forum

IVCO 2017
SUB-THEME PAPER
MEASUREMENT

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Foreword

This paper has been produced for IVCO 2017 and is one of a series of papers exploring this year's conference theme *__Implementation of the SDGs through transformative partnership in volunteering__*.

The paper focuses on the sub-theme *measurement* and what this means for international volunteering for development/volunteering for development and its role in implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. Separate papers consider the sub-themes *__innovation__* and *__enabling environment__*.

Note on terminology: the framing and sub-theme papers variably use the terms *volunteer involving organisations* (VIOs) and *international volunteer cooperation organisations* (IVCOs). IVCOs should be understood as a specific group or type of VIO.

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Introduction

> ## *What gets measured gets managed*
> **Peter Drucker**

> ## *Everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted*
> **Albert Einstein**

This paper aims to frame and inform discussion on how the contribution of volunteering for development can be measured, with a particular focus on measuring the contribution of international volunteering to the SDGs. The paper explores conceptual foundations, draws on some recent literature, and reflects on key questions using examples from the work of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). The paper argues that international volunteer cooperation organisations (IVCOs) need to improve both their measuring of what outcomes they achieve, and their understanding of how they contribute to these outcomes, particularly through the relationships between volunteers and partners.

The paper is organised in four sections:

1. Exploring what measurement means for international volunteering for development
2. Measurement and the SDGs
3. Measuring and/or understanding?
4. Where to from here?

In various places, bullet-pointed questions are offered as prompts for reflection and discussion.

First, a brief note on language. Throughout the paper, the word 'partner' is used to signify the person/s with whom a volunteer works, and 'placement' as shorthand for a relationship between a volunteer and a partner (acknowledging that volunteering may not necessarily involve physical placement). 'Measurement' is considered to mean the act of quantifying something in specific units – necessary for comparison and aggregation. But measurement can only take us so far; it can tell us 'what' (within the frame of the units chosen), but not 'how' or 'why'. It is important, but is only half the story. Finally, while the remit of the paper is 'international volunteering', it's important to note two things: 1) that many IVCOs also work to a significant and increasing extent with national volunteers, and 2) that much of the contribution of volunteering to the SDGs may occur through informal volunteers.

We also acknowledge the limitations of this paper. It is written to address the question 'how can IVCOs measure their contribution to development/their development impact?', not 'how can the overall contribution of volunteering in a society be measured?' Undoubtedly much of the contribution of volunteering occurs through organisations or agencies that do not self-identify as IVC; the ILO (2011) provides guidance on measuring this society-wide impact. This paper focuses instead on IVCOs' own organisational measurement practice. It is based on a limited literature review, coupled with the author's own reflections on the practice of one IVCO. As such, it makes no claim to being a comprehensive treatment of the topic, and aims simply to catalyse discussion.

What measurement means for international volunteering for development

There is clearly a tension within the IVCO sector regarding the what, how and why of measurement – one which is perhaps captured in the two quotes with which this paper begins. IVCOs need to measure their impact – both for 'proving' themselves (notably to funders and the general public) and also for 'improving' purposes, i.e. reflecting on their work and learning how to do better. At the same time, IVCOs note that their work, rooted as it is in interpersonal relationships, is very individualised, context-dependent and long-term. All these characteristics make it hard to measure.

This tension is crystallised when considering whether and how IVCOs can engage with the SDGs and their indicators. On the one hand, IVCOs feel they need to demonstrate their contribution in SDG terms for 'survival' purposes, i.e. to be able to access donor funding. On the other hand, IVCOs may question the SDG focus on tangible development outcomes rather than process, and the perceived 'top-down' nature of the goals.

Recent Forum discussion papers have helped articulate some of the debates around what should be measured, how, and why. While Euler et al. (2016) provide a comprehensive survey of IVCO inputs (in terms of volunteer numbers and locations), Allum (2016) notes increased focus on measuring outcomes, the growing need to articulate value for money, and an alternative emphasis on articulating the distinctive contribution of volunteering. This theme was also explored in the VSO-IDS joint research *Valuing Volunteering* (Burns et al. 2015).

