014, “‘Where is the Bread?’: Programmatic and Informal Community Volunteer Responses to Health Issues”.





## 3.2 Looking at volunteering within the wider context; engaging with the complexities of power and politics

### 3.2.1 Power and politics

We observed power and politics at every juncture in the case studies in all four countries: local corruption, the power of private investors, the power of church and state, and the power of those of higher caste over others. Volunteers have to understand the complex local and national political environment in which they are working if they are to be effective. However, the case studies demonstrated that volunteers were ill informed and ill equipped to deal with the political implications of their actions across all countries and contexts. Occasionally volunteers are able to engage effectively with local politics; Aked observes in the Philippines:<sup>14</sup>

**“Sometimes volunteers coming from outside can navigate the internal power dynamics that prevent organisational development but it does not always make them very popular.”**  
Researcher, Philippines

Within communities it is possible for volunteers to get things done if they know who to talk to and how, but sometimes this involves appearing to take sides and can give them difficult choices about who is included and excluded as a result of their choices.

#### Party politics

The Mozambique research showed that it is not only ‘small p’ politics that needs to be taken into account. Sometimes the borderland between volunteering and political parties is extremely blurred. One of the Mozambique research groups commented that during the municipal election certain activities of the volunteer group such as drainage cleaning and street cleaning were being promoted by the volunteer association as the work of the ruling party.

**“There was different politics that were pushing activities that shouldn’t... or were offering credit where credit was not due.”**  
Individual, Mozambique

The research group suggested that volunteers were engaged in these activities not because these had been identified by the group as priority issues but because they would produce ‘visible’ results, cleaner streets and working drains, which the community could see and would associate with the ruling party. The issue is not about depoliticising local NGOs and volunteers or only accepting volunteers who demonstrate political neutrality. In many cases volunteers may be engaged in the activities of political parties that are undertaking useful and legitimate work within a community. Volunteers’ lack of knowledge of local politics becomes problematic when they are used to promote political messages or campaigns without being aware that they are political actions or when they are encouraged to do so against their will.

In one school in the Hill District in Nepal, political divisions seriously affected the school environment and motivation of the staff. One teacher from the school explains why teachers were not motivated to work with the volunteers:

**“(There are) different people with a different philosophy between teachers and the school governors. The salary of the teachers has been frozen for the past nine months – conflicts about personal rivalries and political conflicts. The performance is decreasing. There is no motivation. There is a lack of manpower, political factors are behind this. Different people belong to different parties. The head teacher and the school governors are against each other... First the conflict needs to be solved and then the volunteers will be more effective.”**  
Teacher, Hill District, Nepal

As a result of the political divisions volunteers eventually stopped visiting these schools.

In Mozambique the *secretario do bairro* (SDB; local leader) often has to give consent to any volunteering activities taking place in the neighbourhood where he has been elected. This permission-giving process is not necessarily uncommon but what creates the difficulties in the Mozambique situation are the underlying power politics.

**“When you have the permission of the Secretario de Bairro you then get the permission of the Chefe do Quaterao and then the people in the community will trust you and you will be able to work with them.”**  
Community church activists, Mozambique

14. Aked, J., 2014, “Views from the Watershed: How Citizens and Actors Describe Volunteering for Development; Reporting on The Impact of Volunteering for Natural Resource Management in Carood Watershed, Bohol”.

Participants in the research suggested that it was easier for volunteers who were seen to sympathise with the politics of the SDB and the ruling party to get the SDB's seal of approval and gain access to resources. It was also perceived by those in the wider community that supported the ruling party as a sign that those volunteers could be trusted. However, individuals who were not in the majority party described the difficulties they could face in securing the agreement of the SDB to do work in the community. It is important to be aware that it is often the people who are not in the majority party who are most marginalised locally, so colluding with these processes may be contradicting the values that volunteering for development organisations want to pursue.

### Local political culture

Cultural and political differences always present a challenge and it is important that volunteers are able to exercise good judgment. The research threw significant examples of where this was not happening:

**“One volunteer was trying to work with schools to get them to open during the bandh (strike), because elections are coming and the schools will be closed a lot. I think this is really tricky ground. Even though the volunteer is being apolitical, actually in this context, that is a very political act.”**

VSO volunteer, Nepal Education

This example indicates both a naivety on the part of the volunteer, but also a lack of political education on the part of the provider. These sorts of politically naive actions should in most cases be avoidable. Caste relations also raised challenges for the effectiveness of volunteering, particularly in Nepal. Caste relations are power relations, and define trust and communication relationships. They often determine the effectiveness of what can be done:

**“In informal conversations with a Tharu teacher she described how she and the other Tharu teachers tended to be separate from the other teachers in the school who were primarily of Brahman caste. Caste relations were rarely openly discussed, but in the Terai District there were suggestions that this could affect the transference of knowledge and skills between teachers and schools.”**

National volunteer, Nepal

Simply choosing to have a Brahman translator can completely change the political dynamics of a meeting because people will not talk openly to people of higher castes, and caste issues are frequently neglected by volunteers. Sometimes it is a structural matter. The volunteer may not have access to translators from other castes, so staff in the country office should find one.

Volunteering also has a perceived impact on the wider politics of a country. In the Nepal research Hacker observes:<sup>15</sup>

**“Following the widespread disturbances in 2012 in the run up to the deadline for the finalisation of the constitution [which was again postponed], questions surfaced about the role of donor and non-governmental organisations in the disturbances, with accusations that they had stirred inter-ethnic conflict through their support of marginalised communities.<sup>16</sup> There was widespread comment on the perceived hypocrisy of the international community, who on one hand called for Nepal to finalise the constitution, and on the other had supported programmes which some thought had increased tensions that were paralysing the process. Although a direct link is difficult to establish, since 2012 there appear to have been responses on both sides: for example, visas for international volunteer placements are now permitted in the main only for placements that work with government partners. At the same time withdrawal of support for institutions such as the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities by one of Nepal's largest bilateral donors, due to their participation in the national strikes, is illustrative of the response from certain key players in the international community.”**

Researcher, Nepal

It is critical that staff in VfD organisations have a sophisticated understanding of the politics of the countries in which they operate. This will enable them to navigate the potential consequences of their actions, and to gain intelligence about events which are likely to have an impact on their work. The systems mapping techniques used in the Valuing Volunteering research could provide an effective mechanism for undertaking this analysis (see section 3.3.3 *Participatory research*).

### Understanding and navigating complex political relationships

It is easy to get exciting projects going in the belief that they are somehow neutral, but very often the most effective change projects challenge powerful vested interests, and in some circumstances this can literally be a matter of life and death:

**“Environmental work in the Philippines is not the safest occupation. Between 2010 and 2012 the Department for Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) reported 20 deaths of forestry workers and environmental advocates part of civil society partners like forest cooperatives. Before 2010 violence against DENR workers was not as severe. Alyansa Tigil Mina and Kalikasan People's Network have reported the death of 17 environmental activists since the current Aquino administration took place.”**

Volunteer, Bohol, the Philippines

15. Hacker, E., 2014, “Education and Volunteering in Nepal: A Case Study from the Hill and Terai Regions”.

16. ‘Duncan stands behind aid for ethnic groups’, E-Kantipur, Tuesday 3 July 2012.

Volunteers may be able to support people to engage effectively with such realities more effectively than paid workers, but they need a deep political understanding of local contexts. They require long-term engagement (see section 3.3.2 *Dependency and sustainability*) and the tools to fully understand the system dynamics within which people work (see section 3.3.3 *Participatory research*). Volunteers need to be trained to engage with these realities. Most currently lack the skills to do so, but we found some positive examples of political engagement, where the politics was understood as central to engagement. For example, a volunteer in the Philippines coached local people to navigate complex politics around investment contracts.

