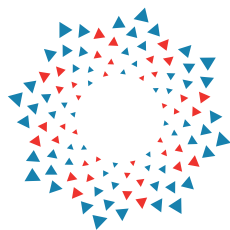


Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality

Research & Think Pieces
prepared for IVCO 2021



IVCO
THESSALONIKI 2021

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Introduction

This volume brings together the research and think pieces written in advance of IVCO 2021, the annual conference for International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations. This IVCO conference addressed the theme Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality and three sub-themes – Decolonisation, Directionality and Digitalisation.

Each year, Forum's Research, Practice, Policy and Learning Group commissions papers to help frame and inform our conversations at the IVCO conference. This year, the group did something a little different, commissioning one main framing paper, an introductory paper and a series of eleven short think pieces on a wide range of issues orbiting the IVCO theme and sub-themes.

The IVCO 2021 Framing Paper by Benjamin Haas of the University of Cologne and Victor Moinina of the University of Sierra Leone, entitled *Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality – Linking Decolonisation and Diversity*, is a remarkably compact but comprehensive exploration of current research, thinking and debates on pressing questions of decolonising aid and development and the place of volunteering in this movement. It addresses questions of power, privilege, structural discrimination and the mechanics of exclusion, and resolves with questions and recommendations for organisations that work with volunteers.

In the Introductory Paper, Gerasimos Kouvaras, the Country Director of IVCO 2021 host ActionAid Hellas, opens with a short theoretical text before taking us on a tour of the IVCO 2021 sub-themes of Decolonisation, Directionality and Digitalisation. Amongst the questions posed in this paper are whether neo-colonial assumptions underlie our organisational practices, how we might work towards more reciprocal relationships with partners, and whether technology promotes inclusiveness or exacerbates existing patterns of inequality.

A series of short think pieces addressed the IVCO 2021 theme from eleven different angles. Academics, practitioners and volunteers contributed informative, challenging, and thought-provoking pieces. Alice Chadwick El-Ali of the University of Bath unpacked the knowledge hierarchies that attach to volunteer modalities – 'international', 'national' and 'community' and the inequalities that produce them. Claire Bennett of AltoLearn showed us how international volunteering organisations can address structural, global issues of power dynamics, attitudes and systems. Chris Millora of the University of East Anglia identified our limited research-based understanding of volunteering in the Global South and promoted more participatory approaches to volunteering research. Helge Espe of Norec revisited and breathed new life into Ivan Illich's 1968 address 'To Hell with Good Intentions'. And Sive Bresnihan of Comhlámh asked 'What is Decolonisation Asking of Us', calling on us to break the cycle of conversations that ultimately lead us to the same place they started, 'nothing ceded, entitlements and privilege intact'. To cite just a few.

We are sure that these papers will continue to spark thought and conversation on questions of volunteering, equality, diversity, inclusion and decoloniality long after IVCO 2021. Our hope in sharing them in this collection is that they will spur us beyond conversation to greater positive action on these issues.

Lucie Morillon

Chair, Forum Research, Practice, Policy and Learning Group

Jean Tan

Chair, IVCO Working Group



IVCO 2021 FRAMING PAPER

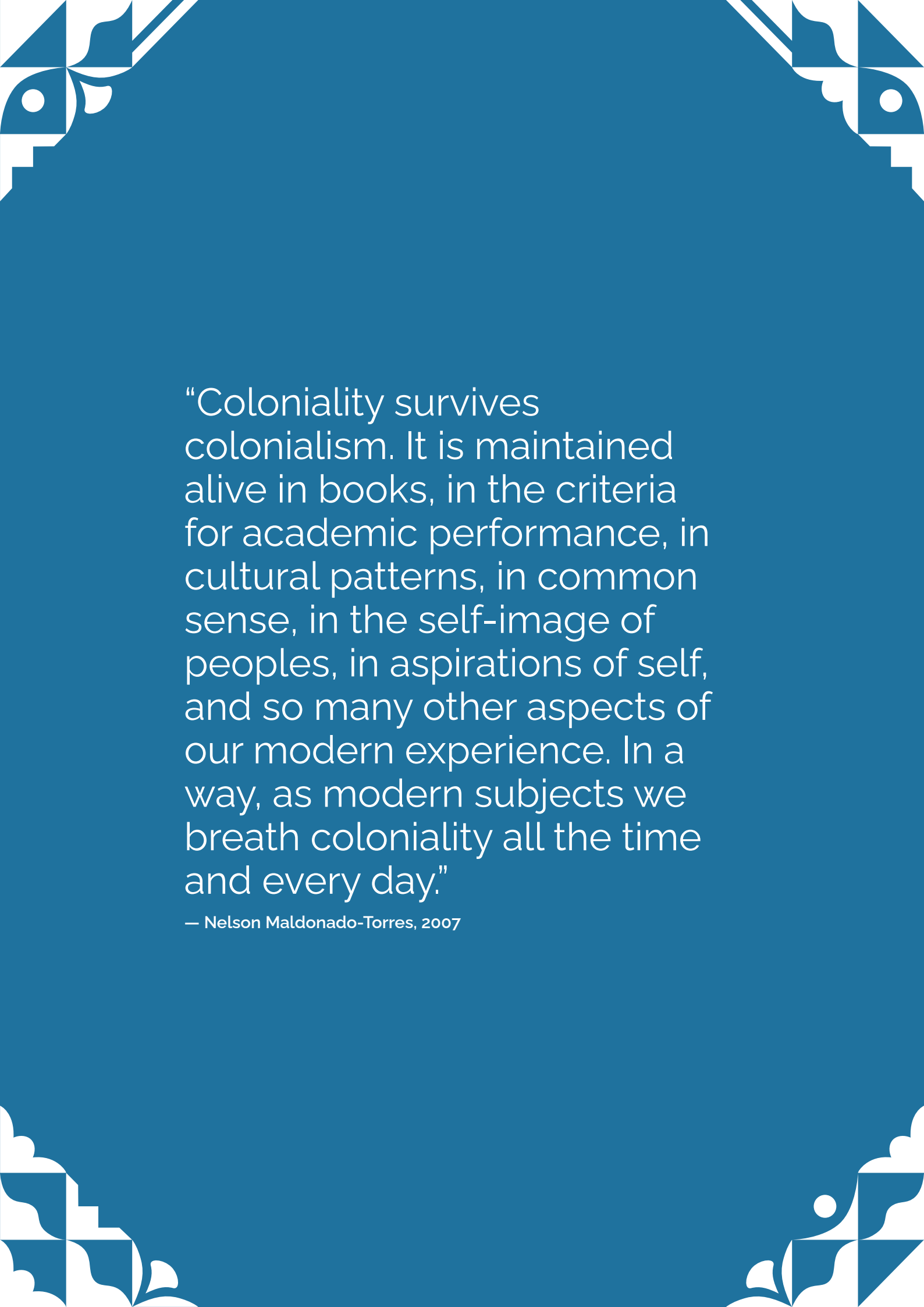
Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality – Linking Decolonisation & Diversity

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The page features a solid blue background with white decorative geometric patterns in the corners. These patterns consist of overlapping squares and circles, creating a modern, abstract aesthetic. The text is centered in the middle of the page in a white, sans-serif font.

“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 BIPOCs¹ 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

¹ 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.¹ 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+² 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.

¹ For intersectionality in "Inclusive Development" see also IVCO 2018 framing paper by Glassco, Arnaud, and Tremblay (2018:7).

² 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.¹

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

¹ 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, 1968¹

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

¹ 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 Dehli 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*.¹ 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).

¹ <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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IVCO 2021 INTRODUCTORY PAPER

44 Questions about Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the theme and the sub-themes of IVCO 2021, set the frame for the research agenda, and invite researchers and practitioners to contribute to advancing our understanding of burning issues in the domain of volunteering for development. Rather than being a research piece itself, this paper introduces 'Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality' as the over-arching theme followed by the three sub-thematic areas of decolonisation, digitalisation, and directionality of volunteering. Each topic is introduced by a short theoretical text followed by a set of questions aiming to inspire and mobilise the discussion.

Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality

The substantial contribution of volunteering to 'hard' development outcomes has been highlighted by researchers, development actors and institutions for decades. Nevertheless, their added value to the process of systemic change towards a more inclusive and equal world has more recently become central in global discourse. An increasing number of research papers have shown how international volunteering activities create solidarity, tolerance, communication, interaction, and good connections between volunteers. Previous IVCO research papers have covered thematic areas of inclusive development and specifically addressing questions related to women and youth (Rath, 2018; Tiessen and Delaney, 2018; Savard and Allum, 2018), challenging the limited room offered to volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) for local or indigenous participation (Mati and Perold, 2019), and highlighting the need to deepen links between inclusive development and intersectionality and develop tools to apply an intersectional approach in different contexts (Glassco, Arnaud, Tremblay, 2018). Although the role of volunteers in inclusive development has been gaining space in academic research (Devereaux, 2008), 'inclusive volunteering' remains a relatively unexplored area. From a volunteer and organisational perspective, recent research has shown that inclusive organisational environments encourage the satisfaction of volunteer needs and positively influence future behavioural intentions towards the volunteer-involving organisation (Huang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, is volunteering for development inclusive in practice?

IVCO 2021, through its overarching theme 'Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality', aims to broaden and deepen this discourse by inviting researchers, practitioners, and volunteers to exchange best practices, discuss the barriers that prevent inclusive volunteering on the side of institutions, societies, organisations, and volunteers, and to recommend solutions. The conference will focus on three burning issues: decolonisation, digitalisation, and directionality of volunteering – seen through the programmatic, organisational, methodological, policy making lenses, amongst others.

Forum's recent research report COVID-19 and the Future of Volunteering for Development (Perold et al, 2021) identifies digitalisation and directionality as two of the key future trends of IVCOs in the post-pandemic era, with organisations predicting an increase in online and local volunteering. At the same time, the notion of the North as the aid 'giver' and the Global South as the aid 'receiver', with a clear superiority of North over South reinforcing unequal global power structures, is still reflected in numerous international volunteering schemes, as highlighted by recent research studies (Georgeou and Haas, 2019).

IVCO 2021 invites contributions on the diversity of volunteer identities, models and assumptions about inclusive volunteering. A wide spectrum of questions will be addressed, including:

- What does diversity and inclusion mean in the context of volunteering for development?
- Do we provide volunteering opportunities to all people regardless of age, culture, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, social status or disability?
- How can organisations offer greater access and ensure a more equitable participatory experience?
- To what extent are volunteers involved in decision-making, properly informed or actively participating in the wider work-related and social reality?
- How would inclusive volunteering contribute towards global equality and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
- What is the role of intersectionality in inclusive volunteering?
- What is the role of states and institutions in creating an enabling environment for inclusive volunteering?
- Which policies and civic structures can encourage diversity and inclusion in international volunteering?
- What are some of the policy barriers for inclusive volunteering, and how do we overcome them?
- How can organisations advocate and influence policy changes?
- What parts of our organisational programming, practice or culture need to change, and what constraints are there?
- What are the existing tools and methodologies to measure diversity and inclusion in volunteering for development?
- What has been the impact of COVID-19, and what opportunities have arisen?
- How have new needs and vulnerabilities resulting from COVID-19 been addressed?
- How do we manage diversity with our limited resources?
- How do we ensure that risk management frameworks and approaches support diverse and inclusive volunteering?
- How can the Global Standard for Volunteering for Development become a compass for change?

Decolonisation

In the ever-growing academic literature on volunteering for development, scholars have demonstrated how global structural inequalities permeate relations between volunteers and hosts. Those relations are found to be “subordinate to, or consistent with, macro-level patterns of uneven power” (Griffiths, 2018). As discussions about unequal power dynamics in the international aid system have recently entered the mainstream, decolonisation of aid has become a central topic on the development agenda. In November 2020, Peace Direct in collaboration with Adeso, the Alliance for Peacebuilding and Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security, convened a three-day online consultation, where over 150 people from the development sector participated, to discuss the issue of structural racism and how to ‘Decolonise Aid’. Although the report highlights structural racism embedded in the everyday culture and working practice of the development and aid sector, it does not capture the domain of volunteering for development. Georgeou and Haas (2019), in a recently published multiple case study paper, demonstrate how state-run Youth Volunteering for Development programmes operate under the logic of “the wealthy North giving to the global South”, reinforcing the already embedded hierarchical power dynamics.

Through the sub-theme of decolonising volunteering for development, we intend to bring the links between colonisation and international volunteering into the foreground and challenge the colonial legacies and power dynamics which undermine the principles of global equality. We look forward to opening the debate, and listening to unfiltered ‘voices from the field’ that present a considerable move towards global equality. Questions seeking responses include the following:

- How can we effectively tackle the issues of power imbalances between international and local volunteers?
- What would it mean to reshape programme design and practices to take into account the history, culture and context of host communities mean?
- How do we ensure that programmes are designed with input from those most directly affected by poverty and marginalisation, and not just in consultation with a small number of powerful elites?
- What neo-colonial assumptions or elements of the ‘charity’ model of international volunteering underlie our organisational practices?
- How can IVCOs foster more equitable relationships between Northern and Southern development actors and a critical understanding of development?
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic provided a good opportunity to further drive the decolonisation of international volunteering with potential changes in the global balance of power?
- How can we critically reflect on development as a goal for volunteering?
- How can we rethink volunteering for development as volunteering for international solidarity and understanding?
- What are the risks of delegitimising solidarity in the process of decolonising development?
- How do we decolonise volunteering research and practice, reflecting on and challenging current practices?
- To what extent do ethnographic studies of marginalised people in the Global South overturn the (neo)colonial mode of research?

Digitalisation

Technology has opened up new pathways for volunteering organisations, enabling a quantitative increase in volunteer opportunities. Internet-based tools have been developed to recruit and support traditional forms of international volunteering and to develop new forms of volunteering. The availability of Internet technology has also revolutionised VIOs' training and communication capacities. Online campaigns have made it easier for international volunteers to advocate for global causes and to participate in global development efforts, even without leaving their home country (Lough, 2015). The recent COVID-19 pandemic has further spurred the sector's digital transformation, with many IVCOs now leveraging technology to support international volunteering activities, given the travel restrictions in place and the fact that e-volunteering has become a trend.

Nevertheless, the digital divide persists! Piatak, Dietz, and Mc Keever (2019) demonstrate that home Internet access has an independent influence on volunteering and that those with access are more likely to become volunteers, either formally or informally. In their IVCO 2018 framing paper, Glassco, Arnaud, and Trembley (2018) conclude that further research is needed to identify the concrete changes and opportunities that online participation is creating for women and youth in the Global South, and how IVCOs and their local counterparts are using online spaces to support inclusive development.

Through the 'digitalisation' sub-thematic area we aim to answer questions such as:

- Does technology promote inclusiveness by providing greater access to volunteering opportunities, or does it exacerbate existing patterns of inequality?
- How do technological solutions contribute to the recruitment of new cohorts of skilled volunteers?
- How can digitalisation increase capacity and diversity?
- What is the future of virtual voluntary service?
- How can we aim to replicate the well-documented positive impact of in-person volunteering with e-volunteering?
- What new digital tools are available to mobilise and manage volunteers more effectively?
- What will be the impact of the digitalisation of work and employment on volunteering in the post-pandemic era?
- How can gaps in connectivity and a lack of digital literacy be overcome to achieve an inclusive digitalisation of volunteering?

Directionality

In a Forum discussion paper, Devereaux and Allum (2016) posed questions around the consideration and recognition of the role of national volunteers in volunteering for development programmes, and the relationship between international and national volunteers as a core element of programme models, introducing the subject of directionality of international volunteering. International frameworks such as the SDGs provide a canvas for a paradigm shift away from a traditional North-South orientation, as 'connecting international, national and local volunteering can encourage embedded relationships and result in more sustainable impacts that go beyond traditional "helping" or aid models' (Thompson et al., 2020). However, neoliberal conceptualisations of development have evidently shaped international volunteering, failing to capture the relational and experiential impacts of volunteering. According to Schech (2017), 'the technologies of proximity afforded by volunteering can lead to critical and transformative insights into development and aidland, particularly when volunteers are embedded in local organisations over a longer time.' Current literature on development volunteering is embedded 'in the geographies of "here" (the developed world as helper)... and "there" (the developing world as "the helped")' (Yea, 2018).

