

4th European Conference of the International Forum on Volunteering for Development¹

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Introduction

The conference was opened by *Unité* General Secretary, Raji Sultan. He welcomed the 42 conference attendees from 25 different organisations, providing a background to the *Forum European conferences*. He thanked all those present for attending, previous hosts of European events for their advice and support, to his colleagues in *Unité* and to the *Swiss Development Cooperation* for enabling the event to take place.

Chris Eaton, Chair of *Forum*, then addressed the conference, welcoming both members and non-members of the *Forum* network. He emphasised the value of having a diverse community, noting how, when and where we supported volunteering for development was organisationally distinctive and something which enabled rich learning across our community. He outlined the importance of collective understanding within the challenging global context we faced. In this context we should take every opportunity to be forward looking.

Chris Eaton outlined the challenges *IVCOs* faced. First, how we respond to the aspirations of Agenda 2030 and the goals of the *SDGs* in what appears to be a shrinking space for civil society. Secondly, a growing intolerance in our countries about international aid and development. Thirdly, the challenges of conflict, security, abuse and exploitation. This potentially promotes a growing crisis of legitimacy for our work.

Adding these three challenges together, he concluded it has led to:

- a proliferation of volunteering in host countries which is conflated with our work, for instance young people being in placed in unstructured placements,
- shrinking space for civil society,
- fiscal constraints and limits which impacts on future government funding,

¹ The conference was held from 28–30 May 2018 in Lucerne, Switzerland. The event was jointly organized by *Unité* and the *International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum)*. It was supported by the *Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)* through its core contribution to *Unité*. The report was written for *Unité* by Dr Cliff Allum, Associate Fellow, Department of Social Policy, University of Birmingham, UK.

- changing social norms and changing technologies.

If we do not rise to these challenges, we face the prospect of a decline in our work and a decline in support for it. It is vital we share best practice, advocate for Volunteering for Development from a stronger base, and focus on string quality standards, which help distinguish our work from voluntourism.

This documentation summarizes the discussions and results of some of the conference sessions.

Session 1: Recent Developments in European based International Volunteering and Volunteering for Development

This session provided the opportunity to share recent developments and challenges faced by the *IVCOs* present. Common challenges emerged:

- **Impact of actual and potential government policy changes:** The nature of the policy changes varied from agency to agency. Some focused on development policy reviews which had reached various stages, e.g. the reviews in Switzerland and Ireland. Others focused on policy changes which impacted on their programme, e.g. *France Volontaires* and the policy of the Government of France on youth. Others were concerned about the lack of a legislative framework, e.g. in Greece and Portugal. Finally, others faced practical changes, e.g. location, as governments decentralised their functions.
- **Diminishing space for civil society:** A number of participants focused on the diminishing space for participation of civil society, both in host countries and home countries. This was evidenced in a growing distrust or xenophobic response in the difficulty of securing visas, notably in East Africa, and the restrictions on holding governments to account
- **Resources:** There was a mixed picture on resourcing, but a number of participants referred to the historic lack of governmental funding or its decline in the context of positive rhetoric.
- **Several participants referenced income diversification, with regular mention of funding from the private sector.**
- **Relevance and Legitimacy:** Several agencies referred to questions being raised about the relevance of volunteering as having a role in development, which in turn focused on legitimacy. This also opened up issues of impact and contribution which underpinned both relevance and legitimacy.

Session 2: Ethics of Volunteering

Chris Eaton outlined that the *Forum Board* were giving this issue a high priority, recognising that safeguarding issues need to have a strong priority in the work of *IVCOs*. He recognised the potential risks and that volunteers could be perpetrators as well as requiring safeguarding. The conference broke into small groups to discuss this issue. They acknowledged this was an important question and had become more important over the past year. The groups identified a range of areas where *IVCOs* could focus their energies.

