



IVCO 2021

Conference Report

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IVCO
THESSALONIKI 2021

act:onaid

forum

Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality.

IVCO 2021 was hosted by ActionAid Hellas from the 16th-20th October 2021, in Thessaloniki, Greece. This was a fully digital event, broadcast through the Hopin platform.



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Introduction

The IVCO conference:

- brought together heads of agencies and other key stakeholders from volunteering for development organisations from around the globe.
- is the annual conference of the International Forum for Volunteering for Development (Forum) and stands for “International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations’ Conference”.

The theme of IVCO 2021:

- was Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality and
- was framed by three sub-topics: Decolonisation, Digitalisation and Directionality.

This report:

- draws out key points and arguments from IVCO 2021.
- highlights exemplary good practices presented at the conference.
- aims to carve out where the conference suggests the sector should go from here.
- does not set out to cover all sessions or presentations but does include links to all session recordings and to the research and think papers that accompanied the conference.



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.**

Thematic frame of the conference

The questions of how volunteering for development (V4D) can embrace all forms of diversity and how it can ensure that "no one is left behind" were the main focus of IVCO 2021. Therefore, the different thematic sessions connected broader debates around diversity and inclusion with discussions on the decolonisation of V4D programmes and organisations. While diversity and inclusion have to be analysed in the context of local or national efforts around including a diverse group of people in volunteering programmes, decolonisation draws attention to historical legacies, post-colonial power relations and structural racism on a local and global scale. Both debates are ultimately centred around questions of power, privilege, structural discrimination and mechanisms of exclusion and were therefore addressed jointly at the conference.

IVCO 2021 aimed to link both debates by inviting researchers, practitioners, and volunteers to exchange best practices, discuss the barriers preventing inclusive volunteering on the part of institutions, societies, organisations, and volunteers, and recommend solutions. Over the course of these sessions, not only opportunities and challenges of the sectors' digital transformation were discussed, but also the possibilities of new models and directionalities to no longer restrict V4D to sending volunteers from traditional donor countries in an effort to connect international, national and local volunteers for more sustainable impacts – in the spirit of decoloniality.

Before the conference, Gerasimos Kouvaras (Country Director of ActionAid Hellas and Member of the Forum Board) explained the reasoning behind the conference topic and its sub-topics in a comprehensive introduction by posing 44 questions – many of which were addressed by the 72 speakers from 33 countries in 17 sessions at IVCO 2021.

→ Introductory Paper: [44 Questions About Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality](#)

By Gerasimos Kouvaras

→ SESSION:

Creating an Inclusive Volunteering Environment for Global Equality



AIMS OF THE SESSION:

- 1 unpack what it means to create an inclusive volunteering environment for global equality.
- 2 challenge the V4D sector to think and respond in new ways.

Addressing power, privilege, and structural racism is essential to more diverse and inclusive V4D programmes.

The diversity lens should not individuate differences, but commit to dismantling systemic inequalities. Decoloniality and intersectionality are essential analytical frameworks within the broader context of global and post-colonial power structures.

"We know that volunteerism can be a powerful vehicle for change. It can break down barriers and connect communities to engage in a common purpose; but to truly foster an inclusive environment for volunteers, we must first understand what diversity and inclusion mean in the context of international volunteering and of decolonisation. Diversity without decolonisation is not enough to bring equality and fairness."



Melanie Gow

AVI – Australian Volunteers International

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



Different approaches for decolonising V4D in practice are already practiced by some IVCOs and should be discussed further, such as (1) Rethinking “development” as a foundational concept of volunteering, (2) integrating decolonial thinking and approaches into quality standards, logic models, theories of change as well as into volunteer training and preparation, (3) Power-sharing and power shift measures, (4) Localisation of programmes and the development of new models and directionalities.

→ **Framing Paper: [Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality – Linking Decolonisation & Diversity](#)**

By Benjamin Haas & Victor Moinina

“TRUE AND AUTHENTIC LOCALISATION IS A STRENGTH-BASED, CO-CREATED SPACE WHERE THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY ARE AT THE ABSOLUTE CENTRE.”



Cristina Cruz-Hubbard
Peace Corps

The Global Volunteering Standard holds IVCOs to high standards around diversity and inclusion, but how we reach those standards and the inclusive ambition we've set for our own organisations isn't necessarily always a clear path.

Three main issues that humanity faces at the moment: (1) inequality, (2) conflict of ideology and identity, (3) climate crisis. In the face of these issues, we should reframe international

volunteering: From the traditional North-South orientation towards embracing and valuing of South-South and South-North, local and reciprocal volunteering models.

Such a paradigm shift can create shared experiences and understandings of our common destiny instead of looking at problems from a North-South perspective.

“INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY BECOMES EMBEDDED IN EVERY INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMME. VOLUNTEERS ARE NOT ONLY THERE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS, BUT ALSO TO COME TOGETHER & TO CREATE A SHARED UNDERSTANDING.”



Ashraf Patel
Pravah & ComMutiny/The Youth Collective

GOOD PRACTICE

Youth

Togo National Volunteerism Agency – AGODE Kossi Mensan Edem

- Volunteering programme for young people who are illiterate or who have dropped out of school (18-35 yrs).
- The programme strengthens civic commitment, improves the level of public safety and cleanliness in cities through the mission of the volunteers while also improving the socio-economic integration of the youth by promoting their access to social-professional inclusion.
- The young people are recruited in their villages and serve in their localities for six months.
- Over 27,000 people have benefitted from the programme.

→ **Think Piece:** [Decolonising Thinking & Practice of Volunteering for Development](#)

By Bianca Fadel

→ **SESSION:**[Decolonisation of V4D](#)**AIMS OF THE SESSION:**

- 1 Discuss how to effectively tackle power imbalances between international and local volunteers.
- 2 Explore possibilities of reshaping programme design and practices to consider the history, culture and context of host communities.
- 3 Reflect on and challenging current V4D research and practice from a decolonial perspective.

