



International FORUM on Development Service
FORUM International du Volontariat pour le Développement

Opportunities and challenges for international volunteer co-operation

Betty Plewes and Rieky Stuart

Prepared for the IVCO Conference
Montreal, September 2007

Foreword	2
Introduction	3
The changing context	4
Change in demand	4
Change in supply.....	4
More suppliers.....	5
More variety.....	5
Growth of civil society.....	6
Dependence on donor funding	7
Aid trends	7
Environmental impact.....	7
Discussion questions.....	7
The rationale for volunteering co-operation	8
Development model – a contribution to poverty reduction and social justice	8
Learning model – developing global citizenship.....	9
Civil society strengthening model – building democratic capacity.....	9
Public engagement.....	11
Discussion.....	11
Opportunities	12
Taking advantage of the pressure for aid reform	12
Learning from organisational change theory and practice	13
Deconstructing volunteering.....	14
Collective research and learning	15
Discussion questions (in four groups)	15
Selected references	16

Foreword

For a number of years FORUM has undertaken a survey of its members to understand and share what is happening in international volunteering throughout the world. We then found ourselves in a position to take a longer view and commissioned Development Initiatives to produce a review over a five year period.

In this paper we look forward and explore how International Volunteer and Co-operation Organisations (IVCOs) are responding to our changing environment.

The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of FORUM or its members or of the organisations for whom the author works. The responsibility for these views rests with the author alone.



Cliff Allum, President of FORUM

About FORUM

International FORUM on Development Service is a network of organisations engaged in international volunteering and personnel exchange. FORUM aims to share information, develop best practice and enhance co-operation between its members.

FORUM's members include both non-governmental (NGO) and state organisations from around the world.

The main activities of FORUM include the following:

- We facilitate the sharing of information, through our website, news updates, sharing of knowledge and experiences.
- We commission and undertake research, as well as facilitating members' involvement in research into issues around international volunteering.
- We organise an annual conference for heads of agencies known as IVCO. This conference is primarily concerned with issues of change, redefining international volunteering and offering opportunities to learn about new models of activity.

Introduction

International voluntary service, which began some 60 years ago, continues to be an important and growing area of international engagement.

The early International volunteer sending organisations such as Peace Corps, CUSO, Operation Crossroads Africa, and VSO had their roots in 19th century missionary activity and early 20th century international peace and post war reconstruction efforts.¹ They were products of the late 1950s and early 1960s and the particular historical/political currents of that time. Newly independent countries needed people to staff their education, health and social service systems and in Northern countries there was a supply of recent university graduates who wanted to see the world as well as make a contribution. Some had professional skills but were at an early stage in their career while others had a general university education and were given short training programs in teaching English (or French or Spanish) as a second language or community development. These programs incorporated the dual dimensions of serving and learning and there was an acceptable fit between supply and demand. There were other organisations like Crossroads or Service Civile Internationale that were mainly cross cultural learning experiences creating links between North and South.

Northern governments were interested in supporting these organisations for their own often political reasons – promotion of national image, dissemination of western values, or as part of a Cold War strategy.

Since then of course the world has changed and the original rationale is no longer valid. Developing countries now have their own graduates to fill the gaps that existed in the early post independence period.

Many of the original organisations still exist and have reoriented themselves to respond to changing circumstances. However there are a host of new personnel sending organisations on the scene. Some of these newer organisations call themselves volunteer senders (now called volunteer co-operation) while others (like MSF or the Aga Khan Foundation of Canada) who do similar kinds of work do not. Still another group of organisations operate on a cost-recovery (or even profit-making) basis to place volunteers internationally. International Volunteer and Co-operation Organisations (IVCOs) include only a small self-identified subset of organisations that send personnel overseas. However, even those who self-identify as IVCOs are a diverse group of organisations.²

This paper tries to unpack some of the concepts in volunteer sending and explores the ways IVCOs are responding to the changing environment, some of the challenges they are confronting, and raises some issues for further reflection. We have written this paper largely from a Canadian perspective, not because we believe it is more important than other perspectives, but because it is what we know well and we can offer concrete examples. We hope that other points of view can build on and contrast with this experience.