More generally it is important to be clear that all development is political in the sense that it involves taking sides on injustice. Talking in one of the Valuing Volunteering meetings, the secretary of the National Anti Poverty Commission in the Philippines highlighted how crucial is asset reform to creating real change on the ground:

**“What does this have to do with volunteering? The most important of the areas for volunteering would be helping to organise the poor, providing intellectual resources and confidence for negotiating this new terrain. Helping the poor is not just helping them to participate effectively into invited spaces. It is about supporting the poor developing the capacity for collective action. The more capacity the better, especially because poverty reduction is not a picnic, there are many contentious issues. The poor have to have capacity in those contentious spaces.”**

Secretary, National Anti Poverty Commission, the Philippines

So it is not enough to provide advice and support as in the example above. It is necessary to support the development of collective action – a form of active citizenship – which can really challenge oppression (see section 3.1.2 *Agency, active citizenship and social capital*).

### Implications

- In some cases volunteering activities were being co-opted to help promote local political agendas. This becomes an issue when volunteers are either unaware that the work they are doing is promoting political messages or when volunteers feel disempowered to raise their concerns.
- When political divisions are deeply entrenched at local level this can seriously limit volunteers’ ability to be effective. VfD organisations need to consider how volunteers can be best supported to navigate this environment.
- Some of the tools such as system mapping which were carried out with local people during the research can help to understand the political realities that need to be overcome in order to be effective.

### 3.2.2 Choosing the right partnerships

The ability of development organisations to reach the poorest and most marginalised is largely determined by the partners they work with. The research found that partners are often selected because they have a history of working with volunteers or because they have the right organisational infrastructure – rather than because they are aligned to a focus on poverty reduction or share the same principles and approach to volunteering. The research was therefore interested in exploring which partners worked most effectively with volunteers and met the needs of the community, looking at what is best for the community rather than what is best for development organisations.

#### Alignment with the poorest and most marginalised and understanding the role of volunteering

The research found that local partners were often selected because on paper they had the right infrastructures in place to support the programme objectives of the relevant VfD organisation or INGO. In an evaluation of the ICS programme in Kilifi it was observed that organisations focused on organisational survival were less likely to be able to continue to embed the kind of changes that had been influenced by the ICS volunteers, so the recommendation was made that these may not be the right partners to work with. However, Lewis observed:<sup>17</sup>

**“If local community impacts really are to be one of the core achievements of the ICS programme then it may be that smaller organisations struggling for survival are the ones that would most benefit from the support of volunteers.”**

Lead researcher, Kenya

The Kenya research noted that often the smaller, emerging organisations provide valuable entry points into poor communities for larger NGOs that lack a presence there. The research suggested that larger CBOs and NGOs could provide opportunities for smaller CBOs to increase their capacity and improve their skills through networks. They could help smaller CBOs to access different volunteer resources that could support their work and help to build their capacity.

The Philippines research found that local partners and communities were sometimes not in a position to negotiate what type of volunteers they would receive, when they would come or how long they stayed. This challenged their ability to align the work of volunteers with community needs because their recruitment had been driven by the needs of the organisation and not what was best for the community:

**“In the Barangay they asked, ‘What will the volunteers be doing?’ We [the local government representatives] explained they would be assigned to Carood watershed to help community members to preserve their environment. I was asked, ‘Are we going to get rich?’ I said no, but they will really help you...”**

Local government worker/Assistant VPS

17. Lewis, S. (2015) “International Citizen Service (ICS) in Kilifi”.

Sometimes working with the wrong partners had led to volunteers being underused:

**“We visited her service centre and the permanent staff member was also undermining her somehow. He had sent her somewhere to look after farming houses, he had not given [her] any role to act proactively or use her full skills.”**  
National volunteer, Nepal

We also heard stories of people who ended up inventing their own placements on arrival. This is not always a bad thing, as often volunteers do their best work in this situation, when they are directly responding to local contexts. An ICS volunteer in Kenya commented that although their inputs within their allocated host organisation had been minimal, interactions with the community had helped them to identify where there could be most useful:

**“I am... helping out with other placements and organising our own CADs [community action days]. I have helped [another partner] and at the special unit in [a local primary school] where I think I am getting somewhere with the projects and actually making a very small difference. I am also working with others to set up projects that we recognised as problems from our interaction with the community.”**  
ICS volunteer, Kenya

### Governance structures

In the Philippines we observed that while on paper CWMFMC had all the hallmarks of being a well-governed policy-making body for the watershed, in reality its members displayed poor governance and limited activity. Aged lists examples of this.<sup>18</sup>

- long stretches without council meetings and no schedule of fixed dates
- outdated memorandums of understanding outlining management responsibilities of volunteers
- absent and overloaded counterparts and placement supervisors which have not been addressed
- lack of capacity development of council members, e.g. POs
- poor attendance at meetings and training sessions
- huge delays in operationalising the framework for the technical working groups.

The work of youth volunteers was able to go some way to challenging perceptions among local leaders at CWMFMC about the contribution that young people could make to development objectives. However, these efforts were in danger of being undermined in the long term by political and organisational systems of governance which lacked the capacity to respond to citizen-led initiatives.



We found some examples of nepotism, which restricted the way in which volunteers were able to work and could affect who could access volunteer opportunities and related benefits:

**“You know it’s a bit difficult to work on a project to be ruled by people who have a family relationship because if my boss is weighing me down, maybe I have to go and tell the vice-boss, but what happens [if] the vice-boss is the boss’s wife, is she going to listen to me? If I am a boss and I take care of the finances and my husband is the president, if I divert funds is my husband going to report me?”**  
Community volunteer, Chamanculo, Mozambique

**“My partner organisation had been getting lots of short-term lower skilled volunteers from various organisations – quite a few were international and they paid money [to the host organisation]; in many cases they would start to find stuff out and by then it would be the time to leave. It was the same with local volunteers; after a while they would start asking questions and then they would get bullied out.”**  
International VSO volunteer, Mombasa, Kenya

Similarly, in the Mozambique research<sup>19</sup>, Picken observed:

**“The need for the supporting volunteer development agency to work with already established legalised and organised volunteering groups... means that the ability for community volunteers to self organise in a more organic manner in response to community needs is somewhat problematic.”**  
Lead researcher, Mozambique

18. Aged, J., 2014, “Views from the Watershed: How Citizens and Actors Describe Volunteering for Development; Reporting on The Impact of Volunteering for Natural Resource Management in Carood Watershed, Bohol”.

19. Picken, S. (2014), Spokes of a wheel. A participatory community led volunteer initiative.

The pattern is consistent across the countries. It is not enough to assume that organisations will be good volunteer hosts and/or development partners. Partnerships need to be built over years, tested through projects, and closely monitored. Very often organisations that appear to be strong are in fact weak, and the bias towards organisations that appear to have an accountable infrastructure in place can seriously undermine engagement at a grassroots level. This undermines the capacity of VfD agencies to support work on poverty and marginalisation.

## Implications

- We saw a tendency for VfD organisations to form partnerships with organisations because they were perceived to have the right infrastructures in place to support programmes working with volunteers. However the findings suggested that, smaller, emerging organisations can potentially provide better entry points into poor communities.
- Knowing how to effectively channel volunteer activities towards poverty impacts can be complex. VfD organisations need to work alongside partners to identify how and where volunteer activities can be properly integrated into their strategic frameworks and theories of change.
- Local partners and communities are sometimes excluded from decisions as to which volunteers are recruited, when and for what. This challenges their ability to align the work of volunteers with community needs.
- Partnerships between national volunteering bodies and VfD organisations were sometimes based on the fact that they both recruit and deploy volunteers. However, the findings suggested that if the aims and objectives of two are not aligned, this can challenge the effectiveness of the volunteer intervention or distort its contribution.
- Volunteering efforts to support social mobilisation on the part of communities can be undermined by political and organisational systems of governance which lack the capacity to respond to citizen-led initiatives. Identifying ways to support the interests of people typically excluded in formal governance or management processes has to be explicitly designed into volunteering initiatives and partnership agreements. The way volunteer-involving organisations – and volunteers themselves – engage with local partners and decision-makers is also an opportunity to model ways of working that espouse different standards of democratic governance and participation.<sup>20</sup>

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20. Aked, J., 2014, "Views from the Watershed: How Citizens and Actors Describe Volunteering for Development; Reporting on The Impact of Volunteering for Natural Resource Management in Carood Watershed, Bohol".



