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## **International Volunteers and the Development of Host Organisations in Africa: Lessons from Tanzania and Mozambique**

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## **Abstract**

The phenomenon of international voluntary service (IVS) in which people (usually from Northern countries) volunteer their services in a country other than their own (usually in the developing world) is one that is growing, resulting in growing numbers of volunteers being hosted in Southern African countries. The motivations for this phenomenon are often shaped around the desire to contribute to development. And yet we know relatively little about the extent to which IVS does contribute to host organisations and communities. In particular, the voice of the host communities themselves has tended not to feature strongly in research on IVS. This article seeks to contribute to that gap. It assesses the contribution of international volunteers to the development of host organisations, from the perspective of the host organisations and the communities that they serve. It draws on case studies conducted in Tanzania and Mozambique and interrogates expectations of what international volunteers can offer, and the realities of host organisations experiences in terms of international volunteers' contributions to social capital development and the ability of organisations to meet their objectives development. It goes on to discuss some of the barriers that host organisations struggled with in the host-volunteer relationship and makes recommendations for how the potential of IVS can be better realised. What emerges most clearly in this research is that the localised relationships between volunteers and host organisations and thus the development potential of the relationship are profoundly shaped by international realities, histories and discourses of international aid and trade and these issues need to be acknowledged by all stakeholders if we are to ensure that the potential of IVS is realised.

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

International volunteering involving people from ‘northern’ countries represents a widespread and growing phenomenon on the African continent.<sup>2</sup> Despite this trend, little research has been conducted into the contribution of international voluntary service to the development of the host organisations and communities where volunteers live and serve. Drawing on interviews and focus group discussions conducted with international volunteer host organisations in Tanzania and Mozambique in 2010 by VOSESA, this paper examines the possibilities and constraints for international voluntary service to foster international social capital and contribute to the development of host organisations and communities. The paper argues that although international voluntary service has yielded some benefits for host organisations and/or host communities, it has had far less impact on the long-term development of host organisations and/or communities. The paper also discusses insights that indicate the potential for international volunteering to be used more strategically in the growth of host organisations. Finally, the paper suggests some factors that need to be addressed if such potential is to be realised. These include the strategic planning capacity of host organisations, their sense of agency within the imbalances of international relations between African countries and northern countries, the extent to which international volunteers are perceived to represent a colonial legacy, and the need for a volunteer friendly organisational culture. In the African context, civil society organisations often operate under difficult circumstances, providing services in poor communities in the context of financial and human resource constraints. Despite these adverse conditions, the evidence from this study is that organisations in rural areas are capable of resilience and innovation, two factors that contribute to their sustainability. We thus need to understand how, and under what circumstances, international voluntary service (IVS) can contribute to strengthening these organisations as critical facets of the civil society context in which they operate.

### **1 Scope of international voluntary service in southern Africa**

Though precise data on the scale of international voluntary service in southern Africa is not available, the fact is that many among thousands of volunteer sending organisations send international volunteers to African countries each year.

In 2010 VOSESA conducted a survey of 201 northern volunteer sending organisations. The survey attracted a 30% response rate. It showed that 89.1% of the 61 organisations that responded to the survey sent volunteers to African countries.<sup>3</sup>

According to the survey, in 2009 Southern Africa received 2 704 international volunteers from the survey respondents, while the corresponding number for 2010 was 2 762 (see Table 1 below). The

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on the findings from a study conducted by VOSESA (Volunteer & Service Enquiry Southern Africa) in 2010/11. VOSESA gratefully acknowledges the funding support received from Trust Africa for this study.

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary findings from a survey conducted by VOSESA in 2010 with 201 organisations in Europe and north America that send volunteers to African countries.

<sup>3</sup> Out of a sample of 201 international volunteer sending organisations, 61 responded from the following countries: Germany (27), United Kingdom (9), France, (5), Switzerland (4), Canada (3) Ireland (2), United States (2), Norway (2), South Africa (2), South Korea (1), Finland (1) Hungary (1), Ghana (1) and New Zealand (1).

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average number of volunteers sent to the SADC by these organizations increased from 180 to 184 between 2009 and 2010.

**Table 1**      **Number of volunteers sent by 61 northern international volunteer sending organisations to the SADC region in 2009 and 2010**

Receiving SADC country	Number of international volunteers sent by survey respondents in 2009	Number of international volunteers sent by survey respondents in 2010
Angola	5	5
Botswana	94	72
Democratic Republic of Congo <sup>4</sup>	847	844
Lesotho	32	27
Madagascar	48	52
Malawi	261	286
Mauritius	5	11
Mozambique	166	200
Namibia	110	103
Seychelles	1	1
South Africa	340	353
Swaziland	26	30
Tanzania	392	416
Zambia	340	316
Zimbabwe	37	46
<b>Total sent by 61 international sending organisations</b>	<b>2 704</b>	<b>2 762</b>

Source: VOSESA (2010)

According to this survey, in 2009 and 2010 the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania received the highest number of international volunteers in the SADC region with 31% and 15% of the total volunteers recorded from the respondents. Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania are SADC countries that received an increase of 20 volunteers or more being sent to them. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there was a fair decrease in the number of volunteers being sent to Botswana and Zambia.

In addition, statistical information obtained from the secretariat for the German *weltwärts* international youth volunteer programme shows that approximately 6,000 volunteers were sent abroad in 2009, of whom over 400 were deployed to southern Africa. And in 2008, the United States Peace Corps reported sending an average of 593 volunteers each year to approximately nine SADC countries.

