

Why measure and for whose benefit? Addressing the challenges of measuring the contribution of volunteering for development in a multiple stakeholder environment¹

Cliff Allum

Research Associate, Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham, UK | Member of the International Forum for Volunteering in Development Research Practice Policy and Learning Group | C.Allum@bham.ac.uk

Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Beweggründe von Organisationen, die entwicklungspolitische Freiwilligendienste organisieren, wenn sie verstehen möchten, wie der Beitrag der Freiwilligen vor Ort verstanden und gemessen werden kann. Dies wird erläutert im Kontext des historischen Wandels entwicklungspolitisch orientierter Freiwilligendienste. Unterschiedliche Ansätze werden an der Schnittstelle zwischen den Erwartungen der Stakeholder und dem sich wandelnden Verständnis von Entwicklungshilfe positioniert. Der Artikel basiert nicht nur auf rein akademischen Erkenntnissen, sondern auch auf solchen, die im Feld zwischen Wissenschaft und Praxis entstanden sind. Es berücksichtigt die mehr als 20jährige Erfahrung des Autors als Praktiker im Feld der entwicklungspolitisch orientierten Freiwilligendienste. Das zentrale Argument: Der Fokus der Messung hat sich mit der Zeit verändert, mit einer unterschiedlichen Betonung des Gleichgewichts zwischen Inputs, Outputs und Outcomes. Das komplexe Rechenschaftsgefüge in dem diese Organisationen verortet sind – Geldgeber, Freiwillige, Einsatzstellen, Regierungen sowie ihre eigene Steuerungsstruktur – hat bedeutende Auswirkungen bezüglich der Frage, was zu welchem Zweck und zu wessen Nutzen gemessen wird.

Schlagworte: Entwicklungspolitische Freiwilligendienste; Wirkung; Wirkungsmessung; Outcome; Nachhaltige Entwicklungsziele; Beitrag.

This article aims to explore the different drivers that international volunteering and volunteering for development (V4D) organisations face in addressing how the contribution of volunteers is understood and measured. It considers this in the context of the historical changes in international volunteering for development, locating different approaches to measurement to the interface of stakeholder expectations and changes in the narrative on aid and development. The article draws upon the contributions made not only within the academic literature, but also in the area of crossover between academics and practitioners. It draws on the author's direct experience of more than twenty years as a practitioner in international volunteering. The central argument of the paper is that the focus of measurement has shifted over time, with a differential emphasis on the balance between inputs, outputs and outcomes. Since organisations sit within a complex framework of accountability – donors, volunteers, host communities and governments, and their own governance – there are significant implications concerning what is measured, for what purpose and for whose benefit.

Keywords: international volunteering; measurement; outcomes; V4D; SDGs; impact; contribution

1 This article is based on a conference paper presented at the 12th International Conference of the International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR) in Stockholm (June 2016). A previous version has been published in a series of discussion papers produced by the International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum). The author would like to thank Peter Devereux who moderated the panel at which this was presented and the Forum Research Working Group for their feedback.

1. Introduction

This article aims to explore the different drivers that international volunteering and volunteering for development (V4D) organisations face in addressing how the contribution of volunteers is understood and measured. It considers this in the context of the historical changes in international volunteering for development, locating different approaches to measurement to the interface of stakeholder expectations and changes in the narrative on aid and development. It traces the pathway of major international volunteering for development organisations from focusing on how inputs were a significant measurement criterion to the impact on volunteers and the engagement with ‘classic’ development outcomes. It considers approaches to measuring the distinctive contribution (e. g. the social capital model [Development Initiatives 2004]) and recent work on valuing volunteering (Burns/Howard 2015), addressing the impact on returned volunteers as social activists (Allum 2008), pursuing their ‘in placement’ contribution (Lough/Matthews 2013), leading to the SDGs post-2015 engagement about both the role and contribution of volunteering for development (Haddock/Devereux 2016).

The approach is based on the use of secondary sources and is not intended to engage in any new primary field research. It draws on the author’s direct experience of more than twenty years as a practitioner in international volunteering.

The paper concludes by setting out future priorities for international volunteering organisations and concludes that an effective interface between academic research and practitioners is vital to the development of a body of knowledge on understanding and measuring the contribution of international volunteering.

In this paper, there is the use of a number of different terms, which in the operational world of the V4D sector are not necessarily used in a consistent way. This is not simply a technical question but a political one. The term *international volunteering* reflects both the source of volunteers and where they are placed (outside of their home country) but not the content or even objectives of what volunteers do, although many programs are ‘development’-focused. Many international volunteer cooperation organisations (IVCOs) may be specialists in this area. *Volunteering for development* (V4D) is a broader category, including national as well as international volunteers; yet it has a potentially narrower focus on *development and peace* in terms of content.

IVCOs may operate with both national and international volunteers as part of their programs, either separately or combined. In this paper, different terminology is used in alignment with different historical moments, but it may not always be consistent and may also be a simplification on occasions. This is a reflection of how the objectives of IVCOs using essentially the same or similar forms of intervention may change over time or are multi-layered.

