International Voluntary Service in SADC

Host organisation perspectives from Mozambique and Tanzania

Final report prepared by

Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA)

April 2011

Helene Perold
Eddy Mazembo Mavungu
Karena Cronin
Lauren Graham
Learnmore Muchemwa
with Benjamin J Lough

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The International Voluntary Service (IVS) study aims to contribute to the knowledge-base on international voluntary service in the SADC region by focusing on host organisations' perceptions of the effects of international volunteers, largely from Europe. Conducted in October 2010 in Tanzania and Mozambique, the research was designed to make comparisons between host organisations and organisations involved in similar work that did not host international volunteers (i.e. comparative organisations). A total of twelve organisations were involved in the study – three host organisations in each country and three comparative organisations in each country (a total of six per country). In both countries all the organisations were involved in the delivery of services to people in poor urban or rural communities.

In addition, a volunteer survey was conducted with volunteers sent worldwide by International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE) and volunteers sent to African countries by the German *weltwärts programme*. The participants were volunteers going into their placements for 2010/11 and volunteers who had already returned from their placements, having served their in 2009/10 or earlier.

The conceptual framework for the study locates international voluntary service within development discourse and explores the relationship between international volunteers and the work of their host organisations in terms of their development objectives within their context of developing countries with quite different histories. It also factors social capital into the international voluntary service experience in order to explore the potential of the international volunteers to produce change in their home countries in respect of altering entrenched perceptions of the power relations between North and South. In this regard the findings suggest that experiences of international voluntary service can legitimately be regarded as setting up international social networks between all the parties, but that the benefits of such social linkages should not be taken for granted. Macro-structural dynamics, contextual realities and problems of access to resources available in these networks can constrain or enable the "use value" of host organisations or communities' international social networks created through experiences of international voluntary service. This conceptualisation also suggests that for international voluntary service to serve as international social capital for all the parties involved, certain macro-structural, micro-structural and individual adjustments have to be put in place.

The host organisations in this study have been in existence for between 4 and 43 years. Established in the post-independence era, most see themselves as having been formed to address post- and neo-colonial ills and to drive development, particularly in the most impoverished urban and rural areas. Their location and missions thus provide international volunteers with a unique opportunity to experience the challenges of development first-hand through human capital development, micro-finance service provision, agricultural programmes, health services and renewable energy promotion. The study shows that international volunteers who genuinely engage with their host organisations in service of their strategic development are also most likely to form a clearer understanding of the development challenges they encounter.

Specifically, the study examines the role of international voluntary service in development and raises three issues that are relatively new in the field:

1. The role of host organisations and host communities in developing the international volunteers;

2. The importance of organisational development in the civil society organisations in which international volunteers are placed; and

3. The role of international volunteers in promoting local/community-based volunteering in the communities and countries where they serve.

The key findings of the study follow below.

1   IVS does not happen in a vacuum

The first key finding of the study is that **international voluntary service is not an isolated activity, but rather a process embedded within the history of relations between the Western world and the African continent.** The study reveals evidence of stereotyped perceptions held between the actors involved in IVS programmes, particularly in the rural areas in which the research was conducted. This explains why international volunteering reflects dynamics of power relations, dependence and alleged exploitation, deception, or strategic behaviour. It also helps explain why international volunteers are not always seen as benevolent actors, but are sometimes viewed as instruments of Western imperialism or agents of neo-colonialism.

In these interactions between the wealthy Western world and the "developing" African continent, international volunteers are often uncritically represented as members of a superior race and a wealthy society. As such, they are viewed as bringing additional resources, credibility and marketability to host organisations, regardless of the actual value of the hosted volunteers. Though host organisations are sometimes aware of the limits of these widespread beliefs, they nevertheless make use of them in order to market or sell their services or products, thus reinforcing and perpetuating these negative racial biases. Conversely, stereotyped perceptions produce myths such as Africans being regarded as poor, incapacitated, weak, lazy, unresourceful and dependent. It seems that international volunteers do not always link prevailing conditions of material deprivation in host communities with historical and current injustices of the global trade and aid regime. In this regard, extreme representations of international volunteers as saviours and exaggerated depictions of host communities as "hearts of darkness" still persist.