VOSESA's analysis of the survey responses plus the statistics from the German *weltwärts programme* and the US Peace Corps shows that in 2009 and 2010, the DRC, Tanzania, South Africa and Zambia received the highest number of international volunteers, who mostly originate from Western Europe. This significant inflow of international volunteers to the region represents a unique opportunity to examine whether and how international volunteers contribute to building international social capital

<sup>4</sup>Additional research conducted by VOSESA in 2010 showed that of the 847 international volunteers received by the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2009, 800 can be almost exclusively attributed to the United Nations Volunteers programme: Mavungu, ME (2010). Fact-finding research on international volunteerism and peace in the DRC. Unpublished research report.

and promote the development in host organisations and communities. This will become clearer through an examination of the experiences of host organisations in Tanzania and Mozambique.

## **2 Researching international voluntary service in the South**

Given the number of volunteers coming to serve in Southern Africa, combined with the fact that research on international voluntary service is located almost exclusively in the North, it became evident that there is a need to determine what the perceived impact of international volunteering on host organisations and communities is from a southern perspective.

The studies available on the impact of international volunteering on host communities indicate that international voluntary service has the potential for positive impacts on volunteers, beneficiaries and host communities as well as sending and hosting organisations. However, research conducted by Comhlámh (2006) notes the complexity associated with international volunteering from the perspective of host organisations. Since then a number of other studies have been conducted, taking account of the host organisation perspective on the international volunteer experience (Lough et al, 2010; Irie et al, 2010; Schwinge as well as Freise et al, both 2011 forthcoming). These reiterate the value of well-matched placements, but confirm the complexity of striking partnerships between host and sending organisations, as well as the risks to host organisations that are not adequately prepared to manage the international volunteers. VOSESA's aim was to contribute to this growing body of knowledge from the vantage point of southern Africa.

This paper seeks to contribute to the literature on impacts of international volunteering by adding the voice from the South – raising issues that host organisations see as important in the relationship with international volunteers and sending organisations. In order to do this, VOSESA embarked on an exploratory study in 2010 that focuses on Tanzania and Mozambique. These two countries were selected because they receive the largest number of *weltwärts* volunteers in the SADC region after South Africa and also receive international volunteers from the International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE) programme (as well as volunteers sent by other international sending agencies). In addition, VOSESA conducted a survey of *weltwärts* and ICYE volunteers going out to placements in 2010 as well as volunteers from both organisations who had returned to their home countries.

The study set out to explore the effects of international volunteering on host organisations, local communities, sending organisations and volunteers; increase understanding of the role of international volunteering in development; and identify critical success factors for IVS to help organisations refine their programmes and inform host country IVS policies.

A comparative case study research design enabled us to make comparisons between host organisations and organisations providing similar services that did not host international volunteers. Differences described by the organisations could then in part be explained by the presence or absence of international volunteers. Both host and comparison organisations were situated in the same rural contexts. Within each case study, qualitative methods were used – in-depth interviews with volunteer coordinators and organisation directors, and focus groups with beneficiaries – in order to gain an understanding of perceptions, values and beliefs about international volunteers and their contribution. The research was conducted by in-country researchers using local languages.

We divide the findings in this paper into two parts. The first section deals with the potential of IVS to contribute to the development objectives of the organisations in which they serve. The discussion is located within a broad conceptualisation of how development is and should be understood. The second section deals with the potential of IVS to contribute to the growth of social capital as defined in terms of networks and trust. The paper then goes on to discuss some of the key challenges to realising the full potential of IVS in relation to development, and makes recommendations that may assist host organisations to better utilise the capacity of international volunteers for their own benefit.

### **3 Conceptual issues in researching the contribution of IVS**

What this article offers is an analysis of IVS in the context of development discourse. Although almost all IVS sending organisations and programmes frame their aims and objectives around the notion of development – *weltwärts*, for instance, carries the slogan ‘development cooperation’ – there has been little research beyond what has been discussed above, that seeks to understand what development contribution IVS makes to host organisations and communities.

Related to the questions we raise, we locate this study within two theoretical frameworks. The first concerns the evolution of development thinking, particularly the relationship that has evolved between Africa and northern countries in terms of development. Ellis (2011) argues that Africa’s relationship with the rest of the world began in earnest in the colonial period. Although there was prior contact between Africa and the rest of the world, most notably during the period of European exploration and later slavery, in the consciousness of the world, and particularly of west European countries (at that time the superpowers of global politics), Africa really only appeared on the political map as European countries began the process of colonisation. In the minds of the rest of the world this continent was in need of development, an idea used in part to justify colonial conquest.

Once the dismantling of the colonial relationships began, a new discourse came to shape Africa’s relationship with the North, taking as its starting point that Africa was still in need of development. During the Cold War era the notion of modernisation was introduced, implying that African countries needed to throw off the shackles of tradition and embrace modern economics (see Coetzee et al. 2001). It suggested that African countries needed to follow the economic and political model of Europe and America, implementing democratic systems and liberal economic policies (Rostow, 1960). Later, during the oil crisis when Africa went into debt, loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund had structural adjustment programmes attached to them. These programmes ensured that African countries implemented neo-liberal economic policies, cutting back on state spending, allowing less labour protection, and dropping trade barriers in order to encourage foreign direct investment.

Critiques of this theory pointed out that in fact Northern countries were keeping African countries dependent through the unequal balance of trade, structural adjustment programmes and other features of what they term the neo-colonial relationship (see Frank, 1966). They argued that international systems of trade meant that developed nations actively kept less developed nations underdeveloped, because they benefit from the underdevelopment of these countries. Later underdevelopment theorists such as Wallerstein (1982) saw foreign direct investment, seen by many economists as the answer to Africa’s lack of economic growth, as a new system of exploiting Africa.