This paper suggests that measuring and understanding are complementary, not contradictory. It makes two main arguments:

1. If IVCOs want to articulate the contribution of volunteering to the SDGs, they need to do so in terms of the SDG indicators. For most IVCOs, this implies a (possibly

significant) shift away from reporting on activities towards reporting on clearly-specified outcome indicators.

2. The need to <u>measure what</u> outcomes IVCOs achieve is, however, only part of the story. IVCOs have rightly emphasised the need to <u>understand how</u> they contribute to these outcomes through relationships between volunteers and partners. Measuring the quality of these relationships and understanding how they develop will help IVCOs better understand and articulate their contribution to the SDGs.

Measuring inputs

One way of measuring 'the contribution of volunteering to development' is in input terms. In one sense this is simplistic; but if we are interested in articulating the value (for money) of volunteering, we need to do so with reference to inputs.

The simplest measure of all is the expenditure of IVCOs. Strictly speaking, though, much of this cannot be counted as an IVCO contribution since a large proportion of IVCO funding comes from governments and is already reported internationally as official development assistance (ODA). It is therefore not 'additional resources for development'; the IVCO is the channel, rather than the source. But we also mobilise additional funds (from the general public, from corporate partners); and of course we mobilise volunteers.

IVCO reporting tends to focus on volunteer numbers (e.g. Euler et al. 2016), but it would probably be more accurate to measure the amount of volunteer time mobilised, since there is wide variation in placement duration. Some attempts have been made to calculate value for money on an input basis, for example 'cost per volunteer'; but as Euler et al. note (2016, p.33), this is a very rough calculation. It would perhaps be better to calculate 'cost per volunteer-month' – but this would still take no account of volunteer quality or the effectiveness of their work.

Volunteer quality could arguably be measured in several ways. A simplistic proxy is the financial value of the volunteer's time, either in the source country (i.e. the volunteer's foregone earnings), or in the placement country (i.e. the cost of employing someone local to do the same job). Such valuations take into account some dimensions of volunteer quality (such as professional skills) but arguably not the most important (relational skills). Finding a way to measure the latter has been an ongoing challenge for IVCOs.

In theory, then, we could measure the financial input value of an IVCO's contribution to development as equalling the additional financial resources mobilised for development, plus the value of volunteer time mobilised, minus the costs of mobilising and managing those volunteers.

Questions for consideration

- Could IVCOs move towards reporting on volunteer time mobilised, rather than simple volunteer numbers?

- How have IVCOs attempted to measure volunteer quality? What lessons have been learned from the attempts?

Measuring results

Measuring inputs is necessary, but can only take us so far; ultimately we are interested in results, which are both harder to measure and harder to attribute. Since many IVCOs struggle even to record their activities (Haddock and Devereux 2015, p.29), measuring outputs, outcomes and impacts may be quite challenging.

When measuring the results of volunteering, we need to consider over what time period, where, and for whom the results occur. There are three broad types of results we may wish to measure:

1. Direct development outcomes achieved during the placement
2. Long-term impacts on partners, their organisations, communities and societies
3. Long-term impacts on volunteers, their organisations, communities and societies.[1]

Type 1 results: Direct development outcomes achieved during the placement

Measuring direct placement outcomes poses two challenges that are well recognised in the development sector: measurement of change, and attribution. IVCOs, like many other development actors, tend to find it easier to measure activities (such as 'training sessions for teachers') rather than outcomes (such as 'improved teaching practice' or 'improved learning outcomes'). When measuring outcomes, we may tend to rely on self-reported data ('Yes, I think I am a better teacher now, thanks to the training' – see for example Lough 2016) or on unreliable measures (e.g. exam results which may be distorted by malpractice).

