

IVCO 2021 FRAMING PAPER

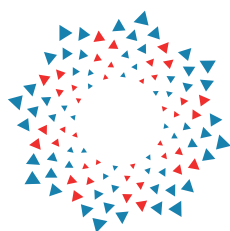
INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING FOR GLOBAL EQUALITY – LINKING DECOLONISATION & DIVERSITY

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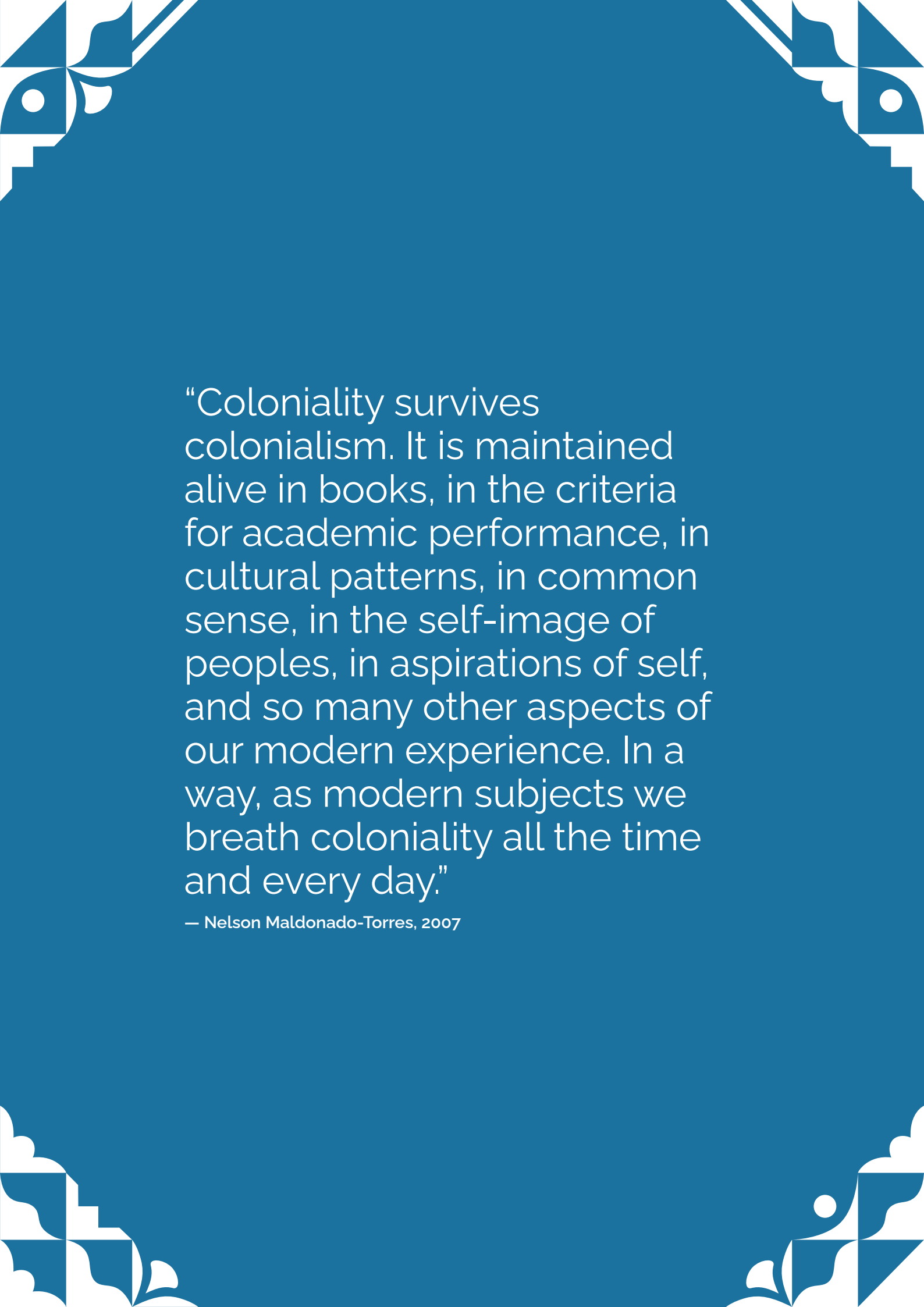
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“Coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and every day.”

— Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 2007

Introduction

Development aid, discourse and practice are continued expressions of coloniality – this assumption has been discussed and evidenced since the invention of development aid after World War II. Books like *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* by Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah (1965) and other later works in the field of postcolonial studies, such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) or Gayatri C. Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (2008, first 1988), informed this debate. Post-development thinkers like James Ferguson and Arturo Escobar raised fundamental questions about the 'good intentions' of Western development aid and criticised the origin and construction of 'development' as a term, theory, and ideology (Pieterse 2009; Ziai 2007). Volunteering for Development (V4D) programmes and initiatives have always been part of this debate.

In 1968 Glyn Roberts published the study *Volunteers and Neo-colonialism – An inquiry into the role of foreign volunteers in the Third World*. He argues that Western volunteers were seen as new, more subtle representatives of their former colonisers in many countries of the Global South. Roberts raised issues such as volunteers filling local jobs, inappropriate cultural influences, income gaps between local staff and international volunteers and social privilege, which were "symptoms of neo-colonialism" (Roberts 1968:31). He therefore demanded the establishment of basic ethics for volunteering abroad.

Over the last decades, many international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs) and international volunteering cooperation organisations (IVCOs) have engaged in debates about decolonising their work—sometimes backed by government and other donor agencies, often not. Decentralising decision making, diversifying leadership and target groups and 'localising' programmes are among the most common approaches towards decolonising V4D initiatives.