### 3.3 How organisations working with volunteers can reach the poorest and most marginalised

#### 3.3.1 Community needs versus top-down programming

One of the most common failures within the development sector is not asking people from the poorest and most marginalised communities what problems most affect them and how they would like them to be addressed.<sup>21</sup> Instead we often make assumptions about what their concerns are.

This list of aspirations was produced by community members in Puerto Princesa in the Philippines. It is instructive. Much of it is unrelated to volunteering programmes from volunteer agencies. Yet it is a direct expression of what people feel they need:

- their children to have a better future (“We want to continue fishing but in the proper way”)
- to reverse the loss of quality family time (identified by children)
- to stop family breakdown as a result of fathers being away for long periods of time to fish
- to increase household income
- to address health concerns related to fishing with a compressor
- to have local leadership on environmental issues
- to have resources to patrol and enforce the no fishing zones.

The wish of this group to increase their household income is likely to be very closely related to their desire “to continue fishing but in a proper way”, rather than bear much resemblance to the assumptions made about them in INGO-type livelihoods programmes. So the international development sector needs to address directly the wishes of local people, rather than provide pre-constructed education, health or livelihood services.

There were many examples throughout the research where engagement had taken the form of consultation rather than participation. These two concepts are very different. Consultation processes offer a voice but no decision-making powers. Participation should enable people to analyse their circumstances and act accordingly.

Consultation often excluded those directly involved in and affected by the issues, and contact was made only with local leaders:

**Most of the big NGOs... only identify one person in the community as a contact and it is usually a village elder.**  
Member of established local CBO, Korogocho, Kenya

**Many NGOs that identify a place like Koch, don’t engage with people on the ground, they only engage opinion leaders... Often the opinion leaders don’t know the feeling on the ground.**  
Community health worker, Korogocho, Kenya

21. Burns, D., Howard, J., Lopez-Franco, E., Shahrokh, T. and Wheeler, J., 2013, *Work with Us: How Communities and Organisations Can Catalyse Sustainable Change*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

22. Aked, J., 2014, “When There Are No Fish Left in the Sea: Does Environmental Awareness Translate into Positive Action?”

It is not easy to bring about meaningful participation. Very often it is necessary to go through elders and local decision-makers even to get access to communities. But this should not preclude engaging with a much wider constituency of stakeholders once a level of trust has been built.

While VfD organisations and INGOs are undoubtedly delivering quality work, they are not necessarily delivering what communities need. The Kenya Korogocho case study reported that in almost all workshops and interviews, participants “continually referred to the lack of meaningful engagement with the community by external NGOs and organisations implementing development projects.”

Underlying this lack of engagement is once again the perception that external organisations know what is best for the people of Korogocho. For example, while one of the major INGOs and the Kenyan government were building roads, bridges and a health centre, the community feared the construction of permanent dwellings because of the likelihood of increased rent charges and the requirement to pay utility bills. There are examples from several research sites of where lack of participation or even consultation had led to certain unsustainable solutions being implemented:

**“NGOs come with initiatives like for the CHWs. The initiatives do not even necessarily solve the problems. They do not consult the community. Like even the latrines [a well-known international NGO] once built. The latrines ended up being demolished because they did not consult the community on the drainage and the general upkeep of the toilets. They became hazardous when they were all filled up.”**

Local volunteer, Korogocho, Kenya

**“[People in] rural areas complain they do not have sources of food. Now it [development] is being prohibited because they do not have a source of living because they are prevented from cutting trees to create charcoal, for example. As we conserve the environment, the livelihoods are not kept at the same time. It is a fallacy in the system. It is not creating shock absorbers.”**

Teacher, Puerto Princesa, the Philippines

**“Often times we only focus on the students but not the community. Even with our partner organisations. And even us... we do not capture this knowledge to inform our practice.”**

Volunteer support staff, Miriam College, the Philippines

The approach taken by the Valuing Volunteering researcher in Kenya<sup>23</sup> is a good example of how participatory approaches to the design and implementation of programmes can be developed:

**“Upon arriving at my placement in a local partner organisation, the first challenge was resisting the temptation to dive straight into setting up a research team. Instead, the first months were spent developing relationships with local counterparts and gaining a feel for local dynamics. Building local relationships allowed these potential stumbling blocks to be successfully navigated. With the help of a local counterpart, who had in-depth experience of the Korogocho context, a volunteer team of representatives from a range of local CBOs and volunteer groups was recruited. Members were given training on a range of participatory techniques including systems mapping and given the freedom to steer the research process. This gave them ownership whilst the training in systems and critical thinking enabled them to deconstruct and better understand the complex factors that caused poverty in Korogocho; ultimately they were then better positioned to take positive action to address the causes of that poverty. [Over] the course of nearly two years of research, the majority of team members remained engaged. And even after the fieldwork officially concluded, members carried out radio-shows on local stations to discuss findings from their work.”**

Researcher, Kenya

### Implications

- Meaningful engagement with a range of stakeholders in the community, not just local leaders or established institutions, can help to ensure development interventions are defined and led by those directly affected by poverty and marginalisation. For example, in the Valuing Volunteering project, setting up local volunteer teams of representatives from a range of local CBOs and volunteer groups and providing them training on a range of participatory techniques gave local volunteers the freedom to steer the research process and take positive action to address community issues.
- For volunteers, resisting the temptation to ‘dive straight in’ and using the initial weeks or months of a placement to build relationships and gain a feeling for local dynamics can help to ensure the volunteer’s work is led by the experiences and knowledge of local actors. Where this is not possible, i.e. for short-term volunteer places, this may place greater onus on the VfD organisation managing these volunteers to build and maintain these relationships.
- The use of participatory research tools enhances the likelihood that meaningful participation can be catalysed and sustained.

23. Lewis, S., 2015, “Community Volunteering in Korogocho”.

### 3.3.2 Dependency and sustainability

One of the big challenges in international development work is how to minimise dependency and support sustainability. The research highlighted the need for work to be rooted in communities in order to be sustainable, but also suggested that long-term relationships can often aid sustainability not diminish it and that volunteers can play a role in facilitating long-term relationships.

#### Time

In Kenya dependency was seen to be a problem because there was a culture of reliance on NGOs. This creates problems because short-term funding often results in communities left hanging after a project finishes. One community volunteer referred to the tendency of funders to “start the project and let someone [else] fund [it]”. Other projects were started with no idea of how they would be sustained. This problem is not unique to volunteering.

Volunteering could have a niche advantage over other forms of development in this area as it should be possible to create long-term relationships with local communities and organisations which are not dependent on short-term project cycles. New volunteers can replace established ones to enable longer-term relationships.

The research in the Philippines concluded that dependency was a function of short-term relationships. While longer-term projects may create dependency in the short term, this dependency is gradually replaced by independence. There was some evidence that short-term projects can create dependency because they do not support independence. So time is a critical factor:

**“We are all widespread and there are very many of us and it’s hard to get together. We depended on the volunteer.”**

David Quisquirin, vice-president  
of the Mangingisda research group

But dependency exists because local people are not supported to develop self-sufficiency, in this case to support the development of a cooperative:

**“The anxiety in the reflections of resident volunteers arises from not having yet experienced the whole process from idea through implementation for themselves... What these reflections reiterate is the length of time required to facilitate enduring change. It is not that we worked with the resident volunteers for too long. It is that we haven’t worked with them for long enough... There is an inherent power imbalance in this dynamic which means we, as outside volunteers, can exit and move on with our lives while the resident volunteers are left with a half-baked project to decide what to do with.”**

University staff volunteer, Philippines

This example suggests that many project interventions create dependency because they are too short, not because they do not have a proper exit strategy. Projects frequently collapse when NGO staff or volunteers leave because people have had enough time to build the skills and resources to make them sustainable.