Globalisation theorists such as Harvey (1989), Robertson (1992), Castells (1997) and Giddens (2008) recognise that despite innovations in information and communication technology and the spread of these technologies to countries that didn't previously have access to ICT (such as those in Africa), the related spread of capitalism throughout the world has meant that there has been increasing social polarisation and exclusion, with an expanding poor population and shrinking middle class. This has affected predominantly less developed countries including African countries. While the riches of the world have thus expanded, the share that accrues to African countries remains minimal.

In response to criticisms of modernisation development thinking and the related top-down approaches to development, as well as recognition of the fact that economic growth was not the only indicator of development, theories about development began to shift. Following the work of Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2001), the world has begun to think of development as a process of enhancing the freedoms and capabilities of countries and their citizens so as to create the space for people to chart their own path, using their own agency. Participatory development processes have been the result at the programmatic or intervention level. These processes recognise the agency of communities and individuals to make their own decisions about what they need. In this context the notion of capacity development, sustainable interventions and skills transfer have become more popular.

With this in mind, we take as our starting point that IVS should contribute to the latter notion of development. It should seek to contribute to the development objectives of the host organisations, but it should do so in a way that respects their agency and capabilities, serving only to enhance what is already in place. IVS should challenge previously held notions of development, which see the North as coming in to save Africa, and which create dependency. We thus assess development both in terms of its contribution to the objectives of the host organisations, as well as the extent to which the relationships generated in the IVS experience actually contribute to shared initiatives that build the sustainability of organisations and challenge previously held notions of dependency.

The second framework that we locate this study in is that of social capital. We consider that the nature of IVS places people in situations in which there is potential for the development of social capital at both the individual level as well as in terms of how organisations can make international linkages – international social capital.

A group of scholars in the social capital debate (Jacobs 1961, Bourdieu 1983, Coleman 1988, Edwards & Foley 1999) developed a social structural conceptualisation of social capital. For the French sociologist Bourdieu, social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a ‘credential’, which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (Bourdieu,1986:248-249). What produces and reproduces access to social capital is not self-regulating markets, but networks of connections operating as the “product of an endless effort at institution” (Foley and Edwards, 1999:143).

Like Bourdieu, Coleman has highlighted the way in which “concrete social relationships can give individuals access to crucial resources not otherwise available despite ample endowments of human or financial capital” (Foley and Edwards, 1999:144). While insisting that subjective attributes as trust,

expectations and norms are endogenous to specific social relations, he shows awareness of the fact that “ a given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others” (Coleman, 1990:144).

The emphasis on the specificity of contexts in which social capital is produced distinguishes his approach from Putnam’s mostly socio-psychological and broad scale approach. Putnam (2000) popularised the concept social capital and revolutionised its focus in research by focusing on three particular aspects of social capital: networks, norms and trust. While some have challenged the notion that norms can be seen as an aspect of social capital (see Schuller, Baron & Field 2000; Lin, 2001), networks and trust continue to be commonly considered as the two key aspects of social capital. “Bonding capital describes social networks that link like people to like people – people of the same nationality, race, ethnicity. Bridging capital links people to people unlike themselves. Both can have positive and negative effects. Bonding social capital is not necessarily better than bridging social capital, but it is easier to build because birds of a feather flock together. Bridging social capital is much harder to achieve” (Putnam, 2004: 18).

Bridging social capital is of most interest to us in this study and we consider the extent to which the relationships forged during the IVS experience contribute to the development of bridging social capital through building trust at the individual level. It is equally important to examine the extent to which the IVS experience offers organisations international network linkages with donors and other key partners – international social capital.

However, access to social resources is neither brokered equitably nor distributed evenly. The context-dependent conception of social capital holds that “ the access required to convert social resources (the ‘raw materials’ of social capital) into social capital has two distinct, but necessary, components – the perception that a specific resource exists and some form of social relationship that brokers individual or group access to those particular social resources” (Foley and Edwards, 1999: 146). Social infrastructures that broker such access may be dyads, informal networks, voluntary associations, religious institutions, communities, cities, national or transnational movements. Social capital liquidity and “use value” thus strongly depends on specific social contexts, which also shape “the means by which access to specific social resources is distributed and managed” (Foley and Edwards, 1999:146).

In the light of the above conceptualisation of social capital, IVS experiences can legitimately be regarded as setting up international social networks between all the parties. However, the benefits of these 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 volunteer 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 potential benefits of social capital can most certainly be undermined by relationships of power and inequality as is often the case in the histories of the countries involved. As Bhattacharyya *et al.* (2004) have pointed out there is a “relative absence of ... relationships of power” in the predominant literature on social capital. Lin (2001) notes that any aspect of social capital must deal with power. For her, social

capital is similar to economic capital in that it always involves power; power must thus be a central point of analysis in social capital research.

We therefore need to examine carefully what conditions exist in the volunteer-host organisation relationship, where power lies, how this plays out and how well placements are structured and managed. This is likely 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.

## 4 Overview of participating organisations

All the organisations that participated in the VOSESA 2010 research are located in rural areas and are involved in sectors that promote development or poverty alleviation. A cursory description of these host organisations, their development activities and organisational capacity is provided below in order to frame the local and organisational context in which international volunteers operated. To adhere to the undertaking that the confidentiality of the respondents would be respected, the names of the organizations have been withheld in this analysis.

Host organisations in Tanzania and Mozambique are not infant organisations; rather, they are established entities that deserve to be referenced as leaders in their respective fields of service. In Tanzania five of the six organisations considered for the study are more than ten years old and two of these were established 20 and 43 years ago, respectively. In Mozambique, all six organisations have passed the eight year mark with one having been in existence for more than 15 years and another for more than 25 years. This demonstrates that the organisations are sustainable and, despite often difficult financial circumstances, are resilient.

Established in the post-independence era, most of the host organisations see themselves as having been formed to address post-colonial challenges and to drive development, particularly in the most impoverished rural areas. The table below summarises what sector the host and comparison organisations work in in each of the countries.