2. Context

The relative importance of measurement in respect of volunteering for development is arguably a reflection of both dominant and countercultural models of volunteering. There is a diversity of interests: those of the institutions, organisations and individuals who resource volunteering activity; those who undertake volunteering; the mediating agencies who send the volunteer; and the host organisations and communities that receive volunteers.² The issue of why and what is measured – and indeed how effectively it can be measured – is related to those diverse interests, which may contradict each other at any moment in time, and indeed may change over time.

In this context, the measurement of inputs appears a far easier prospect than outputs or outcomes. It has been far easier to count the number of volunteers who undertake volunteering for development – at least at the formal level – than to measure what contribution volunteers have made. Related to this is whether there is any interest in measuring volunteering in any other way. For example, if the objective of the institutional agency is primarily in seeing a given number of volunteers in place, then providing the volunteer, the sending agency (if not the institution) and host partner and community are ‘content’, then measurement can remain at the input level.

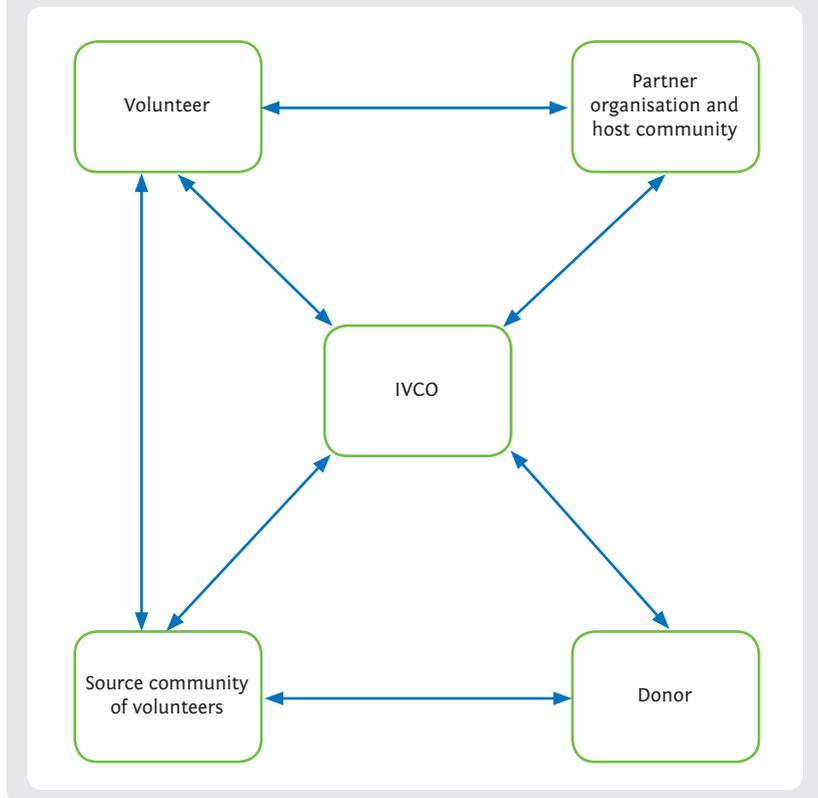
On the other hand, if, for example, the institutional donor decides that just counting numbers of volunteers is not sufficient, this can change the whole system dynamic; or if the host organisation requirements of volunteers change from large-scale inputs to specialised expertise, this impacts on the capacity to deliver volunteers at scale; indeed, any changes in the balance of the key actors may do this.

Changes in the views of host communities as to what they require could prove significant; changes in volunteer expectations may not align with the priorities of other organisations; changes in the mission and values of sending organisations would make connections more or less easy with volunteers and host partners. IVCOs have mediated that space between donor, volunteer and community expectations as to what V4D will deliver, and have both shaped and responded to differential demands for measurement.

Figure 1 shows a simplified model of those relationships. It will vary from one situation to another, but in the traditional model, the mediating role of the IVCO is important to note. It is the only organisation that will have relationships with all other key stakeholders. Being able to demonstrate the contribution that V4D makes is a critical success factor, but different stakeholders may well have different concepts and different rationales that need to be accommodated.

2 It is an interesting question as to whether local partners and communities ‘request’ volunteers or ‘receive’ them. Volunteer programs can be demand led but they are also supply led, where essentially the ‘request’ comes from the sending agency asking the local partner to take volunteers. The term ‘receive’ is intended to cover both supply and demand led situations.

Figure 1: Key stakeholder relationships in the international V4D model



3. Doing the easy stuff – do we really need to measure that much at all?

The context of V4D – better termed North-South international volunteering in its emergent phase of the 1960s – is one of post-war reconstruction, both economically and politically. This took various forms at the level of multi-lateral interventions, nation state interventions and what is now termed civil society. The particular process of the changing balance of colonial influence combined with emerging nationalism and independence movements across Africa and Asia had been set rolling by the end of the Second World War and arguably concluded in this phase in Africa and Asia with the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa in the early 1990s.³ It is not coin-

3 The demise of left-leaning governments and movements in Central America was in some cases followed by the expansion of the US Peace Corps program, e.g. in Nicaragua. The unravelling of colonial history in the former USSR and Middle East is outside the scope of this paper.

cidence that this period was also an era of East-West conflict in the form of the Cold War, which in part was fought out through various means in Africa, Asia and Central and South America.