“THE CONNECTION BETWEEN COLONISATION AND OUR WORK WITHIN THE VOLUNTEERING FOR DEVELOPMENT SECTOR IS UNDENIABLE. [...] IT IS OBVIOUSLY A VERY COMPLEX PICTURE, BUT FOR US IN THE V4D SECTOR, IT IS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL THAT WE ADDRESS AND EMBRACE THIS ISSUE SO THAT WE CAN UNDERTAKE OUR IMPORTANT WORK WITHOUT UNDERMINING THE PRINCIPLES OF GLOBAL EQUITY.”



Stephen Goodman
CEO of Volunteer Service Abroad

Making hierarchies of knowledge visible is critical for decolonising V4D. While many international volunteering schemes now focus on South-South volunteering, the narrative that volunteers of the Global South are recipients of development programmes and poor people the receivers of service from wealthy and benevolent givers is still persistent.

“DECOLONISATION IS THE PROCESS OF UNDOING AND GIVING UP SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POWER AND RESTORING WHAT HAS BEEN TAKEN AWAY IN THE PAST. [...] DECOLONISATION IS NOT A METAPHOR FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION, NOR IS IT A REPLACEMENT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE EFFORTS. TO BE DECOLONIAL IN OUR EFFORTS IS AN ASPIRATION TO RESTORE, RENEW, ELEVATE, REDISCOVER, ACKNOWLEDGE, AND VALIDATE THE MULTIPLICITY OF LIVES, LIVED EXPERIENCES, CULTURE, AND KNOWLEDGE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, PEOPLE OF COLOUR, AND COLONISED PEOPLE, AS WELL AS TO DE-CENTRE HETERO- AND CIS-NORMATIVITY, GENDER HIERARCHIES AND RACIAL PRIVILEGE.”



Aarathi Krishnan
UNDP

There are incongruences between what we find as a dominant image of a volunteer and what actually happens on the ground in many contexts of the Global South. Decolonisation means understanding pre-existing volunteerism systems, informal networks of support, local leadership among the volunteers and building on that before launching our own development programmes and interventions.

To recast and rethink V4D through the lens of decolonisation requires an analysis of power: Who does what? Who sets the agenda? Who gets what and who decides what?

Decolonisation also means engaging communities and leading them to define the change they want.

Some speakers argue that we should get rid of the term “development,” as it is a hegemonic concept based on the colonial discourse of the “modern and civilised” Global North as being opposed to the “uncivilised and backwards” Global South. It has severe depoliticising implications, and even more progressive definitions, such as the SDGs, will not unmake the problematic web of meanings tied to the concept.

Other speakers opt to change the terminology from “volunteering for development” to “volunteering and development,” which would allow to separately unpack what both terms mean and open up space for different definitions of volunteering and development in different places and contexts.

→ **Think Piece:** [Hierarchies of Place & Knowledge in Volunteering for Development](#)

By Alice Chadwick El-Ali

→ **Think Piece:** [What is Decolonisation Asking of Us?](#)

By Sive Bresnihan



The Singapore International Foundation's (SIF) Young Social Entrepreneurs Programme provides young changemakers with more than just a network, but also a family of likeminded individuals seeking to make a positive difference in the world.
Photo thanks to Singapore International Foundation.

“When I speak of hierarchies of knowledge, I am referring to the way that certain definitions and concepts of volunteering and development are valued over others. And for me, efforts to decolonise should involve interrogating who has the power to name and to define as to what counts as volunteering and what counts as development.”



Chris Millora
Research Associate/University of East Anglia

→ **SESSION:**
Directionality – Emerging V4D Modalities



AIMS OF THE SESSION:

- 1 Explore the strategies to build a diverse volunteering ecosystem towards more reciprocal relationships.
- 2 Discuss the challenges organisations face in implementing such new modalities and how to overcome them.

Directionality refers to the geographic nature of volunteer engagement and the movement of people in different directions in the volunteer space. But it can also apply to national volunteers assigned to other parts of the country and community volunteers assigned to neighbouring countries or different social spaces in their communities.

Stronger enabling environments across the Global South mean that V4D programmes are no longer restricted to traditional donor countries. With significant new actors that send volunteers, the future of volunteering is multi-polar and multi-directional with shared goals but diverse approaches to V4D.

COVID-19 has accelerated online volunteering and national volunteering in place of international volunteering. It has forced agencies to focus more on national volunteering opportunities and models, but these responses have also brought new benefits and advantages in their own right. The emerging volunteering world is then one of horizontality and reciprocity. Reciprocity and mutual learning become more important within those new modalities and partnerships.

Community volunteers are increasingly seen as contributing in a very particular and unique approach to local development. However, it is important to note that community volunteers are not new, they have existed for centuries. The sector should be careful with its language and narratives about these local volunteers in order not to create new hierarchies and reproduce colonial mentalities about activities in the Global South.

“VERY OFTEN YOU GET A GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS BECAUSE THEY'RE LOCAL AND YOU GET A TECHNICAL EXPERTISE DESCRIPTION OF VOLUNTEERS WHEN THEY ARE INTERNATIONAL. WHEREAS, OF COURSE, COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS HAVE INCREDIBLE EXPERTISE, SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND ABILITIES. SO THESE LANGUAGES ARE A REAL ISSUE.”



Matt Baillie Smith
 University of Northumbria

"If we're not actively working to decolonise our practice, we are in fact, reinforcing the status quo. Yes, the landscape is starting to shift somewhat. However, it is really moving at a snail's pace, deeply entrenched practices, such as global North centred decision-making, have really been critiqued for decades. Yet, they are still the norm. These conversations are happening, but they need to happen more. And at scale."