¹ Sharraden p.2

² For a useful overview of international volunteering see Sherraden et al , The Forms and Structure of International Voluntary Structure

The changing context

This section builds on the trend analysis developed and discussed at previous IVCO conferences.

Change in demand

Southern countries no longer need or want great numbers of unskilled young people from Northern countries. There is still demand for certain specialised technical and professional skills and particularly fundraising and IT skills. IVCOs report more frequent requests for skills associated with civil society organisations – networking, community organisation, rights awareness and promotion and advocacy. In addition, some of the highly specialised skills are needed only for a short time to address a particular need.

Not only do developing countries like the Philippines not need unskilled people, they export a significant proportion of their skilled labour force to Northern countries. The push and pull factors relating to the international migration of highly skilled people from many Southern countries warrant more investigation, but the impact can be devastating. A 2004 UNCTAD Report showed that 1 million people emigrated from LDCs out of a total skilled pool of 6.6 m. – a loss of 15 per cent. Haiti, Samoa, Gambia and Somalia have lost more than 50 per cent of their university-educated professionals in recent years.³

Change in supply

In the late 1960s, working in a 'developing' country was a rare occurrence – volunteers were viewed as special, newsworthy, and often as eccentric. Nowadays, international travel to all parts of the globe is much more common – there are tourist expeditions to the Antarctic and even, for the ultra-rich, to outer space. The demand for a meaningful cross-cultural experience – a chance to learn and to contribute - has grown exponentially alongside the boom in international travel.⁴ It could be said to be today's equivalent of the 'Grand Tour of Europe' that every young member of the British and American elite aspired to from Victorian times to the post-World War II period. Instead of imbibing the high art and culture of another country, today's international volunteers seek meaning, cross-cultural learning and novelty. Every international volunteer co-operation organisation in Canada reports far more applicants than they could possibly place, and this has led to a proliferation in the number and kind of 'suppliers' of international volunteer experiences, in Canada and elsewhere.

The desire to volunteer – to contribute – has profound and ancient human roots. However, it is only recently that it has become possible to realise this desire by travelling outside one's own community and country. The potential supply of volunteer skills is dramatically increased when media covers disasters and global poverty issues. Canadian humanitarian NGOs (and NGOs worldwide) were inundated with offers of people wanting to drop everything to go overseas to provide help to victims of the Asian tsunami when the first media images of the scale of the destruction were broadcast.⁵

³ Angela Balakrishnan and Pui-Guan Man, The Guardian

⁴ This raises some interesting questions about the environmental footprint of international voluntary service with its heavy dependence on cheap airfares.

⁵ For example, Canada's Globe and Mail, in a July 14 2007 article called "What Makes Us Care" by Bert Archer draws attention to new research on the dichotomy between the brain's rational/analytical response to complex problems (Darfur)

More suppliers

Instead of a handful of Northern organisations supplying international volunteers, there are now a very large number of organisations who send volunteers internationally on a long or short term basis, on a very wide range of terms and conditions. They include volunteers from many more countries than previously – Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern European countries now all have organisations that are prepared to select and send volunteers internationally.

There are organisations that send many kinds of volunteers, and specialist organisations that supply people with specific skill sets (the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières, Project Accompaniment, environmental organisations, peace-building organisations, sports organisations, electoral monitoring organisations, teachers' unions etc.). Professional organisations, like medical, engineering and legal organisations send volunteers internationally on a systematic or an informal basis.

These organisations may be subsidised by funds from governmental International Development Ministries, from Youth or Culture or Foreign Affairs ministries, they may be based on cost-recovery contributions from participants and their networks, and some operate as for-profit businesses – sometimes organised to contribute profits for charitable purposes. Some combine volunteer recruitment and selection with recruitment for paid positions, or use the same logistical infrastructure for both (CARE, CANADEM). There is little sign that the Canadian (or the global) desire for international volunteering is being met. A quick surf of the internet for 'international volunteer opportunities' yielded 1.9 million results.⁶

More variety

There are now many opportunities for young people, indeed for all age groups, to get an intensive cross-cultural overseas experience within or outside of the official volunteer co-operation agencies. However, there is increasing fluidity in categories, as one can be both paid and volunteer (at different times, for different organisations, or shift from one category to the other with the same organisation). One can get academic credit and volunteer through internships or work-study placements. One can volunteer for a long time, a short time, or sequentially. One can shift back and forth between countries – either in retirement or as worker, entrepreneur or student. A brief review of opportunities that came to our attention in the past six months identified the following international volunteering activities for Ontario alone:

- An Ottawa secondary school offers experiential visits to poor communities in Jamaica during the winter school break;
- Canadians are invited to learn about Cuba through an Elderhostel experience;

and the compassionate response to a 'simple' situation of injustice or abuse which tugs at the heartstrings (an elderly woman who cannot repair her house, or a family flooded out of their home). We respond positively to the latter, giving money or time, with an 'old' part of our brain, the article argues, and turn off that compassion - and our support – when the 'newer', more rational, part of brain is invoked. The article points to the need for more research about shifting from one modality to the other, or holding both tendencies. One immediate reflection is that volunteer selection processes intended to sort out candidates' motivation for volunteering might learn more about this research.

⁶ Indeed, there is globally clearly a greater supply of international volunteers than demand for them. For example, just one US for-profit organization, Global Crossroad, claims to send 2000 persons per year to volunteer in environmental and community organisations (www.globalcrossroad.com).

- A small Canadian NGO working in Central America offers Canadians a chance to attend a work camp to build a small village waste treatment facility;
- A private sector worker from the Outaouais region was seconded to the Red Cross tsunami response team in Sri Lanka for six months to offer his logistics and computer skills;
- Canadians participated in several international election monitoring missions;
- Environmental volunteering in Central American NGOs concerned with rainforest preservation;
- Volunteering on the West Bank to accompany Palestinians, especially school children, as they go about their daily lives to ensure their basic rights are not violated;
- Internships with South Asian NGOs for new Masters Degree graduates, about half of them from South Asian background;
- A Canadian parliamentarian voluntarily sharing his experience of federalism with counterparts in Northern Iraq;
- An Ethiopian-Canadian civil servant volunteering to run a workshop for Ethiopian civil servants on ethical issues through an Ethiopian diaspora volunteer-sending organisation.

And these represent only the tip of the iceberg. Not included is the wide range of paid, partially paid, or paying volunteer opportunities offered through academic institutions, professional associations or affiliations like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities or other business and government associations.⁷

Growth of civil society

The last 50 years have seen the development of formally structured civil society organisations (CSOs) in the South as well as a growing awareness of the role of civil society organisations as development actors globally. Southern countries now have extensive national networks of their own community organisations and NGOs and often participate in global coalitions. Organisational forms vary widely from those replicating Northern organisational structures to those built on traditional lines.

As Southern organisations have matured they have developed a more critical perspective on their relationships with Northern NGOs particularly in the areas of policy and partnerships. However in terms of international volunteer co-operation, there is not a reliable assessment of the relationships, although some IVCOs have developed a variety of methods to ask for systematic feedback on their relations with partners.⁸

While civil society has grown dramatically at the national level there is also growth in trans-national networks and organisations that operate at the global level advocating for change in the multilateral system. Some of these organisations also rely on volunteers and interns provided through IVCOs.

⁷ In his 2004 paper, Ian Smillie estimated conservatively that at any given moment, 12,000 Canadians are serving overseas on a combination of short and long term, paid or unpaid assignments.

⁸ There is little comparative data on the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence the quality of the relationship, and responses in specific evaluations are often not comparable. For example, a Southern NGO may say its relations with a Northern partner are good, but they are not asked if they would prefer a different type of relationship or support, or to compare the range of partnerships they have on the basis of clear criteria.

Dependence on donor funding

Some of the larger well-established international volunteer co-operation organisations are government programs, while others are non governmental, but also heavily dependent on state funding. This usually integrates them into the development/aid paradigm with its results orientation, focus on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the approaches agreed upon in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and an increasing focus on a new security agenda. There is a subtext that runs through some of the official ODA discussion that volunteer sending *per se* may be out of date.

Aid trends

Most bilateral donors now require that volunteer co-operation be justified in terms of verifiable contribution to the achievement of ODA goals as defined in the Paris Declaration (local ownership, co-ordination and harmonisation) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There is a commitment to increased aid and ongoing aid reform, but recent evidence indicates that not all donors are honouring their commitments to increased aid levels or to harmonisation.