Academic discussions need to re-imagine the spatiality of development volunteering to include, for instance, refugees and migrants who volunteer in development work in their new homes. Within the domain of local volunteering in the Global South, recent research has also highlighted the negative impacts of wider systemic political and ethnic divisions in volunteer civil society organisations, groups and initiatives including biased access to volunteer opportunities and resources, and volunteers opting to offer help only to those in their own ethnic or political group (Picken and Lewis, 2015). As an increasing number of middle-income countries and emerging economies become both providers and recipients of development assistance, North-South positioning gives space to emerging South-South volunteering programmes, with significant new actors entering the space of international volunteering.

Through the sub-thematic area of directionality, we intend to explore responses to questions including:

- How do we create enabling environments across the Global South so that international volunteering programmes will no longer be restricted to sending volunteers from traditional donor countries?
- What are the strategies to enhance South-North, South-South and reciprocal forms of international volunteering?
- How can we work towards more reciprocal relationships with partners?
- What challenges do organisations face in implementing such programmes, and how can they overcome them?
- Has COVID-19 acted unevenly as a barrier towards different models of directionality?
- What are the implications of COVID-19 for future models of cross-national volunteering?
- What policy reforms are needed to strengthen and build reciprocal partnerships across the different volunteering modalities?
- How can volunteering for development organisations bolster local action and accelerate implementation?
- What is the role of volunteers from the Global North when they return home?

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IVCO 2021 THINK PIECE

Reciprocity & the Sharing of Knowledge as a Gift

Jan Olav Baarøy,

Director General of the Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (Norec)

Have you ever received a gift which comes with a demand? For example, "Dear, this is for you! But please use it correctly, if not, you must return it".

For more than 50 years, gifts in the form of financial assistance from countries in the Global North to countries in the Global South have been given with a degree of demands to either show results or return the funds. Donors have often had high expectations about the impact of the gift, without knowing enough about the context in which the gift was given.

But it is not in the nature of the gift to come with requirements. If so, it isn't a gift. It is in the nature of the gift that the one receiving it should be able to give something back. A gift is reciprocal in its nature — it can and should be reciprocated.

In the 20th century, the French philosopher Marcel Mauss studied a large amount of anthropological material from around the world with a focus on one thing — the sharing of gifts. One of the common denominators of the gift, says Mauss, is that it must be reciprocated, otherwise the recipient will be in a shameful and unworthy position vis-à-vis the donor. It doesn't have to be immediately reciprocated. On the contrary, having outstanding exchanges of gifts binds people and society closer together.

So how do the recipients of development assistance, which year after year of experience receiving gifts where the only chance to reciprocate is to implement the requirements that came with the gift, reciprocate? Many of development aid's shortcomings are linked to the absence of reciprocity. The Norwegian anthropologist Hylland Eriksen has said that it is a fundamental anthropological insight that reciprocity is something that makes life meaningful, and one can ask how meaningful it is for people and society to receive aid without being able to give anything back, and engage in a true partnership for development.

In 1999, the Norwegian Peace Corps was closed down because it had a one-side focus from North to South. The volunteer service re-emerged in 2001 following a decision by the Parliament with an aim of facilitating mutual exchange of personnel between Norway and countries in the South- where a company in Norway wishes to send employees to countries in the South, they must also receive personnel from companies in the South to their workplace in Norway.

Since 2001, we have facilitated more than 10,000 young professionals to cross national borders between countries in the Global South, and between countries in the Global South to Norway. Reciprocal exchange has become a fundamental principle in their partnerships, and the objectives of the exchange are defined by those who send and receive the assistance together. Those who receive a gift can give one back. Skills are shared, knowledge is acquired, and new competencies contribute to organisational development, be it in the Global South or in Norway. The Exchange of personnel is to be able to reciprocate — to give something equally back.

In 2018 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs changed our name to Norec — Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation, which expresses exactly what we do: facilitate the exchange of personnel between organisations across borders. Reciprocity in practice and a meaningful sharing of true gifts.

Sources:

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IVCO 2021 THINK PIECE

Improving Organisational Programming, Culture & Practice

Claire Bennett

Head of Learning at AltoLearn

Traditionally, change in the international development sector comes only at a snail's pace, due to the involvement of large monolithic actors such as governments, multilaterals and global finance institutions. Deeply entrenched practices, such as most important decisions being made in the Global North, have been critiqued as ineffective or disempowering for decades, and yet are still the norm. Instigating radical change may seem especially out of reach for smaller actors, like local community organisations that hold little conventional power in the system and are usually beholden to the agendas of larger institutions that hold the purse strings.

Since their inception, both international volunteering and international development have been based on the concept of charity, which inherently comes with an unequal power dynamic. Still today, in most organisations' external communications there is the notion of the "helper" and the "helped", the active "givers" and the passive "recipients", the idea that those offering charity are to be revered and those receiving it are to extend gratitude. These outdated notions are damaging to all involved. The givers are not incentivised to strive for effectiveness when the act of giving is itself celebrated. Beneficiaries are primed to internalise damaging neo-colonial narratives, and usually have little agency in what help they receive and how it is offered.

Acts of charity, no matter on what scale, are unlikely to create the kind of global change that many of us involved in this sector aspire to. The problems that we are aiming to tackle are structural in nature and global in scope, and sustainably addressing them involves challenging the very power dynamics, attitudes and systems that are entrenched within the aid sector. The need for organisational shift has been highlighted by recent movements and developments, such as Black Lives Matter, #AidToo, and the cataclysmic threat of climate change. Currently, the international development sector is not nimble enough to adequately respond to these challenges, and is instead becoming an increasingly anachronistic system that is modelled on and perpetuates many of the injustices that we claim to tackle.

[So, how do we set about making these necessary, radical shifts that we have proposed?](#)

Authentic change on an organisational level cannot be something imposed from the top down. It cannot be another agenda designed by the Global North, even if the intentions are to offer more power and agency to actors in the Global South, as this will result in the kind of tokenism and feel-goodism that is all too familiar in this sector. Meaningful change needs to come from the "bottom" up – along with truly questioning who is at the top and at the bottom in the first place. We should not just be seeking input from those meant to be benefitting, but asking for their direction and leadership. Instead of a fixed paradigm with predefined outcomes, we need a true handing-over of the reins.

This is, of course, difficult, especially for larger organisations with a wide and varied base. It isn't enough to launch another consultation that assumes a level playing field among respondents in terms of either power or understanding. In order to have the kind of honest and open discussions needed for organisational change, participants from all levels need to have a good grounding in the concepts and have shared mental models. There also needs to be an intentionally-created and tightly-held space for critical thinking and reimagining the status quo.

For example, an organisation committed to decolonising their practices cannot do so meaningfully without putting in a lot of groundwork. Not only is there a need to educate all stakeholders on key concepts, but also, and with infinitely more difficulty, there is a need to create more fluid power dynamics within institutions themselves.

At Alto we have been partnering with development and volunteering agencies seeking to make dramatic organisational culture shifts – for example, moving away from the tourism space and towards community development. This was also the context in which we created AltoLearn, an online learning platform for the “doing good” sector, which offers accessible courses introducing the current dilemmas and challenges in the field, designed by global experts and thought leaders. The aim is to curate space for cross-organisational conversations on difficult topics.

Of course, we do not imagine that individual organisations can create these kinds of shifts in a microcosm. The sector is still constrained and to some extent controlled by larger ecosystems of power. But as we have explored, the system is ripe for change. Put simply, the international voluntary sector cannot continue in the same way while still clinging to the moral high ground and upholding the narrative of “doing good”. The world today is full of progressive discourse and nuanced critique that is pushing us to do better. Some brave and radical organisations need to step forward to shake up the sector and push us towards thinking and behaving differently.