The confidence of the West in this area arguably drew upon theories of capitalism which, in the wake of burgeoning prosperity in the USA, Northern Europe and a resurgent Japan, appeared to contain the essential solution to poverty elsewhere. Alongside the economic model, the Cold War era emphasised the importance of foreign policy – dramatically in some cases – resulting in a developing rivalry in political and economic influence across a range of geographical areas between the West and the communist world.

The international volunteers sat somewhere in the midst of this. The economic was essentially about skills, the politically softer edge of what the Global North (both capitalist and communist) could offer the emerging nations of the Global South. In an era of solidarity movements, volunteer agencies may have ostensibly recruited on the basis of skills, but volunteer motivations were an essential ingredient.⁴ The economic and political came together in the form of large-scale programs of service delivery – typically teachers and health workers, but also engineers and planners.

Measurement of service delivery at this point was not a problem that needed sophisticated understanding. It was assumed that bringing teachers and health workers to countries where they did not have them in sufficient scale would inevitably be better than not having them at all. Building capacity to train local people would take time to go to scale. A counterpart model was favoured in many situations as a means of mutual sharing of skills and promoting the values of the sending country, but this was a long-term strategy. Combining large-scale delivery with skill transfer was not seen as a clear way forward and volunteers presented a cost-effective model for delivery.

It is not surprising in such a context that inputs were at the forefront of measurement, since achievement could be assumed. The number of international volunteers (IVs) sent would be a reasonable proxy of both economic and political objectives. This was an era where ensuring the supply and engagement of people who would volunteer was important – having a role was not such a problem since the perspective drew on the notion there was much to do.

In the 1980s and 1990s, we can see trends that impact on this focus on inputs. Firstly, there is the growth of locally generated professional staff as indigenous teachers and health workers are developed in the emerging post-colonial countries.

4 Some examples would have been CIIR in Central America and IVS in southern Africa. IVS sent volunteers with skills to Mozambique in the 1980s, but their political sympathies would need to have been with the Frelimo revolution. See Judge (2004) for an account of the unspoken political life of international volunteers.

The need for large-scale inputs is no longer evidenced on a widespread basis, but quality begins to emerge as an issue. The requirements of the governments and communities become more sophisticated. In this context, there is the movement by IVCOs from service delivery/counterpart models to ones that are focused on capacity building local organisations and local capacity. This essentially demands a more sophisticated model of measurement as well as delivery.

Secondly, we can see a recognition by donors that the models of large-scale skill-based interventions are not generating the economic success that might have been expected. The 1960s model of unproblematic economic growth becomes less predominant as economies in the Global North stall and stagnate, while the anticipated success in Africa, South Asia and South and Central America is not realised. The assumptions underpinning the contemporary V4D model start to unravel. This implies the need to redefine the role of V4D and opens up the challenge of measuring more closely the contribution of volunteers.

Thirdly, the end of the Soviet Union and Cold War impacts on the balance of the battle for post-colonial influence across Asia, Africa and South and Central America. This impacts on the significance of the role of the international volunteer as a promoter of their home country.⁵

Taken together, this starts to demand a sharper focus on the specific nature of the input and clarity on what difference the V4D input makes. In the wider context of what difference any development contribution makes, and a recognition that NGOs may not make up for the deficiencies in state-based interventions, the focus on contribution develops. This also seems in some western economies to be part of a focus on 'value for money' and a detailed driving down into the value of public expenditure generally. For whose benefit do we have international volunteers?

4. Measuring what we can

Amongst volunteer sending agencies, this generates an era of repositioning which can be tracked to the 1990s in some form or other. Terminology becomes a sensitive issue as some agencies move towards consultancy, others reaffirm the high level skills of their development workers, while others retain the volunteer as the central focus of their work. By the turn of the century, the process of radical change in the international volunteer model is underway (Allum 2007).⁶

5 See Lough and Allum (2011) for case studies on the changing patterns of state funding and the changing rationales for doing so.

6 In 1999, the European network for IVCOs, Forum, commissioned two papers on the future of international volunteering in the context of challenging discussions over the meaning and purpose of V4D, with agencies pulling in different directions. This led rapidly to the restructuring of Forum as a global network and the establishment of the IVCO annual conference. The rationale for V4D and the issue of contribution were immediate areas of focus.

The pressure to define more closely the contribution of IV/V4D is coming from various directions. Governments, either as donors or as deliverers of development programs, are striving to demonstrate development outputs and outcomes and the new Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide, somewhat unevenly, a focus for this. Volunteer agencies – governmental and non-governmental – are being pressed to define their contribution and/or impact. Typically, this turns in different directions: on the volunteers; on partner organisations and communities during placement; and on what happens when volunteers return home.

Measurement has often focused on the volunteer experience. Put simply, for volunteer agencies to be able to recruit people onto their programs, demonstrating the positive aspects of the experience was important. For example, understanding the profile of potential volunteers (e.g. age, sex, educational background, marital status) was a precondition of defining how to promote the program. Demonstrating the 'life-changing' nature of V4D alongside, e.g. reassurance that employers would take a positive view of that experience, provided a focus not just to convince people to volunteer but also set out what might be measured. What happened to volunteers after they had completed their assignment was important in informing how and where to recruit and to generally promoting the volunteering experience.⁷

Going beyond that starts to open the classic question of whether volunteers believe they have made a difference. While the answer is consistently 'yes', it is very often the case that volunteers recognise they have learnt more to influence their own life paths than they have contributed during their time as a volunteer. This anecdotal storytelling has traditionally had very strong currency.