Environmental impact

After decades of action by environmentalists climate change has finally come onto the international agenda in a way that can no longer be avoided by multilateral organisations, states and citizens. Given the dependence of international co-operation on cheap air flights, IVCOs will need to consider how to address their environmental footprint.⁹

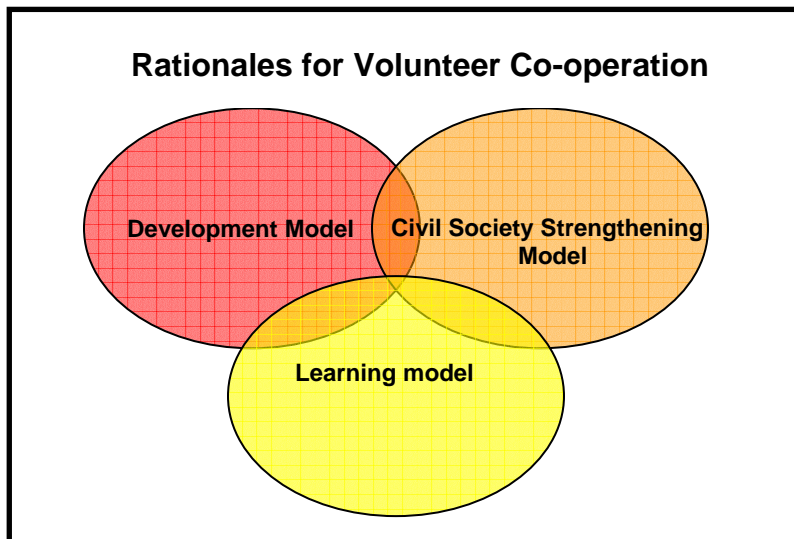
Discussion questions

- Which of these trends are most important, in your view and why?
- Does your agency view these trends as threat or as opportunity?
- What pro-active initiatives is your agency taking to respond?

⁹ See George Monbiot's discussion, On the flight path to global destruction, in The Guardian

The rationale for volunteer co-operation

Over the years IVCOs have undertaken many initiatives to make their organisations and programs more responsive and relevant to the changing circumstances. Among IVCOs we can identify three main rationales for volunteer sending, although in practice, the rationales may well overlap for any particular organisation.



Development model - a contribution to poverty reduction and social justice

Organisations send volunteers to participate in programs to reduce poverty, promote social justice and/or contribute to peace. They identify partner organisations often in civil society, but sometimes in the public and private sectors which host the volunteers. There is often considerable emphasis on skill transfer and strengthening organisational capacity. This model fits within the development co-operation framework of the major donor countries. In recent years it has expanded to include South-North and South-South volunteering.

A variation on this is the partnership or reciprocity model:

Here IVCOs link organisations - usually civil society organisations - in the North and South in relationships of mutual support and learning in thematic areas such as HIV and AIDS or violence against women. An underlying assumption is that Southern voluntary organisations are less well funded and capable than their Northern counterparts, but in the Northern domestic voluntary sector, many organisations suffer from instability, under-funding and transience in staffing. Leading Southern NGOs, by comparison, can be large and have substantial capacity.¹⁰

¹⁰ BRAC in Bangladesh, IBASE in Brazil and TAG in South Africa jump immediately to mind.

Our experience tells us that volunteer co-operation may be one contribution to effective development, but by itself is insufficient. Therefore, volunteer co-operation agencies need to seek out – and indeed help to create – collaborative efforts where the work of a volunteer from another culture can contribute to development success. This means that volunteer co-operation agencies aiming to contribute to development must work in ways that combine human resources with other key ingredients like financial resources, research, and policy advocacy. Because development requires systemic change, they must also work to collaborate to address issues with other actors and other sectors. For example, meeting the MDG goal of education for all requires teacher training, funds for classrooms, money for teacher salaries, water and food for pupils, and effective partnerships among parents, schools and government.