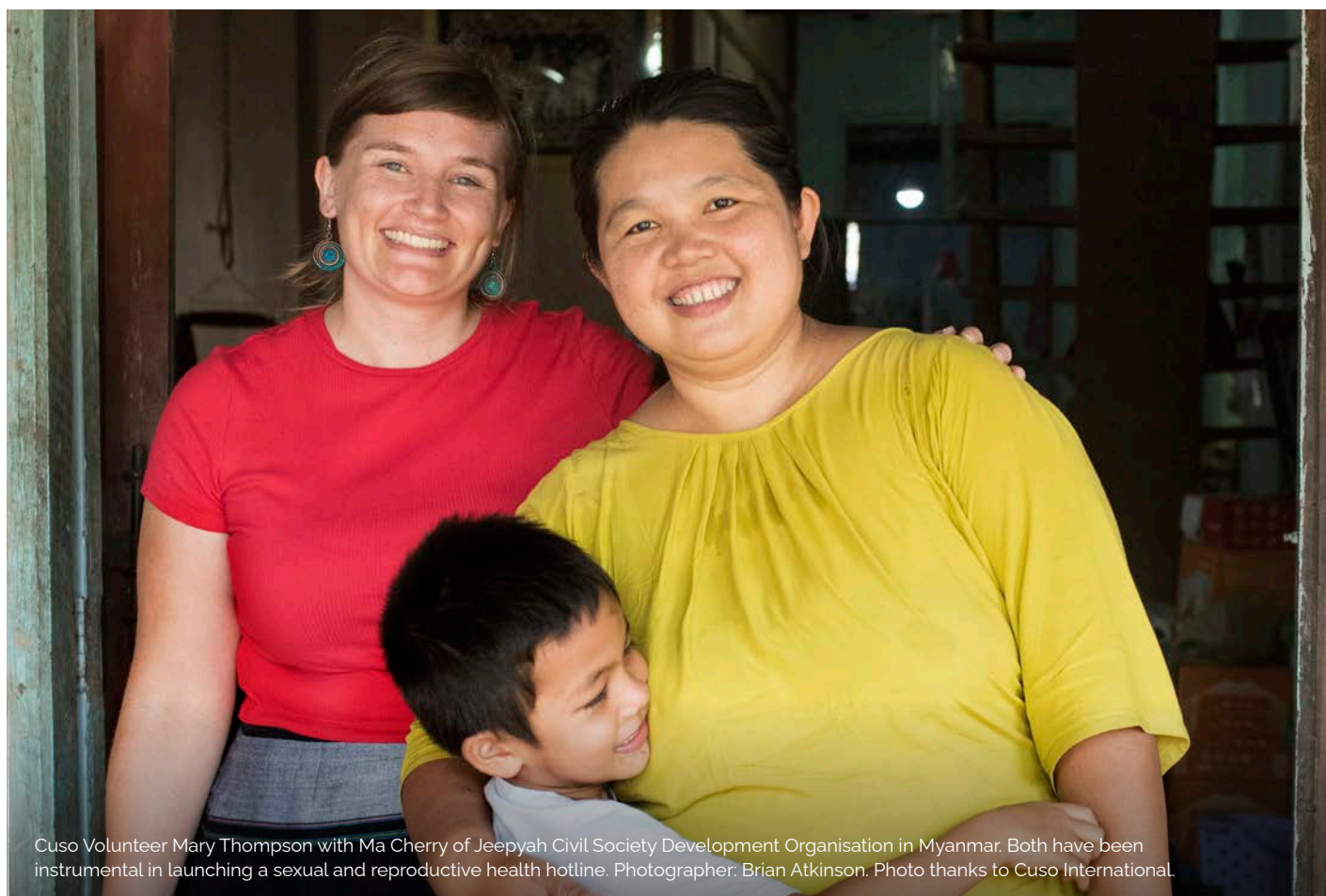
Recently, in the light of the racial uprisings that began in the United States and spread globally since 2020, it has become increasingly clear that the development sector had largely failed to consider *race* and how it interplays with other marginalised identities. "Racial differences are rarely addressed openly in development aid and discourse" (Lough and Carter-Black 2015:207). The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is a vivid reminder that decolonisation of aid and V4D has to go beyond "the tokenistic inclusion of practitioners from underrepresented backgrounds within established international organizations" (Peace Direct 2021). There is an urgent need to talk about structural racism, locally and globally, and adopt an intersectional perspective geared towards transformative justice in every part of society. BLM calls attention to the fact that decolonisation is not only a transnational project between the Global South and North, but that it is also tied into debates around racism and other forms of discrimination and exclusion on national levels.

This framing paper connects broader debates around decolonising aid and development with discussions on diversity and inclusion in V4D programmes. The first has to be analysed in the context of historical legacies and postcolonial power relations. The latter draws attention to national efforts around including a diverse group of people in volunteering programmes and depends on (current) national contexts. However, both are ultimately centred around questions of **power, privilege, structural discrimination and exclusive mechanisms**. The arguments presented in this paper are based on a literature review, the authors' academic and practical experiences,

and five exemplary interviews¹ with V4D practitioners to inform the report and present innovative approaches and practices regarding decolonisation and diversity/inclusion in the sector.

The paper aims to provide an overview of current debates and their importance for the V4D sector and thereby set the ground for further discussions at the IVCO 2021 conference. The paper builds upon the conversations of IVCO 2018 and its framing paper on 'Inclusive Development.' While contributions of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) to 'Inclusive Development' were at the centre of the debate, here we will direct the attention to the internal structures of the V4D sector and questions such as: *Who gets to volunteer and who does not – and why? How does this impact volunteering experiences and outcomes? How is this connected with debates around decolonisation in the context of power dynamics, privilege and inequality? What approaches and ideas can lead to the decolonisation of V4D programmes and initiatives?*

This Framing Paper is complemented by a series of Think Pieces that provide greater detail on key aspects of diversity, inclusion and equality in volunteering for development.



Cuso Volunteer Mary Thompson with Ma Cherry of Jeepyah Civil Society Development Organisation in Myanmar. Both have been instrumental in launching a sexual and reproductive health hotline. Photographer: Brian Atkinson. Photo thanks to Cuso International.

¹ The authors would like to express their gratitude to **Samuel Turay** (National Coordinator, VIONet – Volunteers Involving Organizations Network, Sierra Leone); **Ezekiel Esipisu** (Head of Program Design and Development; VSO International, Pretoria); **Erin Bateman** (Director, Volunteer Cooperation Program; WUSC – World University Service of Canada); **Jelena Wander** (Coordinator, Inclusive Voluntary Service; Bezev – Behinderung und Entwicklungszusammenarbeit, Germany); **Zoe Mander-Jones** (Program Director, Australian Volunteers Program at Australian Volunteers International) **Simone Condon** (Gender Equality Coordinator, Australian Volunteers Program at Australian Volunteers International).

Key Concepts of Decolonisation

As with many terms, the meaning of **decolonisation** is contested and varied. Fundamentally, for many authors, it means “questioning and unpacking how colonial and hegemonic structures of power continue to produce contemporary inequalities, and reflecting on how these highly unequal structures can be addressed” (Krauss 2018). Decolonising refers to the process of “deconstructing colonial ideologies regarding the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches” (Peace Direct 2021). In line with decolonial struggles of the 20th century in Asia, Africa and Latin America, decolonisation is still used to describe the *project* of decolonising specific sectors or areas—such as education, development or V4D.