**Table 2 Overview of host and comparison organisations and sectors**

	Organisation	Sector
<b>Tanzania</b>	Host organisation 1	Childhood education
	Comparison organisation 1	
	Host organisation 2	Microfinance
	Comparison organisation 2	
	Host organisation 3	Vocational and skills development
	Comparison organisation 3	
<b>Mozambique</b>	Host organisation 1	Rural socio-economic development
	Comparison organisation 1	
	Host organisation 2	Support to people living with HIV and AIDS
	Comparison organisation 2	
	Host organisation 3	Encouraging youth volunteer participation

	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Sector</b>
	Comparison organisation 3	

It is clear therefore that all of these organisations are involved in poverty alleviation and capacity building initiatives, and that they are concerned with improving the conditions and life circumstances among citizens in their countries. Being fairly resource constrained, many of these organisations rely on the efforts of local volunteers who assist on an ad hoc or a more permanent basis. The promise of what international volunteers can offer in terms of time and skills is often quite appealing for these organisations and comes with a range of expectations. The next section deals with the expectations that organisations have of international volunteers and what these reveal about the underlying discourses shaping the relationship between volunteer and host organisation.

## **5 Expectations and discourses – what shapes the international volunteer-host relationship?**

One of the key research findings is that the dominant discourses of aid and trade shape the way in which host organisations talk about their experiences with and expectations of international volunteers. These trends are also evident in the expectations that comparison organisations have of international volunteers. In Tanzania, most of the host organisations surveyed had hosted international volunteers from Germany, a former colonial master. Links between host organisations and sending organisations as well as the flow of aid fall within the broad context of long established cooperation between Tanzania and Germany. In Mozambique international volunteers from Germany and other European countries were placed with host organisations. Although few of them came from Portugal, the country has a strong dependence on foreign assistance and power relations that characterise these international relationships manifest themselves in relationships at local level.

Although the relationships between African countries and their former colonial masters are no longer characterised by formal dependence, a dependency relationship continues to exist economically and politically between many African countries and the more developed nations of Europe, the USA and, increasingly, China. This characterises the broader global context of power imbalances and exploitation. Within this context, African countries and their former colonial masters still retain a variety of relationships, many functioning at the level of civil society. The research found that in a manner consistent with these structural issues, host organisations and members of host communities represent international volunteers as beings of a superior race, of higher economic status than their own, and as having special skills. The encounter between the international volunteers and the host organisation and community is therefore inevitably racialised. The volunteers are approached as members of the “white race”, in popular jargon “*muzungu*”, and are thus attributed qualities and resources consistent with popular African representations of Europe. These clichés are themselves rooted in the history of colonial and post-colonial interactions between Africa and the Western world. In a focus group discussion held in Tanzania, it was stated that:

*“White people are very wealthy people; they are filthy rich and have no money problems. They are very developed and their living conditions very far removed from the way we live in poor countries. They are very powerful as nations. They are very intelligent people and capable of anything.”*

Similar representations transpired in a focus group discussion in Mozambique:

*“We all know that what we have here was left by the colonisers. This means that what we know and even what you [in-country researcher] know is because the “whites” taught us. So, people from other regions [meaning Europe and the Americas] are very clever and open minded. They are not jealous, just thinking in witchcraft, etc; they are very kind.”*

These beliefs were quite evident in interviews and focus groups with both host organisations and comparison organisations. However, following their experience with international volunteers, certain host organisations and members of host communities were critical of such simplistic representations of the white race. Nevertheless there was evidence that certain members of the host communities utilise these negative perceptions and relate to European international volunteers as *“access to easy money, financial support for this or that, gifts, or even [a] ticket to developed countries where they believe life is easier and better”*. This was confirmed in a Tanzania focus group discussion where a participant declared that *“there was also a perception that when you tell a white person your problem, they are able to solve it instantly”*.

The complexity of engagement between the volunteers and host organisations became apparent in other ways. It is ironic, for example, that host organisations do not openly challenge widespread uncritical beliefs in white racial intellectual and technical superiority, but rather reinforce them in seeking to draw maximum benefit from such a sorry state of affairs. A staff member in a Tanzania host organisation highlighted as a key benefit of having international volunteers the fact that

*“The organisation’s status has increased because the general population tend to believe that where white people are involved, the organisation must be of international standard, solid and very reliable. When you promise clients that they can get solar energy facilities for instance, they easily trust you because there are white people in the organisation and therefore the organisation is trustworthy.”*

Another host organisation displayed similar instrumentalisation of racial bias for its benefit:

*“International volunteers also have a potential to make a difference when they go in the villages and talk to people through presentations or outreach programmes. Most people in Tanzania have a tendency to listen a person from abroad than a local person, even though both of you might carry the same message. So, when international volunteers say something, there is a great[er] possibility of people believing and acting on it than local people. That way they can influence behaviour.”*

These attitudes demonstrate that the international volunteering experience, if not managed carefully, can in fact serve to reinforce a dependence mentality.

Conversely, certain international volunteers see themselves as coming to develop the host communities. Many focus group participants stated that the white international volunteers saw them as poor and in need of assistance. African underdevelopment was sometimes attributed to a lack of local creativity and poor management. In the words of one focus group participant in Tanzania:

*“International volunteers think there is so much potential, so many natural resources, but [think that] we are incapable of using them – that we do not have ability to use the resources adequately and realise their potential. For instance there are many variations and reserves of minerals, but the country and its people are poor”.*

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.