When an agency spreads its placements widely by country and by sector, it becomes impossible to measure its development contribution systematically, to leverage its contribution, or to learn from its experience.¹¹

Learning model - developing global citizenship

These programs are geared mainly to young people and stress personal, professional and cross cultural exchange. It is difficult to know the total numbers involved in these programs but they are growing. Participants travel to other countries to learn more about global political and economic issues and there is an assumption that this kind of learning will expand their understanding and commitment to global issues in all aspects of their life. Although this is sometimes given a development rationale the link to poverty reduction is longer-term, more tenuous and difficult to document. Therefore some donor agencies express the view that global awareness should be an integral part of not only the educational system but of life long learning, and should not therefore be funded with aid dollars. The logic model presented for access to ODA funding is that returned volunteers are more sympathetic to development co-operation and in their personal, working and civic life undertake activities and support policies that favour poverty reduction. They will become the social and economic catalyst for pro-development change in their own societies. This often meets a positive response from politicians who decide on aid policies, as funding their own citizens to participate can generate positive domestic political support, compared to some other development co-operation investments.

Reciprocal North-South exchange programmes (North/South, South/North, South/South) of this type, while less common,¹² avoid the ethical pitfall of instrumentalising Southern communities – using them as tools for the learning of privileged Northern volunteers. They can also better model the benefits and practices of volunteering and community work.

Civil society strengthening model – building democratic capacity

Civic engagement (community participation) is present in all societies – whether it is West African burial societies, Canadian volunteer fire departments, church women providing meals to shut-ins or aids victims, or the tradition of ‘gotong royong’ - mutual

¹¹ One of the benefits of UNITERRA’s 2003 decision to concentrate sectorally and geographically was its improved ability to document its development contribution, and to learn from its experience.

¹² Some issues relating to South North exchanges are funding and the increasing difficulty of securing visas for visitors to Northern countries.

labour support in Indonesia. It can be an expression of compassion and charity, of mutual self-help or a desire for social justice. It has political, economic and cultural dimensions.

When it encompasses individuals from different groups beyond the family or clan, sociologists argue that it builds ‘bridging capital’, the basis for sharing information, undertaking collective projects for public good, and negotiating conflicting interests without resort to violence. (Robert Putnam) NGO development proponents argue that increasing the number and ‘thickness’ of voluntary efforts is the very basis of a robust democracy, often citing de Tocqueville.

From this premise, strengthening civil society organisations or the voluntary sector (which includes not-for-profit organisations that have paid staff) becomes a valuable foundation for a healthy society. There is also much to be learned from exchanges and solidarity among such organisations, both in terms of providing services and other public goods like public policy advocacy.¹³ A wide variety of citizens organising for their mutual or public good is a development benefit in and of itself, as a basis for a modern state.

The very notion of civil society encompasses a very broad typology of organisational forms, and its tradition and history are different in different historical, political and cultural contexts. As Alan Fowler has noted, “externally imposed forms of ‘civicness’ -- in the form of legally incorporated or formally registered associations and organisations, western norms of behaviour, written constitutions, and rigidly divided institutional relations -- overlay pre-existing indigenous ways of associating and relating which are often familial in the broad sense of the term, non-formal in the legal sense, and highly resilient. These types of civicness interact with each other in complex, and situation-specific ways, forming a dualistic reality which is not consistent with how the West appreciates civil society. In its turn, this means that the international aid system does not see or cannot value informal expressions of civic association, and because it does not appreciate them, thinks that they either do not exist or up to no good.” (Fowler, 1996).

IVCOs offer skills and experience in organising a modern ‘voluntary sector’, including legal frameworks, policies, fundraising, the development of local philanthropy, governance and so on. This is one of the growth areas mentioned by IVCO members. Yet IVCOs are not the only agencies doing this type of work. Foundations have been actively promoting Southern philanthropy and community foundations through organisations like WINGS. Organisations like the United Way and Volunteer Canada and their international counterparts are actively collaborating with counterparts in other countries. This raises questions about how IVCOs can work with these types of experts in the field of civil society development. It also raises issues of the cultural relevance of the voluntary sector models being applied by these experts in other contexts.

As South-South international volunteering related to building civil society grows, the organisations, policies and systems to facilitate this require development. There needs to be a mutual acknowledgement and respect of traditional and ‘modern’ conceptions of volunteering and of civil society. Development agents do not always see or respect or build on traditional forms of volunteering.

¹³ Anyone who doubts the importance of the latter as a public good need only think of the anti-slavery movement and the movement for women’s equality as two important examples. Environmental advocacy is rapidly joining them in importance and impact.