The Philippines research found that a time line which works for one community will not necessarily map onto another. It can depend on levels of trust, previous experiences, the role of individuals or even outside events that influence the number and focus of challenges that the community faces:

**“We started in... 1995. We were supposed to phase out but they insisted for us to extend so we stayed. This is when the typhoon came and farmers were asking for more help and we were able to access funding. They registered with [the] Securities and Exchange Commission. Now they have their own bank-books and they run their own affairs.”**

Volunteer support staff, Bicol University, the Philippines

Time in itself does not enable sustainability. International development literature is replete with examples of projects folding after considerable time. Time is needed for effective capacity building and for underpinning resources to be built up. Time allows confidence, skills and routines to be developed, and an infrastructure to be built, which helps to maintain momentum. This is particularly important where there are shorter-term programmes:

**“The ICS volunteers have established and strengthened around 19 youth groups to work on environmental issues. On the whole, it has been very difficult to sustain the activity levels of youth groups in between ICS cycles. Sometimes as long as 1–3 months goes by without ICS volunteers in Carood. When the next cycle of volunteers arrives they find activity levels have usually dropped off without external support or encouragement. Groups are particularly poor at meeting regularly. If they are not meeting, then they are not actively working on environmental concerns. They lie dormant until they get the next call from an ICS volunteer, illustrating the difficulty of getting youth groups to a stage where they will sustain community-level action without the support of volunteers or a structured programme.”**

Researcher, Bohol case study, the Philippines

Long-term engagements with particular localities are important, and they should include a longer-term approach to specific interventions. As Hacker recorded:<sup>24</sup>

**“Both volunteers and teachers were vocal about the limited length of time in each school. In Nepal because of the large number of holidays, festivals and political strikes, the actual number of visits per school over two years is surprisingly low (with the early cessation of placements exacerbating this).”**

Researcher, Nepal

She cited a volunteer:

**“If you’re limited in time and resources then you’re going to direct your time and attention to the areas covered by the baseline [assessments]. There is a drive to show improvements. So volunteers can be a bit pushy e.g., doing a gluttony of trainings, but it is too much for the teachers.”**

VSO volunteer, Hill District, Nepal

24. Hacker, E., 2014, “Education and Volunteering in Nepal: A Case Study from the Hill and Terai Regions”.



Hacker reflects that sufficient time in schools can allow volunteers to understand the context and build in spaces for collaboration and the implementation of a project responsive to the issues in each classroom, school or community. Without this there is a danger of short-term interventions that have short-term impact. In the Kenya research Lewis observes:<sup>25</sup>

**“The research in Kilifi found evidence to support the claims that ICS volunteers brought new ideas, increased visibility and profile as well as enthusiasm and a can-do attitude. However, many were also engaged in relatively basic support roles, which although they may have increased capacity did so only temporarily and was not likely to lead to long lasting sustainable impact. For example, many volunteers, provided extra classroom support to teachers in special education schools and units... while the volunteers were valued by the teachers for the respite they provided, the effect was generally only short term.”**

Researcher, Kenya

This demonstrates the need once again to link the short-term interventions to longer-term iterative programme development<sup>26</sup>, where the interventions of one group explicitly build on that of groups that went before. It may also be useful to think about how ICS groups partner other local groups which are able to maintain continuity between cohorts.

It is tempting to focus on the end of an intervention when we consider this issue of time, but just as critical is the beginning. Very little time is spent on preparation and trust-building work with communities, host organisations and partners before an intervention. This takes time but lays a foundation built on sustainability.

### A systemic perspective on change

The Philippines studies highlighted the importance of fully understanding the dynamic system within which volunteers are trying to bring about change. Some fishermen had stopped fishing because it had been made illegal. There were serious consequences, and clearly much displaced activity. Children’s drawings showed that illegal fishing continued, for various reasons: low fish numbers caused fishermen to fish illegally, which added to low fish numbers; the market price for endangered species is enticing for those who have a family to feed and creates incentives to fish illegally; and many alternative livelihoods were not viable. For example, disease threatens the viability of seaweed farming; feelings of injustice fuelled dissent; there is poor governance – in Mangingisda, fishermen did not feel they had the support of Banrangay officials (they were willing to support a patrol roster for the local marine protected area but could not access fuel money, food or volunteer stipends to complete the task); inward migration brought in a completely different mindset – and so on.

‘Drawings illustrating illegal fishing activity’



Without understanding the different factors that impact on the fishermen’s decision to continue to fish illegally and how each of these factors interrelate, sustainable change is not possible. So techniques for uncovering system dynamics and holistic strategies for working with them are critical. Lewis reflected<sup>27</sup> that, “For newly arrived ICS volunteers the technique [systems mapping] was well-suited to making sense and building understanding of the local Kilifi context including the challenges communities faced, their ideas for change and what development interventions had and had not worked in the past.” In Nepal, Hacker comes to similar conclusions:<sup>28</sup>

**“Development organisations should adopt a wider gaze that includes changes that occurred outside the classroom and beyond the professional sphere when monitoring and evaluating interventions. This may give a more realistic picture of how change happens.”**

Researcher, Nepal

25. Lewis, S., 2015, “International Citizen Service (ICS) in Kilifi”.

26. Grene, H., 2015, *Is the climate right for VSO Ireland to actively recruit experienced professionals for short term placements overseas, and which models of short term volunteering will ensure the greatest impact for the communities VSO works in?*

27. Lewis, S., 2015, “International Citizen Service (ICS) in Kilifi”.

28. Hacker, E., 2014, “Education and Volunteering in Nepal: A Case Study from the Hill and Terai Regions”.

## Ownership

Despite the suggestion from some research participants that people had become more 'personalised' and less interested in issues outside of their own personal and family sphere, there was a lot of evidence that at community level many people are still motivated by altruism. This is a key factor in sustainability, because local community action does not require high inputs of external money or expertise. The problem is that altruism expressed through volunteering can put a financial burden on volunteers and their families, which may well not be sustainable.

Ownership and a belief that something will change is critical to sustainability. If people do not feel vested in a programme they will not take it on when the funding runs out, or even work towards new funding. In Legazpi, the Philippines, Valuing Volunteering facilitators asked whether it was an option for youth volunteers to survey school students about what they wanted for their school as a basis for initiating projects:

**"That wouldn't work here because someone comes and tells us what needs to be done. The ownership is with someone else. But it is a long process to get people to want to work for themselves again, after years of it being done for them..."**  
Staff, public college, Libon, the Philippines

In Kenya, residents of Shanzu and Kongowea in Mombasa did not consider the possibility of taking collective action. They perceived development as something that was done to them rather than something they would direct themselves; this creates a combination of dependency and lack of ownership. One local nurse stated, "there is a strong belief that the area cannot develop", and this self-perceived lack of capacity to take action acts as a disincentive to volunteering because people do not think it makes any difference either to themselves or the community. Eroded social capital and individual agency reduces sustainability (see section 3.3.2, *Dependency and sustainability*).

## Implications

- Volunteers can play a role in facilitating long-term relationships that aid sustainability. New volunteers can replace established ones to enable longer-term relationships and facilitate effective capacity building; allowing for confidence, skills and routines to be developed, and an infrastructure to sustain these activities to be built.
- Techniques for uncovering system dynamics are critical for building holistic development strategies that can unpack and address the different factors that contribute to sustainable change.
- Participatory discourse is not enough to ensure sustainability. Action is necessary. It is important that programmes support and find funding for independent action, such as the creation of cooperatives as explored in the Philippines, to build critical long-term ownership.

## 3.3.3 Embedding participatory research and iterative learning processes

One of the key findings of the research derives from the research process itself. The research showed that participatory research processes were not only effective at generating knowledge about the impact of volunteering interventions, but they also enabled the poorest and most marginalised to engage much more effectively.

Details of some examples of the methods researchers used can be seen in appendix 5.2.

### Participatory research

We used two interrelated methodologies in this work – participatory systemic inquiry (in 2012) and SAR (Burns, 2007 & 2014 a,b) – facilitating many different types of participatory inquiry to find out what was going on and why. Then we held group discussions to make sense of the data and where possible to generate action.

Our data collection and recording included traditional methods such as interviews and focus groups, Venn diagrams, problem walls, informal discussions, community mapping, network strings, system mapping, story collection and analysis, digital stories, rivers of experience drawings, problem rankings, impact mapping through storyboards, and resonance testing, and quote walls as triggers for conversation and validation.