Even when we manage to measure changes, we face difficulties with attribution. We tend

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1 Note that some authors (e.g. Lough 2016) have categorised results slightly differently, using four levels (the volunteer conceived as an individual agent, the organisations for whom they volunteer, the communities in which they volunteer, and the broader social context). Here, I suggest that we should indeed distinguish between individual, organisational and societal impacts – but for both partners and volunteers. Indeed, we should acknowledge that the primary impact of the volunteer may not be on 'an organisation' but rather (and to differing degrees) on individuals involved in that organisation.

to assume that any positive changes are due to the volunteer's input – but how do we know that the improved teaching practice, or better learning outcomes, is attributable (at least in part) to the volunteer's input, rather than (say) a new head-teacher or new curriculum?

We may not always be able to measure this precisely, of course. However, IVCO legitimacy rests on the assumption that volunteers do contribute directly to positive development outcomes; indeed, IVCOs argue that volunteering is more effective than alternative approaches. We need to back up these claims with evidence.

So to measure the contribution of volunteering, we need to use a counterfactual: what would things have been like without the volunteer? This requires both 'before/after' (change relative to baseline) and 'with/without' (change relative to non-intervention) comparison. Some IVCOs have been encouraged by donor grant conditions to adopt this type of 'double difference' approach to measuring change at a program level (for example, VSO's Girls Education Challenge program in Nepal). Complex approaches may not be appropriate for much smaller-scale programs or placements, but the principles remain the same: if we want to measure the contribution of volunteering, we need to clearly specify intended outcomes, and measure change on both before/after and with/without dimensions. This doesn't mean running a randomised control trial for every individual placement! It means a commitment to a) measuring outcomes, and b) addressing attribution by considering the counterfactual: at the very least, using baselines to measure change, and (where possible) comparing change in IVCO partners with non-partners.

In many cases, the primary intended outcome of a placement is something like 'increased capacity' in the partner. There is clearly some overlap here with Type 2 outcomes. But whether the intended outcome is 'reduced maternal mortality' or 'improved NGO capacity to set and achieve its own goals', IVCOs should be able to clearly articulate indicators for the outcome, and specify how they will generate evidence on whether it has been achieved.

Questions for consideration

- What can IVCOs do to improve our focus on measuring outcomes as well as activities?

- How can IVCOs address the challenge of attribution? Should IVCOs be more explicit about exploring counterfactuals?

- If a placement fails to generate any measureable direct (Type 1) outcomes, has it failed altogether – or might it still make a contribution to development by 'planting seeds' that don't bear fruit until later (Type 2 or Type 3 results)?

Type 2 results: Long-term impacts on partners, their organisations, communities and societies

Measuring long-term impacts on partners poses additional challenges. For many (perhaps all?) IVCOs, these Type 2 results are central to their theory of change; the expectation of long-term change among partners is the main intended outcome. For example: VSO sends experienced teacher trainers to train student teachers in child-friendly and inclusive teaching techniques. In theory, those student teachers will use the child-friendly techniques in their own teaching for many years to come; and it is even hoped that they will spread the new techniques to their colleagues through a diffusion. But there are many barriers to achieving these long-term changes. Newly-qualified student teachers are at the bottom of the school hierarchy and are rarely able to change entrenched practices. Once in post, they are subject to multiple pressures to teach in the old way. Similar challenges exist in many other sectors of IVCO work. Clearly we need to be careful in making assumptions about long-term transformations, and perhaps we should try more explicitly to measure these long-term results.

It's also worth noting that there may be other Type 2 results, both individual and social. Direct beneficiaries of volunteer training may experience individual career development and other benefits (as noted by Lough 2016); this may help spread new ideas more widely, but it may also undermine months or years of work to build capacity in a particular organisation or location. For example, if an IVCO-trained head teacher in a rural government school gets a new job in an urban private school, all the intended benefit to the rural community is lost. Because IVCO work is relationship-based, it may be particularly affected by such issues.

There is also an argument that volunteering contributes to more general social transformation in partner societies, such as strengthening of civil society (Plewes and Stuart 2007), or contributing to changes in social norms (e.g. on gender, disability, or sexuality) through modelling alternative behaviours (Burns et al. 2015). It is also suggested that volunteering helps build positive relationships across borders, contributing to diplomacy and peace-building. On the other hand, as the academic literature attests, volunteering may contribute (if unintentionally) to harmful social dynamics, such as perpetuation of post-colonial stereotyping (Perold et al. 2013).