Public Engagement

In all three models the engagement of the volunteer on return to her/his country is seen as an important element of the rationale for the activity and this is discussed in another paper prepared for this conference by Jean Christie.

Discussion

Whichever model provides the primary rationale for a particular IVCO, there is an ethical requirement to respect the countries and the organisations where volunteers are sent.

For example as more and more young people from Northern countries are being sent to developing countries as part of cross cultural learning programs a number of questions arise.

- What is the absorptive capacity of recipient (mainly Southern countries)?
- What percentage of aid funds should be spent on creating similar programs for young people from Southern countries?

For the learning model-led IVCOs, this means that wherever possible, there should be reciprocal arrangements, North/South, South/North, South/South. At the least there should be support for local organisations to deliver the programme in a given country.

It also means that the benefits of volunteers should not be oversold to partners, funders or volunteers themselves – with IVCOs promising more than they can deliver.

IVCOs sometimes use more than one model to argue their case, and while this is possible, it can lead to role confusion and tension within an agency as each model has a different logic for recruitment, funding, partnerships and follow-up. For example:

- The civil society strengthening model would focus on organisational capacity building: the partner organisation and its human resource needs is the starting point.
- In the development model, the development challenge is the starting point, and the focus is bringing together the interested parties in all sectors and at all levels from global to local to meet the challenge.
- In the learning model, the starting point is the volunteer and how s/he can best become an agent of change for themselves and their own community as well as for their host.¹⁴

Discussion questions

- How do these three rationales for volunteer correspond to your agency's situation?
- How would you modify or nuance these rationales to be more reflective of reality?
- What challenges and opportunities do they generate?

¹⁴ One IVCO staff told us he undertakes his own recruitment directly, because the head office recruiters can't supply the right people within a suitable time frame. This is an example of tension between the field officer's development orientation and the head office's learning orientation.

Opportunities

The foregoing discussion leads us to potential opportunities that IVCOs could explore.

Taking advantage of the pressure for aid reform

There is a growing pressure for making development co-operation work for the poor. Whether one looks at debt relief, growing donor commitment to increasing aid levels, the OECD work on aid effectiveness, or Make Poverty History, there is growing commitment to changing the aid industry. And there is growing evidence for what works and what doesn't: of how efforts can combine. Local ownership, accountability, transparency and co-ordination are positive trends, even though many of us would like to speed up their implementation. In addition, there are emerging large-scale experiments in tackling important issues like malaria eradication or the fight against HIV and AIDS.

Every serious development worker understands that poverty is systemic, and therefore requires systemic solutions. These new trends in development co-operation have in common their growing recognition of the need to take a systems approach. There are profound barriers to making a systemic approach work – organisational need for profile and 'branding', organisational rigidities and lack of skills. However there are some examples among the IVCOs of programs being developed from a more systemic perspective and of new kinds of collaborations:

- **VSO in Malawi health program.** In recognition of the need for Malawian medical personnel to be retained in the system, VSO only places international volunteer medical personnel where the Ministry of Health ensures they have a domestic counterpart, and involves the Ministry officials in the assessment and fulfilment of training needs.
- **Canadian IVCO collaboration in facilitating shea butter production and marketing.** Canadian IVCOs have begun to bring together the various actors in shea butter production and marketing – the women producers and processors, the international buyers, the transporters, and related government staff (Ministry of Agriculture, export development officials, etc. These actors from several west African countries are brought together to strengthen the marketing system and its capacity to benefit the women who produce the shea butter, used extensively in cosmetics. Together, they can identify knowledge gaps, and propose an appropriate use of IVCO resources, as well as pooling their knowledge.

Even where these have encountered difficulties they are important experiments in new ways of working and provide a basis for learning.

Given the active involvement of many IVCOs in the fight against HIV and AIDS, co-ordinated response in this area might be a leading opportunity.

This growing momentum for better and more development assistance creates both a threat and an opportunity for IVCOs. Volunteer co-operation is not exempt from the pressure for harmonisation and co-ordination. There is concern when Southern governments complain that they must relate to hundreds of donor missions annually. Yet local governments or NGOs or communities face the same problem: many Southern NGOs relate to a number of Northern 'partner' NGOs, including volunteer co-operation agencies. Co-ordination, which will require both specialisation (by country, by sector, by

type of support) and also improved collaboration among specialisations, is just as necessary for international co-operation NGOs as for official aid donors.