- Where *IVCOs* had experienced safeguarding issues, it had become a high priority. It was important *IVCOs* did not wait for an incident to happen to give safeguarding a high priority. It was recognised that *IVCOs* face both internal and external pressures which impact on how organisations engage.
- Policies, procedures and cultures must focus on those we serve. We need to recognise the power dynamics in the situations in which we work. We should champion transparency and accountability.
- We should be aware of complacency – it is not sufficient to rely on our belief we come from a “good place” and we must be reflective in our practice.
- Training. There was a need to improve training on the underpinning issues of safeguarding, notably gender sensitivity.
- Whistleblowing. Some *IVCOs* had developed models of whistleblowing which tended to enable direct access to an external agency and which could in turn raise concerns at a senior level.
- Social Media. Recognising this would be a mechanism to communicate both accurate and inaccurate information at short notice.
- Volunteer support, such as using psychological contracting services, that would be confidential to the volunteer and contractor.
- Managing the difference between public opinion, donor expectations/requirements and internal good practice.
- Are we prepared with codes of conduct, risk management strategies and reporting structures in place?
- We could use external audit of our systems and procedures.

In conclusion, a potential role for *Forum* was drawn out in the groups and from the general discussion:

- setting standards and potentially aligning codes of conduct across members

- enabling members to improve practice
- supporting/seeking research in the area of safeguarding

Session 3: Towards a Global set of standards for volunteering for development

Four presentations were made to the conference about approaching volunteer standards in a session moderated by James O'Brien of VSO.

The Leading Standards Working Group

The initial presentation led by James O'Brien and Philip Goodwin of VSO, provided the overview of the work of the *Leading Standards Working Group* which had been established by *Forum*. The purpose had been to develop a set of Volunteering for Development standards to complement the *Forum* Charter and establish a process for take up/adoption by *Forum* members and associate members. It was intended to launch the standards at *IVCO* 2019 and the Group was currently focusing on the research and consultation stage.

There were three main purposes for establishing standards: informing volunteer choices of organisations; supporting organisations in developing good practice; and providing a pathway for shared discussions about good practice and models of volunteering.

The desk review had identified a framework on which consultation could take place. The key elements were the organisational approach; the duty of care standards; volunteer management standards; and volunteering for development programme standards. This desk review, which had looked at 57 standards in 32 organisations in 13 countries, was now coming to an end and workshop consultations would be running between September and December 2018. The draft report of the desk review would be available very soon.

In discussion, issues were raised as to whether the standards would be prescriptive (possibly on the essentials while others might be aspirational); whether *IVCOs* would have the systems/skills for managing people with disabilities in respect of inclusivity standards; issues of reporting against standards; and more detail was sought on the next steps.

Philip Goodwin provided more detail on the consultation process, which was not entirely finalised at this stage. He identified four consultation workshops:

- Sub-saharan Africa led by VSO
- Asia led by AVI

- South and Central America led by UNV
- and possibly an event in Europe linked to the IAVE conference in October

Standards in the EU Aid Volunteer Initiative

The conference then heard a presentation based on the experience of the *EU Aid Volunteer Initiative*. This programme requires the organisations to get certified before sending or hosting volunteers; the certification mechanism therefore applies to both sending and hosting organisations.

The certification process focuses on 18 elements covering all the volunteer continuum and is based on self-assessment. Technical assistance and capacity building projects are funded by the European Union in order to strengthen the capacity of sending and hosting organisations who wish to participate.

FEC (Portugal), Action Aid Hellas (Greece), Comhlámh (Ireland) and La Guilde (France) provided examples of the way this process had resulted in improvements in the way they worked. All the presenters emphasised the development and improvement of policies and practices. Some also referenced improvement in selection processes, others the opportunity of improving ways of working with host partners.

However, it was also noted this process was a complex one and that certification was time limited.

Condensing standards in Unité

In turning to the third presentation by *Unité*, the theme of compression and sharpening was identified as important. Reto Gmünder presented *Unité's* new set of standards for the exchange of personnel in development cooperation. This report was due for publication on 1 July 2018.

During the last few years, *Unité* had developed a large set of documents concerning standards and it was important to consolidate and condense this into a single manual which member could access and use more easily. It was important to have transparency both internally and externally as to the nature and scope of the standards.

The standards covered a range of areas (such as: definitions of personnel exchange, forms of assignments, basic parameters within which the work takes place, partnership working, including values and formal agreements, General standards on programme approach and implementing assignments, co-financing and accountability, specific standards, bibliography) with some presented in greater depth.