The key questions when thinking about organisational change include:

- What neo-colonial assumptions or elements of the “charity” model of international volunteering underlie your own organisation's practice?
- What parts of your organisational programming, practice or culture do you think need to change, and what constraints are there?
- How do you aim to have these conversations within your organisation and with wider stakeholders?
- If we are talking about an authentic and radical shift, how much of your model is “on the table” to be redesigned and reimaged?

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IVCO 2021 THINK PIECE

What is Decolonisation Asking of Us?

Sive Bresnihan

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The following text has been drafted in support of Forum's IVCO conference 2021 and the ongoing efforts of its partners to explore emerging opportunities as well as challenges for volunteering for development. The text focuses on (the difficulties of) decolonisation with reference to scholars who are publishing on this topic.

In their seminal paper 'Decolonisation is not a metaphor', Eve Tuck and K.W. Yang (2012) discuss the 1990 movie 'Dances with Wolves' starring Kevin Costner. In the movie Costner plays Lieutenant Dunbar, a Union soldier in the post-US Civil War era who befriends and helps protect a community of Lakota. In terms of the story's arc and 'to the point of being able to dance their dances' Dunbar is changed through his encounter with the Lakota. He is able to go anywhere and be anything. Assuaged of settler guilt and assured of a future, he 'becomes without becoming' (Ahmed cited in Tuck and Yang, p. 14). The Lakota meanwhile, depicted as a noble and dying race, pretty much remain as they were; there to be known and consumed; good Indians who enable the white man's transformation and confirm his position as hero of the story.

For Tuck and Yang (see the original paper for deeper decolonial analysis of the film) the Dances with Wolves arc is an example of decolonisation accomplished before it has begun, and through the indigenised consciousness of the settler himself. Building on this example of what Dunbar is able to do, (and the implications of same), they go on to problematise the easy adoption of decolonising discourse by different fields, and the ways in which it has begun to supplant prior ways of talking about many things including 'social justice' and 'change'.

'Decolonisation,' they write 'which we assert is a distinct project... is far too often subsumed into the directives of (other) projects, with no regard for how decolonisation wants something different than those forms of justice' (p.2). The joining (of decolonisation) into our spaces, warn Tuck and Yang, cannot be too easy, too open, too settled.

In presenting their own decolonial perspective, the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective recall Tuck and Yang in a recent paper, reminding us 'to ask questions about what assumptions, politics, and theories of change inform the invocation and desire for decoloniality and decolonisation in each context of use' (Andreotti et al, 2021).

Pashby and collaborators (2020) concur with this need for care around terms such as decolonisation and decoloniality. It is all too easy, they posit, to conflate decolonial approaches that challenge the continuity of the modern/colonial imaginary with critical approaches that seek to reform it.

Some more thoughts on decolonisation & decoloniality

How might the field of 'volunteering for development' (which typically enjoys [and asserts] an air of neutrality and benevolence) meet the growing calls for decolonisation? Will the field, like Dunbar, make moves to uphold its innocence? Will it render decolonisation 'accomplished', and all without having to cede or change much?

Inclusion is one of the central themes of the upcoming IVCO conference. How are we preparing for the deliberations? Are we readying ourselves for the presence of that which was formerly excluded? Are we readying ourselves for such presence to really change things? What would make this kind of necessary and seismic shift, possible?

As Tuck and Yang remind us, decolonisation is unsettling. It is not a metaphor for all other things we want to do improve our models but rather about 'the repatriation of Indigenous land and life' (p.1). It is also about the current system's limits and its harmful tendencies and it is about circularities in thinking/reasoning. How do we find ourselves continually returning to where we were - nothing ceded, entitlements and privileges intact?

Can we learn to identify, interrupt, and be taught by such circularities? Can we observe them in ourselves and the spaces in which we move? Can we learn to engage with paradox, namely how to dis-invest from the continuity of the current system while working within it and enabling something very different to emerge? (Andreotti et al, 2021).

Other kinds of questions to hold in mind (emerging of late from various critical and decolonial traditions including Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures) include:

- How to get closer to the edge of another possibility, holding conversations that don't end up over-determining the direction?
- How to interrupt harmful desires which we hold on to; harmful desires which hide behind promises of entitlements and securities?
- How to cultivate capacity for (more) honesty?
- Who is deciding? In whose name? For whose benefit? How come?

Such questions, if practised regularly, can support the disruptions and transformations necessary for a decolonising journey. They require practice however ... and stamina for discomfort. Indeed perhaps it is only once we understand the *difficulty* of decolonisation, the difficulty of transcending our rootedness in the modern-colonial imaginary, that something different will become possible (Pashby et al, 2020).

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IVCO 2021 THINK PIECE

Hierarchies of Place & Knowledge in Volunteering for Development

Alice Chadwick El-Ali

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A key finding from [Forum's recent research on COVID-19 and the future of volunteering for development](#) was the increasing recognition of national and community volunteers within IVCOs' programming. This was an existing movement within research and practice with calls to recognise where most development volunteering happens, which is within countries and communities in the Global South. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has accelerated the recognition of national and community volunteers within development due to their continued presence and work when international volunteers were either repatriated or programmes were discontinued or had their funding cut. In this short piece I am focusing on Forum's research recommendation to recognise national and community volunteers and adequately resource them. I aim to draw attention to the knowledge hierarchies that often get attached to the place-based categorisation of volunteers – "international", "national", and "community" – and the inequalities that produce them.

In development, geographic labels have a history of mapping onto knowledge hierarchies, [reflecting the colonial origins and structural racism of the development system](#). Despite efforts to move beyond such distinctions through increasing Global South leadership and direct funding to partner organisations, these hierarchies of place and knowledge persist. Those who are defined as community-based are working for the development of their own communities and their knowledge is often seen as local, relevant to the context of the community they are operating in. As such, community volunteers are brokers for ensuring development projects are designed and delivered with an understanding of the local context. National volunteers are defined by a broader knowledge base, but their knowledge is still often defined by their country context, which they are only able to move beyond when they gain experience volunteering or working in another country. These place-based hierarchies map onto differences in resourcing, support, and duty of care.

International and national volunteers can receive a substantial stipend, healthcare support and other benefits, whereas community volunteers often do not receive this type of support. In the [case studies accompanying Forum's recent research](#), it was shown that during COVID-19 some organisations cut community volunteers' stipends whilst maintaining those for national professional roles. In an example from my own research in Sierra Leone during a meeting between an international UN Volunteer and members of community-based organisations, a discussion arose about what support volunteers needed to carry out their work. The UN Volunteer said that being a volunteer meant having no expectations about any benefits attached to doing the work. A member of a community organisation disagreed and said that volunteers should be provided with what is necessary to carry out their work, just as the UN volunteer was provided with accommodation and support to do his work, community volunteers should be provided with food, water and transportation to support them to do theirs.

These hierarchies of knowledge and resources within volunteering reflect work in development more broadly. I was talking to a colleague recently who told me that as a national employee of a development agency in his country he can only be paid at a national level, whereas if he moved to a neighbouring country, he would be an international employee and receive a much higher salary and benefits package. Conversely, a UK national working in an African country admitted they earned far more working there than they would at home due to the benefits package offered to them. These anecdotal examples of employment within development are reflective of a deep-rooted [dual salary system that needs to be dismantled](#). Inequalities within development employment are of relevance to volunteering when we consider the [complex interaction between volunteering, remuneration and livelihoods within the sector](#).

There is a growing movement towards southern leadership of IVCOs and development agendas and an increase in focus on South-South volunteering models forming part of the decolonisation and localisation reckoning within the development and humanitarian space. However, these shifts alone do not necessarily overcome the place-based hierarchies in knowledge and access to resources outlined above, especially when it is community volunteers who face the most barriers in moving beyond their place-based designation and having their knowledge recognised as relevant beyond the place they are defined by.

Whilst spending time with community volunteers working on a development project in Sierra Leone as part of my PhD research, I was struck by a sense that in focusing on the local knowledge of community volunteers their expertise was stuck in their community setting. As members of one community spoke at a meeting about the challenges they were facing in terms of lack of access to healthcare and inadequate infrastructure, they showed how these problems were produced by national and global inequalities. The question IVCOs need to be asking is how they can recognise inequalities defined by place without reproducing long-standing hierarchies of knowledge that lead to those with more mobility and resources producing universal knowledge while those who are defined by their locale provide community context. The knowledge of volunteers who never leave their country or community is global knowledge in terms of the critiques, challenges and answers it poses to national and global inequities.