IVCO members could pilot such collaboration, particularly since their contribution, human resources, is essential for the convening, information-sharing, co-ordination, and priority setting that harmonisation entails. The type of change envisioned by the new development modalities cannot be accomplished without individuals who are able to envision and create institutions and partnerships that work across boundaries – geographical, sectoral, and institutional. IVCOs can be one of the providers of such human resources: identifying these people could be a core competency of IVCOs, given their history and experience.

Learning from organisational change theory and practice

Knowledge about making organisations work better has come a long way since Thorstein Veblen, an early proponent of modern bureaucracy. There are two ideas that IVCOs may wish to reflect on: new ideas about specialisation, alliances and collaboration; and the application of the thinking about complex adaptive systems (complexity theory).

IVCOs are often relatively small organisations that individually carry out all the functions in the chain required to place volunteers overseas – recruitment, selection, training, in field support, reintegration and in some cases project and program support.

Today, it is common for organisations in the private sector to enter into a wide range of formal and informal business relationships – with suppliers and with clients – rather than trying to control all parts of its production and supply chain. Greater segmentation and specialisation along this chain permits greater flexibility, speed, and quality. Would IVCOs benefit from greater organisational specialisation while working in more complex collaborations nationally? For example, in Canada if all the IVCOs worked together in collaboration with universities, it might be possible to provide a year of post university service learning to all graduates.

Complexity theory can be helpful in understanding the growth in supply and suppliers discussed in the trends section of this paper. If we conceive of the universe of volunteering as an ecosystem, with complex interactions and linkages, rather than as a competition for limited resources¹⁵, many potential niches and opportunities become visible.

There is, for example, a burgeoning demand for specialised rosters of consulting skills – both volunteer and paid. Electoral assistance, democratic decentralisation, relations between parliaments and the executive branch of government, various aspects of city management from budgeting to garbage collection: in all these areas there are informal and co-ordinated networks of people prepared to offer virtual or real assistance to each other across borders.

Such networks and rosters often operate without aid money, sometimes as extensions of professional networks. Their speed, scale and reach can be extraordinary – and is often ad hoc or spontaneous. People collaborate on a one-time specific problem-solving, or

¹⁵ Both are true – the system is both competitive *and* complementary.

periodically, for short or long, intensive or extensive periods. These new networks are attractive because they satisfy a number of needs – professional development, altruism, learning, innovation. They involve both paid and volunteer work, and are often subsidised by private sector, public sector and not-for-profit employers.

This messy phenomenon is very different from normal orderly process of volunteer co-operation; defining a job description, recruiting, selecting, orienting, placing, supporting, debriefing. Is this a direction where international volunteer co-operation organisations can bring their recruitment, selection and cross-cultural training experience – or learn from new organisational forms? The rapid growth of these types of learning and problem-solving networks could marginalise volunteer co-operation, and at the same time creates unprecedented opportunities for enhancing IVCO timeliness, relevance and impact.

Both lenses – increased segmentation and specialisation through different kinds of relationships along the chain of providing volunteers, and the lens provided by the systems thinking of complexity theory – offer new possibilities for thinking about and organising volunteer sending for greater effectiveness.

Deconstructing volunteering

Mental models are deeply held internal images of how the world works that limit us to familiar ways of thinking since we are often not conscious of them or the effects they have on our behaviour.¹⁶

- What mental model(s) of volunteering is embedded in the current IVCO mindset?
- Do we see volunteering as charity, compassion, self-actualisation, solidarity, and/or accompaniment? How does volunteering relate to social activism and theories of change?
- What are the cultural dimensions of the models?
- How is the motivation for volunteering different from that of paid work?

The authors of this paper volunteer on several not-for-profit boards, and often share our experience freely with colleagues, but we are also paid for consulting work. Some volunteers pay all the costs and make donations for the privilege of digging community latrines or escorting Palestinian children to school. Other volunteers have all their living and travel costs met and earn a respectable local salary. Yet others have their out-of-pocket expenses met but work without pay. Is one type of contribution more meritorious than another?