### ICS volunteers, network strings

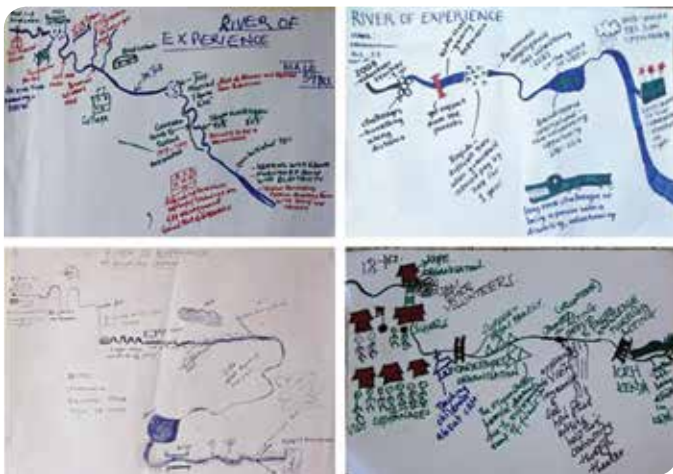


Common to these methods is the generation of stories that are not pre-framed by researchers' questions, so issues emerged as a result of what was important to participants rather than researchers. We found these techniques were particularly effective at conveying emotion:

- system mapping built up from dialogue and stories, which showed how issues are related to each other and the complex causalities that lead to negative outcomes for individuals and communities; these were used to identify potential solutions and as a feedback and validation tool for the community in question



- rivers of experience drawings where people illustrate the trajectories of their lives (or their volunteering journey) through pictures that symbolise a river with twists and turns; these tended to bring out macro level causalities and stimulated dialogue



- digital stories, which are an audiovisual way for people to describe their experiences in the form that they want to convey them.<sup>29</sup>

By using these participatory methods in the research we modelled a way of responding to a number of the critical findings that emerged.

Our research team systematically asked for feedback about the extent to which participants understood and were able to engage effectively with methods the team used, and their results. We found that participants thought that participatory methods offer tools to make a bottom-up analysis of situations; make it possible to carry out two-way learning processes; provide a formal space for relationship building; and provide complex political and systemic analysis. They pointed out that participatory methods allow complex situations to be assessed quickly in a way that all participants could understand.

As part of the training on SAR, local volunteer researchers were asked to reflect on the participatory process. These are some views from Kenya on systemic mapping work:

**“Things that were thought not to be significant at the start ended up becoming more important.”**

Community volunteer, Mombasa, Kenya

**“The approach created more work but was useful in identifying what to focus on. It acted as a good reflective tool and generated questions.”**

Community volunteer, Mombasa, Kenya

**“The community enquiries were a good way to gather information in a more natural way as the researchers went to local people to ask their opinions rather than the other way around.”**

Community volunteer, Mombasa, Kenya

In Nepal, participants noted the speed with which it was possible to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the different issues affecting the communities:<sup>30</sup>

**“The broad initial inquiry and education-focused inquiry enabled the gathering of in-depth information in a short time frame. The workshops enabled the volunteers to understand issues that were affecting the communities that may not have been known before. For example, volunteers later said they had not known about the strict hierarchy that existed in the semi-urban school among teachers, or the alcohol problems that were affecting livelihoods and therefore school attendance in the semi-rural community.”**

Researcher, Nepal

Participatory methods provided a safe space for discussion and learning:

**“Providing a neutral space, facilitated by an individual [the writer] who was relatively neutral and detached from the setting was in some ways useful in terms of discussing issues around ethnicity and caste, and in encouraging parents [who at one school had previously reported feeling that they were not welcome] to actively participate. At the follow-up meetings, the number of participants continued to increase and the communities' engagement in the project was positive, with between 30 and 40 participants returning after the first meeting.”**

Researcher, Nepal

29. [www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=valuing+volunteering+nepal](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=valuing+volunteering+nepal)

30. Hacker, E., 2014, “Education and Volunteering in Nepal: A Case Study from the Hill and Terai Regions”.

If there is a systemic design to the process it is possible to hold parallel inquiries, which makes it far easier to manage conflicts of interest and complex power relationships:

**“To navigate potential power dynamics we worked with volunteer support staff, volunteers and community groups separately. It helped us create a space where people could talk freely. Once the findings were anonymised we invited everyone to come together to reflect on them.”<sup>31</sup>**

Researcher, Philippines

The action research process also provided the opportunity for participants to critically reflect on their approaches and test out new ways of doing things:

**“In the semi-rural school, at the first meeting one point discussed was that parents who were illiterate seemed less likely to send their children to school. Parents and teachers felt that they could encourage parents to attend literacy classes as a long-term aim to improve the culture around valuing education in the community. Coincidentally, there were literacy classes beginning shortly after the meeting and several members of the group agreed to attend and encourage others to join them. At the next meeting, while four of the participants had attended classes, they reflected that learning outcomes were mixed. The literacy teacher could not speak Rana Tharu and the participants found Nepali difficult to understand and learn without being instructed in their mother-tongue. Furthermore, the parents reported that some women’s movement was restricted by their husbands and they were not allowed to leave the house to attend the classes. We discussed how our theory of change could be adapted in light of these insights.”<sup>32</sup>**

Researcher, Nepal

The Philippines research demonstrated that translating learning into action was made easier when participants understood and were fully on board with the principles underpinning the action research process:

**“In many action-learning cycles during the Valuing Volunteering project in the Philippines it has been difficult to get decision-makers to move beyond what academics studying adaption and innovation in the context of climate change call ‘single loop learning’. This means people absorb some of the research findings but only enough to fix errors under the current programmatic model. By proactively joining the research process TMO were able to enter ‘double loop learning’ interrogating what works and why.”<sup>33</sup>**

Researcher, Philippines

When tools were used that helped people to think systemically and understand what caused what, they were able to think through what actions they might take, and the likely impacts of those actions:

**“Systems maps are a means of graphically illustrating the myriad of relationships between issues and stakeholders. The tool works effectively as a way of making sense of complex environments.”<sup>34</sup>**

Researcher, Kenya

**“Young people are very good at systemic thinking. The ICS volunteers are able to map out issues and connections based on their research really rapidly. It is impressive to watch. In Valuing Volunteering Philippines’ experience adults spend a lot of time worrying what to put where.”<sup>35</sup>**

Researcher, Philippines

Participants commented on the ways in which visual processes helped community members to comprehend the issues that they were engaging with and how they fitted into them. These ranged from rivers of life drawings to digital stories:

**“The visual techniques also enabled self-expression on the part of the community members, helping us to see what knowledge and attitudes people had internalised.”<sup>36</sup>**

Researcher, Philippines

**“The digital stories also led to the start of action. At the digital storytelling workshop, exposure visits were arranged with the district education office, NGOs and INGOs after the stories and discussion had highlighted the change that had taken place at the schools, and the lack of the sharing and learning from this experience that had happened in the district.”<sup>37</sup>**

Researcher, Nepal

This extract from the Nepal digital stories case study illustrates how the stories became a way of engaging local residents and a vehicle for engaging senior local decision-makers:

**“The screenings were well attended with between 30 and 50 local residents joining each session. Following the screenings we had a discussion about the stories shown which raised some interesting points (see below)... At the end of the week, we held a (2 hour) session at a local hotel and invited officials from the district education office, and local NGOs and INGOs to attend.”**

Researcher, Nepal

31. Aked, J., 2014, “Volunteering for Gown and Town: Learning and Change Beyond the University’s Walls; Reporting on the Ways University Volunteering Affects Poverty”.

32. Hacker, E., 2014, “Education and Volunteering in Nepal: A Case Study from the Hill and Terai Regions”.

33. Aked, J., 2014, “When There Are No Fish Left in the Sea: Does Environmental Awareness Translate into Positive Action?”

34. Lewis, S., 2015, “International Citizen Service (ICS) in Kilifi”.

35. Aked, J., 2014, “Views from the Watershed: How Citizens and Actors Describe Volunteering for Development; Reporting on The Impact of Volunteering for Natural Resource Management in Carood Watershed, Bohol”.