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IVCO 2021 THINK PIECE

To Hell with Good Intentions

Helge Espe

Senior Advisor for the Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (Norec)

This is commentary to a famous address by Monsignor Ivan Illich to the Conference on InterAmerican Student Projects in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1968.

Illich's mission was the voluntary withdrawal of all North American volunteers from Latin America. The full speech can be read [here](#). It has become a classic text of volunteering self-reflection, as it challenges many common narratives and perceptions, and has even been used in preparation courses for volunteers.

Ivan Illich (1926-2002) was an American priest, writer and public debater, who strongly criticised 'western' economic development models, consistently taking the perspective of the 'third world', as it was called. Younger volunteers may be surprised by his non-compromising language. However, the 1960s was a decade of sharp lines of opposition, divergence and political conflict in many spheres of society, not least in the USA, with growing opposition to the Vietnam War. The political left saw volunteering as an extension of North American public diplomacy, in a negative sense.

Illich criticises two aspects of North American international volunteering in particular, namely the self-image of the volunteer as a do-gooder and the middle class life-style values which the volunteers transmit to the Mexicans, but which at the same time are far out of reach for the host communities. Illich sees the result as utterly negative and imperialistic, stating, "The damage which volunteers do (...) is too high a price for the belated insight that they shouldn't have been volunteers in the first place".

The volunteer's wish to do good and the belief that one is useful for the host community and contributes to its development is pulled thoroughly apart. The do-gooders are primarily seen as being there to build their own images. Illich argues that there is 'a gulf' between how the volunteers and communities feel. He goes on to state, "You will not help anybody with your good intentions. ...The road to hell is paved with good intentions".

The middle class nature of the whole volunteering enterprise is also strongly criticised throughout the speech. "You cannot even meet the majority you pretend to serve..." he asserts. Illich points out the alliance between the North American volunteers and 'a tiny elite' in the host countries that speaks the right language and gives the visitors the feeling of usefulness, even of having sacrificed their time.

Is this still relevant today?

The basic volunteering model which is being criticised is that Global North donor countries send their people to the Global South to teach. This is still an important flow in international volunteering, but it has been modified. Today, even North-based volunteering agencies recruit a growing number of well-educated volunteers in the Global South to go to other countries in the South. A few agencies also facilitate South-to-North volunteering, making it more multi-directional.

Illich's description of the do-gooders' self-image may still be valid for a substantial chunk of Northern volunteers, abroad on an idealistic basis with relevant skills to help the Southern countries reach the SDGs. However, there is solid evidence that for many Northern volunteers, this narrative changes to a more humble one while on service. There is also a growing understanding that the intended effects in the host countries are minimal, and that the most important effects happen through engagement after returning home.

Since Illich's speech, the appearance of social media has provided a number of new platforms to build one's image and display the right attitudes, life choices, and group memberships. As regards the importance for the volunteer of telling others of one's good deeds, Illich is still spot on.

Regarding the middle class aspect of volunteer recruitment, little has changed since Illich's time. Both in the Global North and South, the main recruitment base is people who are well off, often with academic backgrounds and professional careers. Many agencies work explicitly to foster leadership, while people with vocational skills are a minority. With a more modern word, the North agencies and volunteers are in their echo-chambers with the elites of the South.

On the flip side, we can ask if Illich's attack on traditional volunteering is equally valid for South-South and South-to-North volunteering. Would it be relevant to accuse today's Southern volunteers to Norway and other countries of arrogance, ignorance, self-staging and harm-doing to the community? That question is left for you, dear reader, and we end with an optimistic new volunteering narrative 2021:

We are visiting you above all to learn, not to teach. We come from all sections of society. We need your viewpoints to improve at home. And as we speak, people from here are visiting us back home for the same purpose.

A few other selected comments on the piece can be found here:

- Elizabeth Coder, ACPA
- [Phuong Nguyen, Ecuador](#)
- [Omprakash network](#)
- [The Intag Project](#)
- [Stephen Danley, Camden](#)
- [Kathrine Koller, Thinking Beyond Borders](#)
- [Ryan Cooper](#)

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IVCO 2021 THINK PIECE

Decolonising Thinking & Practice of Volunteering *for* Development

Bianca Fadel
Northumbria University, UK

As we all try to find our feet again in the midst of a pandemic with so many concurrent crises unequally affecting countries and communities, decolonising the ways we study and practice volunteering has never been so relevant. More than a rhetorical exercise, this is an effort that requires academics and practitioners to reconsider our very notions of development and volunteering, as well as the assumptions about the ways volunteering offers a pathway to development.

When conducting my PhD fieldwork activities with local volunteers in Burundi, I was often asked about my area of studies. After initial attempts at describing my research as within 'international development', I quickly realised that qualifying development as 'international' was not only meaningless for my counterparts but also loaded with top-down assumptions around how development is achieved and who is responsible for that. Instead, describing my research as within 'community development' immediately resonated with those I met, who quickly understood my quest to analyse volunteering roles and experiences in this process. The challenge to the 'international' as the norm, therefore, resonates with the process of decolonising our understandings of both development and volunteering.

Colonial legacies continue to perpetuate power inequities from local to global scales. This, in turn, tends to determine whose voices are heard in which spaces, including when it comes to shaping volunteering agendas. In effect, the language used to conceptualise volunteering remains dominated by experiences from/within the global North. It overshadows African concepts such as '*Ikibiri*' in Burundi (work that is carried out together for someone in need) and '*Bulungi bwansi*' in Uganda (voluntary commitment for the good of the nation), the latter unearthed in

the context of the participatory and collaborative project Refugee Youth Volunteering Uganda (RYVU).¹ Northern-centred lenses on volunteering also limit our acknowledgement of practices around volunteer remuneration that are ubiquitous in African settings; crucial to livelihoods but also sometimes creating hierarchies and inequalities.² These persistent silences and exclusions narrow our understandings of the myriad kinds of voluntary labour that are part of how 'development' happens in practice.



COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITY IN A RURAL VILLAGE OF MAKAMBA PROVINCE, BURUNDI. PHOTOGRAPHER: BIANCA FADEL, 2019

- 1 RYVU is an interdisciplinary research project funded by the UK's Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), ES/S005439/1. It aims to understand whether volunteering by refugee youth in Uganda helps their skills acquisition and employability and reduces the inequalities they experience. The project is a collaboration between Northumbria University (UK), Mbarara University of Science and Technology (Uganda), Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda) and Loughborough University (UK). For more information on the project: www.rylvu.org
- 2 Matt Baillie Smith, Bianca Fadel, Aisling O'Loughlen and Shaun Hazeldine (2020), 'Volunteering Hierarchies in the Global South: Remuneration and Livelihoods', *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00254-1>>

The common description of local communities as 'hosts', for instance, preserves the verticality of such relationships and implies a level of passiveness from those welcoming international volunteers. At worst, it comes with the assumption that local partners are supposed to 'entertain' international guests who are often unfamiliar with their context and particular vulnerabilities. Challenging this narrative requires building truly horizontal relationships between 'partners' that can collaborate to address locally-defined needs rather than impose external agendas. This is part of what is defined elsewhere as 'supportive solidarity', in which "the role of external actors and agencies is to listen and take time to understand existing community-based models of social support and voluntary action and learn from community members about what types of support would amplify or strengthen these approaches"¹.

Understanding how to operationalise models of 'supportive solidarity' in international volunteering spaces requires an honest assessment of the benefits and mischiefs of the types of practices that were prevalent in the sector before COVID-19. This can then encourage donors, organisations and the volunteer sector as a whole to (re)frame its priorities as we – slowly and unequally – regain or rein in our international mobility. Importantly, these changes need to be grounded in transformed and continuous conversations and relations with community actors. Decolonising this process, therefore, starts with challenging the very notion of volunteering *for* development to question "what sorts of volunteering lead to what kinds of development and for whom?"². Only by recognising this complexity can we then shift our research and practice towards building up horizontal collaborations and understanding the relationships between volunteering and community development – as well as the potential roles of international volunteers in this process.