Nevertheless, many host organisations and members of host communities have seen in the presence of international volunteers an opportunity for mutual development learning and equitable cooperation. Some host organisations and members of their communities see international volunteers as: (1) being proactive even within a context of scarce resources; (2) able to help host communities confront negative cultural practices such as fear of witchcraft (which leads to a lack of investment in good houses and property); (3) contributing to the strategic development of their host organisations; and (4) advocating for the interests of developing countries in their home country. In this regard it becomes clear that IVS provides a context in which historical features of Africa-Europe relationships can be challenged. We use the notion of bridging social capital developed by Putnam as a concept that might explain the potential that IVS has at the micro level to challenge macro-level perceptions of relationships between Africa and Europe.

2 Partner relations

A second key finding that emerged from the study is that **the supply-driven nature of international voluntary service skews the relationship between sending and host organisations and typically results in host organisations not receiving the skills they need for their own advancement**. This is particularly evident in the case of programmes that send young Europeans straight from school into a voluntary service experience. In both

Mozambique and Tanzania, local intermediary organisations are active in interfacing between some host and sending organisations, but even in these cases host organisations often do not receive international volunteers with the skill sets they would prefer. In a supply-driven context host organisations are less able to seek out their preferred sending partners, which puts them at a disadvantage in sourcing the international volunteers with the skills appropriate for their organisations' development. Local Mozambique host organisations in the sample appeared to be more proactive than those from Tanzania in expressing their needs, but in both countries it is clear that the relationship between supply and demand is skewed.

Challenges emerge of poor communication, including international volunteers circumventing communications protocols agreed between the partners, thus further contributing to weakening the role of host organisations within the partnership. Host organisations are also not adequately prepared for the volunteers: since they do not have much influence on the profile of volunteers that they receive, it is difficult for host organisations to plan in advance how to best involve volunteers in their activities. Conversely, the volunteers are not always adequately prepared for their placements. Furthermore, although international volunteers may socialise well with members of the host community, it appears that relations with staff in the host organisations are much more distant, sometimes even cool. Reasons for limited social interactions between volunteers and staff are complex, but include the generational gap between staff and volunteers, the allocation of volunteers to a single department, the location of the volunteers' office away from other staff, and a tendency of top leadership to monopolise control of volunteers. In addition, some host organisations and beneficiaries complained about international volunteers making promises they were unable to keep, and volunteers disregarding important disciplinary and safety measures. The fact that most host organisations have only indirect relationships with the sending organisations is thus symptomatic of the uneven power relationships between host and sending organisations and can work to the detriment of the international volunteer experience for all parties.

How to empower host organisations to equalise their relationship with the sending organisations and to leverage international volunteering more strategically for their own needs then becomes a critical question. In this regard an important leverage point for empowering host organisations emerges in respect of a focus on *organisational development*. This positions international voluntary service as a factor in strengthening grassroots

organisations in SADC countries as civil society players in their own right. The benefits of international volunteering to the host organisation is likely to be a function of the host's ability to interface effectively with the sending organization and to channel the international volunteer's energy, commitment, innovative ideas and knowledge towards the host organisation's strategic development. However, the study demonstrates that for the reasons outlined in the first finding above, such readiness cannot be assumed. It is most likely to be found in relationships that are structured around the equitable interface between the host and sending partners, with their joint involvement in programme design and implementation.

3   Managing expectations

Both host and comparison organisations demonstrated a keen interest in hosting international volunteers, undoubtedly linked to their acute need to access financial and human resources. Comparison organisations assumed that the volunteers would be skilled, once again guided by the misperception that all Europeans are skilled and have the ability to access financial resources. Host organisations mostly requested skilled volunteers, but often did not receive them. They have also become keenly aware that international volunteers are often not able to help them access financial resources. The online survey of young international volunteers from Europe supports this finding since only a few respondents reported sourcing funds for host organisations or host community members. Host organisations are thus starting to differentiate between international volunteers of different levels of competence, which may ultimately assist in countering some of the stereotypes mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, host organisations demonstrated insight into the varied motivations of the international volunteers. While all respondents recognise that international volunteers are often motivated by a genuine commitment to help others and promote change, they also report that some international volunteers demonstrate a greater interest in tourism and social activities, and lack commitment. Host organisations in both countries report that volunteers tend to be focused on their own ideas about the need to produce change within the organisations in which they are placed and are less concerned with understanding the context in which such changes need to be sustained. Transparency and communication between hosts and volunteers were identified as the key to building trust and cooperation.