Leigh Mathews
AltoLearn

Blended volunteering approaches will become more and more important in V4D, meaning a complementary approach with a real interplay between international and national and community volunteers. This can lead to more significant impact and empowerment of primary actors by putting the development outcome at the centre of interest, and from there decide which type of volunteer is best suited for that specific purpose, rather than placing the volunteering experience of a Northern volunteer at the centre.

“AS WE KNOW, FROM THE LONG HISTORY OF NORTH-SOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN THE INTERNATIONAL SPACE, DIRECTIONALITY INVOLVES POWER IMBALANCES, AND THAT'S PARTICULARLY EVIDENT IN NORTH-SOUTH RELATIONSHIPS.”



Helene Perold
Perold & Associates

New modalities and approaches can challenge and oppose post-colonial power imbalances, but they can also create new ones. The sector should be cautious in order to prevent repeating historical mistakes.

Even though more and more South-South programmes and community volunteering approaches are being implemented, still very few agencies also facilitate South to North volunteering.

→ **Think Piece: [To Hell With Good Intentions](#)**

By Helge Espe

→ **Think Piece: [Think Piece: Improving Organisational Programming, Culture & Practice](#)**

By Claire Bennett

GOOD PRACTICE

Solidarity

ICYE Kenya, Courtney Kelner/ICYE International Office, Mercy Inyanya Kubasu

- The International Cultural Youth Exchange (ICYE) is an international, non-profit organisation that provides international voluntary service opportunities. It works as a federation of full and associate member national committees committed to global solidarity and tackling inequalities in international volunteering.
- Due to the global narratives around development, ICYE found it more challenging to make it interesting for young people from the Global South to volunteer in the Global South. Many find Europe more interesting. ICYE wants to shift this narrative by creating awareness within the federation about the opportunities in the Global South.
- Hence, ICYE introduced a solidarity funding scheme that provides scholarships for South-South volunteers to which anyone can donate.
- The fund wants to increase South-South volunteering and its infrastructure and to give more young people from low-income families the chance to volunteer.

→ **SESSION:**
Directionality – Community Volunteering & Localisation



AIMS OF THE SESSION:

- 1 Discuss the status of domestic community volunteering and the localisation of the SDGs.
- 2 Explore how V4D organisations can bolster local action and accelerate implementation.

Local and regional communities are critical to the realisation of SDGs and have been tasked to accelerate the pace of much-needed transformations. To scale up these efforts, greater cooperation is needed between both national and international organisations.

Historically, the international V4D sector has ignored national and community volunteers.

There is a need to pay attention to the complexities of community volunteering in order to avoid romanticising it. Research is only beginning to understand the complicated picture around community volunteering; for example, different motivations of volunteers, their contexts and forms of volunteering. It can even be exclusive and can reproduce vulnerabilities.

Community volunteering has lots of diversity and contradiction, and it isn't separate from some of the kinds of humanitarian and aid development organisations and government policy making

Different types of community volunteers have to be considered, including migrant volunteers and refugees.

VSO for example, has undergone a significant paradigm shift by seeing the lead for development in the Global South rather than directed from the Global North. In its new model, most of the volunteers are national or community-based. This requires a mindset shift from the concept of the beneficiary to primary actors, seeing people as active agents of change, not passive recipients of aid. This shift recognises their capacity to be volunteers and active agents of change.

Several speakers agreed that the days of large numbers of international volunteers going for development are over. And therefore it is important to think quite carefully about how international volunteers are deployed and to do what

→ **Think Piece: [“A Poor Man Cannot Volunteer”](#)**

By Moses Okech et. al

GOOD PRACTICE

Local Volunteering

Alianza–Actionaid – Silvia de Benito

- Programme in Colombia “Empowering youth-led volunteering in local-level responses” and project “Strengthening local volunteering in Colombia through artistic expressions” together with youth organisations.
- Volunteer activities through the arts were designed after mapping local youth organisations, identifying common spaces, discussing the current context and providing training on human rights and peacebuilding.
- One remarkable outcome is a music video written, designed, recorded, edited and scripted by the volunteers. It is called “I am a volunteer” – it’s a must-see!
- The project has shown that arts are the best way to reach out to communities to address more serious topics like peacebuilding and conflicts. At the same time, it is an opportunity for youth volunteers to develop their expression and show their own identity.

→ Music Video: [I am a volunteer](#)→ [Session 2B](#)

→ SESSION:

Digitalisation & the Future of V4D



AIMS OF THE SESSION:

- 1 Discuss whether technology promotes inclusiveness by providing greater access to volunteering opportunities or if it exacerbates existing patterns of inequality.
- 2 Explore the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 Examine how we can replicate the positive impact of in-person volunteering with e-volunteering.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digitilisation, but also widened the gap between those who can access, use and benefit from technology and those who cannot. However, if appropriately implemented, technology certainly promotes diversity and inclusion in V4D.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual volunteering offered IVCOs the opportunity to continue working with their partner organisations.

Virtual volunteering allows citizens to become engaged while following through with other personal commitments, such as work and school, and often involves people who would otherwise not have participated in V4D activities or programmes. Thereby, virtual volunteering has the potential to make V4D more inclusive, flexible and have a greater reach.

Cultural exchange remains an essential aspect of service in virtual spaces. Technology can help to improve volunteer matching, training and support in various ways. It can create new collaborations, networks and partnerships.

→ **Think Piece:** [Digitalisation, Diversity & Inclusion in Volunteering for Development](#)

By Helene Perold & Benjamin Haas

→ **Think Piece:** [The Challenges & Opportunities of Inclusive Online Volunteering](#)

By Elaine Sly

GOOD PRACTICE

Digitalisation

Singapore International Foundation – Lynette Teo

- Singapore International Foundation believes that technology promotes inclusiveness. The foundation created a digital storytelling platform, [ourbetterworld.org](#). It tells stories of volunteers and non-profits doing good across Asia.
- In 2020, they had over 32 million online views. It has a community size of over 755,000, the majority of which is from the Global South. Anyone with Internet access can take action.
- The foundation provides a unique and inclusive approach by bringing together online and offline communities, fostering South-South volunteering and raising awareness of how volunteers contribute within and across communities.
- In one project, they brought together Singapore and international volunteers from the digital sector and 500 youth from across Asia in a three-month-long digital upskilling programme. After three months of coding, design thinking and user experience training, the youth developed nearly 50 prototypes to combat climate change in their countries.