These exaggerated depictions of African communities as “hearts of darkness” were quite prevalent particularly amongst comparison organisations. Alongside these perceptions, however, there exist balanced conceptions of host communities’ development and reasonable formulations of the contribution international volunteering can make to their development. The experience with international volunteers therefore seems to challenge some of the elevated notions of white people that organisations had before working with international volunteers. This was particularly the case in two of the Mozambican comparison organisations that had previously hosted international volunteers, but which had decided to put their hosting on hold while they determined whether international volunteers were in fact able to contribute to meeting their strategic goals. In another example, a Tanzania host organisation respondent was unequivocal about the extent to which his organisation had taught the international volunteers everything they knew about building renewable energy products: *“when they come, the office trains them on the products they have; they also train them about micro-finance, and specifically about the solar energy equipment product, which is an asset leasing product”*.

It is clear therefore that there are strong discourses of dependence that continue to shape the interactions between international volunteers and host organisations, and which inform the expectations that comparison organisations have of international volunteers. While this is problematic in the sense that it reinforces the dependency discourse, the question remains as to whether international volunteers do in fact contribute in any significant ways to the development objectives of host organisations.

## **6 IVS’ potential to contribute to development objectives**

Though host organisations did not provide elaborate definitions of what they meant by development, their responses indicate that they understood development as a process of continuous and sustainable improvement of their living conditions. It was viewed as a process that brings about qualitative change to key socio-economic sectors including food security, education, health, housing, infrastructure, and sustainable energy.

As we have discussed above, when we consider the potential of IVS to contribute to development, we assess the extent to which IVS has contributed to organisations meeting their development objectives, as well as the ways in which the relationships either challenge or reinforce the dependency relationship that is often characteristic of development efforts.

Of course, the answers to these questions are complex. The evidence from the research demonstrates that international volunteers certainly do bring much needed skills and capacity to the host organisations, and this can enable them to improve their functioning and performance. However the impact that individual volunteers can have is often dependent on the way in which the organisation plans to use these volunteers.

Evidence from this research points to at least four key ways in which volunteers were seen to contribute to the development objectives of the organisations. Firstly, volunteers often brought new ideas and

innovative ways of enhancing the organisations' strategic planning. For example, some of the organisations reflected on how volunteers had set up new monitoring and evaluation systems, had exciting ideas about potential new programmes, and put into place client tracking systems. Very often these contributions were dependent on knowledge of new ICT systems, which organisations would otherwise not have been able to access. A host organisation in Mozambique reflects on what they could learn from international volunteers:

*"Interacting with international volunteers would be great, if one considers that it would be an opportunity of interacting with people from abroad with different thinking and probably it would give/bring new ideas and new teaching on various issues. Considering that these volunteers are coming from developed countries, it would be fine to exchange ideas on how they do things so that we also can improve our things here."*

The research demonstrates that while most international volunteers were able to make some contribution during their time of service, their contribution was particularly strong if they are skilled. Provided that international volunteers have insight into how to mentor local counterparts, the transfer of critical skills, which are important to sustain development, can be achieved. Host organisations expressed their preference for skilled volunteers, as did comparison organisations which had not yet received international volunteers, but were keen to do so.

Secondly, international volunteers brought much needed human resources to the organisations, thus enabling some organisations to expand their reach and improve the quality of their programming. One Mozambican organisation noted that it aimed to expand its programmes nationally, but didn't have the resources to pay salaries of hired staff to do so. The involvement of international volunteers assisted it to reach these targets. Other organisations point to the ways in which the introduction of client tracking systems, staff accountability systems and monitoring and evaluation systems have enhanced the quality of their programmes.

Thirdly, as noted earlier, many of the host organisations used to their advantage the perceptions that communities and donors have of white people. Some of the organisations pointed out, for instance, that hosting international volunteers brings credibility to the organisation since *"as foreigners and white, people are likely to hear and trust their word compared to local activists"*. This attitude was leveraged with clients or beneficiaries who, host organisations claimed, were more likely to buy into the programmes if they were presented by a white person. In some cases host organisations felt that the presence of international volunteers was likely to enhance their appeal to potential donors. Host organisations felt that international volunteers could represent their case more successfully than they could themselves, because donors were more likely to trust the views of the international volunteers.

Finally, host organisations felt that international volunteers were able to view situations with new eyes and with different experiences, and were thus able to produce technical and cultural innovation. One Mozambican host organisation stated,

*"An international volunteer brings innovation/innovative thinking and different experiences of dealing with problems. They can contribute to the improvement of certain activities that the organisation is implementing. If there is a doubt, quickly there is an exchange of ideas and things move forward."*

There were a number of examples of innovation introduced including the incorporation of a child-centred approach to pre-primary education, student inclusive teaching methods in a vocational training centre, and technological innovation to harness wind energy.

## **IVS and sustainable development**

Key to assessing the development contributions to the organisations is an understanding of how sustainable these benefits have been. The research was conducted four months after the return of the latest set of volunteers that were hosted and it seems that many of the changes that were introduced had been continued.

However, it must be noted that the sustainability of such contributions relies on a number of factors, not least of all the agency of the organisation in ensuring that volunteers are selected and managed to contribute to the organisation's goals. This includes involving staff in planning for the volunteer placement as an integral part of organisational functioning; ensuring that placements match the needs of the organisation as closely as possible; developing productive working relationships between volunteers and permanent staff as well as local volunteers; setting clear deliverables for the international volunteers against which their contributions can be assessed and measured; and ensuring that staff are in a position to run and sustain any improvements that international volunteers might have made in the organisation. Success and the sustainability of organisational changes also rely on the volunteers having a learning orientation towards the host organisation and respecting staff rather than seeing themselves as being 'better than' or 'above' staff.

The data show that the organisations that were hosting international volunteers were able, by and large, to manage them according to their own strategic objectives and to use their talents in ways that would benefit their overall development objectives. Even where they received volunteers that were not equipped to carry out the activities that they had hoped they would undertake, they were able to redeploy these volunteers into other activities that could support the overall objectives of the organisation. Thus it is very clear that the organisations use their own agency to try and gain all that is possible from the international hosting experience.