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- 1 Alice Chadwick and Bianca Fadel (2020), *Volunteerism and Community Resilience: Locally Owned Solutions Delivering Impact*, Volunteering Together to Enable Change and Create a Better World Context Papers (Washington DC, 2020), p. 7. <<https://www.iave.org/iavewp/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Volunteerism-and-Community-Resilience-Locally-Owned-Solutions-Delivering-Impact.pdf>>.
 - 2 Alice Chadwick, Bianca Fadel, and Chris Millora (2021), 'Ethnographies of Volunteering: Providing Nuance to the Links Between Volunteering and Development', *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 2021 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00389-9>>.

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IVCO 2021 THINK PIECE

Inequalities & Imbalances in Research on Volunteering for Development

Dr. Chris Millora

Research Associate, University of East Anglia

Over the years, the exploration into the links between volunteering and development has developed into an important research field – generating useful insights for academics, practitioners and policymakers. Volunteer organisations, NGOs and aid agencies also contribute to this knowledge base as they utilise research to improve their practice and better engage with their volunteers.

But despite such interest, research-based understanding of volunteering in so-called Global South countries remains limited (Butcher and Einolf 2017), particularly, of the experiences of volunteers who, themselves, come from marginalised communities (Lewis 2015; Lopez-Franco and Shahrokhi 2015). In addition, it has been argued that dominant definitions of volunteering have been regarded as 'universal' despite being developed by analysing volunteering practices in the Global North (Hazeldine and Baillie Smith, 2015; Butcher and Einolf 2017; Millora 2020). This meant that certain forms of volunteering are privileged over others (Hazeldine and Baillie Smith, 2015). Several researchers on international volunteering have tended to use an 'exogenous lens' – whereby volunteering in the Global South is studied using frameworks developed elsewhere, often from Northern scholarship. Therefore, the lenses through which volunteering practices in the Global South are understood, and the yardsticks used to measure and evaluate them, often carries a 'Northern bias' (Butcher and Einolf 2017).

Such imbalance motivated me to conduct an ethnographic study on the volunteering practices of informal settlers and young people living with HIV/AIDS in two communities in the Philippines. Through this research, I wanted to expand dominant definitions of international volunteering that often sees countries in the Global South (such as the Philippines) as 'hosts' of development programmes from the Global North (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011). At the same, I sought to challenge the fact that people labeled as 'poor' and 'vulnerable' are often seen as 'recipients' of volunteering programmes rather than as the volunteers themselves. My study builds on a range of research that has explored the complexity of volunteering in various contexts (see for example, Jenkins 2009, Banerjee 2011; Lewis 2015; Burns et. al. 2015). Engaging with this literature and approaches taught me two important lessons in the attempt to redress the above imbalances in volunteering scholarship.

I found that an important starting point is revisiting the kinds of (research) questions that are being asked. For example, the common query 'how does volunteering lead to development?' could be expanded into 'How can volunteering lead to what kind of development and for whom?'. The latter recognises that 'development' could come in many forms – peace building, gender equality, health equity, social justice, etc. Asking 'for whom' signals awareness of the power dynamics and inequalities in any development effort and that volunteers are not a homogenous group. Volunteers are women, youth, people with disabilities, informal settlers, indigenous peoples – they have varying volunteering experiences, activities, aspirations and are being impacted by development differently. This also encourages organisations such as IVCOs to not only focus on the experiences of the international volunteer but also those of local volunteers in their partner communities.

Apart from reconfiguring questions, I think one must also look into how they are finding the answers. Cross-country comparisons, global surveys and volunteer work measurements are important, but they only tell us part of the story. Ethnographic approaches that focus on understanding practices of everyday life have the capacity to generate highly contextual insights on how volunteering is enmeshed into local culture and wider helping activities (Chadwick, Fadel and Millora 2021). Such community-based research approaches can reveal power relationships at the local level and the possibility of volunteering to counterintuitively expand inequalities rather than narrow them. Much impact is also generated through action research by practitioners

where the main aim is not only producing 'new' knowledge but also changing and improving practices. There are also participatory approaches to research where volunteers themselves take on the role of research leaders or key research partners (as opposed to subjects) (see for instance, Burns et. al., 2015). Through these research methods, we can gain insight into the volunteering practices these communities are already engaged with before launching into our development programmes and interventions.

I am aware that my suggestions of expanding research questions and methods might lead to more questions rather than answers – an outcome that might be less expected by practitioners and policymakers who may be concerned with concrete targets and indicators. However, I believe that making research a more serendipitous and exploratory exercise (rather than fixed) could generate useful insights and expand understandings on the links between volunteering and development. This is important because how we understand volunteering and development influences the way we 'do' volunteering and development. Being aware of and challenging imbalances in research on this area could potentially lead to more inclusive practices and interventions.

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IVCO 2021 THINK PIECE

“A Poor Man Cannot Volunteer”

Moses Okech, Matt Baillie Smith, Sarah Mills & Bianca Fadel
Refugee Youth Volunteering Uganda Project (RYVU)

The title of this provocation is taken from an interview with a government employee as part of our large interdisciplinary research project 'Refugee Youth Volunteering Uganda' ([RYVU](#)). Interviews with stakeholders in the first phase of the research captured views on the role of youth volunteering in Uganda. This striking quote speaks to issues of inclusion as well as to who decides what kinds of volunteering count. Our analysis reveals how volunteering for skills acquisition and livelihoods is promoted by various actors, but the opportunity to volunteer (and the form it takes) is shaped by wider inequalities. Our research also highlights how some actors and policy makers view volunteering as the preserve of the well-off, excluding the ways vulnerable communities practice care, solidarity and self-interest through volunteering.

Our research has identified how volunteering has diverse and often contradictory meanings in Uganda. These include: its role in community and volunteer wellbeing; its role in enhancing livelihoods and securing work; as a mechanism for service delivery. But different forms of volunteering are not valued and recognised equally, with everyday forms rooted in Ugandan histories of community action often sidelined in favour of forms that fit the norms of aid and development organisations.

Policy making for volunteering in Uganda and globally strongly emphasises its impacts on youth skills and youth empowerment. But despite this, there has been a lack of robust and systematic evidence in Uganda backing this claim up. It is clear from our research that how volunteering impacts skills is related to existing socio-economic inequalities. Different vulnerabilities impact who can access different kinds of volunteering opportunities, and what benefits they might get from those, shaped by wider power dynamics.

Although the focus in youth volunteering policy is that it helps skills and employability to ultimately reduce inequalities, inequalities exist in accessing volunteering opportunities and in areas such as remuneration. For example, in Uganda many young refugees are motivated to volunteer not only to help the community and learn new skills, but also to receive a small remuneration as a valuable income stream.¹ However, it is clear from our project that there are differences in who can access these opportunities, with often only professionals able to access remunerated forms of volunteering. A skilled refugee may use volunteering to gain qualifications that are recognised in Uganda, improving their employability but not necessarily their skills. A refugee without professional skills may wish to volunteer to build their skills yet may struggle to access the opportunities that allow for this. Ultimately, opportunities and experiences of volunteering are shaped by poverty, geography, and existing vulnerabilities.

Despite the assumptions from some policy makers, our survey data shows that the 'poor man' definitely is volunteering, as nearly half of the current volunteers in our sample come from households reporting a monthly income of less than 100,000 Ugandan Shilling.² But the format and potential benefits of that volunteering is shaped by their poverty and vulnerability.

¹ In our extensive survey of over 3000 young refugees (aged 15-24 years old), the motivations of current volunteers included 'help the community' (53%), learn or gain new skills (40.4%) and 'make friends' (35%), but then strikingly 'get money (33.5%)', even ahead of 'get a job' (27.5%) and other recognised motivations to volunteer. For more details of our survey and wider project, visit www.ryvu.org

² For comparison, the average minimum monthly wage is 130,000 Ugandan Shilling.