The (academic) analysis of the continuity of colonial structures, actions and discourses are mainly conducted in **postcolonial** studies. Global power relations are, to a large extent, the effects and continuations of European colonialism. *Postcolonial* therefore relates to both the time after colonial rule and ongoing colonial or neo-colonial dependence and dominance. Postcolonial studies problematise hegemonic concepts such as ‘race,’ culture, class and reflect (white) ‘Western’ and supposedly universal thinking and knowledge production (e.g., Hiddleston 2009; Kapoor 2008); for example, the development discourse as a continuation of the racist civilisation discourse of the colonial era (MacEwan 2009; Ziai 2012). A postcolonial perspective recognises that racialised power relations shape V4D programmes on structural and interpersonal levels, just like the development sector in general.

Numerous **privileges** for white people arise from global postcolonial power relations, meaning advantages that they mostly perceive as given or ‘normal,’ although they do not apply to all people. These privileges are manifold and express themselves materially (e.g., access to resources such as housing or the labour market, freedom of movement) and discursively (non-discrimination, being white as the norm and unmarked, development/civilisation discourse). This system of privilege and oppression is perpetuated through **structural racism**. This structure normalises and legitimises an array of dynamics that advantage white people while disadvantaging BIPOCs² worldwide. Global structural racism is hence seen as both a cause and consequence of colonialism and imperialism. The privileges based on structural racism create conscious and unconscious **social exclusion, discrimination** and **social inequality** on the individual and the structural level. It impacts the political economy of the development and V4D sector and the interpersonal dynamics between its practitioners.

Privilege comes with **power**. The privileged (global) position is opposed to the position of ‘non-power’ and oppression. A power-critical perspective recognises that different power structures determine the scope for action, attitudes and behaviour of individuals and groups. In the context of development, aid and V4D, those power structures are predominantly postcolonial.

Devaluation/Othering	+	Power	=	Discrimination
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Prejudices, Stereotypes – Attitudes – Norms and Values 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Structural – Cultural – Social – Political – Economic – Situative 	Can lead to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Individual – Ideological – Institutional

2 Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

Inclusion & Diversity – A Decolonial Perspective

Diversity means acknowledging and valuing differences in society or between individuals. It is often conceptualised as a tool to build more equitable societies and programmes through the **inclusion** of those 'others' who are different from the 'ordinary'. The concept of diversity is frequently criticised for invoking and individuating differences without necessarily evoking a commitment to dismantle systemic inequalities, thereby possibly reinforcing existing power structures. The risk lies in the implication that certain standards determine the ordinary, which are usually those equipped with privilege and power (Ahmed 2012:53). Additionally, if diversity is seen from a managerial perspective, it is reduced to an investment and becomes economised within a globalised neoliberal idea of economy. This solidifies and converts transcultural principles and practices into economic ones. Consequentially, this could reinforce processes of the ongoing neoliberal reframing of international volunteering as a critical feature of the contemporary development landscape (see, i.e., Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011).

Albayrak (2018) therefore points out that there is a need to take on a decolonial perspective on diversity to work towards transformative justice:

“Diversity reinforces the existing unjust system, decolonization challenges it. Diversity authorizes the advantaged, decolonization empowers the underrepresented and undervalued. Diversity seeks to include people; decolonization seeks to rehabilitate them. Diversity is for the mainstream; decolonization is against the mainstream. However, none of these are to say that diversity is a horrible thing. It is rather to underscore that **diversity without decolonization is not enough** to bring equality and fairness” .

In order to design more diverse and inclusive V4D programmes, it is essential to address issues of power and privilege and take on a power-critical and decolonial perspective that is aware of diversity. The aim is to create structures in all areas of life that enable members of society to participate without barriers and without adapting to what is seen as the norm by the privileged and mainstream society. Diversifying V4D programmes and activities without acknowledging unequal power relations or a commitment to fight local and global exclusive structures and ideologies of domination and suppression cannot bring equality or transformative justice.

For example, statements about diversity at the end of job advertisements for volunteers are insufficient if they force minorities to fit into certain categories that have been defined by *the typical* volunteering experience or profile standards. Minority volunteers do not represent their cultural values and perspectives during their engagement if their differences are perceived as *not typical*. If a group of volunteers is mainly white, it is not enough to include BIPOC volunteers in this group. IVCOs have to ask what these volunteers are likely to experience in a predominantly white group and how they can offer structures and spaces of empowerment.

In this regard, traditional V4D programmes that send mainly white, middle-class volunteers (see, i.e., Devereux 2008) to the Global South can be seen as a (new) form of coloniality — not only towards the societies of the South (if programmes are not decolonised in their structures and approaches), but also because of the discrimination and exclusion of, for example, BIPOCs who experience discrimination in their countries based on systematic neo-colonial racism.

Barriers & Enablers of Inclusion – An Intersectional Perspective

It is crucial to adopt an intersectional perspective to analyse who gets to volunteer and how dimensions of diversity impact the quality of volunteering experiences. **Intersectionality** is a helpful analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality identifies multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage, including gender, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion and disability. These intersecting and overlapping social identities may be both empowering and oppressing (e.g., Carastathis 2016). As intersectionality aims to identify how intertwining systems of power affect those most marginalised in society, it is vital for the discussion around decolonisation and inclusion. It offers a framework to analyse discrimination of V4D actors and volunteers based on racist postcolonial power structures and other, more local and/or national dimensions of discrimination, such as gender identities and disabilities.³ For any measures towards inclusive programmes, it is important to acknowledge that many areas of diversity intersect with each other.

For example, Cheung Judge's study on young Black British international volunteers draws on the intersections of race- and class-based stigmas. He shows how discrimination based on race is often „complicit in the disciplining of certain young bodies, even as many of these young people were facing vulnerabilities and violence associated with socio-economic marginalization“ (Cheung Judge 2016).

There are two general kinds of obstacles for inclusion and diversity in V4D programmes. On the one hand, there are those that can be confronted through personalised ways of addressing individuals and groups from such backgrounds. On the other hand, there are more systematic and fundamental forms of exclusion. While the former can be readily identified and addressed, the latter requires a deeper understanding of societal processes of social exclusion. Many IVCOs focus on specific dimensions of diversity for practical and political reasons, but use intersectionality as a guiding principle for inclusion and diversity. In the following, we explore some specific enablers and barriers for inclusion and diversity. While the list of said enablers and barriers is far from exhaustive, it can still provide a basis for further discussion.