However, in the context of the discourses that shape the interactions between beneficiaries and volunteers, as well as interactions between host and sending organisations, their ability to leverage international volunteers for more impactful development outcomes is limited. For instance, despite expressing a preference for skilled volunteers, the host organisations often have little if any control over the selection of volunteers and very often end up hosting young volunteers who are newly out of school, who have limited skills to offer the organisation, and who have very little experience. Communication barriers and inadequately structured relationships between sending and host organisations also mean that often the host organisations don't know what kind of volunteers they will be receiving. This constrains their ability to plan accordingly. There were also examples of international volunteers going over the heads of their superiors in the host organisation and communicating directly with sending organisations. In one case this had consequences for the removal of grant funding, seriously threatening the resource base of the organisation.

What this demonstrates is that although international volunteers can contribute in many ways to the development objectives of the organisation, the broader structural relationships and the discourses and

expectations that shape these relationships limit the full extent of what can be achieved through this relationship. This raises a question as to the potential of IVS to contribute to overcoming broader development challenges, including challenging the power imbalances between African and northern countries in the global context of aid and trade. It is perhaps onerous to suggest that individual experiences of IVS should contribute to challenging the unequal balance of power in the development arena. However, well managed micro level interactions could contribute to giving host organisations access to networks and resources, thus developing bridging social capital that might serve to start challenging the power relations, at least at the level of partner organisations involved in the IVS sending and hosting relationship.

## **Potential of IVS to contribute to individual development**

One of the key motivations for the involvement of sending organisations in the IVS relationship and for international volunteers to offer their time, is the opportunity that volunteering in a foreign country offers to develop new skills and expand experience. There is thus a development motivation on the part of the volunteer that extends beyond their hoped for impact on the organisation and in the community. They are also hoping for changes and development within themselves.

Our data demonstrate that indeed the experience does develop the volunteer in significant ways. For example, the survey of returned volunteers conducted as part of the study shows that they are more likely than outgoing volunteers to report higher levels of international social capital, greater degrees of open-mindedness, a more informed perspective on intercultural relations, and greater commitment to civic activism and community engagement once back home.

Host organisations are also very aware of their influence in this regard. They note how they are ultimately responsible for the learning that these volunteers achieve in the duration of the volunteer placement. Host organisations noted that they were able to transfer skills to the volunteers, particularly work place skills as well as specialised skills. One Tanzanian organisation shared how they transferred teaching skills to one of their volunteers. The host organisations are also aware of the ways in which they played a role in the career choice of the volunteer. One indicated that the volunteer was encouraged to study nursing in Tanzania following her service period in that country and a focus group participant in Tanzania declared:

*“International volunteers also benefit from the experience as some of them proceed with studies and careers in specialisation that have to do with what they do as volunteers like teaching. The previous volunteer came in this school because she wanted to be a teacher and on finishing the volunteering experience, she said she is going to the university to study education”.*

Although the host organisations expressed some frustration at having to manage volunteers who could not speak the local language, they also expressed some pride in the role that they play in providing the opportunity for a volunteer to acquire a new language. Similarly, they are very aware that the experiences and opportunities they provide for the volunteer are instrumental in the volunteer’s cultural learning. Host organisations are thus confident of their ability to impart skills and learning to the volunteers they host. This is something that is not always appreciated fully by the sending organisations who could use the experience of the host organisations more actively to ensure that volunteers are better prepared during their orientation and training.

## **Barriers to harnessing the potential of IVS to contribute to development**

The data show that IVS certainly has the potential to contribute to development at the organisational level. Notwithstanding the ad hoc benefits that have accrued to organisations thus far, however, the reality is that the potential of the IVS contribution is constrained by structural challenges arising from the hierarchical nature of the relationship between host and sending organisations, and the history that underpins these relationships.

While host organisations certainly recognise the potential benefits of international volunteers and value the lengthy period of uninterrupted service they can provide (6 or 12 months in many cases), the study found no evidence of a massive demand for international volunteers. One explanation may be rooted in the fact that host organisations depend heavily for their human resource base on the contributions of local volunteers. Whatever the reason, it is clear that the IVS relationship is very much driven by the supply of international volunteers rather than the demand for international volunteers. Because programmes such as *weltwärts*, ICYE and others see the value of exposing young people to international experience, the supply of international volunteers is growing, characterised increasingly by larger numbers of unskilled and young international volunteers. In addition, the expectations that host organisations have of volunteers from the North means that they may uncritically agree to host the international volunteers and only later face the challenge of considering the use value of these placements. What this means is that the relationships between sending organisations and host organisations are inevitably structured unequally, with host organisations being on the back foot in terms of articulating demands for the types of volunteers who would be most beneficial to them. It is also clear that many of the host organisations do not give sufficient thought to the human resources costs that they are likely to incur in managing international volunteers.

In the survey of 1 750 volunteers conducted as part of this study, a few volunteers felt they were not needed by the organisation; that the organisation had to “make up” tasks for them to accomplish, and that these tasks did not have significant practical value to the organisation. As one volunteer, who ended up leaving her placement, stated, *“I felt more like a burden than a contributing person, I had to make up my own project later on which wasn’t easy...”* Another volunteer remarked, *“Sometimes it was obvious that they had a hard time encountering stuff for me to do, and at times, I felt extremely insignificant.”*

In a number of cases the host organisations’ lack of preparedness for hosting the international volunteers was found to be a consequence of their limited engagement in the partnership with sending organisations. This prevents well planned selection, allocation and mobilisation of the invaluable human resources available in these international voluntary service networks. Without a significant increase in host organisations’ capacity to select the type of international volunteers they really need and to plan in advance how to make optimal use of them, these international networks will produce some ad hoc benefits, but they will continually fail to deliver on their best potential.