Host organisations are not meaningfully engaged in the selection and recruitment of international volunteers and thus lack the opportunity to exert any significant influence over this phase of the

volunteer management. Host organisations were unequivocal in their call for greater engagement in this aspect of the process, which carries through to the orientation of international volunteers. Host organisations shared a number of criticisms about the pre-departure orientation for international volunteers, particularly in relation to language preparation and briefing volunteers on the host organisation and the cultural/country context, much of which seems to be Eurocentric in nature. Host organisations also demonstrated some inadequacies in their volunteer orientation and supervision, especially with respect to promoting good staff/volunteer relations and to ensuring that international volunteers respect the rules and procedures of the organisation.

All of the host organisations recognise that there is a need to improve their volunteer management practices so that they can enhance the benefit of the volunteering experience for the volunteer and their organisations. However, only through improved communication and collaboration can the host organisations enhance their volunteer management capacity and improve their preparation to host international volunteers meaningfully.

4 The effects of IVS

The IVS study has generated significant information about the effects of international volunteering on host organisations, local communities, and the volunteers from the perspective of the host organisations and host communities. Host organisations overwhelmingly reported benefits from hosting international volunteers. In this sample there were examples of some international volunteers who helped mobilise resources for the organisations, while others provided much needed assistance in the areas of monitoring and evaluation, technology and system development, and others helped inspire new projects, perspectives and collaborations at the organisations. These contributions in turn helped to improve the services of the host organisations.

4.1 Strategic use of international volunteers

Across the study, host and comparison organisations agreed that the strategic use of international volunteers would be most beneficial for their development. The importance of strategic considerations are evident from the examples of host organisations that have improved their systems and from those comparison organisations that have stopped recruiting international volunteers until such time as they are clear on the role they should play. The analysis suggests that three factors govern the extent to which host organisations optimse the strategic benefit they receive from the international volunteers: **First**, benefit derives from careful planning of how and

where the volunteers will be used in the organisation and the need for affected staff to be involved in this process from the start. **Second**, organisations need to specify clearly the skills, attributes and attitudes they are seeking from the international volunteers, and this match needs to be achieved through a more demand-driven approach to international voluntary service. **Third**, strategic benefit is directly related to the extent to which international volunteers are managed and guided during their stay in the organisation.

4.2   Programme delivery

With regard to programme delivery, the effect in both countries was mainly evident on programme quality although some examples were reported of international volunteers helping to extend the reach of programmes. Host organisations spoke positively about the establishment of systems that strengthen organisational effectiveness through increased staff accountability, monitoring and evaluation and continuous improvement. For these benefits to be realised, however, the evidence suggests that staff must be involved in planning for the volunteer placement as an integral part of organisational functioning; productive working relationships between international volunteers and permanent staff are necessary; international volunteers should have a learning orientation towards the host organisation and respecting staff rather than seeing themselves as being 'better than' or 'above' staff; clear deliverables must be set for the international volunteers against which their contributions can be assessed and measured; and organisations need to ensure that staff are in a position to run and sustain any improvements that international volunteers might have made in the organisation.

4.3   Innovation

While some respondents felt that professional experience was the main factor in enabling international volunteers to help organisations achieve innovation in their practice, the data suggests two additional key ingredients for change: genuine interest on the part of the volunteer in the future of the organisation and the level of commitment that the volunteer demonstrates in his/her engagement with the organisation. For innovation to be sustained, it is clear that close and mutually beneficial engagement between the international volunteers and the staff is required to put in place the support for the innovation.

4.4 Costs

The respondents in both host and comparison organisations start from the premise that international volunteers represent a 'free pair of hands' and that free labour is unlikely to

make financial demands on organisations. However, the evidence is clear that the training and management of volunteers requires time and resources from the host organisation, particularly in the case of international volunteers who come straight from school with little experience, and this translates into costs. Host organisations did acknowledge that sending organisations and some international volunteers also incur costs in the process.

4.5   Effects on local volunteering

A key area of interest in this research is how the presence of international volunteers impacts on the relationship between host organisations, their communities and local volunteers. This is one of the questions that some SADC governments are also starting to ask, particularly in the face of high unemployment rates for local young people.