→ [Our Better World Storytelling Platform](#)

→ [Session 6](#)

"COVID-19 HAS PRESENTED US WITH THE REASON AND OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD THINGS BETTER AND MORE INCLUSIVE FOR OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND VOLUNTEERS ALIKE."



Lynette Teo
Singapore International Foundation

→ **SESSION:**
The Role of States & Institutions on Inclusive V4D



AIMS OF THE SESSION:

- 1 Discuss whether technology promotes inclusiveness by providing greater access to volunteering opportunities or if it exacerbates existing patterns of inequality.
- 2 Explore the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 Examine how we can replicate the positive impact of in-person volunteering with e-volunteering.

The Australian government wants to support inclusive volunteering in a meaningful way without being tokenistic. The programme's diversity and inclusion strategy makes explicit statements of intent regarding disability inclusion, LGBTIQ+ inclusion and gender equality.

The programme has engaged expert organisations to research and evaluate the programme practice in these areas.

Plans to actively promote the programme in Australia through a broad awareness campaign, including TV recruitment ads, were put effectively on hold due to the Australian Bush fires of 2019 and 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic.

France Volontaires is an implementing agency of the French ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. It brings together state, local and regional authorities and associations within the framework of developing and promoting volunteer and solidarity commitments around the world.

France Volontaires has explored some dimensions of inclusion, such as migrants, local young people, and people who usually do not participate in volunteering programmes.

From France Volontaires' perspective, the state plays a key role in setting up an appropriate environment by recognising volunteering as a strategic tool to motivate young people, to promote commitment, to reach the SDGs and to promote volunteering. Furthermore, the state's role is also to design policies that include inclusive measures by removing barriers and fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships and involving local governments, connecting various local national and international programmes, and by responding to priorities and securing financial resources.

The Volunteer Involving Organisations Society Kenya aims to have the national government appreciate the role of volunteer organisations and volunteers by promoting development within the various sectors socially, economically, and politically. The society wanted to start a discussion with the government on developing enabling infrastructures that would support volunteering in the country and mainstream volunteering within the ministries, departments and agencies.

Several achievements have been accomplished, such as the development of a volunteerism law, and several research projects were carried out to evaluate the contribution of volunteering to the Kenyan development agenda.

The objective of the African Union Youth Volunteers Corps is to involve young people from Africa in continental development programmes through youth participation by providing service for their continent. It also offers young Africans opportunities to serve and gain crucial professional experience, soft skills, social competence, and leadership skills. And the programme aims to promote Pan-Africanism based on shared values among future generations on the African continent.

Additionally, the African Union promotes volunteerism within the member states in various ways, through platforms, a reference group on volunteerism, a model for national volunteer policies, volunteerism reports, and the facilitation of peer-to-peer learning – among other activities.

GOOD PRACTICE

Disability

ENGAGE Nepal – Simone Galimberti

- Partnerships and relationship building is crucial for social inclusion. ENGAGE Nepal developed an approach to leverage two significant enablers of relationship building: Volunteerism + Sports.
- People with disabilities face more obstacles in life. By leveraging the power of volunteerism, ENGAGE creates new friendships between youths and young people with and without disabilities, while at the same time creating more awareness in society about social inclusion.
- Flagship programme “ENGAGE Sport Coaches” selects and trains local youth without volunteer experience to become sports coaches. They learn about disabilities, inclusion and leadership and are matched with a sports team
- Everything becomes a learning experience based on reciprocity.

→ [ENGAGE Nepal](#)

→ [Session 2A](#)

→ SESSION: Launching the revised Global Volunteering Standard



AIMS OF THE SESSION:

- 1 Present and launch the revised Global Volunteering Standard.
- 2 Introduce the new online platform of the standard.
- 3 Hear from organisations' experiences applying and localising the standard to their context.

The Global Volunteering Standard was launched at IVCO 2019 in Kigali, and since then, it has been piloted and reviewed. Additionally, Forum built an online platform with a self-assessment tool and a resource library. Any organisation in the world can sign up for free.

Overarching aim: to promote and support more responsible and more impactful volunteering.

Covers the entire programme cycle and the “volunteer journey” with four main areas: (1) Designing and Delivering Projects, (2) Duty of Care, (3) Volunteer Management, (4) Measuring Impact.

→ [Introductory Video to the Global Volunteering Standard](#)

“WHEN WE WALK THROUGH THE STANDARD WITH THE ORGANISATIONS, THEY IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFY THEIR AREAS OF WEAKNESSES AND WHERE THEY THINK THEY ARE DOING MORE THAN WHAT THE STANDARDS ARE REQUIRING. THIS IS VERY USEFUL FOR US IN THE LOCALISATION [OF THE STANDARD].”