Regarding our interviews and the perspective of several authors, **communication** is one of the main barriers to inclusion in V4D programmes and initiatives. Many potential volunteers who traditionally have not been part of V4D programmes do not feel addressed by V4D organisations who themselves have often only recently diversified their structures and staff. The language used in promotional material, on websites and in videos is essential to show that everyone is welcome. But visual branding can also be an important feature to speak to other target groups and show that different people can be part of volunteering. Certain groups may be less likely to respond when the brochures and websites do not include pictures that reflect diversity. For people with impairments or disabilities, easy language, accessible documents and websites, sign language or subtitles for websites are essential communication tools. To effectively engage LGBTIQ+⁴ people in V4D programmes, it is necessary **to use language and terminology that is used by the community**. For example, it is important to support local autonomy and use local definitions and cultural terms.

³ For intersectionality in "Inclusive Development" see also IVCO 2018 framing paper by Glassco, Arnaud, and Tremblay (2018:7).

⁴ LGBTIQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer.

Especially with regard to the Global South, there is a need for localised content. Documents should be translated into local languages and sign languages should be used where necessary for easy comprehension about what volunteerism and V4D is all about. This can enable more volunteers to understand their significance and relevance.

Furthermore, the information must also reach the relevant target groups. Here, **role models** who have volunteered and share their experiences are essential. **Peer-to-peer communications** and testimonies that reach out through specific communication channels used by those communities (especially through social networks), have proven to be very effective approaches. Organisations that work with different target groups (e.g., with the LGBTQ+ community or religious groups) can work as bridges between IVCOs and potential volunteers. Many people learn about volunteer opportunities from others who have volunteered themselves, which creates a reinforcing pattern. Increased exposure to international volunteering is, for example, one of the main reasons for higher volunteer rates among people with higher education. This can be observed in international service-learning and alumni travel trips, which are gaining popularity at many colleges and universities (Moore McBride and Lough 2008). Considering the positive effects of V4D for the volunteers, if this reinforcing pattern goes unchallenged, V4D unintentionally contributes to the reinforcement of social privileges and inequality.

Another important barrier identified by different scholars is the fact that development aid and volunteering are **profoundly racialised in the public imagination and discourses** in the Global North (Cheung Judge 2016; Lough and Carter-Black 2015). Postcolonial stereotypes of traditional volunteering roles are a barrier to encouraging people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to volunteer. Many BIPoCs either do not feel addressed by development volunteer opportunities or they do not want to engage with a sector that, to a great extent, is part of a neo-colonial practice that they themselves are suffering from in the local context. The V4D sector should be pioneering the decolonisation of the development discourse and engage in critical discussions on how the Global South is portrayed with problematic and often racist images on charity billboards and in media and educational materials in the Global North (see, e.g., Bendix 2018). This of course includes a critical reflection of the images and language used on all levels of V4D programmes.

The race of development volunteers from the Global North has to be seen in the context of neo-colonial aid relationships. "As a result, help provided by white development volunteers can influence, aid recipients' internalized sense of power and agency [...] Because white volunteers are often commended with high levels of resources, knowledge, skills, trust and compassion, their racial privilege tends to result in a comparative denigration of indigenous ideas and practices" (Lough and Carter-Black 2015:209 and 219). There are two reasons a more racially diverse volunteer group (as well as IVCO staff) would facilitate the decolonisation of V4D programmes: first, a diverse group helps to break with perceptions in the Global North and South that structure the ways in which different parties perceive themselves and their roles. The social construction of traditional V4D programmes thereby reinforces the whiteness of power. Although the value and virtue of people no longer depend on their skin colour, the colonial histories embedded in skin colours are visible, powerful and indelible (Fox 2012). Second, more racially diverse volunteer groups could enable volunteer experiences for those hitherto excluded from V4D programmes. In the USA, for example, 90 per cent of the volunteers are white, only five per cent identify as Black (Lough and Carter-Black 2015:209).

The volunteer experience in, for example, Africa for those racialised as Black would fundamentally differ in some aspects compared to white volunteer experiences (Cheung Judge 2016). IVCOs need to be prepared to monitor these different experiences and adapt their training and briefing concepts, respectively.



Exchange project between Norway and Uganda, with personnel from Design Without Borders. Photo thanks to Norec.



Case Study – Indigenous Pathways

Australian Volunteers Program at Australian Volunteers International (AVI)

Diversity and Inclusion have been a theme for quite some time already for the Australian Volunteers Program but have been elevated structurally recently. The Australian Volunteers Program has over many years supported Indigenous Australians to undertake volunteering assignments internationally. Its Indigenous Pathways programme, launched in September 2021, will bring this support to a new level. The Indigenous-led programme focuses on expanding and strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in international volunteering by providing culturally safe, flexible and tailored support. “Cultural safety” is a crucial concept for the programme. “A culturally safe environment is free from challenge or denial of a person’s identity and allows them to openly be who they want or need to be. Feeling ‘culturally safe’ is the ability to engage with people or services whilst feeling that your culture, values and history are respected and acknowledged—including the impacts of colonization and/or assimilation” (AVP 2021:11).

Within this approach, new models have been implemented such as pairing volunteers or group assignments to be more supportive and reduce barriers to engagement. Indigenous Pathways follows a strength-based approach and aims to connect Indigenous volunteers with partner organisations working in similar contexts where, their knowledge and expertise is valuable. For example, connecting Australian Indigenous rangers with Indigenous rangers in Solomon Islands.

Alice Tamang, AVP’s Indigenous Programs Coordinator, describes her view on the programme as follows:

“As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we carry a wealth of knowledge and experience that can help contribute to meaningful change in communities overseas. Our history, on the land now called Australia, has thrived for at least 65,000 years. We are descended from the longest living culture in the world, the pioneers of agriculture, medicine, sports, education and kinship. We have survived, we are progressive and we are carrying our ancient knowledge and wisdom alongside our personal and professional expertise, across many sectors in a growing society. More so, we are a family – a vast and interconnected family whose clans, tribes, family groups and communities, whether urban, rural or remote, proceed to break down barriers to excel. The Australian Volunteers Program is an incredible opportunity to share our dynamic expertise. Within the Australian Volunteers Program, is Indigenous Pathways – a program that focuses on expanding and strengthening Indigenous participation, by providing flexible and tailored support.” (Alice Tamang, in AVP 2021:6)

The programme is implemented by the Indigenous Programs Coordinator, and training on Indigenous inclusion for the in-country staff has been carried out. An Indigenous Advisory Panel was founded, composed of Indigenous Australians that have been involved with the programme. The panel also provides support, mentoring and advice to Indigenous volunteers through their journey. In 2021 the programme appointed its first Indigenous alumni representative, which raises the visibility of Indigenous volunteers and the Pathways programme. COVID has

interrupted parts of this programme. The Australian Volunteers Program is now eager to get the programme running and increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers. The programme will be promoted through indigenous media channels and connected with Indigenous-led organisations in Australia to reach this goal.