In discussion it was clarified this was not the only instrument that *Unité* had available. Every four years there was an institutional assessment which aimed to identify

areas of improvement for individual members. In turn there was an annual review with the *Unité Quality Commission* which informed the process of implementation.

Unité, as a network organisation, focuses on standards for members and does not directly engage with the standards relating to host organisations, which is seen as a matter for members to address. Nevertheless, the standards used by *Unité* would have implications for the partner organisations that members worked with.

Child Protection in Frances Volontaires

The final presentation in this conference stream concerned *France Volontaires' (FV)* experience with Child Protection and vulnerable adults. Agnes Golfier made clear this was more of a journey and sharing of experience than a final outcome. The model that *FV* use meant that risks might be associated with staff, volunteers and the 10.000 visitors who access the volunteer spaces that *FV* have established across the globe.

Different pressures forced *FV* to address this issue – from donors; from partners, volunteers and the media in the context of developments such as voluntourism; and meeting international standards on volunteering. Reviewing what they needed to do, *FV* then looked at a range of steps, including looking at important documents both of *FV* and externally; identify existing practices that needed to be reviewed; seeking external support on key issues; clarifying definitions; and creating tools to address cases when they arose.

The first steps have been taken. *FV* has introduced a new module on volunteer training and developed a partnership with the *Child Safe Movement*.

In conclusion Agnes Golfier identified the following main questions:

- recognizing a common responsibility on vulnerability,
- finding a balance between protection and security,
- promoting a «Do No Harm» approach.

In discussion on the presentations, there was a strong focus on the issues of child protection and vulnerable adults. A series of questions were asked about victim support, to which *FV* responded by clarifying that victims in-country should seek in-country support. The difficult question of corporeal punishment was one where volunteers were guided against intervention at the time, but to seek advice and raise outside of the situation. It was recognised they could easily become potentially vulnerable if they intervened.

It was also recognised that *IVCOs* may have different understandings of the terminology, e.g. what constitutes a vulnerable adult. We should be prepared to challenge

our own assumptions and mutually support across organisations. A number of specific areas came to light where there might be risks – recruitment and selection in the first instance, but also host homes and the reliability of police checks. The conference was left with the thought that the assumption that standards may not operate for host organisations needs to be carefully thought through.

Session 5: Understanding and Measuring the outcomes of volunteering for development

This session, which took place over two days, explored six different presentations related to the measurement of the outcomes of volunteering for development programmes. It was moderated by Martin Schreiber of *Unité*.

FOCSIV: measuring soft skills in youth volunteering

Daniela Peschiulli of *FOCSIV* opened this session by focusing on the challenges of measuring the soft skills developed through youth volunteering and how this could be best communicated in a language understandable in the business world. Recognising the increasing opportunities for young people to volunteer internationally, Daniela Peschiulli outlined current approaches to measuring soft skills, including the *EVS Youthpass* system.

Focusing on the issue of validating non-formal learning experiences, she set out the work undertaken on the *EaSY approach* which aimed to evaluate soft skills in International Youth volunteering.

The *EaSY approach*

- to accompany soft skills self-awareness process of young people
- to develop a model of soft skills in *YIV* and its gradings
- to develop tools to support the soft skills

Based on mapping analysis seven soft skills were identified, providing the basis for an on-line self-assessment test for volunteers, which in turn provided the basis for a soft skills report identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Further steps focused on the development of the pre-departure guide for volunteer trainers and the return/orientation handbook for trainers. The final step is the Field Test involving more than 400 volunteers and 50 trainers which lasts until July 2018.

In discussion it was recognised the outcomes were yet to be identified. It was also apparent the EC preferred self-assessment models rather than certification.

*FK Norway and added value*²

The next presentation was by Helge Espe of *FK Norway* who focused on the concept of added value. He explained the FK model and how it focused on transformation at institutional, individual and societal level. Important in understanding these changes was the survey tool. This looked at changes in knowledge transfer and capacity building at the institutional level; engagement and commitment at the individual level; and impact on national level, formation of international partnerships and change through mobilisation at societal level.

Helge Espe illustrated how these transformations were evidenced in the survey and identified the importance of *SDG 4.7*³ as an outcome of the *FK Norway* programme. In conclusion he posed the question as to what stimulates long term, deep value.