Research as part of RYVU suggests that better evidence is needed on who benefits from what kinds of volunteering in particular contexts to ensure volunteering does not reinforce and further entrench skills, employability and other inequalities. The research raises three questions that are particularly relevant to the theme of the conference, "Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality":

- Do volunteer engaging organisations understand and address how vulnerability shapes access to and experiences of their volunteering opportunities?
- Does being more inclusive in volunteering help address the inequalities and vulnerabilities that shape the lives of groups such as young refugees, whose voluntary labour is sought?
- Does the spread of ideas of volunteering originating in the Global North undermine efforts for more inclusive volunteering that tackle inequality within the Global South?

Refugee Youth Volunteering Uganda (RYVU)

RYVU is an interdisciplinary research project funded by the UK's Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (ES/S005439/1). It aims to understand whether volunteering by refugee youth in Uganda helps their skills acquisition and employability and reduces the inequalities they experience. The project is a collaboration between Northumbria University (UK), Mbarara University of Science and Technology (Uganda), Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda) and Loughborough University (UK). For more information on the project and the full team, visit www.ryvu.org

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IVCO 2021 THINK PIECE

Digitalisation, Diversity & Inclusion in Volunteering for Development

Helene Perold & Benjamin Haas

Digital technology has been a significant force in how, where and when people volunteer, but in 2020 COVID-19 produced a massive change in how volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) use the internet and mobile technology in their operations and programmes. This article highlights some aspects of how digitalisation has impacted on inclusive volunteering as a pathway to other forms of citizenship and peace building.

Adaptation & Innovation

Following the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic in 2020, small and large VIOs had to rely on digital technology to work from home, support their staff and volunteers, and remain relevant in the new context. Online meetings became commonplace and IVCOs were able to convene global consultations, notwithstanding the challenges of time zones, languages, and unstable connectivity in some countries.

Some VIOs reported using technology to hold online concerts, organise fundraising campaigns, and conduct internet-based advocacy. Using mobile phones and the internet, a feminist movement in Peru extended psychosocial support to women who were victims of gender-based violence, but who would previously not have had such access.

With COVID-19-related travel restrictions imposed worldwide in 2020, many IVCOs offered their repatriated volunteers the option of working online with their partner organisations. Initially the uptake was low and some repatriated volunteers found the online support a poor substitute for on-site engagement. A number of IVCOs have since developed sophisticated online volunteering systems that aim to address challenges such as lack of in-country experience.

Limitations on Inclusivity

Issues of exclusion soon emerged in the new context and VIOs are particularly concerned to 'leave no one behind'. In Peru, a climate change social movement initially struggled to build the commitment of young activists: *"Trying to fill this gap through Zoom is almost impossible."* In Uganda, the reliance on technology changed the profile of the young women reached by the YESS programme – from young girls in schools to older girls who had access to mobile phones. In some cases democratic organisational governance was threatened where national leadership members were located in different cities and connectivity was not available.

Driven partly by concerns about exclusion and lack of reciprocity, a debate has emerged about whether virtual volunteering will replace face-to-face volunteering, because *"digital does not work everywhere"*: Volunteer Canada reported that 56% of its members were able to adapt some programming to virtual delivery, but 20% to 30% could not. Nevertheless, Naua in Jordan is confident that in future *"everything needs to become a couple of clicks"*.

Will digital further widen the divide?

Despite the growing uptake of digital technology, the persistent digital divide requires looking closely at the five 'As':

- Availability – to whom is the technology (un)available?
- Affordability – for whom is the technology (un)affordable?
- Awareness – who is (un)aware of the technology?
- Abilities – who has the digital literacy to use the technology?
- Agency – who has the self-belief to use the technology?

Inequalities in the availability of digital infrastructure undermine efforts to build an enabling volunteering environment because of systemic interlocking factors that exclude the participation of many grassroots VIOs in the digital space. In one country, extending the reach of digital infrastructure depends on introducing more competition in the digital space which is dominated by a private sector monopoly.

In Peru, COVID-19 is impacting in a small way on the digital divide: *"COVID-19 has pushed people to digitalize. ... We now have a lot of families that have internet"*; nevertheless, even here internet access is not available in all sectors e.g. to micro-entrepreneurs.

Systemic Bias & Discrimination

Technological tools are not neutral and sometimes perpetuate stereotypes through 'algorithmic bias' instead of eliminating them. For example, Google and other search engines prioritise national volunteering opportunities over those at local level. This constrains access to the full range of volunteer opportunities, which in turn hampers inclusivity.

Gender features strongly in how the internet and other platforms are constructed. For example, the English version of Wikipedia seems to collect 'neutral' knowledge, but it is dominated by male volunteer editors, which introduces a bias against the perspectives of women. In other contexts men can control how women use ICT at home, while online abuse can translate into offline threats and violence against women. Mobile phones with tracking devices can be used to restrict women's mobility, but can also ensure their safety and security.

Conclusion

Volunteering for development in an increasingly digital world faces the same power structures and forms of discrimination as it does offline. Powerful interests in the private sector and governments shape the nature, reach and costs of internet provision, which triggers crucial questions for inclusivity in volunteering for development.

Endnotes

- 1 This contribution draws heavily on the following sources: (1) a paper commissioned by IAVE on Volunteering and the Digital World (Perold, Haas & Goodrow, 2020) available at <https://www.iave.org/virtualforums2020/>; (2) data from a study on COVID-19 and the Future of Volunteering for Development (Perold, Mati, Allum & Lough, 2021) conducted for the International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) available at <https://forum-ids.org/research/#results>; and (3) data from a research study conducted for IAVE on Volunteer Leadership: The COVID-19 Experience (Mati, Allum & Perold/IAVE forthcoming, September 2021 at www.iave.org). Note that some quoted matter in this paper has been edited for clarity and brevity.
- 2 See for example Lough, B., & Mati, J. M., 2012; Caprara, D., Mati, J. M., Obadare, E., & Perold, H., 2013.
- 3 International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCOs) concentrate largely on sending/placing international volunteers in host countries. Some are funded by governments while others operate more independently as NGOs. Volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) operate in countries, sometimes in partnership with IVCOs, as well as in regions and sometimes in the international volunteering space.
- 4 Perold *et al.*, 2020b: 19
- 5 Movimiento Manuela Ramos, Peru. (Perold *et al.*, 2020c: 19)
- 6 Perold *et al.*, 2021b:19
- 7 Movimiento Ciudadano Frente al Cambio Climático (Citizen Movement against Climate Change), Peru, 2020.
- 8 The Youth Exchange South to South (YESS) programme (supported by Norec) forms part of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and hosts exchange participants in Ghana, Rwanda and Uganda. (See Perold *et al.*, 2021c:40)
- 9 Perold *et al.*, 2021c:21
- 10 Volunteer Canada, Volunteer Ireland and Naua in Jordan were interviewed for IAVE 2021 *op. cit.*
- 11 Figures for July 2021 show that 66.6% of the world's population use mobile phones; 61% of the world's population are internet users; and social media penetration is almost 57% of the world's population. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-july-global-statshot> Issues of exclusion are evident in the lack of information about digital prevalence in rural areas; reportedly research in these contexts was made more challenging by COVID-19.
- 12 Vota, W., 2019
- 13 For example, VIONet, Sierra Leone (*op cit*) noted that many of its members *"don't have the app, the phone, they don't have internet [and] the internet is not strong enough. In fact, they're using their phone data, which is quite bad; they just load small data which they can use for a call for a minute, seconds, [then] it's finished."*
- 14 Reported by Volunteer Support Program Guyana interviewed for the IAVE 2021 research study *op. cit.*
- 15 Reported by Perú Voluntario, interviewed for the IAVE 2021 research study *op. cit.*
- 16 Rastetter, 2020: 164
- 17 Points of Light was interviewed for the IAVE 2021 research study *op. cit.*
- 18 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_bias_on_Wikipedia In recognition of such bias, an initiative called Herstory was formed in 2016 to help close the gender knowledge gap on Arabic Wikipedia. Young volunteers produce content about gender equality and women and girls' rights. See Gul, M., 2020.