Anecdotally, we all know that (good) volunteer experiences can and often do influence the choices that former volunteers make later in their lives. (Christie 2007)⁸

Moving beyond the anecdotal that volunteering experience is valuable poses the question of what do we want to measure? One interesting case study is that of the experience in Canada, where international volunteering traditionally has been delivered by NGOs, with a significant element of state funding. Tracking the Canadian volunteer agency history between 1999 and 2007 is essentially a pattern of the agencies justifying the value of international volunteers when they returned to Canada, as the relevant government department, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), sought to identify that contribution. CIDA commissioned a review in 2005, which concluded how:

7 See for example Skillshare International *Development Worker Research Report 1978-1998*, published by Skillshare International (1998). "We now have a clearer picture of what kind of people become development workers, what work they will do when they are placed and what will happen to those who return."

8 The anecdotal has a more collective equivalent, which is highly visible in some cases: the US political system is full of former Peace Corps volunteers in both main parties.

The “overseas experience” had a “profound impact on the values and beliefs of returned volunteers, as well as on their skill levels, the career and education decisions they have made on their return, and their involvement and support to local community or international development.” (Jackson 2005)

Other studies also exist of what impact volunteers make on return, which tend to show they are more active in voluntary roles and therefore more active as ‘citizens’ in their home communities.⁹ This is not methodologically difficult, since they tend to rely on sample surveys of volunteers – questionnaires – plus interview follow-up.¹⁰ Nevertheless, these approaches showed correlation but not cause and effect. Put simply, would international volunteers have followed a similar trajectory in any case?¹¹

A further study of Canadian returned volunteers attempted to address this question. Kelly and Case (2007) refined the model used in the CIDA-commissioned study, using 1,150 former Canadian University Students Abroad (CUSO) volunteers, gaining a significant 647 responses and holding 40 interviews. They also standardised their sample against the regular profile of CUSO volunteers, allowing for when people undertook their volunteering and which parts of Canada they came from. They produced a number of interesting findings, but one essential point – that Canadians who volunteer abroad tend to be active volunteers on return to Canada, are more likely to volunteer than Canadians as a whole and contribute more hours as volunteers (Kelly/Case 2007).¹²

This kind of methodology, which attempts to address the change in perception or behaviour of volunteers, has been an attractive way of demonstrating the contribution of volunteers. This leads into the issue of who benefits from V4D and what has been studied. This tends to be about changes in the volunteers and how they might benefit, echoing the historic institutional recruitment needs of VIOs. As Buckles and Chevalier (2012) noted:

The few studies that have been done focus primarily on the benefits of volunteering for the volunteers not the consequences of volunteering for other stakeholders (e.g. Tiessen/Heron 2012; McBride et al. 2010).

However, researching what happens to volunteers is arguably not the mainstream area of interest to at least two key stakeholders: donors and host partner communities. That takes us to what has become the holy grail of the contribution of volunteers: what is achieved during placement and how it can be measured.

9 See for example Sherraden et al. (2008) and Machin (2008) as contemporary pieces with the Canadian work.

10 Jackson et al. (2005) sampled 500 returned volunteers followed by 10% interviews.

11 Some research on the Australian Volunteers International (AVI) program suggests this is likely. See Fidler (1997).

12 This is discussed in Allum (2008).

5. Measuring to compete on other terms?

Organisations concerned with volunteering as a form of development activity are likely to have a desire to understand and measure what they are achieving, within the constraints of their resources. Indeed, the earlier history of interventions has been in part characterised by the principle of ‘do no harm’, which recognises that whatever the experiential value to the volunteer, there is no automatic positive outcome from V4D interventions.¹³

However, the increasing focus on development outcomes and ultimately impact, partly arising either directly or indirectly from the focus on MDGs, became connected to greater demands on reporting requirements in terms of contribution. This was also combined with an era of tightening public sector funding alongside value for money policies. These factors all combined to focus increased attention on what difference V4D makes in terms of development outcomes.

From the early years of this century, the global network for international volunteering agencies, Forum, found members simultaneously concerned about funding on the one hand and their ability to demonstrate impact on the other. There was a recognition that the tools were not really available and that volunteer agencies did little in this area. UNV, prompted in part by the pressure to demonstrate contribution to the United Nations MDGs, led a major action research project, including six international volunteer agencies who were members of Forum, to pilot and develop tools that would enable a better understanding of the impact (or contribution) of V4D. The outcome was a comprehensive pack of exercises and tools to assess the contribution of volunteering to development, published by UNV five years after the pilot (UNV 2011).¹⁴

This model set out a logical framework for volunteering for development, running from the top level of ‘Goal’ down to ‘Purpose’, ‘Outcomes’, ‘Outputs’ to ‘Activities’. It included a table of expected changes in key stakeholders and set out exercises and tools to be used to assess at placement and program levels. The methodology was largely participative, essentially using stakeholder views as the building blocks for making an assessment.¹⁵ The caveats were important:

- 13 This principled position has been arguably challenged and in some cases undermined by the blatant supply-driven North-South youth programs in recent years. This includes both the commercial developments of volunteer experience and the voluntourism expansion, but also state-funded programs. See Allum (2012) for a fuller discussion.
- 14 The use of the terms ‘impact’ and ‘contribution’ reflect the nuances of the debate around what was possible to be demonstrated and the management of expectation.
- 15 It should be noted that at ISTR 2008, a shared panel of academics and practitioners focused on international volunteering, included a presentation by Caspar Merkle who led this research in its original form in UNV. See Merkle (2008).