In establishing international channels of circulation of much needed resources, international voluntary service has the potential to contribute significantly to the development of host organisations and communities. The fact that experiences of international voluntary service are often framed within the development discourse demonstrates the recognition of such potential. However, what is understood to be ‘development’ varies according to different schools of thought among the parties. Hence,

international voluntary service objectives and programme design reflect a variety of development paradigms, ranging from the most retrograde to the most progressive. Notwithstanding this ideological diversity, almost all experiences of international voluntary service are underpinned by some hope of achieving positive change in the host organisation or community.

The reality is that IVS does not occur in a vacuum. It is profoundly shaped by discourses of development, aid and trade, which challenge the ability of the IVS relationship to contribute significantly to development. If the relationships between host and sending organisation and between host organisation and volunteer continue to be overlaid by notions of superiority and inferiority, of developed and undeveloped, then the relationships will in all likelihood continue to function paternalistically with little real development change being effected within the host organisation or the volunteer. Improving orientation programmes and providing opportunities for more in-depth intercultural reflection will go some way to addressing these difficulties, provided the uncomfortable issues of race and power are faced and addressed.

In addition, it is critical that host organisations become aware of their agency and their power to effect change in the lives of the volunteers and to manage their own development. The research demonstrates that the host organisations are well established and resilient despite their challenging circumstances. They need to recognise this as an asset that positions them to be more demanding of the IVS relationship. The research also shows that international volunteers had the greatest effects in organisations where they were managed strategically. There is thus work to be done to ensure that host organisations begin to see themselves as equal partners in the IVS relationship, and begin to demand better communication channels, greater consultation, more involvement in selection and preparation of volunteers and the strategic use of volunteers.

## **7 The potential of IVS to build social capital**

One of the key contributions that IVS can make is that of building social capital – both for the host organisations and for the volunteers. If micro-level IVS relationships reflect and are informed by many of the macro-level issues as we have argued above, they also provide a space where meaningful change could potentially take place, precisely because they offer a space in which social capital can be built. Indeed, experiences of international voluntary service can legitimately be regarded as setting up international social networks between all the parties. These networks contain invaluable resources needed by all stakeholders including the sending organisation, the sending country, the host organisation, the host country and the host community.

Bridging social capital is the type that IVS potentially could contribute most strongly because, by its very nature, IVS brings together people of different backgrounds, cultures, nationalities and races. Bridging social capital can operate in at least two ways: in an instrumental fashion, that is in the development of use-value networks; and in the development of trust between individuals and groups. Let us first consider IVS's potential to contribute to the development of networks.

Host organisations in this study felt that the contribution of international volunteers to their development could be carried out in the form of advocacy in their home country. A staff member at a Mozambican host organisation stated:

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*“When they return to their home country, their report is not biased by political interests. They give the real picture of the needs, weaknesses, and strengths of the developing countries. At the end of the day, their reports influence somehow assistance particularly technical assistance”.*

This expectation corroborates evidence from VOSESA’s survey of returned volunteers, which indicates that international service affects returned volunteers’ community engagement and level of civic activism in their home countries. Upon returning home, volunteers seem to become more interested in joining local groups, projects, or clubs. They seem to have a greater interest in volunteering locally as they find time to make positive differences in their home communities. Increased civic activism is an important finding considering that some development theorists (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) assert that true social change can only be realised as people living in countries of greater power and influence become engaged *in their own home countries* to change the laws and policies that negatively impact developing countries. It is encouraging that returned volunteers are more likely to report helping to raise awareness of global issues, of attending political gatherings, and of writing to media and organisations to voice their views on globally important issues. In addition, one host organisation reported on how an international volunteer helped them to secure resources from a donor to whom they would otherwise not have had access. Besides this concrete example, however, the extent to which civic activism on the part of volunteers in their home countries leads to international social network linkages for host organisations is unclear.

To what extent then does IVS contribute to the development of trust between individuals and groups? IVS places stakeholders in a situation they would otherwise not encounter and offers the potential for trust to develop. However, this must be seen simply as a *potential* space for engagement. The extent to which trust can actually develop and can challenge commonly held perceptions underlying notions of difference and development rely on well managed, strategically considered volunteer placements that encourage deep intercultural learning.

Host organisations report that international volunteers are very interested in learning about the culture of their host country – they are eager to travel, to take part in cultural activities and to eat the foods. However, there is also indication that international volunteers carry with them “a romantic view of Africa”, an essentialist view, sometimes supported by old fashioned clichés of African culture. For these outsiders, classical African culture resides in cultural manifestations such as festivals, traditional dances, arts, and other extraordinary cultural events rather than in the features of dynamic and complex urban life. These representations are of course shaped by the view of Africa propagated by European anthropologists or ethnologists as well as by European tourism agencies. One respondent in a Tanzania host organisation expressed his disapproval of this cultural outlook on Africa: *“You find volunteers just laugh to see a person swimming in the river as if it’s so traditional, backward and something strange. That is not good”.*

Our analysis of the data suggests that this is where intercultural learning tends to stop – at the level of the cultural facade. There is little evidence to suggest that the IVS experience helped volunteers to challenge their perceptions of development, to think about why certain cultural norms exist and the role they play in daily life, and to understand the ways that the historical legacy of development has impacted on local culture. Although the survey of returned volunteer demonstrates that many returned volunteers were starkly aware of the inequalities that exist within the host countries, there is little

evidence that a paradigm shift has occurred in respect of gaining greater insight into the inequalities of international relations and the impact of this on the psyche of Europe and Africa.