Local volunteers are present and active in all but one of the 12 organisations surveyed. However, the organisations view the local volunteers differently from the international volunteers. That relationship is shaped by the ways in which volunteering is broadly understood in the host countries. In 2010 Mozambique passed legislation that recognises the value of volunteering in the socio-economic development of that country and sets up an agency that will oversee the interests of volunteers, both foreign and domestic. In Tanzania the government released a draft national volunteer policy in 2007, which is being reviewed by the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Youth Development. However, neither of these policy frameworks are yet impacting on the perceptions of ordinary people, with the result that local volunteering remains relatively unorganised and unsupported.

Three categories of local volunteers emerge from the study:

1. Local volunteers who founded organisations/institutions and run them on a voluntary basis (founder of a kindergarten; sisters from a religious order). We refer to these as 'founders';
2. Local volunteers who have a stake in the organisation or institution (such as the parents of children at a school or the leaders of membership groups in a micro-finance organisation). We refer to these as 'stakeholders'';
3. Local volunteers who serve in the organisation for limited periods of time (1-3 months). We refer to these as 'short-term volunteers'.

The first two categories were more prevalent among the Tanzania organisations than in Mozambique. In Mozambique the local volunteers were mostly in the last category.

Two constraints were identified to local volunteering: *poverty*, which weakens people's ability to volunteer for any length of time because they need to find paid work, and *the absence of institutions or arrangements that facilitate volunteering.* Nevertheless, despite local volunteers serving for short periods of time (reportedly between one and three months), host and comparison organisations in both countries were unequivocal in their view that they would not be able to function without the use of local volunteers: they depend on local volunteers for the reach, success and sustainability of their operations.

In comparing international and local volunteers, host organisations surveyed generally say they value international volunteers because they are fully funded, they have good education backgrounds and they may help the organisation gain access to new sources of funds. The advantages of the local volunteers is that they are fluent in local languages, understand the local culture and are able to their skills as appropriate. For these reasons it is possible to regard the two sets of human resources as being complementary in nature. Both are significant and both are valued by the organisations surveyed.

This study did not survey the volunteers active in the sample organisations (neither local nor international volunteers) and we thus cannot comment on the relationship between them in the host organisations. However, some evidence suggests that no special efforts were made in these organisations to pair local and international volunteers. The question that arises for future research is how the presence of international and local volunteers in an organisation can be structured to impact on the quality of the services offered by the organisation and how this might affect the nature of the volunteering experience for both local and international volunteers.

4.6   Resource mobilisation

Resource mobilisation is a critical expectation held by the organisations of the international volunteers. Respondents attached value to the volunteers' strong education backgrounds, their ICT skills and their ability to learn quickly. However, it is mainly financial support that most organisations hope the international volunteers will produce. Across the two countries a range of examples emerged of how international volunteers had mobilised in-kind donations for the host organisations from sources outside the country, with three examples of volunteers embarking on successful fundraising projects. In some cses, however, the host organisations were disappointed because young volunteers just out of school had limited networks and no fundraising skills.

These expectations include the assumption that international volunteers can intercede with funders on behalf of African organisations whom funders are unlikely to trust. Once again, this demonstrates the perception that international volunteers represent wealthy and powerful countries and are more likely to be able to influence funders in those countries than the African organisations could do in their own right. However, some respondents in Tanzania are concerned about the motivation for international donations and how sustained they may be, while others in that country raised strong objections to the 'dependency syndrome' that emerges when international volunteers are seen purely as conduits for financial support rather than significant partners in development. The response of one group of beneficiaries is worth quoting here:

> *"[international volunteers] can come in and support in these [local] initiatives instead of them being the sole driving force or for us to expect them to just raise funds and get resources for us. When we overcome that, then volunteerism is going to be beneficial and established on principles of mutual benefit, sustainable development and respect, and it can be a positive contribution."*

It is interesting to note that in the volunteer survey, the majority of returned volunteers from both the ICYE and *weltwärts* programmes believed that their contribution was more significant in terms of skills transfer than by providing resources directly to their host organisations. This supports the findings above that international volunteers are not naturally or easily able to mobilise resources for host organisations. Organisations that have high expectations in this regard are likely to be disappointed.

4.7   Sustainability

The question of how international voluntary service impacts on the sustainability of host organisations can be viewed from the perspective of whether international volunteers help host organisations meet current needs without compromising their ability to meet their needs in future. The other perspective is to look at the impact of the experience on the international volunteer.