From the perspective of the authors of this paper, **the Indigenous Pathways programme is a powerful example of Indigenous participation in V4D programmes in a country with its own history of invasion and colonisation.** Coloniality intersects globally and locally. **Diversifying V4D programmes, as done by AVP in an exemplary manner, provides opportunities to fight local and global exclusive structures** on a path towards global equality.



Traditional models of long-term volunteering might not be appropriate for all groups. For example, AVI's experience with Indigenous volunteers was that it was more difficult for them to leave their communities for such a long time. The same can apply to people with disabilities or from deprived economic backgrounds if the long absence has implications for their legal status. Therefore, **new ways and more flexible models of volunteering** have to be developed in order to attract and support a diverse group of volunteers.

Questions of **resources and adequate funding** are often important for people with disabilities. In Australia, for example, government support is tied to their presence in Australia. Volunteers who go abroad for longer periods therefore lose their rights to financial support. Funding is needed in various aspects of the volunteer life, such as assistance services, sign language interpreters during preparation seminars, physical therapy, shower chairs, regular blood tests, medication and more. Disabilities often come with economic discrimination, which has to be taken into account. In order to attract people with impairments and disabilities, it is particularly important for organisations to not only change their communication strategies in order to motivate them to apply to volunteer. All levels of the volunteer service have to be inclusive, from funding to the preparation, contact persons, involvement of host organisations, ensuring staff and partners understand and are able to practise disability-inclusive programmes. etc. Otherwise, the acceptance of people with disabilities into a programme can even lead to frustration and an increase in exclusion and discrimination.

Access to **legal information** is essential for LGBTIQ+ volunteers in order for them to make informed decisions before they embark on volunteer activity abroad. The same applies for **appropriate mental and physical health resources** that should be provided. Sufficient, up-to-date information and resources to support all stakeholders has to be available and an environment should be created in which, for example, LGBTIQ+ volunteers and staff feel safe reporting incidents of discrimination, harassment or assault. This also applies to other groups, such as BIPoCs or people with disabilities.

For all dimensions of diversity, it is important to ensure that any measures of inclusion are informed and led by people themselves in line with the **'nothing about us without us'** paradigm.

AVP, for example, is about to launch a community of practice in order to open up a space for LGBTIQ+ people to engage with the programme and to decide and control in which forms and ways that happens. The inclusion of host organisations and all other V4D stakeholders is also important on the way to more inclusion and diversity to ensure a common understanding, and that none of the measures become top-down processes, which, from a decolonial perspective, again are problematic.



Case Study – Disability & Decolonisation

bezev – Behinderung und Entwicklungszusammenarbeit e.V (Disability and Development Cooperation), Germany

bezev is a German NGO committed to inclusive development and the rights and participation of persons with impairments and disabilities in the context of development cooperation. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) it follows a rights-based approach, in which participation is seen as a fundamental human right. As an organisation that sends volunteers abroad, *bezev* supports projects abroad designed for and with people with impairments and disabilities. Furthermore *bezev* is a leader and competence centre in the design of inclusive international volunteer services. The service is thereby seen as an instrument to implement the right to participation. A significant part of *bezev's* activities has been focused on changing the framework conditions of government-funded V4D programmes in Germany to make them accessible to people with impairments and disabilities.⁵

Most of *bezev's* partner organisations in the Global South are organisations who themselves work in the field of persons with disability or inclusion. This comes with several advantages and exceptional impacts. Both sides benefit from the fruitful exchange on the level of self-representation and empowerment. For example, the shared experiences of the deaf or hard of hearing in the Global North and South provides an intriguing foundation for mutual learning of the specific sign languages, local deaf cultures and support between the volunteers and those they work with. It offers an opportunity to let supposed cultural differences between the North and South take a back seat and to focus on human commonalities instead. Volunteers who use a wheelchair are encountered with more adequate infrastructure in a receiving organisation that provides accessible facilities for the people they work with.

The placement of volunteers with impairments and disabilities offers the opportunity to complement the images about the Global North in the Global South. In *bezev's* experience, people in remote areas are often surprised to see that disabilities exist in the Global North. This is due to the powerful and colonial images about the Global North of expertise, modernisation and

⁵ See the section on barriers and enablers.

perfection that have been promoted for decades, not least through the development sector. A similar effect occurs in Germany. By making people with disabilities visible as agents of change, *bezev* works to change exclusive structures in the Global North and changes the discriminating image of people with impairments or disabilities as merely passive and needy recipients of support. In this way inclusive volunteering contributes to a social rethinking.

This case study shows how **the inclusion of people with disabilities into the volunteering space can tackle issues of power and discrimination at the local and global level and provides essential elements for a decolonised volunteering sector**, as those volunteer encounters challenge the traditional understanding of development. *bezev's* work is an important indicator that Germany is a 'developing country' regarding inclusion and diversity and could learn from countries of the Global South. *bezev* is therefore working toward hosting volunteers from the Global South with and without impairments or disabilities in Germany.



The Singapore International Foundation's Young Social Entrepreneurs (YSE) programme marked its 10th anniversary in 2020 with an inaugural Study Visit and Overseas Workshop in China. Since 2010, YSE has worked with more than 1,000 changemakers spanning 30 nationalities, whose social businesses have positively impacted the lives of the communities they operate in. Photo thanks to Singapore International Foundation.

Decolonising V4D in Practice

“Volunteer service, as a world movement, cannot play 'neutral' in view of the real causes for this situation of privilege and poverty. It is useless to throw one's energies into curing the sick, feeding the hungry and teaching the unlettered, if one is not inspired at the same time to counteract the spirit and practice of neo-colonialism”

— Glyn Roberts, 1968⁶

In this section, we will outline the most popular approaches that have been presented by different organisations, consultants and scholars regarding the decolonisation of development in general and of V4D in particular. The summary is not exhaustive, and some of the approaches might make more sense for some regions and programmes than for others. We are also aware that many organisations have already applied these approaches or different ideas, but will not be able to mention all of those achievements. We hope the general message around these approaches will help to promote and inform further discussion of the topic at various levels.