However, we must be aware that such learning does not happen automatically. Rather it is a result of an informed induction and orientation programmes, along with carefully structured opportunities for reflection throughout the IVS experience. Host and sending organisations need to take responsibility for this if they wish to contribute to the meaningful creation of international bridging social capital.

## **Barriers constraining the IVS potential for building social capital**

What we have outlined thus far points to the potential of IVS as a vehicle for the development of social capital. However, currently there are a range of barriers that constrain the ability of host and sending organisations to harness the full potential that IVS could offer in this regard.

Interactions between host organisations, volunteers, sending organisations and intermediary organisations have been fraught with serious structural constraints. These problems constitute impediments to the optimal utilisation of the opportunity to host international volunteers. The lack of direct linkages between host organisations and sending organisations can be a source of inefficiencies and misunderstandings. Most host organisations surveyed in Tanzania and Mozambique relate to an intermediary national organisation and thus have no direct relationship with the sending organisation. In most cases this was taken as a given fact. However, such engagement between these actors generates a host of difficulties that could have been avoided with a more direct, engaged and equitable relationship had been established between host and sending organisations. . The indirect relationship between some of the host organisations and sending organisations affects the ability of the volunteer and the host organisation to build trust and networks that extend beyond the placement. In fact their inability to build direct relationships in many instances threatened the viability of the placement.

For instance, a number of communication failures arose partly as a result of the indirect relationship between the sending organisation and the host organisation. Host organisations in Tanzania complained that international volunteers sometimes report directly to the sending organisation without informing the host or intermediary organisation. Such behaviour, according to host organisations, creates unnecessary friction between the parties and undermines relationships between staff and volunteers, thus limiting the potential of IVS to contribute to building social capital. In one instance an outgoing volunteer did not submit a report to the host organisation, choosing to communicate only with the sending organisation. Although this was ultimately not sanctioned by the sending organisation, it left the host organisation *“in the dark regarding what the volunteer has learnt, her experience in the organisation and any feedback the volunteer might have regarding her stay”* (Tanzanian host organisation). This lack of shared and transparent feedback undermines the future development of the host organisation as is evident in this statement from a different Tanzanian host organisation:

*“This situation deprives the host organisation [of the] opportunity to respond to any important issues the volunteer might have brought up, but also it means that the host organisation will not work on improving the situation and experience of the volunteer because it does not know the volunteers’ recommendations or perception of her various experiences.”*

It also means that future relationships with international volunteers relies almost solely on the willingness of the volunteer to continue the communication and not on an equal partnership that sees

sending and host organisations co-managing databases of returned volunteers for the provision of information.

Returning to the notion of macro-structural dynamics, it is clear that the contextual realities and problems of access to resources available in these networks constrain the potential of IVS to contribute both to the development of networks and trust. As shown in the discussion above, the indirect relationship between certain host organisations and sending organisations and the lack of transparent flow of information among the main players limit the “use value” of these social networks to host organisations. This apparently hierarchical structure of the partnership disallows full ownership of the relationship by the host organisation and strategic utilisation of the opportunities it can deliver. If the transparent flow of information were to be part of the expected *modus operandi* of placements, better managed, more equal partnerships could go a long way to realising the potential that lies in the IVS experience. Practices to the contrary would reinforce the neo-colonial relationships that IVS has the potential to change.

## **8 Recommendations**

Two key recommendations emerge from this research. The first asks that the IVS relationship be more critically considered in future research as well as in the development of new relationships between host and sending organisations and volunteers.

The questions and challenges we raise in this article are uncomfortable. They ask us to revisit a painful past that we would prefer to forget and they ask to confront the current inequalities that persist in global relations. We cannot ignore the fact that these issues manifest themselves in the micro level interactions between international volunteer and host organisation, and between host and sending organisations. The more we push these issues away, the more likely we are to miss out on realising the transformative potential of the IVS relationship.

As such, open engagements between host and sending organisations need to discuss how these relationships play out. Programmes need to be designed not only to increase understanding between host and sending organisations, but also open pathways for both organisations to be more instrumental in the selection, orientation and preparation of volunteers.

A second recommendation concerns how host organisations view themselves and how they are viewed by sending organisations. Currently host organisations do not have a lot of say in the selection of volunteers, in the preparation of volunteers or in the post-service communication with volunteers. If we are to harness the potential of IVS to contribute to the sustained development of the organisation and the volunteer, then seeing host organisations as equal partners in the relationship is not negotiable. Host organisations need to recognise their own power and agency in this relationship, and need to be more demanding of what they want out of the relationship. Similarly, sending organisations need to recognise that these organisations do not exist to host their international volunteers, but are committed, resource-scarce, innovative entities operating in challenging circumstances. Sending organisations need to ensure that the hosting role is respected and is mutually beneficial. Only if we can engage in the structural issues at play in the IVS landscape will we begin to harness the potential that IVS offers.

## **9 Conclusion**

This paper has argued that international voluntary service can serve as a tool for building international social capital and foster the development of host organisations. Given the significant inflow of volunteers from the Western world to the African continent and the involvement of many African host organisations in the broad welfare and development sector, international voluntary service holds the possibility of connecting host organisations to new resourceful social networks and of directly providing host organisations with much needed human capital and expertise. It also demonstrates the potential of host organisations to contribute to the volunteers' skills and personal development, and to build social capital that might challenge, at the micro level, the dominant global power relations.

However, the lack of constructive engagement between host organisations and sending organisations as partners in the IVS relationship serves as a serious constraint. Communication deficits, the limited nature of intercultural learning, and the difficulties host organisations face in strategically using the volunteers are constraining the full utilisation of the possibilities embedded within international voluntary service experiences. It is critical that international voluntary service be approached as a tool capable of enhancing international social capital and fostering development. For this potential to become reality, there is need for more favourable conditions which enable host organisations to play a much more strategic and proactive role in the IVS landscape.

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