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IVCO 2021 THINK PIECE

COVID-19, Inequality & Volunteering for Development

Considering a Capability Approach

Dr. Alok Rath

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The COVID-19 pandemic, the worst in 100 years, has thus far taken a heavy toll on human lives and quality of living across the world, and has been particularly damaging to fragile national health, social protection, and economic systems in the Global South.

The World Social Report (2020:3)¹ reveals that income inequality within countries, including most developed countries with China and India, has grown substantially between 1990 and 2015. The share of income of the richest 1% of the global population has increased in 46 out of 57 countries where data was compared. A recent World Bank estimate² suggests that about 97 million people were pushed into poverty in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A Brookings study³ (2020) suggested that as many as 60 countries, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are likely to be off-track to meet the SDG target of eradicating poverty, exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A question naturally emerges - while almost all developed economies have experienced negative economic growth in 2020/21, why has the pandemic inflicted the highest and severest social and human impact in the Global South, particularly in the least developed and emerging economies? A series of global studies and evidence in 2020-21 attribute the impact of the pandemic to two major systemic and structural problems. One is a huge capability gap between nations, and the second, a widening capability deficit between groups of people within nations.

So, how do we address this? My argument is two-fold: first, to recognise the root cause of capability inequality and second, to address this inequality systematically and sustainably by using the volunteering for development methodology as a mainstream development approach in national development strategies and plans. Why?

Amartya Sen's work (2000)⁴ on the capability approach focuses on creating opportunities, awareness, and mobilisation for poor, marginalised, and vulnerable people to be able to access basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment, and social protection without barriers. However, a market and private sector-dominant approach to development, as against a people-centric one, has continued to flourish. The 2008 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, not to mention the extreme climate crisis, expose the inherent systemic weakness in the disempowerment of the most marginalised and vulnerable people and communities.

Increasing evidence from development organisations applying a volunteering for development methodology suggests that it enables development actors to adopt a root cause analysis (focused on exclusion, accountability and resilience), and to involve the most marginalised and vulnerable communities to lead their development journey and apply a relational volunteering model⁵ to build community capability and system-strengthening for accountability to reduce poverty and inequality.

1 World Social Report (2020). United Nations: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/01/World-Social-Report-2020-FullReport.pdf>

2 Daniel, G.M, Nishant Y, Christoph L, R.Andres C.A & Haoyu W. June 24, 2021. Updated Estimates of the Impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Turning the corner on the pandemic in 2021? World Bank. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-COVID-19-global-poverty-turning-corner-pandemic-2021> (Accessed 7th October 2021).

3 Homi Kharas & Kristofer Hamel (May 6, 2020). Turning Back the Poverty Clock: How will COVID-19 impact the world's poorest people? Brookings: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/05/06/turning-back-the-poverty-clock-how-will-COVID-19-impact-the-worlds-poorest-people/> (Accessed 9th May 2020).

4 Sen, A.(2000).Development as Freedom. Anchor Books.

5 Valuing Volunteering: The Role of Volunteering in Sustainable Development (2015). IDS & VSO. https://www.vsointernational.org/sites/default/files/the_role_of_volunteering_in_sustainable_development_2015_vso_ids.pdf

The volunteering for development methodology may emerge as a human capability model for the SDGs and social justice as it builds the voice and choice of the most vulnerable, marginalised and excluded groups of people. Volunteers work in multiple settings, from communities to government ministries. They connect communities with the duty bearers and stakeholders (the state and the market) to demand and access quality, accountable and basic services that meet their well-being and a right to life with dignity.

A million people around the world volunteer, of which 70% are informal, contributing directly in their own communities (UNV 2018: x)¹. This is a powerful resource, and we need to better understand, recognise and apply its contribution to nations' social outcomes. Through the OECD's Better Life Initiative, countries have started to develop much-needed policies to understand the importance of well-being measurements² that directly reflect on improvement to people's capabilities. It is time for donors, as well as national and international frameworks, to adopt a volunteering for development methodology that aims to plan, deliver, and measure the capabilities of the most vulnerable and marginalised communities. This will enhance these communities' ability to manage and overcome emergencies such as COVID-19, and will continue to build marginalised and vulnerable people's chances of realising their rights under the Sustainable Development Goals.

¹ The Thread that binds: Volunteerism & Community Resilience State of the World's Volunteerism Report (2018). UNV

² How is Life? 2020: Measuring well-being (March 2020). OECD

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IVCO 2021 THINK PIECE

The Challenges & Opportunities of Inclusive Online Volunteering

Elaine Sly
CBM Ireland

Traditional volunteering is shifting. The current pandemic has forced us to adapt to a new world where virtual arrangements and remote working are now becoming common practices. Although we have all learned and rapidly adapted to this changing situation, challenges still exist. These new working methods have presented positive opportunities, but they have also introduced and amplified existing challenges. As an online volunteer with CBM Ireland, I have experienced first-hand the benefits and barriers of working completely remotely and navigating the world of online volunteering. In this Think Piece, I will highlight some opportunities as well as barriers I have grown to appreciate based on my experience, as well as learnings from the project I am working on-VIVID: Technical Assistance in Humanitarian Response, Ensuring Valuable Volunteering and Inclusion of persons with Disabilities. Overall, I think online volunteering is hugely positive and a significant way forward for inclusive volunteering opportunities.

Challenges

1. Digital Accessibility

A rapid research study was conducted by the volunteer sending organisation Viatores Christi, exploring the opportunities and challenges of online volunteering for humanitarian aid. Results have shown most organisations are not educated on the importance of digital accessibility. A challenge with online volunteering is the complex task of technology. It can be extremely overwhelming learning how to navigate an organisation's online space. Most people have different levels of competence in terms of technology, and it is often very difficult to teach someone remotely how to access and follow certain programmes and training. In addition, most online platforms are not accessible for persons with disabilities. This can compound barriers for enabling diverse practices in online volunteering. There are many digital accessibility toolkits available to overcome this challenge. Moreover, capacity building for transforming an organisation's practices can improve this along with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) being involved and leading the process of change.

2. Lack of Resources

Research results also highlighted that most organisations primarily identify costs as a barrier to facilitate remote volunteering opportunities. For example, cost-related barriers create obstacles to access training resources to take on volunteers in a remote capacity and to have the appropriate equipment in place. Training is considered important as research participants highlighted high levels of concern on how to communicate effectively and build relationships to ensure an effective impact. These challenges can be addressed with appropriate planning, resource investment, programme design and monitoring and evaluation.

Opportunities

1. Inclusion

Persons with disabilities are often excluded from opportunities to volunteer offline. Online volunteering has opened up many opportunities for people with disabilities, and other often excluded groups, to get involved in the organisations they have wanted to. For example, by allowing people from different geographical locations to work remotely.

Inclusive online volunteering could become significantly more universal in the humanitarian and development sectors if organisations consult OPDs in training their teams on digital accessibility.

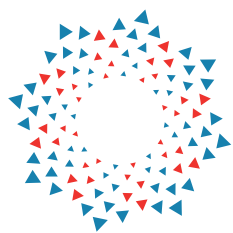
2. Diversity

Online volunteering provides opportunities to shift programmes which exclude specific groups, such as persons with disabilities, from participation in humanitarian aid and to play an important and effective role in the future.

The VIVID-T research states that "Persons with disabilities, persons who have settled in Europe, and other groups such as the long term unemployed, traditionally excluded from volunteering for humanitarian aid, offer valuable and often unique perspectives that can improve the EU's humanitarian responses". Overall, it is clear that diversity should be considered an added value to programmatic strategies.

Disability-inclusive-development seeks to include people with disabilities in humanitarian aid processes by recognising their potential, valuing and respecting their contributions and perspectives, honouring their dignity, and effectively responding to their needs.

To sum up this Think Piece, online volunteering and its ability to provide opportunities far outweigh the challenges for humanitarian aid. Online volunteering contributes to the sector by connecting and empowering people, realising their full potential, building futures, and contributing to mutual learning. However, these opportunities need to be enabled for all and must respect the SDG principle of 'Leaving No One Behind' in order to be considered effective and successful.



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