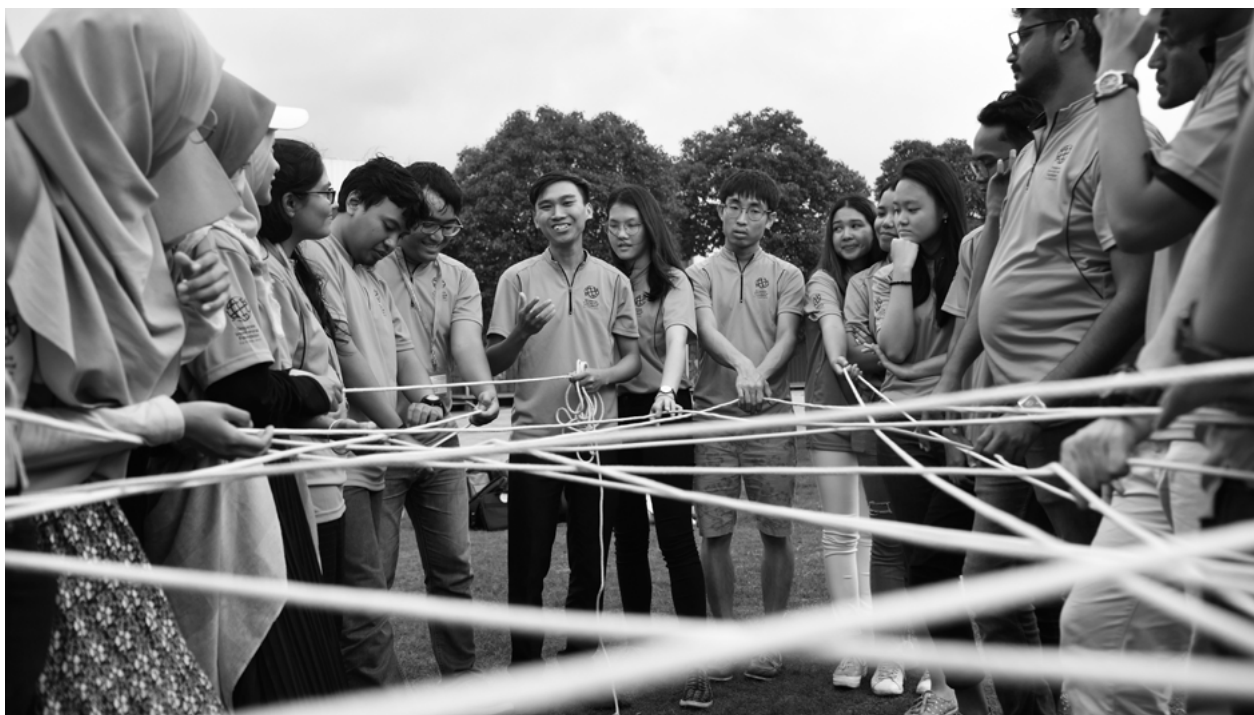
Paul Buenconsejo
Philippines Coalition on Volunteering

The standard was piloted by 18 organisations around the world, supported by Forum over the course of 2020. Forum learned from their experiences and revised the standard based on that input.

The revised version of the standard includes several updates, such as online volunteering, environmental protection, diversity and community inclusion and accessible content and language.

→ [The Global Volunteering Standard](#)

→ [The Global Volunteering Standard Platform](#)



The Singapore International Foundation's Young Social Entrepreneurs (YSE) programme marks its 10th anniversary with an inaugural Study Visit and Overseas Workshop in China. Photo thanks to Singapore International Foundation.

GOOD PRACTICE

Gender Inclusion & New Modalities

VSO - Rebecca Pursell-Gotz/Speak it Loud Zimbabwe – Margret Damba

- Following a blended approach, national, community, and international volunteers worked together to support and train women and girls in various ways. The project aimed to challenge patriarchal norms and attitudes, behavioural change related to women's rights, access to education, increase the ability to negotiate relationships and economic income.
- Volunteers' contributions were manifold, for example, in Nepal: Focus on menstrual hygiene management and the role of peer educators, both in training women and young girls on how to create reusable sanitary pads, but also lifting the taboo of the issue of menstruation for those involved.

→ [Session 9B](#)

“We are responding to the global call to action, to examine systemic racism in our sector, to shift power, to shift direction, with a new focus and vigour that I haven't seen before in my two decades in the sector.”



Erin Bateman
WUSC Canada

Where should the V4D sector go from here? Recommendations & lessons from IVCO 2021

IVCO 2021 has shown that many steps towards decolonisation and more diverse and inclusive programmes have already been taken. Still, many crucial questions and tasks still lie ahead for the sector. The sector is undergoing several paradigm shifts, with new actors, approaches, ideas and modalities continually emerging. What kind of lessons and recommendations does IVCO 2021 provide for the future of volunteering for development?

Decolonisation

The sector should further reshape and rethink V4D through the lens of decolonisation. To do this, all stakeholders, but particularly those in the Global North, should reflect vigorously on questions of power as summarised aptly by Aarathi Krishnan in Session 5:

- 1 Who does what, who sets the agenda, who gets what, and who decides what?
- 2 How can we meaningfully centre communities in decision-making, not just participation and inclusion?
- 3 How do we move from perspectives of leadership to ones of solidarity and of allyship?
- 4 What do we have to relinquish in order to make this happen?
- 5 Do we understand and acknowledge our positionality?
- 6 Are we willing to reflect on our views of the world and how it influences the decisions we make?
- 7 Where do we want to situate ourselves in the spectrum of colonisation, decolonisation, decoloniality, anti-racism, and shifting the power?
- 8 And where in this do we feel that we have the right to act? And where in this do we feel and recognise that we might actually have to take a step back?

Decolonisation also implies the concept of reparations. What could this mean for the V4D sector? At the conference several linkages to V4D were discussed and should be further elaborated on in the future, as this discussion is often avoided:

- Asking how money could flow directly to communities.
- Shifting priorities in allocating resources to models that are not the traditional North-South trajectory.
- Further discuss how financing South-South and South-North volunteering can be part of the decolonial commitment of the sector.

“The standard is at the heart of Forum's work. [...] It is a practical, tangible expression of Forum's mission to support organisations to become more impactful.”



Heather Shapter

Crossroads International & Chair of Forum Board

Many approaches to decolonising V4D in practice have been presented at IVCO 2021 as well as identified by the conference framing paper. The sector should now mainstream these approaches and understand decoloniality as a cross-cutting issue. Future programme design and planning should put decolonisation at the centre of interest. Some areas of V4D still need more attention, for example:

- Include decolonial approaches and anti-bias training in volunteer training, preparation and accompaniment.
- Include decolonial aspirations in standards, theories of change, project logic and quality management.
- Reflect Volunteer Involving Organisations internal structures and diversity policies.
- Localise decision-making and include all stakeholders in programme design.
- Make sure to use adequate language, narratives and images throughout the sector and its public appearance.
- Contribute to changing the public image about volunteering and development.