If the IVCO core competency lies in recruiting, selecting and placing human resources, is it possible to offer these services on a sliding scale for different purposes, depending on the need? For example, CANADEM, a Canadian roster of experts primarily in governance and security, offers fee-for-service international placement services for a range of government departments, international agencies and NGOs, as well as volunteer internships. CARE Canada has offered HR support for international recruitment and placement as a for-profit subsidiary for its own needs and those of others.

¹⁶ The concept of mental models was developed by Peter Senge

IVCOs have already broken out of the two-year North-to-South placement model. It is possible to imagine an even wider range of work than at present – sequential volunteering, where a person goes for several periods of varying duration, rather than long or short-term.

Another dimension of deconstructing the concept of international volunteering, is that often people have roots in several countries. People are increasingly mobile, not only in terms of the South-North brain drain we have already mentioned, but also in terms of their ability to combine ‘the best of all worlds’ – to refuse to be bound by limiting categories of identity. One colleague is a Canadian citizen born in Ghana, whose family is originally from Nigeria, and who spends part of the year in Ghana running an NGO, part of the year consulting internationally, and yet a third part at Canadian academic institutions. He and his family are equally at home in Africa and in Canada. While this example is clearly at one end of a range, fluidity is becoming a familiar pattern for entrepreneurs too.

While funders (Is this true?) are becoming more open to funding a wide range of volunteer co-operation, North-South, South-North, short-term and long-term, such volunteer co-operation is not yet framed in terms of this kind of mobility. Retired people may also be interested in placements for part of the year in their country of origin/country of adoption. They can bring rich experience and may need little additional support. Could this type of arrangement be an intentional part of volunteer co-operation?

Another dimension of the demographic shift is the number of people of Asian, African and Latin American backgrounds who are becoming more interested in community investment than in remittances to family. The recognition that ending poverty requires more than financial transfers is growing with second-generation diaspora members and within wealthy emigrant communities. How can this drive be supported by IVCOs?

Collective research and learning

This paper points to a number of issues where sector-wide research and analysis makes sense. How many international volunteers are there? Is there concentration in certain sectors or regions? What are examples of volunteer co-operation agencies coordinating their work with other types of development actors, and with government, communities and businesses to tackle development problems? How do other types of international human resource flows function, and what can volunteer co-operation agencies learn about more effective functioning? All IVCOs would benefit from the knowledge gained by this type of research. Could IVCOs press for such research through the technical assistance committee of the OECD-DAC as a way to profile these issues?

Discussion questions (in four groups)

- How could IVCOs take advantage of this opportunity?
- What would need to change?
- What would be a first step?

Selected references

- **Archer, Bert**, What makes us care?, The Globe and Mail, June 14 , 2007
- **Balakrishnan, Angela, Pui-Guan Man**, The best migrate, the rest suffer, The Guardian Weekly 03.08.07, p.41.
- **Bergdall Terry**, Civil Society Strengthening in Africa , MAP Consultations
- **ICVO Documents** prepared by Judith Randall and Tony German of International Development Initiatives
 - Survey Results 2005,
 - Trends Survey 2005 – Making a Difference, Trends in International Co-operation and Volunteering, A discussion paper for ICVO 2005, Tokyo, October 2005
 - Survey Results 2006
 - Trends in International Co-operation and Volunteering, Over 2006 and the last 5 years, Rethinking International Volunteering and Co-operation, 2006
- **Monbiot, George**, On the flight path to global meltdown, The Guardian, September 21 2006. Accessed 04.08.07 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2006/sep/21/travelsenvironmentalimpact.ethicaliving>
- **Senge Peter, Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts, Richard Ross and Bryan Smith**: The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organisation, New York, Doubleday 1994, pp.235-36.
- **Smillie Ian, Hubris**, Humility and Human Resources: Notes on the Proposed Canada Corps, Paper prepared for CCIC, October 2004 Accessed 04.08.07 at http://www.ccic.ca/e/docs/002_cda_corps_hubrishumility_final.pdf
- **Sherraden, Margaret, John Stringham, Simona Costanza Sow, Amanda Moore McBride**, The Forms and Structures of International Voluntary Service, CSD Working Paper 06-07, 2006 Accessed 04.08.07 at <http://gwbweb.wustl.edu/csd/Publications/2006/WP06-07.pdf>