Measuring these impacts (both positive and negative) poses considerable challenges. In particular, there is a tension between the need to study the long-term impacts of volunteering, and the increasingly short-term timescales of available funding. But the principles of measurement – the need to identify indicators and collect data systematically – are the same, whatever the timescale.

Questions for consideration

- What more can IVCOs do to understand the long-term impact of their work on

partners? What experience do IVCOs have of a) articulating intended long-term outcomes and identifying indicators, and b) measuring them, as well as unintended outcomes (both positive and negative), after placements have finished?

■ How can IVCOs integrate long-term follow up with partners into their regular work? How can resources be found to invest in this?

Type 3 results: Long-term impacts on volunteers, their organisations, communities and societies

Type 3 results tend not to be articulated explicitly as a rationale for volunteering, and are often assumed rather than measured, but may be particularly important for some funders. As O'Brien et al. (2017) point out, businesses may be interested in volunteering as a means of improving their reputation, or motivating their workforce, while governments may be interested in volunteering as a means of projecting soft power, or securing social support for their aid program. I am not aware of efforts to measure the contribution of volunteering in these particular respects, but there is certainly interest in whether volunteering helps to catalyse 'active citizenship' (Volunteering Matters 2016), and VSO's recent *Impact Beyond Volunteering* research (Clark and Lewis 2017) explored these questions in considerable detail. VSO has recently begun surveying all volunteers before and after their placement to understand changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices (including the propensity to engage in further voluntary action); and AVI has begun using 'before and after' reflections from volunteers to understand how volunteering has affected them, and whether it has encouraged them to become more globally engaged.

Many IVCOs (including VSO) now work to a significant extent with national volunteers, and with South-South volunteers. Comparing changes between different types of volunteers may help us understand the extent to which different elements of the volunteer experience – such as cross-cultural exchange, or the nature of the role – may impact on volunteers and their sending communities.

Questions for consideration

■ How can IVCOs do more to explore the long-term impact of volunteering on volunteers?

■ Is the long-term impact of volunteering different for national vs international volunteers, or for North-South vs South-South volunteers?

Measurement and the SDGs

Let's step back here and consider how this discussion connects with the global development agenda. Much current debate in the volunteering sector is shaped around the desire to measure volunteering's contribution to the SDGs, and indeed the original terms of reference for this paper asked us to consider this explicitly.

Previous papers, such as Haddock and Devereux (2015), have begun to explore this area. However, the literature thus far has tended to discuss the SDG goals and targets, rather than the indicators. Since it is the indicators that will be used to measure progress against the SDGs, this paper focuses on what it might mean in practice to measure IVCO contribution using the SDG indicators themselves – however imperfect they might be.

Goal 17

The literature on volunteering has frequently made reference to the importance of Goal 17, 'Partnerships for the goals'. As noted by others, SDG 17 has three targets that are particularly relevant to measuring the contribution of volunteering: target 17.9 on capacity building, and targets 17.16 and 17.17 on multi-stakeholder partnerships. Table 1 sets them out, with their associated indicators.

Table 1: SDG 17 targets and indicators relevant to volunteering

Theme	SDG Target	SDG Indicator
Capacity building	17.9: Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation	17.9.1: Dollar value of financial and technical assistance (including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation) committed to developing countries
Multi-stakeholder partnerships	17.16: Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries	17.16.1: Number of countries reporting progress in multi-stakeholder development effectiveness monitoring frameworks that support the achievement of the sustainable development goals
	17.17: Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships	17.17.1: Amount of United States dollars committed to public-private and civil society partnerships

It is clear that there are limitations to these indicators: most IVCOs would argue financial investment is a deeply inadequate measure of capacity building. Nonetheless, these indicators are the product of global debate and agreement, and as such are what we have to work with for the moment. While using them, IVCOs may also wish to discuss and develop proposals for alternative indicators.