FEC – Volunteering, Mission and Gift

Catarina Antonio of *FEC Portugal* made the final presentation of the first half of this session and began by outlining the role of FEC in co-ordinating and supporting 61 Catholic organisations in Portugal involved in both short-term and long-term volunteering. FEC, inspired by IYV 2011, had undertaken a study, called *Volunteering and Gift* which had two objectives;⁴

- to evaluate the impact that Missionary Volunteer action has on the development of local communities
- To evaluate the impact that Missionary Volunteer action has in the lives of the volunteers involved and in Portuguese society

Looking through the perspective of gift, FEC concluded that “experiencing the meaning of gift with a Christian intentionality proves decisive for motivation and self-assessment or external assessment of the actors and institutions involved.”⁵ The survey identified increased demand and supply for volunteering opportunities, with a strong motivational feature on “the other”. Returning volunteers feel differently and are more resilient.

2 Since the conference *FK Norway* has changed its name to *NOREC (Norwegian Agency for Exchange Co-operation)*.

3 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development and life-styles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

4 *Volunteering, Mission and Gift* is available on request from *FEC* and is published in summary form in English.

5 *Volunteering Mission and Gift* (undated) published by *FEC*.

HORIZONT3000 – measuring impact of Technical Assistance programmes

In the second part of this session, Klaus Ebenhöf of *HORIZONT3000* made the first presentation and he began by explaining the work of the long-established Austrian organisation which is the only one recognised in the legislation on development workers in that country. *HORIZONT3000* has nine organisations who are members and one of their programmes is the *Technical Assistance Programme*.

HORIZONT3000 commissioned a consultancy to explore the impact of their *Technical Assistance Programme*. The survey covered three countries in East Africa, around 60 projects in two sectors across the period 2010–2015. The overall goal was to understand the contribution of the *Technical Assistance Programme* to the overall capacity development of local partners, especially in the field of organisational development. The methodology involved questionnaires, workshops, interviews as well as desk research. The outcome: the *Technical Assistance Programme* had an impact at individual, organisational and institutional level. Most of the partner organisations:

- have improved their policies, procedures and guidelines,
- have improved efficiency and effectiveness in programme delivery,
- are attracting more funding for their projects,
- are improving networks and cooperation with other NGOs,
- have increased trust with their governments

However, *HORIZONT3000* recognised this was not really an impact study, more an evaluation. In that sense, the organisation had some important learning. First, ensure the study is adequately resourced both in terms of finance and staff time; secondly, if the intention is to measure impact, ensure that there is a clear theory of change; thirdly, ensure there is excellent preparation within the organisation, for example on the training of staff on the theory of change.

The VSO Volunteer Relational Model

Philip Goodwin and James O'Brien introduced the *VSO Volunteer Relational Model*. *VSO* had developed its recent approach to understanding the contribution made by volunteering to development on the basis of the valuing volunteering research which had taken place over a two-year period and involved six in depth country studies. In addition, further evaluations since then had contributed to the understanding of *VSO* in this area. The significant change was to move away from seeing volunteers as a resource to one where programmes could be designed in such a way that they engaged with the way volunteers added value.

The “relational” people-to-people approach of VSO reads as follows:

Through the relationships that volunteers develop, we can bring about change that is simultaneously more sustainable, locally owned and appropriate than many other forms of intervention. This “relational” aspect of volunteer interventions enables greater engagement and empowerment of “primary actors” - something which supports VSO’s “people-centred” approach. In terms of our niche, we can say that our relational or “relationship-based” volunteer methodology supports an approach that puts poor and marginalised people first.

The approach enabled volunteer contributions to be assessed across eight areas, which would vary in significance depending on the nature of the volunteer intervention. In this context, the case study of the *UK International Citizen Service (ICS)* programme was presented, setting out the theory of change underpinning the programme and where the evaluation of the programme had focused on the eight areas identified in the valuing volunteering research.