Rethinking Development

Following a postcolonial perspective, an important step towards decolonisation would be to rethink development as a foundational concept for V4D activities. Postcolonial scholars have shown that the concept is historically based on the colonial idea that Europe represents the economic, cultural and social norms from which the former colonies deviate. Even though the understanding of development has been renegotiated and the way of speaking and thinking about development has been transformed considerably over the last decades, development is still linked to the colonial discourse of the modern and civilised Global North as being opposed to the uncivilised and backwards Global South.

In *Development Discourse and Global History: From colonialism to the sustainable development goals*, German political scientist Aram Ziai (2012) shows the severe depoliticising implications of the term 'development.' Whilst in the Global North diverse social, political, economic problems or grievances are usually specified and named, in the Global South they are all linked to the single process of *development*. By doing so, we obscure global inequalities and injustices as well as their complex historical as well as more recent causes. Many progressive actors in the Global North and South were hoping for a new understanding of 'development' by introducing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. We have to acknowledge the more inclusive way the SDGs were agreed compared to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, the SDGs continue to ignore the underlying inequalities in the international system, for example, our trading rules. The SDGs proclaimed the universal approach of the 'One World' concept but nevertheless, the problematic division between 'developed' and 'developing countries' appears throughout

⁶ Glyn Roberts from the UK has worked with the Swedish Peace Corps in Ethiopia along with his Swedish wife in the 1960s and attended the World Assembly of the International Secretariat for Volunteer Service in 1967 in New Delhi as an advisor to the Swedish delegation. Inspired by his observations in the field he started to analyse development volunteering critically from a practical and academic perspective. Next to his work mentioned in the introduction he published the booklet *Questioning Development: Notes for Volunteers and Others Concerned with the Theory and Practice of Change* in 1974. "His arguments were fresh and, for some, influential", writes the Guardian on his death in 2016 (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/may/06/glyn-roberts-obituary>).

the set of goals. For a new understanding of 'development', detached from racist and colonial connotations and continuities, lots of effort would be necessary to introduce the development concept to the Global North. We would have to start framing issues such as violence against the LGBTIQ+ community, racism, increasing mental health conditions or the destructive carbon emission rates as 'development' issues of the Global North. This seems almost utopian. It is also questionable whether less rather than more complexity is helpful when describing social, political and economic problems and injustices. Hence, the proclaimed universality of the SDGs or other attempts to redefine development in a progressive manner will not address the essence of the problem: "The web of meanings tied to the concept [of development] during six decades of development policy cannot be unmade simply by adopting a progressive definition" (Ziai 2015:65).

What is a possible solution to this problem? Many IVCOs and volunteer initiatives use rationales, principles and paradigms that counteract the problematic development discourse, such as *global solidarity*, *global equality*, *social justice*, *transformative justice*, *Buen Vivir*, *Ubuntu* or *reciprocity*, to name a few. For them, they offer more politically and historically adequate foundations for volunteering programmes and their goals. This should be discussed further, particularly with regard to their practical consequences.

Indigenous concepts like *Ubuntu*, for example, can highlight the relational aspect of volunteering. Furthermore, *Ubuntu* can be read as a decolonising way of "how we define well-being and how we live together on this planet" (Moyo 2021:1), as opposed to the Western concept of development that is ultimately linked to neoliberal capitalism, extractivism and unequal globalisation. The same applies to *Buen Vivir* as a fundamentally different approach to a good life and the human-nature relationship (Gudynas and Acosta 2011). However, engaging with those concepts would also mean listening to the Global South and shifting the power of narratives and definitions to those who were mainly silenced during those six decades of mainstream development policy and discourse.

Social or transformative justice opens up space to acknowledge colonial exploitation as one of the main causes of today's global inequalities, thereby placing the historical responsibility of the Global North at the centre of the discussion. *Reciprocity*, understood as equal partnership between mutually empowered parties, has the potential to include much needed change in the Global North (think of the climate crisis, for example) into the programme design and to acknowledge that it can learn a lot from the Global South. "When reciprocity is low, volunteering as 'service' tends to reinforce power differences in the minds of both giver and receiver" (Lough 2016:1). Roberts wrote in 1968: "*Peace does not grow out of friendship or technical aid; peace grows out of social justice. A true volunteer organization demonstrates, it works for and it demands social justice*" (1968:5).

Rethinking Quality Standards

However, rethinking the paradigms that underlie V4D programmes and initiatives should not be reduced to a semantic level. The consequences for the practical level need to be negotiated with all stakeholders involved. Taking decolonisation seriously would also imply integrating decolonial thinking and approaches into quality standards, such as the *Global Volunteering Standard*, or into IVCOs' logic models and theories of change.

Brazilian educationalist and Professor of Race, Inequalities and Global Change in Canada, Vanessa Andreotti, has introduced an interesting analytical framework to start conversations about a decolonised and more inclusive future of V4D programmes. She states that we need to gain a

better understanding of the social and historical forces that connect us to each other globally. Her HEADS UP approach calls for more sceptical optimism and ethical solidarities to go through the difficulties and discomfort of confronting our past legacies and current inequalities. HEADS UP stands for *hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticisation, uncomplicated solutions, and paternalism* (Andreotti 2012). Together with other decolonial approaches, the ideas that she puts forward could become standards for a decolonised practice of V4D.

By putting the improvements for poor and marginalised communities in the Global South at the centre of all V4D activities, the focus is on **the symptoms** of an unequal postcolonial world. The sector should ask where it can contribute to combating the causes of these power relations that are based on structural racism. Responsible volunteering has to go beyond equal partnerships. Responsible volunteering and the quality of V4D programmes should be guided by decolonial ideas. Frameworks like HEADS UP could be a good starting point to rethink the sector's understanding of quality and areas of impact.

Power Sharing and Power Shift

Power sharing approaches address those who are structurally privileged, and their aim is to shift these structures towards a more equitable distribution of power and access. Therefore, power sharing approaches ask: How and where can “we” change our attitudes and actions towards both a more equitable society as well more global equity? Power sharing is therefore relevant within organisational structures (staff diversity), for target groups and with regard to postcolonial power structures within North-South partnerships. Relinquishing the power to interpret and define ‘development’ could be a first step in this process.

UK-based NGO Integrity Action has outlined their ideas about addressing power disparities in partnerships between grant-holding INGOs in the Global North and organisations in the Global South, including *two-way due-diligence*, drafting *thoughtful and power-sensitive Memorandums of Understanding* and shifting *the lead to the South*.⁷ The latter includes moving both funding as well as the administration of the funds to the South.

V4D programmes should rethink their leadership structures and decision-making processes against the background of power sharing (see the interview with VSO, for example). Decolonised programmes from the Global North would not only consult their partners and stakeholders in the Global South, they would include them on all levels of their programme structures (Georgeou and Haas 2019).