So, SDG indicator 17.9.1 requires IVCOs to value their capacity building assistance in dollar terms. Let us explore how this might be done, using VSO as an example. VSO, an IVCO founded in the UK in 1958, now works with volunteers from many countries worldwide. In 2016/17, VSO deployed:

- 319 national volunteers (estimated average placement length 12 months)
- 239 international professional volunteers (estimated average placement length 24 months)
- 94 corporate volunteers (average placement length 2 months)
- 2 political (Member of Parliament) volunteers (average placement length 2 weeks)
- 1539 International Citizen Service (youth) volunteers, half from the UK and half from placement countries (placement length 3 months)

VSO therefore deployed a total of 2193 volunteers in 2016/17, who together will contribute 14,375 volunteer-months of work, or 1193 volunteer-years.[2] If we value this time using the average UK salary of approximately £27,000 p.a., it is worth ~£32 million. (In reality, this is probably an over-estimate. 32 per cent of the volunteer-months were contributed by young ICS volunteers, and 27 per cent by national volunteers. The labour of both groups, in their home countries, is almost certain to be valued at a (much) lower financial rate. On the other hand, the labour value of highly skilled volunteers may be higher. To get a more accurate estimate, these variations should be taken into account. However, they are beyond the scope of this paper, so for the moment let us stick with the estimate of £32m as the value of the volunteer labour mobilised by VSO.[3])

VSO also mobilised financial resources; its expenditure in 2016/17 was £75.7 million. However, ~£55m (72 per cent) came from DFID and other government sources. These funds are already classified as ODA, so cannot be double-counted in SDG reporting. The additional resources for development mobilised by VSO were therefore ~£21 million.

How should we deal with the costs of mobilising and managing volunteers? If an IVCO's expenditure exceeds the value of the volunteer labour mobilised, does that mean it offers poor value for money? In fact, for many IVCOs (including VSO), volunteers contribute as

2   For simplicity, we've ignored the labour value of the volunteers already in placement at the start of the year, and have counted the value of the new volunteers' labour in future years.

3   While there may be a multiplier effect – these volunteers catalysing others – this would be an outcome, rather than an input, so is not included in this calculation.

an integral part of wider development programs, rather than being the sole focus of IVCO activity. So to understand the net contribution of VSO, it would be necessary to work out what proportion of the organisation's expenditure is used to mobilise and manage the £32m of volunteer labour contribution, and deduct this from the total of labour and resources mobilised. Such data is currently not available.

Questions for consideration

- How should volunteer labour be valued financially? What rules of thumb do IVCOs need to ensure consistent measurement worldwide?

- How can IVCOs avoid double-counting their ODA-sourced funding under SDG indicator 17.9.1?

- How should IVCOs account for the costs of mobilising and managing volunteers?

Let's briefly look at the other two SDG 17 indicators.

Indicator 17.16.1 (Number of countries reporting progress in multi-stakeholder development effectiveness monitoring frameworks that support the achievement of the SDGs) is clearly a very blunt indicator for measuring partnerships. 'Progress' could (for example) be interpreted as number, size, or quality of partnerships. IVCOs might focus on partnership quality, since this is often considered to be a key feature of volunteering, but there is no common approach to measuring the quality of partnerships – although some development NGOs have engaged in initiatives such as the Keystone 'partnership survey' started in 2010.[4] This might therefore be an area where IVCOs could innovate and contribute to deepening global understanding of what this indicator might mean in practice.

Questions for consideration

- How do IVCOs currently measure 'progress' in partnerships? Is there scope for developing a common approach for the IVCO sector, to enable us to collectively articulate our contribution under SDG indicator 17.16.1?

Regarding indicator 17.17.1 (US$ committed to public-private and civil society partnerships), the IVCO contribution would simply be total IVCO expenditure. As such, it's a less informative figure than indicator 17.9.1.

In summary, if IVCOs want to measure their work in a way that enables it to be captured

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4 http://keystoneaccountability.org/international-non-governmental-organization-survey/

using existing SDG 17 indicators, we need to agree how to a) calculate the financial value of the volunteer labour mobilised, and b) develop indicators for 'progress in partnerships'.

Beyond this, though, IVCOs may wish to advocate for an additional (or alternative) indicator under SDG target 17.9 on capacity strengthening – one that focuses on outcomes, rather than inputs.