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, but that they are still being created today by, and in, the Global North. Besides South-South and community volunteering, IVCO 2021 suggests the sector should shift its focus to the much-needed change in the Global North (e.g. concerning the imperial mode of living, climate crisis, structural racism, neo-liberal globalisation) by implementing considerably more North-South volunteering schemes and include North-North volunteering in the frameworks of V4D.

Development

The conference has also shown that rethinking the concept of development is an urgent matter. It has become repetitive to mention that the term, discourse and practice of "development" is a-historical, depoliticising and contains an undeniable and insurmountable colonial burden. The sector should now take action. Several speakers at the conference agreed that a new foundational basis for global volunteering activities should be developed and their practical consequences discussed. Those can include:

- International and/or global solidarity
- Reciprocity, mutual learning and understanding
- Social justice, intersectional justice and/or global justice
- Reparations and allyship
- Ubuntu or Buen Vivir

These concepts are already relevant for many organisations. Questions for the future:

- What could they imply for the V4D sector as a whole practice?
- What could solidarity and justice look like in an unequal postcolonial world?
- What does volunteering look like in the spirit of allyship against systemic racism and white privilege?
- How can we frame programmes around alternative understandings of development, such as Ubuntu or Buen Vivir?

→ Think Piece: [Reciprocity & the Sharing of Knowledge as a Gift](#)

By Jan Olav Baarøy

Directionality & emerging new models

New models and innovative new approaches are the future of V4D. Some speakers even predicted the end of the traditional North-South model. While directionality has been widely acknowledged by the sector as being crucial for decolonisation and diversity and inclusion, the future task for the sector will be to develop more blended approaches as put forward by VSO, for example. How can different types of volunteers effectively work together? The sector should also continue to recognise different types of volunteering, such as migrant or refugee volunteers and community volunteers – without losing sight of the different positionalities and hierarchies within a postcolonial world.

The sector should further value and appraise local and community volunteers as drivers for change – as opposed to traditional development models. They do not only offer new ways of framing ideas of development and focus interests on the local level, they also offer possibilities for inclusion and diversity – as shown by the good practice example from Togo where youth volunteers were employed in their villages in order to improve their social and professional integration.

Online & remote volunteering

Several speakers discussed the consequences of the rapid digital transformation triggered by COVID-19, and the opportunities and challenges for V4D. The sector as a whole should learn from the good practice and experiences that have been made in the last two years to further develop online and remote volunteering approaches. They have proven to be a solution to some barriers and to include people who would not have volunteered previously.

However, digitalisation can also reproduce and exacerbate inequality in the context of the digital divide. A future task for the sector will be to evaluate the consequences of this divide and to develop measures to overcome it. This includes financing digital and technological infrastructures for partner organisations or providing Internet data allowance to participants, local volunteers or primary actors.

A crucial question for the future of online and remote volunteering will be the relational aspect of V4D. How can remote volunteering still build authentic relationships between people and where are the limits for transcultural exchange and learning in the digital space? Innovative training material and approaches should be developed to create an environment of active learning and participation in the digital space.

Diversity, inclusion & intersectionality

IVCO 2021 has made a strong case for discussing diversity and decoloniality together. Therefore, broader frameworks of decoloniality and intersectionality should be at the centre of dealing with social justice and diversity in V4D programmes and activities in the future. Coloniality is a perspective that enables us to analyse colonial legacies and global structures, but also power asymmetries, social exclusion and discrimination along various axes, such as race, gender, body, ethnicity and income.

Many IVCOs have implemented extraordinary measures, programmes and approaches for diversity and inclusion. The sector should learn from these experiences and continue deconstructing barriers to volunteering. This includes barriers to access and work within IVCOs and volunteering agencies.

Among Forum members, these conversations will continue through the Community of Practice on Diversity and Inclusion.

Funding

Over the last two years, donors have seen how in-country volunteering is more sustainable in a crisis like a pandemic than international volunteering because of the reduced risk of programme closures. This might be an opportunity for advocating for changes in directionality.

Southern organisations often lack the opportunity to get into direct conversation with the donors. The sector should reflect on this issue and develop new funding models and grants.

With new modalities, new questions about funding will also emerge. The sector should find answers to these and learn from new models such as the solidarity fund as put forward by ICYE.

Research

As we are only beginning to understand some of the new issues within the V4D space, such as the role of community volunteers, IVCO 2021 calls for new and innovative research approaches. Cross-country comparisons, global surveys and impact measurements are essential, but tell only part of the story. Ethnographic approaches such as those put forward by Chris Millora can help to understand practices of everyday life and have the capacity to generate contextual insights on how volunteering is unmatched in different local contexts and within different volunteering modalities.

Action research and participatory approaches that generate knowledge with and by practitioners and volunteers should gain more attention. Those approaches aim not only to produce knowledge, but also to change and improve practices.

→ Think Piece: [Inequalities & Imbalances in Research on Volunteering for Development](#)

By Dr. Chris Millora

"I believe that states need to find a way by which they can anchor volunteering within their various ministries, various departments and agencies. [...] Governments and states need to find a way by which they can support, finance or give resources in any manner and form that will support volunteering. [...] We will remain open to support other networks within different states, within different countries in Africa or across the world. We are open to share our experiences and to use that as an opportunity to also learn as we build inclusive volunteering globally."