Localisation Agenda

Many donor agencies and IVCOs have undergone policy reforms over the past several years. Localisation has been a key element of these reforms that move funding, contracting and leadership to the local level. It is often seen as part of the process of decolonising structures, as countries in the Global South are taking charge of their own development and effectively adapting volunteering programmes to local conditions (Ocampo 2013).

⁷ <https://integrityaction.org/what-we-are-learning/blog/3-practical-ideas-to-shift-the-power-in-partnerships/>

However, in the humanitarian sector, the localisation approach in practice led to disappointment and reproduced colonial behavior among INGOs. The definition of 'local' was changed to allow country offices of INGOs to qualify as 'national' or 'local,' thereby enabling them to benefit from the approach. Hence, "what could have been a landmark moment ended up being a huge disappointment to local organizations worldwide. INGOs with country offices had protected their interests and their funding sources" (Peace Direct, 2021). If the V4D sector does not want to follow this negative example, it should translate rhetoric into real practice and follow through and relinquish power to local actors.

From the discussions we have had on the various case studies, there is a widespread understanding that volunteer organisations adopt their own understanding of V4D in their locality. Even though it has been widely thought to be a Western concept, there has been collaboration between governments and organisations, as in the case with VSO in South Africa and VIONet in Sierra Leone. V4D was previously seen as a 'White Savior Phenomenon' in which volunteers from the Global North came to 'rescue' communities in the Global South. This perspective is gradually changing by including local volunteers in V4D frameworks. Moreover, it was also seen as a sort of energiser in which stakeholders (i.e., heads of government ministries, departments and agencies) have embraced the need to partner with and involve local institutions to maintain their programmes.

Perhaps the localisation of V4D has been challenging in some contexts, such as in the African context, in that some documents like the continental framework on volunteerism need to be localised so that the language is understandable across cultures. Such frameworks can be used as local source documents that V4D organisations can refer to.



Case Study – Using Local Institutions to Drive Change

Volunteering Involving Organisations Network – Sierra Leone (VIONet Sierra Leone)

VIONet is a Sierra Leonean network of volunteer organisations committed to providing leadership in community development work and approaches. It is a network that ensures that local institutions are the drivers of change and provide ownership of their diverse activities. With VIONet, there is a collaboration between government entities, such as the National Youth Service Scheme (NYS), the Ministry of Youth and a mix of local NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), and international organisations.

Established by United Nations Volunteers and VSO after the Sierra Leone Civil War, this network was inactive for several years. It was revived by some youth volunteers whose institutions have been clamouring for funding and vying for the attention of relevant partners for nearly four years, while the network creates change.

Due to their assistance in providing services during emergencies like mudslides, fires and during the COVID-19 outbreak, VIONet's model of V4D has been one in which the local NGOs and CBOs

are seen taking the lead in service delivery, rather than international organisations. It is one of the few models that is consulted in the implementation of the SDGs in the country and always respected when conducting research on the impact of SDGs at the community and national levels. VIONet is also working with continental actors such as ECOWAS and the African Union to popularise and promote their agenda for volunteerism.

According to the national coordinator, the concept of diversity and inclusion is being promoted by the network with ease, as most ideas on volunteerism come from the local volunteering organisations. It is quite easy for them to own and work on the ideas without fear of them being considered Western or foreign by local actors. It can be described as a successful model because networks around West Africa and the entire African continent have been seeking out consultation by VIONet on their specific areas of interest that have been challenging for them; these other networks have asked for best practices that can be replicated with ease and precision.

VIONet is a powerful example of how volunteers who come from the communities directly can often represent a more diverse group, and they are the first ones to respond to community needs. VIONet's success speaks to the principle of decolonising the idea that volunteers should come from the Global North. Initiatives and approaches of home-based volunteers and local institutions, as brought forward by VIONet in Sierra Leone, can offer indigenous solutions to a local understanding of 'development'. This in turn raises questions about the traditional model of North-South volunteering, providing the opportunity to discuss future V4D models and their relationships with local volunteer initiatives.



Decolonise Volunteer Training

In line with Andreotti's HEADS UP approach, all accompanying elements of preparation, training, learning and debriefing should include critical units about colonial legacies in North-South relationships, white privilege, power, racism and critical whiteness. "[Briefing] volunteers on the context of their placement," as put forward by the *Global Volunteering Standard*, misses an important part of the context if coloniality, power and racism are not part of the briefing. In the light of more inclusive and diverse programmes, these revised accompanying concepts should be sensitive to intersectionality of power relationships within a more diverse group of volunteers.

Part of this reflection can also be overcoming 'intercultural' concepts, as they often imply an acculturation, and instead apply modern and progressive understandings of trans-culturalism (Guilherme and Dietz 2015).

Change in the Global North

Taking postcolonial responsibility means changing and fighting colonial power structures and racism as the currently prevailing global system of power. IVCOs in the Global North should engage in critical education initiatives for change in their own societies and engage in political struggles against neo-colonial exploitation, climate crisis racism and more. This also includes a critical examination of organisational structures. Creating stronger links between responsible domestic and international work can be an important element of a decolonised V4D agenda.

New Models

Several organisations, such as VSO, France Volontaires and Norec, have already implemented new models of volunteering. From a decolonising perspective, South-North volunteering programmes should be a particular focus in the coming years. There are still a limited number of volunteers from the Global South in the Global North. The North must acknowledge that it can learn from the South. Volunteerism is an excellent avenue for this in the spirit of mutual learning and transcultural exchange. Thereby, the impact focus on change in the Global North can be strengthened. The increase in South-North volunteering can be part of a broader reframing of V4D programmes that has already been happening in the context of the inclusion of different models into the sector, towards a complementary combination of international, national and regional volunteers.

An idea that could be derived from interviews is that the use of 'best practice' could be superseded by 'best fit'. This is because more institutions are undertaking best fit activities of what already exists in countries of the Global North, which is based on funding as opposed to the realities in their countries. This can be mitigated by the use of local techniques to solve local issues and problems (see case study below).

A soft diplomacy approach can contradict the decolonisation of V4D if it is not combined with strong South-North programmes (Georgeou 2012; Georgeou and Haas 2017; Magu 2018). Moving completely away from international volunteering towards the support of local volunteering and South-South programmes is not a possibility for many organisations, as has been pointed out in the interviews conducted for this research. Many donor agencies still focus on sending their nationals abroad, in line with soft diplomacy priorities. IVCOs should lobby their funding agencies to change their attitude in this regard, but also try to find new partners to fund varied models of volunteering. However, the diversification of models could be an important way to decolonise the idea that knowledge and skills only come from the Global North.