Questions for consideration

- What capacity building indicators do IVCOs currently use? What scope exists for sharing indicators and agreeing common approaches?

Goals 1 to 16

We've seen that the indicators for SDG 17 are narrow, and provide little scope for articulating what most IVCO stakeholders would consider to be the true value of volunteering. What is the potential for IVCOs to measure their contribution in terms of the other SDG indicators – for example, measuring health work using Goal 3 indicators, or education work using Goal 4 indicators? Since there are 169 targets and 229 indicators, each IVCO would need to identify the ones that are most relevant to their work. Taking this approach would require (possibly considerable) IVCO reorientation towards use of the SDG indicators, as well as (possibly difficult) work on attribution. IVCOs might be resistant to using these indicators and/or might find it very difficult to collect the necessary data – but, if we wish to measure and articulate our contribution to the SDGs, is there an alternative?

Let's consider what this would mean for an organisation like VSO. VSO's work is focused on three core program areas: education, health, and livelihoods (respectively 29 per cent, 14 per cent and 19 per cent of our expenditure in 2016/17). Last year we reached 900,000 people with our education work, 1.3 million people with our health work, and 165,000 people with our livelihoods work. In common with many other IVCOs, VSO tends to report on its work in these terms: expenditure, and numbers of people reached, supplemented with illustrative case stories.

For education, the 900,000 number relates to our impact indicator 'evidence of improved learning outcomes for disadvantaged or marginalised learners'. Measuring our work in terms of SDG indicators would entail a shift towards articulating changes achieved in much more specific terms – for example, SDG indicator 4.1.1b: the number and proportion of children (boys and girls) enabled to reach specific literacy standards by the end of primary school; and 4.5.1: parity indices for this and other indicators relating to various dimensions of inequality/marginalisation. While there is certainly overlap, we cannot easily translate our current measures into SDG indicator terms. Doing so would strengthen an IVCO's ability to

articulate its contribution to development in globally-understood and globally-comparable terms. But is this what IVCOs wish to do? And how could we calculate the expected future outcomes resulting from skills transfer (Type 2 and 3 results, discussed above)?

Questions for consideration

- Is there appetite in the IVCO sector for using SDG indicators to frame all our M&E?

- In order to be visible and influential, do IVCOs need to articulate their contribution to development in terms of the SDG indicators?

- Even if IVCOs do not wish to use them, might IVCO donors start using SDG indicators and demand that we do the same? To what extent is this happening already?

- What challenges do IVCOs face in using SDG indicators to measure their contribution?

- What alternatives might IVCOs wish to propose instead?

Measuring and/or understanding?

So far, this paper has focused on the challenges of measuring IVCOs' contribution to development in SDG terms. This may be necessary to increase the visibility of volunteering's contribution to development. But measuring what we contribute is only half of the challenge. The other – and arguably more important – half relates to deepening our understanding of how IVCO activities lead to these results. IVCOs need to explain how volunteers contribute to development outcomes described by the SDG indicators. In particular, they need to measure and understand the relationships between volunteers and partners that are at the centre of IVCOs' work.

VSO has now published several studies that emphasise the relational nature of volunteering, i.e. the fact that the relationship between volunteer and partner is the central mechanism through which change is brought about (Burns et al. 2015; Clark and Lewis 2017). Our *Valuing Volunteering* research (Burns et al. 2015) identified eight ways in which volunteers may create benefit or contribute to the public good (Box 1). These are now used to frame evaluations (e.g. Trapani and Zhang, forthcoming), and to inform the design of new monitoring tools such as VSO's Volunteer Survey, which is completed by all volunteers. In these ways, we are trying to learn about how volunteering works to contribute to development outcomes.

Box 1: The eight ways in which volunteers may contribute to development

1. Improving the quality and effectiveness of services
2. Increasing inclusion by extending the reach of services to the poorest and most marginalised
3. Acting as a catalyst for innovation
4. Promoting and enabling collaboration across multiple partners and stakeholders
5. Strengthening local ownership and the agency of people to take control of their own development
6. Promoting participation by encouraging and modelling approaches that place people at the heart of development processes
7. Promoting positive social action and volunteering
8. Inspiring new ways of thinking and being by modelling alternatives to entrenched norms and behaviours.