36. Aked, J., 2014, “When There Are No Fish Left in the Sea: Does Environmental Awareness Translate into Positive Action?”

37. Hacker, E., 2014, “Valuing Volunteering Nepal: Using Digital Storytelling to Explore Issues in Education in the Far Western Region of Nepal”.



Hacker observed the importance of participants being able to also directly see the outcomes that came out of the process:

**“It was important that there were tangible outcomes to some of the inquiry lines. An example is this infrastructure project which was first discussed at the action research meetings and led to the establishment of a separate group that included the partner organisation, international volunteer and community who went on to raise funds and lobby local officials.”<sup>38</sup>**

Researcher, Nepal

Training other people to do the research was an important part of the process. Without this, participatory research stays within the realm of specialist researchers and its reach becomes quite restricted. Aked reported that even what appeared to be complex processes such as system mapping proved engaging and conceptually relatively problem-free to convey:

**“The other researchers [supporting the Mangingisda research] also reported that volunteers learned the techniques quickly... over the course of the next visit, the lead researcher facilitated systems-mapping exercises using the data because this was the most difficult technique for others to learn. She was excited to discover however that the peer researchers had already begun causal maps that we could learn from.”<sup>39</sup>**

Researcher, Philippines



Central to the empowering and participative principles underlying the research was the goal that work should be locally owned and provide opportunities for local people to develop their skills by taking part. For the Korogocho research<sup>40</sup> Lewis worked with a colleague at the local CBO, Progressive Volunteers, to identify local volunteers and volunteer networks that wanted to be involved in the research. Lewis provided these individuals with three days’ training, which included sessions on understanding complexity, defining volunteering, interview techniques, community fieldwork, systems, causation mapping, and so on. A coordinator was recruited as a key point of liaison.

Finding good partners on the ground; developing their capacity to carry out research, and then building a learning architecture into the country offices to enable the learning to inform policy and practice is critical to maximise the potential of these methods.

### Learning and evaluation

In order to be adaptive to fast-moving environments and changing needs, it is necessary to build a process of iterative learning into the work of VfD programmes. This can be done through the sort of embedded research Valuing Volunteering researchers have carried out, as discussed above, or the work undertaken in ICS programmes. It might seem as if learning would be difficult to embed in the context of a programme based on three-month placements, but paradoxically the opposite proved to be the case. Because each of the ICS programme cycles had a mid-cycle and end-of-process review there was an opportunity for organisational learning every six weeks. This is similar to the timing of a typical action research cycle:

**“In trying to understand what made it possible for the ICS programme to adapt and learn, Valuing Volunteering Philippines identified three important factors. Firstly, the locally based programme supervisors approached their work with a very reflexive learning style. They had a passion for the programme and for making it the best that it could be. They also encouraged this level of reflection among volunteers, creating safe environments to try things out, even if this meant the occasional false start. Secondly, the programme operates on three-month cycles with structured spaces for review. Volunteers have a mid-phase and end-phase review where they typically go on a retreat to reflect on volunteer outcomes and community outcomes. This is on top of one-on-one supervisions with volunteers. Local programme supervisors meet with all the Volunteer Placement Supervisors in one session and all the host homes in another session at the end of the cycle to collect feedback. The regularity of these review processes almost functions as a continual monitoring process. Interestingly, this learning took place outside of the monitoring and evaluation frameworks that were introduced.”<sup>41</sup>**

Researcher, Philippines

38. Hacker, E., 2014, “Education and Volunteering in Nepal: A Case Study from the Hill and Terai Regions”.

39. Aked, J., 2014, “When There Are No Fish Left in the Sea: Does Environmental Awareness Translate into Positive Action?”

40. Lewis, S., 2015, “Community Volunteering in Korogocho”.

41. Aked, J., 2014, “Views from the Watershed: How Citizens and Actors Describe Volunteering for Development; Reporting on The Impact of Volunteering for Natural Resource Management in Carood Watershed, Bohol”.

A similar observation was made in Kenya, but while the seed of a good innovation was there it needed adapting:

**“The limitation is that the reviews focus more on the process of managing volunteers than the process of understanding how and why change is (or is not) happening. For example, placement descriptions are not typically informed or validated at the level of the community.”<sup>42</sup>**

Researcher, Kenya

One feature of the learning process is being able to give internal feedback. Some volunteers wanted to be able to do this, but did not find it easy:

**“Thereafter some of the workshop participants secretly requested further meetings and representatives of the community volunteers involved in the initiative met with the Valuing Volunteering researcher for a focused group discussion based on their concerns and requests that they would like to present to the volunteer development organisation.”<sup>43</sup>**

Researcher, Mozambique

Volunteers criticised more traditional monitoring and evaluation methods, such as reviewing impact against a set of fixed programme outcomes, which they thought sometimes focused on the wrong things and failed to measure what was most successful:

**“Typically measurement and evaluation work is undertaken for accountability reasons so programme impact and success are measured and understood against programmes goals (e.g. in the theory of change). Its limitation is that it often fails to review success against the changes that have occurred in people’s lives. The interpretative methods we used responded to this challenge by focusing on individual and community perspectives and locally grounded explanations. But these insights can take you to unexpected places, which can make the approach, initially at least, seem unfocused, messy and at times confusing.”<sup>44</sup>**

Researcher, Philippines

In Nepal the research observed that there is sometimes too much emphasis on observing changes that happened – when teachers are using certain techniques for example – rather than looking at whether facilitators or teachers felt that they had the power and ability to change things:

**“The volunteer observes the teacher. She writes notes. She doesn’t talk to us until afterwards. She has noted the positives and negatives while we are teaching.”**

Teacher, Terai District, Nepal

Aked<sup>45</sup> points to the lack of practice around measuring what has changed for people and communities as a result of volunteer programmes in universities: “Most of the universities we engaged do not have any community impact tools.” Academic staff in the Philippines concur:

**“We still don’t have any records or mechanism for follow up on the work they do now and their impact in the community.”**

Volunteer support staff, Xavier University, the Philippines

**“Often times we only focus on the students but not on the community. Even with our partner organisations. And even us... we do not capture this knowledge to inform our practice.”**

Volunteer support staff, Miriam College, the Philippines

This is not unique to the Philippines or universities. This takes us back to the participatory processes described above. Action research provides a record of the learning after each meeting; system maps can be used to show power relations and causalities; life stories provide a baseline of needs; digital stories can distil key messages; dialogue tells us what people think, and so on. These practices can be built into an organisational decision-making process and support adaptive programming.

## Implications

- Participatory methods offered tools to make a bottom-up, comprehensive analysis of situations and allowed complex situations to be assessed quickly in a way that all participants could understand and feel comfortable engaging with.
- The action research process provided the opportunity for participants to critically reflect on their approaches and test out new ways of doing things. Translating learning into action was made easier when participants had “a positive culture around creativity and learning and so provided the space to experiment and learn along the way”.<sup>46</sup>
- Finding good partners on the ground and developing their capacity to carry out research ensured that the research was locally owned and sustained.
- By focusing on individual and community perspectives and locally grounded explanations, researchers were able to build a much richer picture of the changes that had occurred in people’s lives than if they had only measured success against pre-defined programme goals.
- Recruiting volunteers as researchers can help to embed participatory research capacity within an organisation.

42. Lewis, S., 2015, “International Citizen Service (ICS) in Kilifi”.

43. Picken, S., 2014, Spokes of a wheel. A participatory community led volunteer initiative.

44. Aked, J., 2014, “When There Are No Fish Left in the Sea: Does Environmental Awareness Translate into Positive Action?”

45. Aked, J., 2014, “Volunteering for Gown and Town: Learning and Change Beyond the University’s Walls; Reporting on the Ways University Volunteering Affects Poverty”.

46. Aked, J., 2014, “When There Are No Fish Left in the Sea: Does Environmental Awareness Translate into Positive Action?”

## 4. Conclusion



This research intends to demonstrate to the international development sector how the role of volunteering can be integrated into development programmes as a powerful mechanism for reaching out to some of the poorest and most marginalised groups. The participatory approaches that were employed throughout the research and the learning generated from this process can also provide some inspiration and insights into how we can strengthen bottom-up approaches to development.