Although the logical framework includes several levels up to impact, this methodology is NOT intended to measure the impact of volunteering. This would be inappropriate, as in general the work of volunteers is not enough to generate impact on its own. Rather, we look at how volunteering contributes to short and long-term development goals (UNV 2011: 10).

At the same time, looking towards the potential contribution to the MDGs, the aspiration is suitably modest:

The purpose of including the MDGs in the assessment methodology is to enable volunteers and partners to look in general terms at how they make a contribution in the wider context of international development targets. This is not about trying to attribute changes to individual volunteers, projects or programmes, but attempting to look at the cumulative contribution of volunteering within the broader context of ongoing development processes. (UNV 2011: 17)

This major piece of work had ultimately acknowledged that the challenges of attribution and scale were bridges too far at that stage. But importantly, it acknowledged that the standards set mitigated against what could be demonstrated in terms of V4D, indicating that the MDGs were “very much based on quantitative rather than qualitative data.” (UNV 2011: 17)

The methodological reliance on participatory exercises, seeking some level of demonstration of contribution based on what people said, could be extended to partner organisations. This was relatively unexplored. This might seem surprising, since the methodology could have been applied to partner organisations and communities: in what ways do partner organisations and communities believe the volunteer has been able to make an effective contribution?

The UNV research project, combined with Forum’s interest in developing discussion papers on key topics, demonstrated the potential of multi-agency collaboration and coincided with the emergence of a new wave of academic interest. Individual interests in international volunteering research had always been a feature, though often rare at an academic level. Peter Devereux was drawing on his own and other agencies’ experiences to produce a doctorate thesis and was one of a team of research fellows supported by the Global Service Initiative at the University of Washington in St Louis, led by Margaret Sherraden and Amanda Moore McBride. The Center for Social Development at the University of Washington produced a series of papers from around 2007 on international volunteering, including measurement; elsewhere, the work of social geographers was focused on international volunteering; and individual Forum members were bringing to light the work of academic institutions and research bodies in their own countries. The desire on the part of IVCOs to demonstrate contribution began to drive a connection between

practitioners and what appeared to be a less connected world of individually inspired academics in this field of research.¹⁶

In late 2008, in the aftermath of the field research on the UNV project and a joint presentation of academics and practitioners at ISTR, Forum decided to form a Research Working Group, bringing together interested members and interested academics. This group was not initially focused on academic research but on evidence-based discussion papers, except in one area: impact. A research proposal was developed that focused on the contribution that V4D made to partner organisations and communities. Ben Lough was commissioned to undertake the work.

The outcome was an important study of V4D in Kenya, facilitated by Forum members, using interviews and focus groups to work with volunteers, program staff and beneficiaries (Lough 2012; Lough/Matthews 2013).¹⁷ The work with community members was based on participatory workshops and short surveys. The outcomes of the pilot were potentially challenging. From the community perspective, short-term volunteering was seen as less beneficial than long-term volunteering; while cited as a strong benefit of volunteers to local partners and communities were the resources IVs brought with them and the prestige of certain skin colours.

This was sufficient to raise up the agenda the potential of developing a greater knowledge of what communities and organisations who received volunteers really thought, revealing perhaps that in the midst of donor priorities, volunteer aspirations and organisational priorities, the ‘Southern voice’ was not really being heard as well as it might. This cooperation has led to a larger scale piece of work, which it is intended to scale up again in the future.¹⁸

On the terrain of the MDGs, demonstrating the contribution of V4D was difficult and ultimately unattainable. The setting of the MDGs had not effectively considered the mechanisms that would deliver the MDGs, which inevitably were driven by the policies of the governments of the Global North. V4D had no seat at *that* table at that time.

16 There starts a process of interesting crossovers between researchers and practitioners. At ISTR 2008, a panel of two academics and two practitioners was brought together by Peter Devereux. He later joined UNV and the Forum Research Working Group before returning to academia. Another member of the panel was Dr Ben Lough, part of the research team at the University of Washington in St. Louis led by Margaret Sherraden, who joined the Forum research group and later worked for UNV on the State of the World's Volunteerism Report. Although Forum and its members have attempted to engage research from the Global South, this connection has been harder to develop. The link with VOSESA, now sadly no longer with us, was perhaps the most significant.

17 The earlier version is the initial draft findings.

18 This remains an important area on which research is currently being focused. Forum is currently supporting SSHRC-funded research on the perspectives and experiences of partner organisations by Ben Lough and Rebecca Tiessen.

While this period had seen the development of new tools, the leap from the intervention of an individual volunteer to demonstrate impact at scale on key areas of health and education was too great and not competitive with the apparent plausibility of the well-scripted development project focused on tangible outcomes. IVCOs were trying to utilise the models of development measurement and reporting which had not been designed to demonstrate the contribution of volunteering. They were struggling to demonstrate a contribution to classic development outcomes, while the tools did not easily demonstrate the significance of the volunteer contribution.