Fredrick Sadia

Volunteer Involving Organisations Society



Sessions & speakers

(including links to session recordings)

→ [Speakers Bios](#)

Welcome Ceremony

- Toily Kurbanov – Executive Coordinator, UNV
- Carol Spahn – Acting Director, Peace Corps
- Andreas Souvaliotis – Founder and CEO of Social Change Rewards Inc.
- Heather Shapter – Chair of Forum Board and Chief Executive of Crossroads International
- Julia Sánchez – Secretary General, ActionAid International
- MC: Gerasimos Kouvaras – Country Director, ActionAid Hellas

SESSION 1:

→ [Creating an Inclusive Volunteering Environment for Global Equality](#)

- Benjamin Haas and Dr. Victor Moinina – Researchers, IVCO2021 Framing Paper
- Ashraf Patel – Co-founder of Pravah & ComMutiny/The Youth Collective & Erin Bateman – Director of Volunteer Cooperation at WUSC
- AGODE Kossi Mensan Edem – Director of Programmes/National Volunteer Agency of Togo
- Cristina Cruz-Hubbard – Chief Diversity Officer/Peace Corps
- Moderator: Melanie Gow CEO/Australian Volunteers International (AVI)

SESSION 2A:

→ [Voices from the Field](#)

- Simone Galimberti – Co-Founder/ENGAGE
- Christine Ogola – Programme Assistant, Resilient Youth and Livelihood Department/VSO
- Ricar Pascoela – Coordinator of Working Women's Centre Timor-Leste
- Manisha Dhakal – Executive Director/BDS, Partner of CECI-VCP and Seema Khah – Chair Person/Nepal Muslim Women's Welfare Society, Partner of CECI-VCP
- Moderator: Christine Messier – Programme Director/Crossroads International

SESSION 2B:

→ [Voices from the Field](#)

- Courtney Kelner – Grants and Programme Officer/ ICYE Kenya and Mercy Inyanya Kubasu – ICYE International Office and Programme Coordinator/ ICYE Kenya
- Silvia de Benito – Senior Officer in Volunteering/Alianza – Actionaid
- Moderator: Fred Sadia – Secretary & National Coordinator/Volunteer Involving Organizations Society, Kenya"

SESSION 3:**→ [The Role of States & Institutions on Inclusive Volunteering for Development](#)**

- Lénaïk Le Poul – Programme manager, Climate and ecological transition/France Volontaires
- Fredrick Sadia – Secretary & National Coordinator/Volunteer Involving Organizations Society
- Christina Munzer – Director Humanitarian & Development Deployments Section, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
- Dr. Meshesha Shewarega Gebretsadik – Coordinator, The AU Continental Volunteer Platform
- Moderator: Benjamin Lough – Director of Social Innovation/University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

SESSION 4:**→ [Launching the revised Global Volunteering Standard](#)**

- James O'Brien – Executive Director/Forum
- Rahim Hassanali – Global Leadership Manager of VSO and Coordinator of Forum Standards Working Group
- Paul Buenconsejo – Executive Director/Philippines Coalition on Volunteering
- Fazirah Naser – Senior Executive, Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa (YSS)/Student Volunteers Foundation
- Erin MacLeod and Nicole Dagher – Consultants of Forum Standards Working Group
- Mark Cumming – Head of Comhlámh and Member of the Forum Board and Stephen Goodman – Chief Executive Officer/VSA and Member of the Forum Board
- Moderator: Heather Shapter – Chair of Forum Board & Executive Director/Crossroads International

SESSION 5:**→ [Decolonisation of Volunteering for Development](#)**

- Dr. Chris Millora – Research Associate/University of East Anglia
- Aarathi Krishnan – Strategic Foresight Advisor/UNDP
- Nazmul Ahsan – Manager – Young People/ActionAid Bangladesh
- Leigh Mathews – AltoLearn
- Moderator: Stephen Goodman – CEO/Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA)

SESSION 6:**→ [Digitalisation & the Future of volunteering for Development](#)**

- Lynette Teo – Manager, Volunteer Cooperation, Programmes Division/Singapore International Foundation
- Jennifer (JJ) Di Bella – Chief of Programming and Training, Africa Region/Peace Corps and Vanessa Dickey – Project Expert, Virtual Service Pilot/Peace Corps
- Boudewijn Wijnands – Founder & CEO/Deedmob
- Stephanie Boyd – Communications Advisor (Volunteer)/Cuso International
- Moderator: David Styers – Coordinator/Volunteer Groups Alliance

SESSION 7:**→ [Directionality – Emerging Volunteering for Development Modalities](#)**

- Ujjwal Sundas – Director of programme and research/Samata Foundation, Nepal
- Nadira Pervin – Programme Manager Networking and Communication/Nagorik Uddyog
- Helene Perold – Director/Helene Perold & Associates, South Africa
- Dr. Alok Rath – Global Head, Knowledge, Evidence, and Learning/VSO and Prof. Matt Baillie Smith – Social Sciences/University of Northumbria/Refugee Youth Volunteering Uganda
- Thierry Debris – Programme Manager for International Volunteering Development/France Volontaires
- Moderator: Helge Espe – Senior Adviser/Norec

SESSION 8:**→ [Directionality – Community Volunteering & Localisation](#)**

- Prof. Matt Baillie Smith – Social Sciences/University of Northumbria and Professor Peter Kanyandago – Refugee Youth Volunteering and Chair of the Board of Directors of the African Volunteers Association
- Lea Sofia Simonsen – Senior Project Manager for International Programmes/ActionAid Denmark
- Dr. Philip Goodwin – Chief Executive/VSO
- GBEMOU Kudzo Nyameko – Programme Manager/ASSOCIATION JSA
- Moderator: Erin Bateman – Director of Volunteer Cooperation/WUSC (World University Service of Canada) and Forum Board Member

SESSION 9A:**→ [Organisational challenges](#)**

- Josef Estermann – Responsable for Basics & Research Comundo/Unité – Comundo
- Wan Ahmad Hazman bin Wan Ahmad Daud – Board Director/Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa (YSS)/Student Volunteers Foundation
- Dr. Tracy Kandeya – M and E Advisor/VSO
- Rebecca Pursell-Gotz – Research Specialist: Volunteering for Development/VSO