The post-2015 development debates signal a new imperative to focus on the poorest and most marginalised – to leave no one behind. The experience of these people is one of exclusion as a result of power, discrimination and a failure to understand the complexity of their lives. This means that they can't access services even if they are made available and suggests that a more relational approach to development is necessary. We have shown the potential of embedded volunteers, whose work is centred on relationship building, a volunteering practice that places the knowledge and experiences of the poorest and most marginalised at the forefront.

However, we also saw that this does not happen automatically. The research showed how systemic drivers pushed volunteering organisations to privilege expert knowledge and partnerships with established organisations that have strong accounting systems etc. To counter these drivers and create a meaningful bottom-up approach to development, VfD organisations need to intentionally embed participatory research, iterative organisational learning and adaptive programming.





## 5. Appendices

### 5.1 Numbers of people who participated in the participatory research

KENYA		
Inquiry	Who	Number
<b>Mombasa</b>	Shanzu Volunteer Involving Organisations	5
	Kongowea VIOs	5
	City centre VIOs	5
	Local research team	20
	International VSO volunteers	2
	Volunteers in Action Network	10
	Community members spoken to	400
	Wider Mombasa volunteers	30
	<b>Korogocho</b>	Involved in participatory sessions
	CBOs and Self Help Organisations	50
	Local volunteers (research team)	15
<b>Kalifi</b>	ICS volunteers	80
	Local volunteers	30
	Community members	200
<b>Others</b>	Volunteer Involving Organisations Network	20
	International and national volunteers	50
	Other volunteers	60
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1282</b>

NEPAL		
Inquiry	Who	Number
<b>Education</b>	International volunteers	25
	Teachers	39
	Community members	65
	Students	40
	ECD facilitators	12
	Local volunteers	25
	<b>NDVS</b>	NDVS project officers
Public servants		8
Key stakeholders in the Nepal volunteering sector		15
NDVS volunteers		65
<b>Digital Stories</b>		Participants
	Community validation events	60
	Stakeholder validation event (INGOs, Gov officials, NGOs, CBOs)	15
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>383</b>

MOZAMBIQUE		
Inquiry	Who	Number
<b>Aeroporto (Youth church vols)</b>	Youth church volunteers (male & female, 15 - 28yrs)	10
	Other participants	200
<b>Kubatsirana (Where's the Bread)</b>	Director of Kubatsirana	1
	Manager of Kubatsirana	1
	Volunteer reps	2
	Volunteer group 1 (women)	10
	Volunteer group 2 (20 - 40yrs)	7
	Pastors	2
	Activista group (30 - 50yrs)	12
	Community members	15
<b>Chamanculo D (Spokes of a Wheel)</b>	Male	6
	Female	6
	AEFUM vols	1
	Participants	100
	International volunteers	4
	VSO Staff	1
<b>AEFUM volunteer group</b>	AEFUM volunteers	15
	Participants	100
	Ministry of Youth and Sports	1
	UNV representative	1
	CNV staff and members	10
	Red Cross Mozambique	30

MOZAMBIQUE		
Inquiry	Who	Number
<b>Kutenga</b>	Activistas (17 - 40yrs)	6
	Hospital volunteers and activistas	6
<b>Formal health volunteers</b>	Community members	70
	Local governance representatives	10
	Volunteers	2
	Mothers (supported by volunteers)	6
	Hospital staff	3
	Health committee	10
	Secretario do Bairro	1
<b>Canhandula</b>	Association Volunteers	24
	Association Volunteers Board	6
	Hospital volunteers	4
	Nurse	1
	Health post staff	2
<b>Beira</b>	Community members supported by volunteers	5
	Community members	30
<b>Inhambane</b>	Community members	30
<b>Boane</b>	Director of Kindlemuka Organisation	1
	Activistas and volunteers (23 - 60yrs)	8
	Participants	50
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>872</b>

PHILIPPINES		
Inquiry	Who	Number
<b>Bohol (generic)</b>	School children/members of youth groups	19
	Residents	82
	Multi-stakeholder	14
	Active members of People's Organisations	8
	VSO national volunteer	1
	VSO international volunteers	3
	VSO diaspora volunteer	1
	VSO ICS volunteers (batch 4)	18
	VSO ICS programme supervisors	3
	VSO Bahaginan staff	5
	Host homes	15
	VSO International staff (Asia workshop)	6
	Local government/university staff	10
	Returned ICS volunteers and family	6
<b>Bohol (relational)</b>	VSO ICS vols (batch 5 & 6)	36
	Local volunteers in core research team	3
	Psychology Department (University of the Philippines)	20
	Basdio Youth Group	8
	Adult residents, Basdio	6
	Other youth group leaders	6
	Local government/university staff	7
	Members of People's Organisation and residents	29
	Teachers	2
	Host mother/resident	1
	VSO ICS programme supervisor	1
	VSO Bahaginan staff	5

PHILIPPINES			
Inquiry	Who	Number	
<b>Palawan (TMO)</b>	TMO local volunteer/student volunteers	5	
	Fishermen	61	
	Seaweed farmers	9	
	Women residents	69	
	Teachers	21	
	Out of school youth	7	
	High school students	28	
	Elementary students	15	
	Barangay officials	10	
	Peripheral actors	8	
	TMO staff	8	
	<b>Palawan (Fishermen)</b>	Resident volunteers	15
		TMO staff	8
		Peripheral actors	8
VSO national volunteer		1	
TMO local volunteers/student volunteers		3	
<b>HEI</b>	Barangay officials	3	
	VSO Bahaginan staff	2	
	Staff members (Jesuit Volunteers Philippines Foundation, University of Ateneo)	3	
	Staff members (Ugnayan ng Pahinungod, UP Los Bagnos)	8	
	Social Work Degree Programme, Bicol University	92	
	Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Bohol Island State University	64	
	Kristohanong Katilingban sa Pagpakabana (KKP), Xavier University, Cagayan de Oro	29	
	Institutional Network for Social Action (UNSA), Miriam College, Manila	40	
	Staff members of the Commission for Higher Education	2	
	<b>National level</b>	National Volunteers Coalition	10
Three national stakeholder meetings		40	
University of Philippines staff		7	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1257</b>	

## 5.2 Case study summaries

### 5.2.1 Kenya

Lead researcher: Simon Lewis

#### **Community volunteering in Korogocho**

The community of Korogocho (or Koch) is an informal settlement situated in north-east Nairobi. The Korogocho researchers started by exploring community needs and then looked at existing volunteer work to assess whether and why they felt that it was successful. The researchers aimed to model a way of working that prioritises the importance of understanding local contexts and the needs of marginalised and vulnerable communities.

#### **International Citizen Service (ICS) in Kilifi**

The Kilifi inquiry entailed 12 months of SAR across four separate cycles (each cycle covering a three-month placement) of International Citizen Service volunteers (UK and Kenyan national youth volunteers). Around 80 ICS volunteers, 30 local volunteers and over 200 local people were involved in the research. The focus of the inquiry was to understand how and where these groups of youth volunteers were contributing to local development in the context of these programmes, and also compared the impact of short-term compared with long-term (six-month plus) volunteer placements. The research developed a much more participative and practical induction process for UK and national ICS volunteers at the start of their placements, which prioritised active engagement with local people in order to better understand community dynamics and thereby ensure future volunteer activities were sensitive to local contexts.

#### **The community dynamics of volunteering in Mombasa**

The Mombasa research was initially structured around a number of general research questions, which aimed to establish the challenges and dynamics faced in three communities – Kongowea, Shanzu and the city centre. These sites were chosen by a team of local volunteer researchers from different volunteering organisations in Mombasa, who were brought together specifically for this project. Against the backdrop of building an understanding of community contexts, researchers investigated what volunteering was occurring, how it was perceived, what impact it was having, and what factors were potentially limiting its effectiveness. Results revealed intriguing issues surrounding differing community dynamics that affected the impact of volunteering.