We're also aiming to measure – and better understand – changes in partner and volunteer knowledge, attitudes and practice with regard to VSO's core approaches of social inclusion and gender, social accountability, and resilience. New scalar tools have been developed to help us understand whether our work is contributing to the long-term (Type 2 and 3) impacts on partners and volunteers that we hope for in these areas.

Clark and Lewis (2017) found that more than half of volunteers became more involved in voluntary action after their placement than they were before, and identified other key impacts such as career changes, and influencing others (although the study cannot definitively prove causality). We now aim to measure these Type 3 impacts systematically for all volunteers, and to relate them to volunteers' experiences on placement, using Volunteer Surveys that all volunteers will complete before placement, at the end of the placement, and twelve months after return home. The second survey also places particular emphasis on measuring and understanding the quality of relationships formed between volunteer and partner.

Why focus on the relational dimensions of volunteering? VSO's implied 'theory of change' of volunteering goes something like this:

A) A combination of volunteer-specific, placement-specific and contextual factors are the basis for formation of relationships between volunteers and partners, which lead to…
B) Changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices on the part of both volunteers and partners, which lead to…
C) Development outcomes (of Types 1, 2 and 3, as previously discussed).

This framing suggests that the quality of relationships (often articulated as the 'unique selling point' of volunteering) forms the foundation for achievement of development outcomes. The relationships are not an end in themselves, but rather the channel through which positive changes are generated. Thus, a focus on the quality of relationships is not a substitute for measuring development outcomes; rather, we should measure both, and then explore the links between them. If IVCOs base their work on the belief that establishing good volunteer-partner relationships helps effect positive change, we can challenge ourselves to gather evidence to demonstrate this.

Developing a clearer understanding of the factors that contribute to good volunteering relationships – volunteer-specific characteristics (such as motivation, openness and professional skills), placement-specific characteristics (such as clarity of role, duration and management support) and contextual factors (such as language difficulties) – may also help us work towards global standards for responsible and impactful volunteering.

Questions for consideration

- How do IVCOs measure the quality of the relationships between volunteers and partners?

- What factors do IVCOs believe most affect the quality of these relationships, and how do they take these into account when arranging placements?

- How can IVCOs test the hypothesis that better quality relationships lead to better development outcomes?

Where to from here?

It is clear that measurement matters. IVCOs deploy scarce resources of money, time and effort (both our own, and those of volunteers and partners) on the basis of both explicit and implicit claims of development benefit. Consequently, we have a responsibility to analyse whether we are deploying these resources as effectively as possible.

This paper suggests that measuring and understanding are complementary, not contradictory. It makes two main arguments:

1. If IVCOs want to articulate the contribution of volunteering to the SDGs, they need to do so in terms of the SDG indicators. For most IVCOs, this implies a (possibly significant) shift away from reporting on activities towards reporting on clearly-specified outcome indicators.

2. The need to measure what outcomes IVCOs achieve is, however, only part of the

story. IVCOs have rightly emphasised the need to <u>understand how</u> they contribute to these outcomes through relationships between volunteers and partners. Measuring the quality of these relationships and understanding how they develop will help IVCOs better understand and articulate their contribution to the SDGs.

Measuring both inputs and results more consistently will not only help IVCOs articulate their contribution in terms that 'translate' into the wider development discourse, but will also enable us to examine critically the question of cost-effectiveness. IVCOs face increasing pressure to demonstrate 'value for money'; upping our game on measurement will enable us to address this more confidently and consistently. In order to do this, we need to start agreeing on some common approaches for valuing the work of volunteers, measuring the capacity of partners, and so on.

But beyond such calculations lies a more fundamental question: how does positive and sustainable change happen? The work of IVCOs rests on the belief that it is through interpersonal relationships that development results are achieved. Let us challenge ourselves to demonstrate this with evidence.

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