6. Can we measure distinctiveness?

But there was also another path that had been pursued. This focused on measuring what made V4D *distinctive*. This was really an attempt to explore the essential nature of the volunteer relationship; how this would shape and engage with communities in ways other forms of interventions would not be able to do. This was part of the received ideology of international volunteering: that somehow the relationship between international volunteers and host communities generated something different from the more conventional, commercially driven programs.¹⁹ This could be found in the quality of relationships, underpinned by different motivations and a shared sense in different ways of what can be termed comradery.

In 2004, Forum commissioned Development Initiatives – a well-renowned consultancy in the development rather than volunteering field – to consider the added value of international volunteering and specifically to explore the potential of social capital as a way of understanding it. The Development Initiatives research indeed concluded that social capital could be a very useful concept in understanding this distinctive contribution, taking it beyond anecdote and ideology.

If a social capital framework is applied to a lot of volunteer activity, it becomes clear that many of the broad benefits volunteers bring – networking, a people-centred approach, partnership, a motivation beyond money, an openness to exchange of ideas and information – are ‘not just warm cuddly feelings.’ Rather they are key elements of social capital – which is ‘widely recognised as having the potential to sustain and renovate economic and political institutions’ (Development Initiatives 2004: 13).

However, this area of research did not progress as hoped. Forum did not have the funding to commission a larger project and the orientation to ‘classic’ development outcomes took centre stage. However, it did foster a strand of review that explored the distinctiveness of volunteering in different cultures and contexts and that

¹⁹ See Devereux (2008) for a discussion of this aspect of international volunteering. But especially note the request from what would now be termed the Global South for people to come who engaged in the ‘whole life of society’ and not just knowledge exchange.

thread did continue as a perspective in the more mainstream work. Explorations as to whether there were distinct, culturally defined models of volunteering was one such focus.

But the social capital strand did get picked up again at scale and as a specific focus with the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) *Valuing Volunteering* research (VSO 2015). This was built on a partnership between VSO and the Institute of Development Studies in the UK, using volunteer researchers in different geographical locations and drawing on models of community engagement. The establishment of the fieldwork again explicitly sought the cooperation of other Forum members, although the final research tended to rely heavily on the activities of VSO volunteers. The outcome was a clear statement of the distinctive value of volunteering based on the significance of relationships. In some sense, it rehabilitated the earlier models of the importance of community solidarity and relationships as the critical and distinctive contribution of V4D, rather than the technical transfer of skills.²⁰

Alternative thinking from another place also challenged some of the established orthodoxy. In 2012, Buckles and Chevalier brilliantly challenged the World Bank model of proof, the control group model, which could never really be applied to V4D (except in terms of the volunteers who were sent out). Their argument was based on the reasonableness in other arenas of the balance of probability as being sufficient evidence for validity.

We suggest that to assess impact in complex settings, methods need to bring together the processes of fact-finding and the construction of meaning in complex settings currently separated in mainstream methodologies (Buckles/Chevalier 2012: 4).

7. Measurement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The current debates about measurement are not primarily focused on whether V4D contributes to the benefit of the volunteer except insofar as it results in some form of attitude and behaviour change, e.g. active citizenship. Superficially, this is not the prime purpose of targets such as the MDGs or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These mainly focus on ‘classic’ development outcomes, which are essentially the agenda of donor governments, despite efforts to widen the constituency. Civil society has attempted to influence the nature of those goals, and indeed some international development NGOs, who can be seen as part of the development system, are relatively comfortable with the global goals; others, for example

20 For academic discourse, see Institute of Development Studies – IDS Bulletin Vol. 46 No. 5, September 2015, which is dedicated to this.

those who have seen the importance of the volunteering for development tradition, have fought to gain a foothold in this model and face challenges as to how to use forms of measurement which connect their activity to the global goal indicators (Haddock/Devereux 2015).

However, the knowledge base that had developed during the time of the MDGs was brought to bear on the emergent SDGs. Given that experience, it was important to make every effort to ensure that V4D had a level of recognition as a key mechanism for the SDGs to be achieved and that the SDGs themselves were developed and defined in such a way that enabled qualitative approaches to be valid.

The process and orientation gave a significant push for reorientation: the SDGs apply to everyone, not just developing countries; greater engagement with civil society enabled a stronger focus on the process; while the SDGs themselves allowed space for 'classic' development outcomes alongside the subtleties of SDGs 15-17.

V4D became more visible as a desired and appropriate route to achieve the SDGs in comparison with the MDGs process. However, the issue of measurement remains a challenge, not least because the SDGs key performance indicator (KPI) processes are more driven by statistical influence and the drive for aggregation. Models to address the challenges of measurement featured in the innovative paper developed by Haddock and Devereux (2015), which inspired IVCOs to look at the cross-walk model amongst others. But these are early stages. IVCOs are still primarily pressured by models of upward accountability to deliver to donor or departmental demands on development outcomes and the problem of measuring how the contribution of an individual volunteer can be aggregated alongside the contribution of other volunteers. Attribution remains a clear challenge; and where it is demonstrable, such as in the *Valuing Volunteering* work, how does this engage with the dominant paradigm on aid effectiveness?