The lifespan of the organisations in the sample shows that, despite in some cases being survivalist in nature, they have tenaciously found various means of running their operations and delivering services needed by their communities. The use of local volunteers is one such strategy while another is to establish linkages with organisations locally and abroad to source a variety of resources, including funds and human capital. International volunteers fall into this latter category. The key

factors in sustaining change in host organisations revolve around whether international volunteers have the appropriate skills or the willingness and commitment to work cooperatively with local staff, and whether staff were closely involved in the development of new approaches or systems. Furthermore, organisational resilience is critical to sustaining any funding relationships established by international volunteers.

The volunteer survey found that across the two organisations (ICYE and *weltwärts*) returned volunteers were more likely than outgoing volunteers to report higher international social capital, open-mindedness, intercultural relations, civic activism and community engagement. This is positive since it is on their return to their home countries that these volunteers have the opportunity to make significant impacts on their families, peers and wider communities in respect of sharing insights and new knowledge gained during the volunteer experience abroad. Their ability to position their host organisations as significant players in development could ultimately influence the 'superior/inferior' perspective of their countrymen and women in respect of relations between Africa and Europe.

5 Perceptions of influence on international volunteers

There is evidence that host organisations and communities exercise huge influence on international volunteers. The fact that most of them embark on a volunteer experience at the pre-tertiary education stage makes it more likely that they will learn a great deal from the host organisation and community. Given that many of the international volunteers located at the host organisations in this study come to do volunteering without professional skills, they acquire important technical and soft skills under the guidance of host organisation staff. The acquired skills also facilitate their career choice since prior ideas and career preferences can be reinforced or challenged. Thanks to the volunteering experience, they learn a new foreign language and culture which has a positive impact on their future employability and social profile.

However, the cultural learning process is bi-directional as the host organisation and members of the host community also learn or adapt to certain cultural elements of international volunteers. There is evidence of certain cultural practices in the host organisation being challenged and sometimes forced to change as a result of the involvement of international volunteers in the organisation. Time management is another area where international volunteers' culture of punctuality and time precision has led to change of practices in host organisations. Intercultural exchange also takes place through the mutual teaching of languages and several accounts emerged of romantic relationships

and even marriages between international volunteers and members of the host community. A particular challenge, however, relates to engaging the international volunteers in terms that help them transcend romanticised notions of traditional African culture and instead to help them gain an appreciation of the richness and complexity of 21st century African life.

Conclusion

The central finding of this study is that IVS occurs in the context of both the history of colonialism and the neo-colonial experience, as well as within the wider contemporary context of geopolitical power imbalances between North and South. This points to the risk that the IVS experience may be perceived in host countries as perpetuating such power imbalances unless cogent steps are taken to re-craft working relationships between host and sending organizations.

The study also yields important findings about the potential of IVS to contribute to development. One of the most significant issues here relates to the relationship between IVS and the organisational development of the hosts in which they serve. The strengthening of a multiplicity of civil society organizations (community-based, non-governmental and private sector) is important not only to deliver much-needed services for poverty alleviation, but as a critical factor in creating a flourish environment for public participation. By recognising the centrality of host organisations as catalysts for development, IVS can be repositioned more clearly in support of organisational development, rather than as a largely interpersonal 'helping hand' experience. Ideally host organisations need to become more forthcoming in expressing their needs for the strategic human resources they require to strengthen their operations, and participate actively in the processes that precede the arrival of international volunteers.

Related to this is the potential of IVS to raise the profile of local volunteering as a critical aspect of public participation for development and democracy. **The study points unequivocally to the central role that local volunteers play in sustaining grassroots organisations.** In view of concerns about the supply-driven nature of international voluntary service in SADC countries, it becomes important to structure relationships between international and local volunteers in ways that provide room for reciprocal learning, and increase the authenticity of the volunteer experience.

By looking at the relationship between all the parties involved in the international voluntary service experience, the study has tried to throw light on the potential of IVS to generate real opportunities for redressing power imbalances between North and South and for fostering deep intercultural,

inter-political and inter-economic learning among all the parties involved. Ultimately, however, the effectiveness of international volunteers working towards change in their home countries through development education or advocacy for the transformation of international trade and aid relations will be the litmus test of their impact on the development of the host organisations and communities in which they have served.