SESSION 9B:**→ [Advocacy for reform](#)**

- Aminata Kelly-Lamin – Advocacy and Policy Manager/ActionAid Sierra Leone
- Paulino Buenconsejo – Executive Director/Philippine Coalition on Volunteerism
- Ibrahim Soro Kamara, Mariatu Esther Kabb and Elizabeth Agatha Musa – Programme Manager and Communication Officers/On behalf of Volunteers Involving Organisations Network (VIONet)
- Syed Hasnain – President of UNIRE (Italian national union of refugees and exiles)

SESSION 9A:**→ [Methodological Tools](#)**

- Darlene Grant, Ph.D. – Senior Advisor to the Director/Peace Corps
- Andres Morales – Volunteering & Youth Development Regional Coordinator – Americas Region/International Federation of the Red Cross
- Sádé Budhlall – Director of Volunteer Development/The Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society
- Katherine Tubb – Volunteering Consultant/Independent

SESSION 9B:**→ [Gender inclusion](#)**

- Geeta Pradhan – Social Inclusion and Gender/VSO
- Rebecca Pursell-Gotz – Research Specialist for Volunteering for Development/VSO and Margret Damba – Volunteer as the Gender and Women Empowerment Advisor/Speak it Loud Zimbabwe
- Lechin Lu – Criterion Institute
- Prof. Rebecca Tiessen – School of International Development and Global Studies/University of Ottawa

SESSION 9A:**→ [Indigenous people](#)**

- Alice Tamang – Indigenous Programmes Coordinator/AVI
- Awounkeu Francois – Country Representative/Cuso International and Tatiana Palouki – Volunteer/Cuso International
- Patience Malunga – Training Adviser/Norwegian Agency for Exchange Co-operation (Norec)

SESSION 9B:**→ [The Role of Coalitions at National Level](#)**

- Nichole Cirillo – Executive Director/IAVE
- Romanus Mtung'e – Country Representative/Cuso International and Freeman Givonce – National volunteer as a Health Safety and Environment advisor for Small and Medium Entrepreneurs through Small Industry Development Organization

SESSION 9A:**→ [Inclusion of older people](#)**

- Mayuko Onuki – Assistant professor/Waseda University/JICA Ogata Research Institute
- Julia Nakamura – Graduate Student, Health Psychology/University of British Columbia

SESSION 9B:**→ [Disability Inclusion](#)**

- Lou Talbot Beirne – Programme Manager/CBM Ireland
- Jelena Wander & Regina Fuchs – Project managers for Inclusive Volunteering at bezev
- Zulqurnain Asghar – Chief Executive/Potohar Mental Health Association

Conference research & think pieces

- **Introductory Paper:** [44 Questions about Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality](#)
By Gerasimos Kouvaras
- **Conference Framing Paper:** [Inclusive Volunteering for Global Equality – Linking Decolonisation & Diversity](#)
By Benjamin Haas & Victor Moinina
- **Think Piece:** [To Hell with Good Intentions](#)
By Helge Espe
- **Think Piece:** [The Challenges & Opportunities of Inclusive Online Volunteering](#)
By Elaine Sly
- **Think Piece:** [Hierarchies of Place & Knowledge in Volunteering for Development](#)
By Alice Chadwick El-Ali
- **Think Piece:** [Inequalities & Imbalances in Research on Volunteering for Development](#)
By Dr. Chris Millora
- **Think Piece:** [Digitalisation, Diversity & Inclusion in V4D](#)
By Helene Perold And Benjamin Haas
- **Think Piece:** [Improving Organisational Programming, Culture & Practice](#)
By Claire Bennett
- **Think Piece:** [Reciprocity & the Sharing of Knowledge as a Gift](#)
By Jan Olav Baarøy
- **Think Piece:** [COVID-19, Inequality & Volunteering for Development – Considering a Capability Approach](#)
By Alok Rath
- **Think Piece:** [“A Poor Man Cannot Volunteer”](#)
By Moses Okech, Matt Baillie Smith, Sarah Mills & Bianca Fadel
- **Think Piece:** [Decolonising Thinking & Practice of Volunteering for Development](#)
By Bianca Fadel
- **Think Piece:** [What is Decolonisation Asking of Us?](#)
By Sive Bresnihan
- [More research by Forum & its member organisations](#)

IVCO 2021 in numbers

Programme & Speakers

- A total of 17 sessions were scheduled from 18-20 October 2021:
- 9 of them were in the form of panel sessions (the first part was pre-recorded – broadcasted at the specific day and time – and then a live Q&A/discussion part followed)
- 8 of them were in the form of “pods” (they were all pre-rec- orded and played one after the other with no live discussion part)
- 5 invited speakers opened the Welcome Ceremony
- 72 speakers and 12 moderators participated in all 17 sessions
- Speakers came from 43 organisations in 33 countries

Total Participations

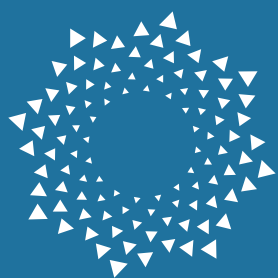
- A total of 520 participants have registered to the IVCO2021 event (both conference and fair):
- 180 of them were conference delegates with a paid ticket
- 9 subsidised tickets to IVCO2021 were granted to Global South representatives (after submission and assessment process)
- 11 free tickets to IVCO2021 were granted to special invited speakers
- 19 free tickets to IVCO2021 with limited access only to a specific session were given to speakers of these sessions, that required the specific limited participation
- 1 free ticket – winner from IVCO 2020 engagement competition
- The remaining 301 participations are mainly Fair Booth holders and representatives and free visitors to the Fair.

Only Conference Delegates

- 220 conference delegates representing 65 organisations and 49 countries

→ [IVCO 2021 Conference Insights](#)

See you at IVCO 2022 (hopefully) in Senegal!



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