8. Back to the Future?

It is important to recognise the complexity and contradictions in stakeholder demands. Even during a period of sign up to development goals as a desired outcome for V4D, major governmental donors can be seen to set in place potentially contradictory pathways for V4D. One recent example concerns the International Citizen Service Programme (ICS) launched by the UK Government in 2011.

The Department for International Development (DfID) shifted its V4D resourcing away from long-term development opportunities onto a new youth program characterised by a short-term opportunity for a diverse group of UK youth under the banner of ICS. This soon developed into a contract, funded entirely on the basis of

supply-side performance indicators and leaving totally aside the demand from the host organisations.²¹

Such a programme was not in any real sense based on the aspirations of host communities, who in many cases had to come to terms with this radically new model in a short space of time or lose the support of international volunteers. The primary concern was the delivery of a large number of UK volunteers to overseas placements – back to counting inputs – and in the better models at least adopting a “do no harm” model even if the development outcomes were difficult to demonstrate.

This aspect of “whose programme” rather than “whose benefit” seems to colour recent events for example in the UK and Australia, where governments previously content to fund programmes under the flagship of well-known volunteer agencies now pursue a stronger brand in their own image. In such contexts, ‘soft power’ objectives necessarily come to the fore, alongside a greater sensitivity to the demands of home – as against host – communities. In Germany we are constantly witnessing a similar discussion regarding *weltwärts*.²²

9. Conclusion and policy implications

From a practitioner’s perspective, progress to address issues of measurement of V4D has been slow. It would be easy to say this is a result of being locked into a paradigm not of the IVCOs’ making. But it is also important to acknowledge that there have been periods when it was taken as read that the contribution of V4D was important and significant. Arguably IVCOs were reluctant to innovate and reposition and tended to remain with models that fitted an earlier era.

However, this is not really about complacency, although that can be read into the situation. Two important preconditions arguably undermine the efforts to demonstrate contribution: firstly, the need to convince key stakeholders of the value of V4D in both the Global North and the Global South; and secondly, the insufficiency in theoretical models that underpin and create a level of robustness and confidence in setting out the framework for V4D.

21 This followed on the back of a previous youth program whose prime focus was development awareness in the UK and was deliberately allocated to organisations who were not international volunteering agencies. See Allum (2012). This new program was delivered by a consortia led by VSO, who had previously warned of the proliferation of gap year programs and had championed a reciprocity model in Global Xchange. See Devereux (2008). However, ICS rapidly developed into a program providing 3,500 UK volunteers per year and Global Xchange was closed.

22 The parallels with *weltwärts* are further discussed in Allum (2012), where it is noted the key driver for the programme was a matter of demand from volunteers, which means the program was essentially supply drive.

Where IVCOs have attempted to push the boundaries on the models, arguably they have engaged better with the challenges of measurement.²³ But in some areas, such as youth volunteering, it is certainly arguable that the lack of an evidence-based theoretical model allows the space for contradictory objectives and programs that do not satisfy stakeholder expectations.²⁴

Consequently, meeting the challenges of measurement of V4D does, at root, demand a significant uplifting in the nature of the theory that underpins the work, alongside clarity and confidence in what it can deliver. It demands creating environments where the contribution of V4D is valued by stakeholders. It demands an evidence base on what V4D is doing and achieving.

An effective interface between academic research and practitioners is vital to the development of a body of knowledge on understanding and measuring the contribution of international volunteering. In 2013, UNV opened a dialogue with Forum, amongst others, to address the issue of strong evidence-based research that would improve understanding of the contribution of volunteering to development. This has led to the development of a Global Research Agenda, led by UNV in collaboration with Forum and the Center for Social Development, which has provided a focus for academics and practitioners to come together and collaborate to address this issue. This represents the latest stage in a journey of cooperation and collaboration aimed at developing a theoretical underpinning of V4D and demonstrating how it can be measured.

Where this will lead ultimately will depend on the willingness or otherwise of practitioners and academics to collaborate and the resources available to support effective research. From the perspective of Forum, there is now an alignment which offers an opportunity not previously apparent – a body of interested academic researchers engaging with this topic at a far larger scale than before; a growing interest amongst Forum members and membership of the Research Policy Practice and Learning Group at its highest level; and the context of the SDGs, which offers an opportunity to engage and influence key policy makers. In consequence, following policy issues need to be considered:

23 This, of course, needs to be qualified, but examples such as the paradigm shift in the FK Norway model have arguably generated a positive organisational culture of research, reviewing of models and demonstrable contribution. Nevertheless, ensuring the theoretical model is effectively communicated and understood remains a challenge (Tjønneland/Helland 2016).

24 For example, the UK Government requires the ICS youth program to meet diversity targets concerning the sourcing of UK volunteers while expecting the program to contribute to development objectives. Local partners and communities are experiencing an increase in short-term youth volunteer programs in contrast to long-term adult programs, which is not based on evidential studies of what local partners and communities require (Butcher/Einhof 2016).

- Developing the active participation of V4D implementing agencies both in the process of developing theoretical models that can be related to V4D practice and in research collaboration with interested academics.
- Developing collaboration between IVCOs and academics working through the International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR) and actively promoting the findings of crossover work in academic as well as practitioner literature.
- A scaling up of support for research activity generally, but specifically for research that addresses issues of measurement focused on the experiences of communities in which volunteers are placed.