Case Study – New Models & Approaches

Interview with the Head of Programme Design & Development, Ezekiel Esipisu, from VSO International, South Africa

Authors: VSO has been on a journey, making essential changes to its V4D model and trajectories as well as with its organisational structure. What are the critical elements of these changes?

Ezekiel: First of all, my team's mandate is to assure the highest quality of programme design which aligns to our VSO V4D practice. On the organisational level, VSO has adopted the idea of dispersed leadership and diversity which can be reflected in the composition of our senior leadership. We do not have an international head office; our senior team is scattered around our different offices across the globe. We have worked within the programme cycle over the last couple of years, collaborating closely with other teams within the organisation. Our relational volunteering model, has seen a significant increase in South-South volunteering. That doesn't mean that we no longer work with volunteers from the Global North, but their number has reduced. Our key consideration here since 2015 is that we are not necessarily a volunteer placement organisation, but rather embed volunteering within our programme designs. If a programme design requires certain capabilities to deliver the programme, then we identify the right volunteers as part of our "people design". We have shifted away from placing volunteers just for the sake of reflecting high volunteer numbers. This has been a total reboot. Once we have identified the capabilities needed for a specific programme, we look at the volunteer typology. Different kinds of intervention will require a specific type of volunteer typology or a blend of those typologies. These typologies include national, local or community, international volunteers. In instances where we are able to find local (community) and national volunteers with the right skill sets for a particular project, we also prioritise working them.

Can you give us an example of a context in which a local volunteer is more appropriate?

For example, suppose you need a social inclusion and gender expert to effectively deliver a project. In that case, it is often more helpful if you get a local volunteer who understands the socio-cultural context. Furthermore, the community might accept this volunteer better. The shift in the mindset here is to say that we will find expertise in the Global South. There are only some highly technical roles that we might be difficult to get in the Southern context. For example, experts in the field of newborn or maternal healthcare are scarce but in high demand in the South. Those Professionals with such skills are already in high demand and serving large populations.

From your perspective, what has to be done regarding the decolonisation of the V4D sector?

There are many issues. The development and growth of the resource base in the Global South is evident. We are not in the 1960s anymore. This still has to be strengthened as part of a decolonisation process. We do have significant talent in the Global South that has to be recognised and tapped to make positive contributions. This has not been optimally explored as one might expect in the V4D sector. People in the Global South are taking on more and more volunteering roles. The more you have volunteers that a better understanding of the local context, the more the project is likely to succeed.

At VSO, the senior leadership level increasingly includes people from the Global South, which is crucial in bringing diversity and voice of these groups of people to organisational strategic conversations. This shift has helped put voices from the Global South at the heart of VSO's major organisational decision making processes. This is one of the important ways and actions through which VSO is responding and contributing to the decolonising debate within V4D organisations. Also, at the international Board level, VSO has representation from across the world including Global South. Along with this VSO has pursued inclusion in the composition of the international board ensuring representation from youth representation and women. This is critical.

What is your position on the postcolonial critique of the term development?

Well, volunteering for development is our model. So we clearly use the term. But we have a meaningful debate on how we can present development in a pragmatic way, but one that resonates with our times. This can be reflected in the five dimensions of change through which our volunteers contribute are development. These five are: inclusion, ownership, inspiration, participation and innovation. For example, we work towards inclusion by working on power dynamics. If we achieve inclusion at the level of the most marginalised communities, then there is a high possibility that we shall contribute to breaking down the structural barriers to achieving development. If the work that we do creates an environment through which these ideas will be implemented successfully and effectively, we know this is development.



Decolonisation is Hard to Measure

The development and V4D sectors are permeated by the logics of impact measurement, evaluation criteria and monitoring reports. It is not recommendable to transmit these logics and attempts too easily to decolonisation efforts within volunteering programmes. Decolonisation is very hard to measure—especially in quantitative terms—, as there is no end goal: “We cannot, and undoubtedly should not, quantify how far we are along our pathway to freedom. There is no one-size-fits-all explanatory approach [...] Rather than focus on measuring decolonization, we should focus on the sharing and collaboration of ideas and practices” (Grewal 2021). Qualitative frameworks to document progress and approaches might be conceivable. Scholars and experts of decolonisation as well as V4D actors from the Global South should take on a leading role in any of such endeavours.

Conclusion

Volunteering for Development has achieved noticeable success over the last decades and has often offered a different perspective on development compared to the mainstream and technical development aid sector. In the past, volunteers worked in remote areas, making it possible for countries to benefit from their work and at the same time promoting volunteerism worldwide. Now, more and more countries are seeing the need for experienced people from the Global South to be involved in their work. This is a very gratifying advancement and can be seen as an essential element of the decolonisation of V4D models, as well as a contribution to diversity and inclusion; for example, as shown by the case study from Sierra Leone.

In the future, broader frameworks of decoloniality and intersectionality should be at the center of dealing with social justice and diversity in V4D programmes and activities. Coloniality is a perspective that enables us to analyse how power asymmetries, social exclusion and discrimination (along various axes such as race, gender and geographical and economic inequality) are linked to the ongoing legacy of colonial history. Decoloniality helps to understand the role of the development sector as a modern or colonial institution that strengthens Western perspectives at the expense of the plurality of global knowledge.

Decolonised volunteering programmes provide a source of ownership and allow for the implementation of creative ideas from the community, and from local volunteers. They have open forms of expertise and are open to transcultural and plural approaches to knowledge and social development. The VIONet, AVP and VSO case studies can be seen as models that seek global change, but acknowledge the different historical responsibilities and positionalities of the Global South and the Global North.

V4D organisations should use their platforms and networks to fight against racism as a global structure and ideology. This requires a transformation of organisational structures based on decolonial and intersectional approaches and the willingness to share and shift power between more and less powerful actors and stakeholders. Decolonising V4D also means acknowledging that many injustices whose symptoms the V4D sector aims to combat with its projects, volunteers and approaches have been created historically, as well as today, by and in the Global North. Decolonising development means directing focus to much-needed change in the Global North. A possible future volunteering model might pair volunteers from the Global South with volunteers from the Global North and send them on a joint journey. For example, first they would serve for six months with a climate protection NGO in the dying forests of Germany, followed by six months in the Brazilian Amazon.

In many ways, the global volunteering movement has historically been at the forefront of social innovation and transformative approaches. Will it play the same role regarding decolonisation, inclusion and diversity on a path towards global equality?

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