Unité – impact model and measurement methodology

Reto Gmünder presented the *Unité* model on impact and measurement. He set out aspects of the *Unité* impact model:

- The impact model was based on two levels/circles of effects, where development service was seen as impacting on beneficiaries through the contribution of partner organisations; and where capacity development was an outcome of the intervention of development workers in the partner organisation.
- The impact model is based on a series of assignments, which on one side build from an individual assignment through to programmatic and institutional level; and on the other on the results of capacity building leading to the *SDGs*.

Since 2006, *Unité* had worked on measurement methodology, adapted from the UNV approach and which involves a series of structured workshops and a consideration of three levels: project, country/sector and institutional. Four different methodologies had been used: logical framework analysis, most significant change, outcome mapping and SWOT. Three main questions are addressed: what are the main results, how are they achieved and what are the lessons learned.

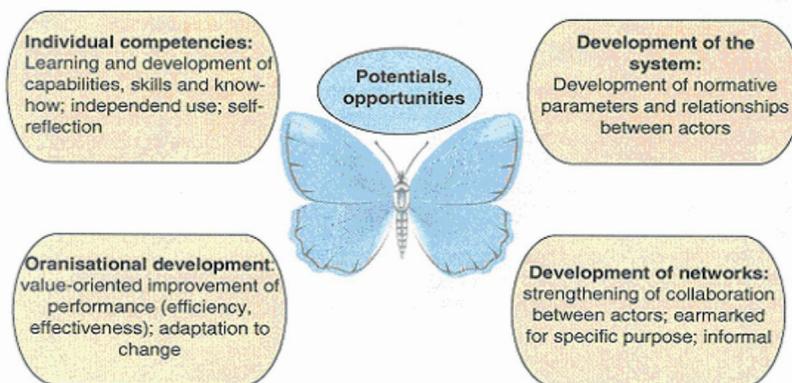
Four major studies had taken place between 2011 and 2018 with four of the members of *Unité* and the key details of those studies were presented to the conference. Overall, the prevailing strengths and some weaknesses of this participatory qualitative approach were shared, together with aggregate quantitative reference indicators that were utilised.

Comments and conclusion of the session

Putting ahead framed youth volunteering, valuing soft skills, which were acquired in the South, after returning to the North, remains an overall challenge. Self-evaluation by returnees is rather questionable – the way to a recognized certification proves, both methodologically and legally, quite difficult.

Moreover, demonstrating added value cannot be done only at an individual-relational level. Even so recent social research is able to present some significant results. Institutional and social relevance is essential, as *FK Norway* emphasised. In order to achieve this level of significance *FK Norway* is working successfully in stable strategic partnerships, with a focus on reciprocity and highlighting the transversal character of some *SDGs* (not only 4.7, but also gender etc.), i.e. development cannot be limited to an individual apprenticeship (“learning model”) and changes in the host and sending society are to be aspired (“development model” and “Civil Society Strengthening”). The widely-used “up-scaling” from individual to social level is methodologically questionable.

Meanwhile *HORIZONT3000* depicted practical challenges of impact studies; scientific methodical constraints are to be highlighted. In conventional studies on volunteering for development, neither the principle of validity⁶ nor reliability⁷, as fundamental cornerstones of the social sciences, can be fulfilled – nevertheless, methodological transparency must be guaranteed. In this spirit, *Unité* - in application of its above described impact model - tries to combine in a complementary way participatory qualitative analysis (impact assessing workshops with both partner and beneficiaries) with quantitative input-oriented data collection.



6 Refers to how well a scientific research measures what it sets out to, or how well it reflects the reality it claims to represent.

7 Any significant results must be more than a one-off finding and be inherently repeatable.

According to the 4-dimensional CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT⁸ *model* (considered as a leading tool in the impact discussion on “volunteering for development”/development service), especially the wings of “individual competencies” and organisational development, are relevant in the impact assessment.

In the concluding comments and discussions, a number of issues were raised. The valuing volunteering research was an indicator that research was possible, yet also emphasised how little there was to draw on. “Big Data” remained a challenge. The focus on *SDG 4.7* had been a very strong area during the conference but it remained to see if donors would fund volunteering as a way of contributing towards it. The range of contributions had shown that different organisations had different reasons for focusing on measuring outcomes and taking the necessary steps to prepare was an important factor in having valuable results from any evaluations.

8 Human and Institutional Development for the support of processes of change in developing and transition countries.