### 5.2.2 Mozambique

Lead researcher: Alexandra Picken

#### **‘Where is the Bread?’: Programmatic and Informal Community Volunteer Responses to Health Issues**

This inquiry looked at volunteers and activists engaged as community health volunteers in the provision of home-based care. These volunteers often work either directly on government health service programmes or as part of donor-funded programmes. The inquiry explores the varied ways that community health volunteers respond to community needs and investigates the experiences of the volunteers, the organisation that mobilises them and the communities they volunteer for. The organisation involved in the inquiry is one of the biggest volunteering organisations in the country, working with over 250 community volunteers.

#### **Community Youth Church Volunteers: Trust and Motivations; A Systemic Action Research Inquiry**

This inquiry focuses on community-based youth volunteers with foundations in the church and explores their ability to effect change in the community in public and sexual health. It looks at how volunteers work in informal spaces and the importance of building relationships of trust in the community, while simultaneously negotiating relationships with formal governance structures and political elites. The inquiry was led by a group of three community youth church volunteers over 12 months and engaged a number of local stakeholders including community members receiving public and sexual health services, local decision-makers, and other NGOs and INGOs operating in the community.

#### **Spokes of a wheel. A participatory community led volunteer initiative**

This inquiry looks at an internationally funded local initiative aimed at supporting participatory community development through the promotion of volunteering. The inquiry is led by volunteers engaged in this initiative, and considers their perspectives on how and where they believe volunteering can contribute to poverty reduction within the community. It sets out some of the challenges these volunteers encountered when trying to take ownership of the initiative.

### 5.2.3 Nepal

Lead researcher: Elizabeth Hacker

#### **The National Development Service of Nepal: National Government Volunteers and their Impact on Poverty Alleviation. A Case Study**

This inquiry focused on the NDVS volunteer scheme, established in February 1999 under the Secretariat of the Government of Nepal's National Planning Commission, in order to assist in reducing poverty, as outlined in the Government of Nepal's Tenth Five Year Plan. Having started with 220 volunteers in 20 districts, the coverage of this scheme has expanded to cover almost all districts of the country. Over 9,000 individuals have now served as volunteers in rural and remote regions of Nepal. Nearly all volunteers are mobilised in the health sector, where they have various roles, such as health assistants and auxiliary nurse midwives.

#### **Education and Volunteering in Nepal: A Case Study from the Hill and Terai Regions**

This case study looked at the impact of volunteering in the education sector. In particular, it explored the impact of volunteering on improving the quality and access to education for the poor and marginalised, centred on two locations in the hill region and Terai (plane region) of Nepal. It focused on a particular intervention that mobilised local and international volunteers to increase the access, retention and participation of marginalised and out-of-reach children in quality inclusive education. It looks at the impact of the intervention and explores whether and how it was responsive to the needs of the communities affected. In doing so, it highlighted aspects of volunteering that led to change, looks at issues that challenged or limited the impact of volunteering, and points towards how development organisations working through volunteers may tackle them.

#### **Valuing Volunteering Nepal: Using Digital Storytelling to Explore Issues in Education in the Far Western Region of Nepal**

A digital storytelling workshop was undertaken in the far western region of Nepal in January 2014. The workshop and resulting digital stories support existing inquiries undertaken into education and volunteering in this area. ECD facilitators who had worked with international volunteers on a VSO project on education intervention for more than 15 months and accelerated learning facilitators who worked on the same project were invited to take part. Participants were invited to create digital stories that addressed the question, How has volunteering affected you and your community? Watch the Valuing Volunteering Nepal digital stories at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcXd7qhUq18>.

### 5.2.4 Philippines

Lead researcher: Jody Aked

#### **When There Are No Fish Left in the Sea: Does Environmental Awareness Translate into Positive Action? Reporting on the Impact of Volunteering for Environmental Education in Coastal Communities of Palawan**

This inquiry was carried out with TMO, a government office looking after the protection of Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in Palawan. It examined the use of environmental science graduate volunteers in environmental education work with communities, informing organisational learning about the future direction of their Information, Education and Communication Programme.

#### **Riding the Waves of Change: The Challenges of Volunteering in Highly Complex Poverty Contexts; Reporting on Action Research Among Volunteers in Mangingisda, Palawan**

An action research inquiry was conducted over 18 months in Mangingisda, a coastal community in Palawan, by a group of international, national, local and resident volunteers. It focused on three key areas: ecological matters (protecting fish stocks), livelihoods (providing alternative ways of generating income) and volunteerism (directing human resources towards the first two).

The inquiry aimed to support further learning for TMO's volunteering and environmental education programmes and assist the community of Mangingisda to overcome barriers to development. It also explored the practicalities of adopting action research as an approach that can identify and respond to strengths and limitations of volunteering for poverty alleviation and development at community level.

#### **Views from the Watershed: How Citizens and Actors Describe Volunteering for Development; Reporting on The Impact of Volunteering for Natural Resource Management in Carood Watershed, Bohol**

This inquiry explored what role volunteerism can play at the intersection between environment, poverty and vulnerability across different geographical zones – for example, from upland to coastal communities. VSO and its in-country federated member VSO Bahaginan have been working through volunteers to support the management of the Carood watershed in Bohol, Visayas, since 2010. The combination of international, diaspora, national and local volunteers working in Carood and the ready availability of theories of change operating at the local, programme and country levels made the watershed a rich canvas to explore the ecosystem of volunteering as it relates to social and environmental change. The inquiry was wide-ranging, spanned a year, and incorporated multiple community engagements.

#### **Volunteering for Gown and Town: Learning and Change Beyond the University's Walls; Reporting on the Ways University Volunteering Affects Poverty**

This inquiry was carried out with six volunteering programmes situated in public and private universities all over the Philippines to understand how universities leverage their considerable human resource – students, alumni and faculty staff – to influence change and development for people living in poverty. It provided an opportunity to work with in-country volunteering organisations and educational institutions to integrate participatory and systemic approaches into analyses about how volunteering affects poverty.



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### The Valuing Volunteering publication series

In addition to this synthesis report the Valuing Volunteering series includes the following published case studies:

#### Kenya

Lewis, S., 2015, "Community Volunteering in Korogocho".

Lewis, S., 2015, "The Community Dynamics of Volunteering in Mombasa".

Lewis, S., 2015, "International Citizen Service (ICS) in Kilifi".

#### Mozambique

Picken, S., 2014, "Community Youth Church Volunteers: Trust and Motivations; A Systemic Action Research Inquiry".

Picken, S., 2014, "'Where is the Bread?': Programmatic and Informal Community Volunteer Responses to Health Issues".

Picken, S., 2014, Spokes of a wheel. A participatory community led volunteer initiative.

#### Nepal

Hacker, E., 2014, "Education and Volunteering in Nepal: A Case Study from the Hill and Terai Regions".

Hacker, E., 2014, "The National Development Service of Nepal: National Government Volunteers and their Impact on Poverty Alleviation, a Case Study".

Hacker, E., 2014, "Valuing Volunteering Nepal: Using Digital Storytelling to Explore Issues in Education in the Far Western Region of Nepal (Digital Stories and Accompanying Write-Up)", available at [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=valuing+volunteering+nepal](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=valuing+volunteering+nepal).

#### The Philippines

Aked, J., 2014, "Riding the Waves of Change: The Challenges of Volunteering in Highly Complex Poverty Contexts; Reporting on Action Research Among Volunteers in Mangingisda, Palawan".

Aked, J., 2014, "Volunteering for Gown and Town: Learning and Change Beyond the University's Walls; Reporting on the Ways University Volunteering Affects Poverty".

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*Valuing Volunteering* was a two year (2012 – 2014) global action research project, conducted by VSO and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to understand how and why volunteering affects poverty and contributes to sustainable development. This report summarises findings from inquiries conducted in the Philippines, Kenya, Mozambique and Nepal which explore the role of volunteering across different development contexts and systems. Using Participatory Systemic Action Research it asks local partners, communities and volunteers to reflect on how and where volunteering can contribute to positive, sustainable change.

For more information about the global *Valuing Volunteering* study please contact: [enquiry@vsoint.org](mailto:enquiry@vsoint.org)



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