References

- Allum, Cliff (2007): "International Volunteering and Co-operation: New Developments in Programme Models", International Forum on Development Service Discussion Paper.
- Allum, Cliff (2008): "Measuring Volunteerism in Civic Engagement", Unpublished conference presentation to ACUNS 2008, International Forum on Development Service, <http://forum-ids.org/2008/06/measuring-volunteering-and-civic-engagement/> (accessed on april 7th, 2016).
- Allum Cliff (2012): "Youth International Volunteering and Development: an opportunity for development, international understanding or social inclusion?", International Forum on Development Service Discussion Paper.
- Buckles, Daniel J. and Jaques M. Chevalier (2012): "Assessing the impact of international volunteer co-operation. Guiding questions and Canadian experiences", International Forum on Development Service Discussion Paper.
- Burns, Danny and Jo Howard (2015): What is the Unique Contribution of Volunteering to International Development?, in: IDS Bulletin, Vol. 46, No. 5, p. 1.
- Burns, Danny et al. (2015): Valuing Volunteering: the Role of Sustainable Development, in: IDS/VSO.
- Butcher, Jacqueline and Christopher Einolf (Eds.) (2016) : *Perspectives on Volunteering. Voices from the South*, n.p.
- Christie, Jean (2007): "Voluntary Service and Public Engagement: What's happening? What's new?", International Forum on Development Service Discussion Paper.
- Development Initiatives (2004): "International volunteering: trends, added value and social capital", International Forum on Development Service Discussion Paper.
- Devereux, Peter (2008): "International volunteering for development and sustainability: outdated paternalism or a radical response to globalisation?", in: Development in Practice, Vol. 18, No. 3.
- Devereux, Peter and Kornelia Guse (2012): "MDGs, Sustainable Development Goals and the Post 2015 agenda: opportunities for consolidating the recognition of volunteerism", International Forum on Development Service Discussion Paper.
- Fee, Anthony, Helena Heizman and Sidney J. Gray (2015): "Towards a theory of effective cross-cultural capacity development: the experiences of Australian international NGO expatriates in Vietnam", The International Journal of Human Resource Management, DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2015.1093015.

- Fidler, J. (1997): "Impact of the Overseas Experience on Returned Volunteers in the AVI Program", Melbourne.
- Haddock, Megan and Devereux, Peter (2015): *Documenting the Contribution of Volunteering to the SDGs: The Challenges and Opportunities of Universal SDGs for IVCOs and Volunteer Groups*, Forum Discussion Paper 2015, <http://forum-ids.org/2015/12/forum-discussion-paper-2015/>, (accessed on april 7th, 2016).
- IDS Bulletin(2015), Vol. 46, No. 5.
- Canadian International Development Agency: *The Power of Volunteering: A Review of the Canadian Volunteer Cooperation Program*, Montreal.
- Judge, E. (2004): *To whom it may concern*, in: Skillshare International, Leicester.
- Kelly, Sean and Robert Case (2007): "The Overseas Experience: A Passport to Improved Volunteerism. A Research Report", Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, Canada.
- Lough, Ben J. (2012): "Participatory Research on the impact of International Volunteerism in Kenya: Provisional Results", International Forum on Development Service Discussion Paper.
- Lough, Ben J. and Cliff Allum (2011): "Changing Patterns of State Funding for International Volunteering", International Forum on Development Service Discussion Paper.
- Lough, Ben J. and Cliff Allum (2013): Effects of neoliberal adjustments on government funded international volunteer cooperation organizations, in: *Development in Practice*, Vol. 23, No. 7, pp. 908-919.
- Lough, Benjamin J. and Lenore Matthews (2013): "Measuring and Conveying the Added Value of International Volunteering", International Forum for Volunteering in Development Discussion Paper.
- Machin, Joanna (2008): "The Impact of Returned International Volunteers on the UK: a scoping review", Institute for Volunteering Research.
- McBride, Amanda Moore, Benjamin Lough and Margaret S. Sherraden (2010): "Perceived impacts of international service on volunteers: interim results from a quasi-experimental study", in: CSD Research Report, St Louis.
- Merkle, Caspar (2008): "Assessing the Contribution of Volunteering to Development", Eighth International Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research, Barcelona.
- Sherraden, Margaret S., Benjamin J. Lough and Amanda Moore McBride (2008): "Impacts of International Volunteering and Service", CSD Discussion Paper, St Louis.
- Skillshare International (1998): "Development Worker Research Report 1978-1998", Skillshare International, Leicester.
- Tiessen, Rebecca and Barbara Heron (2012): Volunteering in the developing world: the perceived impacts of Canadian youth, in: *Development in Practice*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 44-56.
- Tjønneland, Elling N., Johan Helland, Stein-Erik Kruse and Mari Norbakk: *Chasing Civil Society. Evaluation of Fredskorpset*, Norad.
- UNV (2011): "Assessing the Contribution of Volunteering to Development: A Participatory Methodology", UNV.
- VSO (2015): "Valuing Volunteering. The Role of Volunteering in Sustainable Development", IDS/VSO.